Collecting the Records of Industrial Society in Great Britain: Progress and Promise

RONALD L. FILIPPELLI

AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS RARELY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY to spend time as visiting staff members in foreign archives. The profession has been retrograde in developing the kind of international arrangements that the traditional academic disciplines have long enjoyed. The benefits of such arrangements are manifold. In addition to receiving treatment for any case of ethnocentrism he or she might possess, the visiting archivist has the opportunity to observe and evaluate a different archival environment. At the very least this leads to a rethinking of some of the conventional wisdom guiding developments at home. A recent stay as a visiting archivist in Great Britain offered this writer the opportunity to work closely with archivists, historians, and others actively engaged in the collection and preservation of the records of industrial society. Great Britain is currently undergoing a vigorous, cooperative archival effort which is resulting in the preservation of valuable source material hitherto largely neglected by British archives. Several components of this effort are worth sharing with American archivists, especially those concerned with the collection and preservation of the records of modern industrial society.

It seems odd that Great Britain, where the Industrial Revolution began, has traditionally paid so little attention to the records of its industrial past.[1] Perhaps this is a reflection of the habit of the British elite, like any elite, of perceiving its history as synonymous with the history of the nation. Or perhaps it merely reflects an understandable myopia with regard to relatively modern records in a nation as old as Britain.

Whatever the reason, things are changing. British historiography has changed considerably during the past fifteen years or so, dramatically altering the country's archival landscape. The traditional bias toward conventional political history and the social, cultural, and intellectual history of the upper class is giving way to an upsurge of interest in working class and industrial history. The rather nondescriptive rubric for the new history is "social history." Following the lead of Edward Thompson in his class study, *The Making of the English Working Class*, the practitioners of this new cultural history of industrialization have rejected the narrow economic framework of their predecessors and have begun to study the impact of industrialization on the social structure, values, and traditions of society over long periods of social change. While a class analysis provides the theoretical

[1] I do not mean that no collections of this kind existed prior to 1960, only that there was no systematic attempt to locate and collect such materials. Libraries which had built up extensive collections of primary material on industrial society include: the British Library of Political and Economic Science; Nuffield College Library, Oxford; the British Museum; and the Trades Union Congress Library.

The author is archivist of the Pennsylvania Historical Collections and Labor Archives at Pennsylvania State University. He spent July 1976 as visiting archivist at the Modern Records Centre of Warwick University.

underpinning for these investigations, it is class defined not merely by occupational categories but by studying the impact of industrialization on man's productive relations, his ideas, and his social, cultural, and political institutions.[2]

There are signs of this change everywhere. Great Britain, for example, is leading the way in the development of the discipline of industrial archeology. As well as studying the physical remains of past industrial activities, industrial archeologists are broadening their inquiry to assess the significance of those remains in the context of social and technological history.

Interest in labor and business history has also increased dramatically. Labor history societies have been established throughout Great Britain. In addition to the Society for the Study of Labour History, founded in 1960 to encourage study, teaching, and research in the field and to promote the preservation of labor archives, there are at least eight other labor history societies currently active. Some six of these are well enough established to publish journals or bulletins.[3] Business history is keeping pace. A variety of societies are flourishing and there is an active and growing Business Archives Council.[4]

The inroads being made by social history can also be seen in those bastions of traditionalism, the universities. A chair of social history has been created at Lancaster. Departments of social history have been established at the universities of Warwick and Hull, and a new journal, *Social History,* is published with the support of the latter institution.[5]

One of the most interesting things about the growth of social history is the grass roots aspect of its development. While the contributions of established scholars have been significant, much of the credit must be given to young historians, extramural labor educators, students, and workers who have come together through what might loosely be called the history workshop movement. Modeled on the history workshops sponsored by Ruskin College, Oxford, for the past ten years, these forums have been described as a fluid coalition of workers, students, and historians attempting to "bring the boundaries of history closer to people's lives." The workshops address themselves to the basic elements of social history in an

[2] For an excellent survey of the state of social history in Britain see Susan Eade, "Social History in Britain in 1976—A Survey" in *Labour History* no. 31 (November 1976): 38-52. Among the many scholarly books to come out of the social history movement in Britain, especially noteworthy are E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964); J. F. C. Harrison, *The Early Victorians: 1832-1855* (London, 1971); Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain* (London, 1971); M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout, eds, *Essays in Social History* (Oxford, 1974); Raphael Samuel, ed., *Village Life and Labour* (London, 1975); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford, 1971); Douglas Hay et al, *Albion's Fatal Tree* (New York, 1975).

