

[Recording of the week: Gay UK – falling in love with peace](#)

This week's selection comes from David Govier, Oral History Archivist.

The Second World War saw women take on roles that they had not been expected to undertake before. Women moved from the home into factories, ship yards and pivotal roles in war administration. In one of the earliest recordings used in the British Library's [Gay UK exhibition](#), Mary Wilkins (born 1909) remembers her war experience and reflects on how it informed her identity.

Mary describes how her emotional feelings towards women developed during her childhood. She remembers making a promise to herself, while working as an ambulance driver during the Second World War, to join a peace organisation. She also describes listening to the pacifist and suffragist Sybil Morrison give a speech in Coventry and falling for her 'hook, line and sinker'.

[Mary Wilkins on falling in love_C456/066](#)

This interview extract is part of the Hall Carpenter Oral History Archive which is part of the British Library's Sound Archive. It is a collection of 113 oral history interviews relating to lesbian and gay experience in Britain, and, together with the Hall Carpenter physical archives held at [London School of Economics](#), is one of the largest resources for studying gay activism in the UK. The British Library's current Gay UK exhibition uses over a dozen oral history extracts from the Hall Carpenter collection to tell the varied stories of a broad range of gay people throughout the twentieth century.



The Hall Carpenter Memorial Archive was established in 1982 and grew out of the Gay Monitoring & Archive Project, which collected evidence of discrimination and police arrests in the UK. The archives were named after lesbian author Marguerite Radclyffe Hall and writer and early gay rights activist Edward Carpenter. In 1985 the archives employed Margot Farnham to coordinate an oral history project documenting the life experiences of lesbians and gay men in Britain. Farnham worked with volunteers who located interviewees, carried out interviews, and helped produce documentation such as summaries and transcripts. In 1989, an anthology called '[Inventing Ourselves – Lesbian Life Stories](#)' was published based on the interviews with lesbians.



You can find out more about the Hall Carpenter Oral History Archive and our other oral histories of sexuality in our [collection guide](#).

[Gay UK: Love, Law and Liberty](#) is a free exhibition in the entrance hall at the British Library until 19 September 2017.

Follow [@BL_OralHistory](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

[Recording of the week: keep calm and carry on rehearsing](#)

This week's selection comes from Lucia Cavorsi, Audio Project Cataloguer.

There is no doubt Arturo Toscanini was a one-of-a-kind conductor. Renowned for his mastery, Toscanini was obsessed with the most minute details of a performance. But such a quest for perfection, whose outcome would undoubtedly delight listeners, came at a price for orchestra members: shouting, swearing, and humiliation.

Here is the conductor in New York during a seemingly frustrated rehearsal with the NBC Symphony Orchestra of Alfredo Catalini's *Dance of the Water Nymphs* from the opera *Loreley*. The tension in the room is almost palpable as Toscanini delivers his fiery tirade in a mixture of English & Italian before storming off in disgust.

[Toscanini's outburst during rehearsals New York, 1953 \(1LS0002055\)](#)

Toscanini was a man who believed music was a religious ritual to be enjoyed in absolute silence. It was he who transformed his favourite love, Milan's La Scala theatre, turning it into an autonomous body, banning encores and putting an end to the shame of risottos being served in the balconies during

performances.

Intransigent both in music and in life, it is no surprise that Toscanini's favourite motto was: 'Your back bends when your soul does'.

2017 is the 150th anniversary of the birth of Arturo Toscanini and is being marked through a series of international celebrations including concerts, exhibitions, lectures and special releases.

Follow [@BLSoundHeritage](#), [@BL_Classical](#) & [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

[Recording of the week: 'The BBC are coming on Friday, can we show them a prototype?'](#)

This week's selection comes from Tom Lean, Project Interviewer for An Oral History of British Science.

To anyone who grew up in the 1980s the Acorn BBC Microcomputer was the computer they used at school, a machine that gave countless Britons their first experience of computing and sold over 1.5 million units. Yet this iconic piece of computer hardware came about almost accidentally. With the world on the verge of a computer revolution in the early 1980s, the BBC were desperately searching the British electronic industry for a computer to accompany a new educational television series about computing. To a small company in Cambridge called Acorn Computers, having the BBC adopt their new computer as the BBC Computer was a deal that could transform the company into a major player. However, as Acorn designer Steve Furber recalls, there was one problem: they didn't actually have a new computer yet, and they had just a week to develop one...

[Designing the Acorn BBC Microcomputer \(C1379/078\)](#)



This clip is part of [Voices of Science](#), an online resource which uses oral history interviews with prominent British scientists and engineers to tell the stories of some of the most remarkable scientific and engineering discoveries of the past century.

Follow [@BL_OralHistory](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

[Recording of the Week: a princess cannot eat stew](#)

This week's selection comes from Niamh Dillon, National Life Stories Project Interviewer.

Prue Leith is well known to television viewers of the *Great British Menu*. She started her career as a chef and restaurateur in London. In this extract from a longer recording with Niamh Dillon for [Food: From Source to Salespoint](#), recorded in 2008, she recalls a surprise visit from Princess Margaret. Her request for pheasant stew caused considerable consternation in the kitchen resulting in a fire, a singed jacket and a spilt pot of coffee. If only VIP's knew what happens behind the scenes!

[Prue Leith and Princess Margaret C821/202](#)

 **Prue Leith (courtesy Paul Tozier)**

The full interview with Prue Leith can be found in [Food](#), an online collection of oral history recordings that chart the extraordinary changes which transformed the production, manufacture and consumption of food in 20th-century Britain.

Follow [@BL_OralHistory](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

[Recording of the week: choosing dreadlocks](#)

This week's selection comes from Holly Gilbert, Cataloguer of Digital Multimedia Collections.

Mother and daughter, Jan and Ama, talk about why they both have dreadlocks. This is the first time they have told each other their reasons for choosing to wear their hair in this way and their motivations are quite different, though Jan's hair definitely inspired Ama's choice and they both really like the way that dreadlocks look and feel. They discuss how other people react to their hair and how this makes them feel as well as how their hair connects with their self-identity, their appearance and their blackness. Later in the conversation they talk about how fighting for racial and gender equality has

evolved over time and is different for their respective generations, how their hair is part of being active in those fights and how choosing dreadlocks is a way of defining their own idea of beauty.

[The Listening Project_Choosing dreadlocks](#)



This recording is part of [The Listening Project](#), an audio archive of conversations recorded by the BBC and archived at the British Library. The full conversation between Jan and Ama can be found [here](#).

Follow [@CollectingSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.