[3] The labor history societies include: the Scottish Labour History Society; the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History; the Irish Labor History Society; the North East Group of the Society for the Study of Labour History; the North West Group for the Study of Labour History; the Sussex Society for the Study of Labour History; the Yorkshire, Humberside and North Midlands Group of the Society for the Study of Labour History; and the North Staffordshire Labour Studies Group.

[4] In addition to publishing the journal *Business Archives,* the Business Archives Council attempts to maintain liaison with county archivists and departments of economic history in the universities and technical colleges so that it can provide advice and assistance for companies wanting to establish an archives or deposit their records.

[5] Hull University is also sponsoring, with the aid of a Social Science Research Council grant, the publication of a multi-volume dictionary of labor biography. Under the joint editorship of John Saville and Joyce Bellamy, the first volume was published by Macmillan in 1972 and the second in 1974. A third volume was in press at the time of this writing. The plan is to cover the whole period of the modern British labor movement, from the 1790s to the present, excluding the living. The editors' interpretation of labor biography is broad enough to include cooperators, socialist intellectuals, Christian socialists, and Labour Party members of Parliament.

attempt to coordinate them with an overall view of capitalism as a historical phenomenon, both as a mode of production and a system of social relationships. Along with providing a forum for the sharing of research and first-hand experiences, the workshops have inspired a number of students and workers to search out and preserve the records of working class history in their communities. Another tangible result of the movement has been the launching of an ambitious journal, *History Workshop*, published twice yearly by an editorial collective.[6]

All of this activity has led inevitably to an enormous expansion in the amount and kind of modern records finding their way into British repositories at all levels. Indeed, social history might be characterized by the range of sources it exploits. In an approach so wide ranging literally no source is excluded, including traditional materials—family papers, church registers, governmental records—used in new ways. Less traditional sources such as photographs, drawings, maps, and advertisements have gained new prominence. Because of their scope and impact the records of the institutions of industrial society, such as unions, reform organizations, cooperatives, and businesses are receiving special emphasis.

Much credit for this must go also to the appearance in Britain for the first time of government bodies with significant funding and an interest in supporting research based on the study of unpublished modern records. The most significant of these is the Social Science Research Council, formed in 1965.[7] In its formative stages the council made two decisions which were to have a profound impact on the preservation of the records of industrial society. It decided to give support to the provision of research facilities (and not just research projects in the strict sense), and it interpreted its charge to include economic and social history.[8]

These decisions led the council to conclude that the first priority was to find out just what primary source material existed, how much was safely in repositories, and how much was in private hands and at risk. The council funded a study by two industrial relations scholars to find the answers. They found that comparatively little material was being preserved in repositories, much had disappeared, and considerably more was at risk. More significantly they concluded that the most important task was to survey in great detail the surviving records of all unions, companies, employers associations, and joint organizations that had ever existed in the United Kingdom and publish a guide to their contents and location.[9]

There was precedent for such surveys in Britain. One of the most successful was even then being carried out in Scotland by the Scottish Committee of the Society for

[6] A central aim of the journal is to restore a wider context for the study of history, both as a counter to the scholastic fragmentation of the subject and with the aim of making it relevant to ordinary people: "Editorials" in *History Workshop*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976), p. 1. The journal includes a section on archives and sources aimed at being critical as well as bibliographical.

[7] The Social Science Research Council was created in 1965 following the dismemberment of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. In many of its activities it corresponds to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. However, unlike these units it also funds permanent research units at several universities.

[8] David Allen, "Surveys of Records in the British Isles," in *Archives*, vol. 10, no. 46 (1971-72), p. 1.

[9] George S. Bain and Gillian B. Woolven, "The Primary Materials of British Industrial Relations," in Industrial Relations Research Unit of the Social Science Research Council Reprint Series, No. 2 (Warwick, 1971). For additional information on the state of industrial records preservation in Great Britain see also John E. Pemberton, "Access to Primary Materials in the Social Sciences" in *ASLIB Proceedings*, vol. 22, no. 1 (January 1970), pp. 22-29; E. J. Hobshawm, "Records of the Trade Union Movement," in *Archives*, vol. 4, no. 23 (March 1960), pp. 129-37; Sidney Pollard, "Sources for Trade Union History," in *The Amateur Historian*, vol. 4, no. 5 (Autumn 1959), pp. 177-81.

the Study of Labour History and had already resulted in the publication of *An Interim Bibliography of the Scottish Working Class Movement.*[10] The potential value of such a survey was reflected in the fact that the survey had already resulted in the deposit of some ten thousand feet of records in Scottish repositories.[11]

Of course the idea of a survey of labor records long predated the Scottish effort. Beatrice and Sidney Webb had carried out a massive survey of their own in the 1890s, the results of which constitute the splendid Webb Collection at the British Library of Political and Economic Science. A more recent attempt to survey the records of British trade unions began in 1963 under the sponsorship of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts and the Trades Union Congress. While it did turn up valuable information, the death of the principal investigator ended the project.[12]

While scattered precedents existed, there was no precedent for the massive surveying effort undertaken under the sponsorship of the Social Science Research Council. The council clearly perceived that for the historian, the record surveying project is the equivalent of the sample survey or the econometric model; it is the type of costly, but necessary, large scale project obviously dependent upon large scale funding. The council moved vigorously and allocated a comparatively high proportion of its grants in the fields of economic and social history for records survey projects.

The surveys funded by the SSRC have been so numerous and varied as to touch on almost every aspect of modern British history. The most ambitious to date, and the one which most nearly corresponds to the recommendations made by the authors of the SSRC study, is the Modern British Political Records Project. It began as an SSRC funded pilot project at Nuffield College, Oxford, in 1968. Now under the direction of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, and with massive council funding, it is attempting to locate and list the surviving papers of all persons and institutions having significant influence in British public life from 1900 to 1951. More than 5,000 individuals and institutions have been identified as appropriate for inclusion, a significant proportion of which are trade unions, trade associations, and other industrial and service institutions. The project has already resulted in the publication of three volumes, two more are in the press and one other is in preparation.[13]

Other surveys of interest to social and economic historians and supported by the SSRC include surveys of source material on British inland transport and communications; business records of Coventry and related areas; records of trade unions, cooperative societies, and working class political movements in Scotland (a continuation of the earlier Scottish study); records of the agricultural engineering industry; and unpublished materials relating to the South Wales Coalfield.[14]

[10] Ian McDougall, comp., *Interim Bibliography of the Scottish Working Class Movement and of other Labour Records Held in Scotland* (Scottish Labour History Society, 1965). A new, revised, and updated edition is due to be published soon.

[11] Bain and Woolven, p. 414.

[12] Doris Crowther, retired librarian of the Trades Union Congress, began the survey. A short article on the work she did manage to carry out appears in *Bulletin* 13 of the National Register of Archives (HMSO for RCHM, 1964).

[13] David Allen, 47-51, and Chris Cook (compiler), *Sources in British Political History: 1900-1951: A Guide to the Archives of Selected Organizations and Societies,* vol. 1 (London, 1975); *A Guide to the Private Papers of Selected Public Servants,* vol. 2 (London, 1975); and C. Hazelhurst and C. Woodland, *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers: 1900-1951* (London, 1974).

[14] David Allen, 48-51.

While the SSRC has devoted most of its research facility grants to surveys, it has also in the past demonstrated a willingness to support the collection and processing of records. The most massive undertaking of this kind was the South Wales Coalfield Project which has resulted in the deposit at University College, Swansea, of 179 manuscript collections, over 300 hours of oral history, and 26 miners institute libraries. Other collecting projects have centered on the oral history of the suffragette and suffragist movements and the oral history of the British in India. Grants for the processing of materials have gone to the Fawcett Library on Women's History, the University of Bristol, for the cataloging of the Independent Labour Party Archive, and to Nuffield College, Oxford, to catalog the Fabian Society Papers.[15]

The initiative of the SSRC encouraged a variety of private foundations, associations, and other government bodies to support survey projects. Under private sponsorship, surveys centered on Scottish banking, the insurance industry, the shipping industry, and others have been or are being carried out. The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts supported a six-year project to calendar the archives of the Labour Party.[16]

Perhaps the most noteworthy private initiative was the grant from the Leverhulme Trust to establish and support for four years the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University. Established to collect the records of British industrial relations, it stands as the only British archival repository primarily concerned with the collection of the records of national trade unions. In its first three years of operation the centre accessioned some 140 collections.[17]

One of the most interesting developments on the British scene has been the emphasis on regional and local history. There exists a strong affirmation among archivists and historians of the principle that research materials should remain in the area where they were generated. Ongoing regional projects are in existence in Coventry, South Wales, Manchester, and East London, among others. Often these are generated by academics, but just as significant to their success is the participation of members of the community, trade associations, trade unions, and local government. Like the discipline of social history that has inspired them, the regional projects cast a wide net. In most of the projects the location and preservation of records and oral history are important components.

While some of these projects, such as those of Manchester and the South Wales Coalfield, have solid institutional homes in universities; others depend almost entirely on volunteer community support.[18] One such project, the Peoples Autobiography of Hackney, has demonstrated the potential of the community based, voluntary model, and is being carried out by interested people in the East London borough in an attempt to reconstruct the history of that working class community over the past century. Mostly through the use of oral history, history workshops, and the collection of old photographs and documents, the Hackney

[15] W. A. Cole and Glanmoore Williams, *South Wales Coalfield History Project, Final Report* (Swansea, 1974). For information on projects funded by the Social Science Research Council see Social Science Research Council, *Newsletter,* 1965 to present.

[16] David Allen, 48–51.

[17] Warwick University, Modern Records Centre, *Report for the Session, 1973–1974,* and *Report for the Session, 1974–1975,* and *Report for the Session, 1975–1976* (Coventry, 1974–76).

[18] The South Wales Coalfield Project is associated with the University College of Swansea and the Manchester project with the Manchester Polytechnic.

collective has published seven books of primary source material on the history of the community.[19]

One significant result of projects such as the Peoples Autobiography of Hackney is the demonstration of how ordinary people can utilize the technique of oral history to reconstruct their own past. Oral history by professional historians is becoming established in Britain, although somewhat more slowly than it has been in the United States. However, what strikes the visitor to Britain is how effectively this tool is being used by nonprofessionals. Examples range from *Lifetimes: A Group Autobiography,* two booklets generated by the Manchester Studies Project, in which a group of working people relate their lives in a Manchester "overspill town"; to *Working Lives,* autobiographies of Hackney workers, published by the Peoples Autobiography of Hackney. Much of this oral history is finding its way into local repositories.[20]

With the great increase in the number of modern records finding their way into British repositories, the problems of processing collections and informing potential users of their existence are becoming more acute. In the matter of processing, British archivists, used to detailed listings of small collections of personal papers or estate records, are facing up to the fact that this approach will not be feasible with the massive records of modern institutions. The use of the traditional approach on the Labour Party Archive took six years and according to one of the archivists involved, is no longer financially possible.[21] In the matter of dissemination of information, however, it seems to this writer that the British have made considerably more progress toward solving the problem than have their American counterparts. Some of the British success can be attributed to Britain's compact size. The advantage here can be seen in the effectiveness of the National Register of Archives, a unit of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.

The National Register is a central collecting point for information about archival holdings in British repositories. Reports in the form of finding aids to collections from most local records offices, university libraries, public libraries, and special institutes come to the Register at the rate of approximately 1,000 per year. A few, like the Labour Party Archive, are compiled by the Royal Commission itself. The reports are housed in a central searchroom in London and are indexed according to short title, location, person, and subject. In order to reduce the disadvantage of having this information available only in London, the Register sends copies of selected finding aids to other major research libraries in the United Kingdom. The Register also publishes an annual *Accessions to Repositories,* listing all reports received during the calendar year. While these attempts do not entirely overcome the problem of limited accessibility, they do mitigate it to a

[19] Published by Centerprise Press, a collective publishing effort which is part of the Hackney project. Other titles which have been published are Arthur Newton, *Years of Change,* the autobiography of a Hackney shoemaker, 1900-65; *The Threepenny Doctor,* a collection of oral reminiscences about an eccentric doctor noted for his care of the poor; *A License to Live,* the autobiography of a Hackney taxi driver; *A Hackney Camera, 1883-1918,* a collection of Hackney photographs; and *A Second Look,* a photographic record of a walk through Hackney in the 1890s with contemporary equivalents.

[20] For additional information on oral history as part of social history in Great Britain see Raphael Samuel, "Local History and Oral History," in *History Workshop,* vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 191-208; and R. Turner, "Towards an Oral History of Labour," in *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin,* no. 27 (Autumn 1973), pp. 63-71.

[21] Conversation with Richard Storey, archivist of the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University, who directed the cataloging of the Labour Party Records. The project consumed two man-days a week for six years. The result was sixteen guide and three index volumes—a total of some 2,000 pages of typescript. Harvester Press is currently marketing a microfilm edition of the collection.

considerable degree.[22] For example, the existence of the Register permits specialized historical journals to provide their readers with fairly complete information about archival accessions in their field. Thus, both the *Bulletin* of the Society for the Study of Labour History and *Business Archives* annually publish checklists of archival accessions in their areas of specialization.[23]

Much of what is going on in modern records identification, collection, and preservation in Great Britain can profitably be considered by American archivists. It is not that the collection of this kind of material is anything new in the United States; indeed, it can be fairly said that much more has been done here than in Britain. The same can be said of oral history, a decidedly American contribution to the collection of primary source material. What is of interest in Britain is the emphasis on records surveys of material not already in repositories, the local and regional approaches to collection, and the cooperation with nonprofessionals in the effort. While the emphasis of this essay is on the records of industrial society, the principles embodied in the British approach apply to records in all categories.

There is no lack of current activity in the United States with regard to government financial support for archival projects, including surveys. The National Endowment for the Humanities and, more recently, the records program of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, are the two most noteworthy examples.

Most of these surveys, however, concentrate on surveying collections already in repositories. While that concentration is important, it neglects what might be even more significant in the long run, the location of valuable material still held by private institutions. While our methods for providing information about archival holdings are far from perfect, the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) and the revision of Hamer being carried out by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission are notable attempts to cope with the problem, and they have the potential to provide much more of this kind of information. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission project is most promising in this regard. Let us hope that its automated system will provide for continuous revision, updating, and cross indexing so that in addition to the ability to generate small directories for individual states and areas, as promised, access by subject and name will also be possible. In order to do this most effectively, reporting information from repositories will have to be more complete than it now is for both NUCMC and NHPRC. Indeed, is there any reason why the two operations could not share their resources so that we could have the best of both worlds, the mobility of the book and the foundation for a true national register? Of course this would be expensive, but if some of the money now being spent on surveys of existing archival holdings could be diverted to such an effort, then records surveys could concentrate on identifying materials which are not in archives and which may be at risk. There are several advantages to the combined approach. First, the periodic appraisal of the national patrimony as regards historic records,

[22] For a discussion of the relative merits of the National Register of Archives and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections see Felicity Ranger, "The Common Pursuit," in *Archives*, vol. 9, no. 43 (April 1970), pp. 121-29; and Philip Hepworth, "Manuscripts and Non-book Materials in Libraries," in *Archives*, vol. 9, no. 42 (October 1969), pp. 90-97.

[23] A similar central register exists for oral history. Maintained by the British Institute of Recorded Sound, the register provides the scholar with the location and nature of archival recordings in British repositories. The institute's newsletter, *Oral History*, regularly includes information on work in progress.

including how much has disappeared, and, second, the opportunity for repositories to collect valuable materials on a more cooperative and systematic basis.

Surveys of the kind I am advocating are most effectively carried out as cooperative ventures. Archivists, through their regional and national associations and in their roles as members of funding review boards, should emphasize the principle of cooperation among institutions. There are examples available to us which offer evidence of the efficacy of the cooperative approach.[24] The approach will require a *share the wealth* attitude not always present in American archival circles. Agreement on methods, jurisdiction, and final disposition must be reached. A competitive attitude will ensure a quick demise to the project.

One principle crucial to such a cooperative effort, and one which the British are increasingly operating under, is the decentralization that is crucial to the successful collecting of the massive records of modern industrial society. In the collection of the records of large institutions, the American bias has been toward centralization. There is certainly a strong archival argument to be made for housing all of the records of an organization in one place, especially when one takes into account the traditional disciplinary approach which has dominated American historiography. But, increasingly, the interdisciplinary approach is taking hold. The move toward social history has given life to a similar movement here.[25] As historians reduce their geographical focus and extend their disciplinary boundaries, more and more attention will be focused on community and regional studies, the only arenas where the sophisticated study of such diverse materials is feasible. Another weighty and parallel entrant in the historical arena, cliometrics, is also geared to the particular rather than the general.

Aside from the demands created by new research methodologies, there is another, more basic, rationale for decentralization. When one removes the records of all or part of an organization from the environment in which they were created, then the social ecology of the area is damaged. The records have left their natural context. They are separated from the other records and artifacts of the community to which they relate and the sum of which they are an integral part.

Much good work in the preservation of local records has been done by local historical societies and libraries. For the most part, however, their facilities are inadequate to meet the demands that would be placed upon them by modern records. What has been accomplished can usually be credited to the energy of a few dedicated people working in isolation, often with a narrow view of the history of their communities.

In order to collect effectively the records of modern institutions at the local or regional level, outside financial support will be essential. Only cooperation among

[24] An excellent example is the project carried out by the Society of Ohio Archivists in conjunction with the Ohio Network of American History Research Centers and the Ohio Historical Society. The project resulted in the publication of the *Guide to Manuscript Collections and Institutional Records in Ohio* (Columbus, 1974). While materials already in repositories are included, the majority of the entries designate the location and scope of records still in the hands of the creating institutions. The recent NHPRC-funded survey of the records of the seven defunct eastern railroads which were combined to form CONRAIL is the kind of large scale undertaking which will require cooperation among various institutions both in the evaluation and disposition of the records.

[25] See especially Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York, 1967): Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976); Stephen Thernstorm, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964).

the various cultural institutions of the community or region will generate this to the degree necessary. Only with cultural cooperation will commercial, industrial, and service institutions see the value of supporting collection activity. Records preservation is only part of the picture. The effort should be coordinated, as it was in the South Wales Coalfield Project, with groups interested in the architectural, archeological, and artistic heritage of the region.[26] Such a coalition will bring to the archivist allies and collaborators with a prestige rarely associated with the collection and preservation of documentary evidence. American archivists have not usually been included in these cultural coalitions and their exclusion has been a mistake. Operating alone, the archivist can only hope to scratch the surface of the community's real history. Modern records will be preserved to a significant degree only if archivists reach out to the community through a network of contacts, opportunity screens if you will, reflecting the community's aggregate of economic, social, and cultural interests.

The scenario may seem utopian, but our present emphasis on centralization in the collection of modern organizational records is no less so. True centralization is an ideal rarely achieved. Most institutions that have attempted it are full to the breaking point and have still attained far from total coverage. Whatever the merits of the theoretical arguments against centralization, the sheer quantity of modern records is beginning to dictate disposition decisions. If we are to save any appreciable number of them, particularly as they reflect local conditions, we must make every effort to develop cooperative programs so that what we save will reflect as nearly as possible the interrelated nature of our history. The British have made a start. We should watch their progress closely.

[26] Much of the success of the South Wales project can be attributed to the cooperation and interest of those outside of the university. Key support came from institutions whose help was critical to the project, such as the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organization, the National Coal Board, South Wales Labour Party branches, and especially the South Wales Area of the National Union of Mineworkers. Other trade unions, cooperative societies, and community organizations such as choirs and silver bands gave valuable assistance. Local history societies were alerted to the need to preserve twentieth-century documentation and to the value of oral history. Special events which generated community support were a "Call to the Valleys Year" conference of historical societies, and an oral history conference for those working in the field in Wales, including the Folk Museum of Wales, the National Museum of Wales, public libraries, and local historical societies.