



BSI Oral History Project Tops 200!

By Ray Betzner

For the better part of the last two decades, members of the Baker Street Irregulars have been sitting down with each other just to have a quiet chat while their conversations are recorded. The conversations are friendly and roam through the life, experiences, and joys of dedicated Sherlockians.

Those conversations are also a vital part of the BSI Trust's Oral History Project, probably the most popular and best-known initiative of the BSI Trust.

When the conversation is over, the recording heads to Marsha Pollak ("A Small But Select Library"), who has been overseeing the project since 2013. The stories of these Irregulars are one of the most important pieces of BSI Trust's attempt to capture the experiences of fellow Sherlockians.



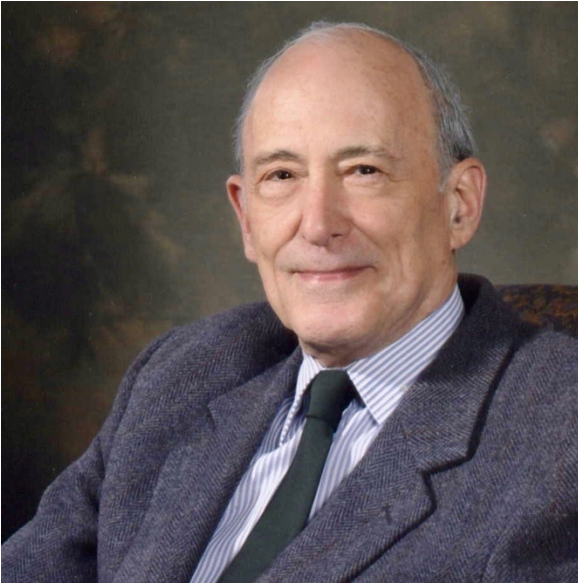
The [most recent recording](#) to be posted for the Oral History Project is of the late [Nicholas Utechin](#) ("The Ancient British Barrow") speaking with Roger Johnson ("Pall Mall Gazette") in 2014. Photo by Jean Upton.

Today, there are more than 200 recordings, profiling the lives of Irregulars born in the early decades of the 20th century, to more recently invested Sherlockians. The fact that the recordings are being archived and will be available to future scholars makes the Oral History Project unlike anything else in the Irregular world.

Just as important is that we are learning more about the experiences, achievements and interests of Irregulars. Marsha said the stories she hears, and the details she has learned about other people's lives, are fascinating.

“Sometimes you know these people's names and their Sherlockian interests, but do you know their lives outside of the BSI? Not so much,” she said. The Oral History Project has been capturing the sometimes less-well-known histories of Irregulars for nearly 20 years.

Dozens of Irregulars have gone out—first with cassette recorders, then digital recorders, and now with cell phones—to sit down with friends, mentors or folks they're getting to know for the first time. Sometimes they are talking to Irregulars whose activities are better known, but equally important are the conversations with Irregulars who have not been able to attend recent dinners or have experienced a faded interest in the Sherlockian world.



An [interview](#) with long-time Irregular Peter Blau (“Black Peter”) is also available as part of the Oral History Project.

Photo used with permission.

“Having a person's voice is very powerful. Hearing them tell their own stories really helps complete the picture of that individual,” Marsha explained. “Most people who do these interviews tell me they are a joy to do, and I can tell you they're a joy to listen to.”

A Long History

The idea to put together the recordings came about from a couple of places. Early in 2003, Julie McKuras (“The Duchess of Devonshire”) and Sue Vizoskie (“Mrs. Saunders”) came up with the idea of a biographical questionnaire. Mike Whelan (“Vincent Spaulding” and later “Wiggins”) liked and approved the project and in March 2007, the BSI Biographical Questionnaires were mailed to members. The work to collect the written profiles of Irregulars continues under Sue's direction.

In the interim, the BSI Oral History Project was conceived and was complementary to the written one. That was in the early 2000s.

The first recordings were made a few years later, with the responsibility formally overseen by Don Terras (“The Politician, the Lighthouse, and the Trained Cormorant”) and then Andy Solberg (“Professor Coram”). The first efforts were to capture the voices of senior Irregulars like Ely Liebow (“Inspector Gregory”), Fred Kittle (“Jack Stapleton”), and David Hammer (“Major-General Stoner”). As time went on, the program expanded to include younger Irregulars as well.

Making the recording is only a part of the process. Early recordings had to be digitized. Today, a great deal of time is then spent on getting the MP3 file ready to be posted on the BSI Trust website. Marsha noted that work involves many volunteers who often do this work in addition to a full-time job. The BSI Trust, working with its partners at the Indiana University Lilly Library, are then posting the finished recordings to the [BSI Trust Oral History web page](#).

More recordings will be posted in the coming months, making the thoughts, words and histories of these Irregulars available to researchers and others for years to come.

How You Can Get Involved

You can join the dozens of Irregulars who have taken part in the BSI Trust’s Oral History Project.

The first step is to contact Marsha Pollak <mlpollak@icloud.com> via email. She can send you a guide to conducting the conversations, a set of possible questions and a name or two of candidates who have yet to be interviewed.

*“Having a person’s voice is very powerful.
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complete the picture of that individual.”*

Marsha Pollak

It’s best to conduct interviews in person whenever possible, as eye contact can help establish a better rapport, Marsha explained. If an in-person interview cannot be done, telephone and video interviews are also possible.

Most often, interviewers are linked with Irregulars who live in their area. It’s also important to find a quiet environment for the discussion. Restaurants, coffee shops or other public areas often are too noisy for good quality sound.

Each person being interviewed is also asked to sign a release form that would allow the BSI Trust to make the recording available online. To find out more about those who have been interviewed and how you can get involved, visit the [Oral History](#) page of the BSI Trust website.

From the Chair

By Thomas A. Horrocks



Tamara Shu

It is a real pleasure for me to begin my column with good news. The first BSI Trust/Lilly Library intern has been hired. Her name is Tamara Shu and she is a junior with a double major in cello performance and comparative literature at Indiana University.

A Sherlock Holmes fan, Tamara has begun working on accessioning some BSI collections and digging into the content for the online version of the BSI history exhibition that was held at the Lilly in 2019.

I also want to report that the BSI Archival Series edited by the late Jon Lellenberg will be revived with support by the BSI Trust. The last volume edited by Jon covered the history of the BSI during the late 1940s. The BSI publications program, in conjunction with the BSI Trust, will continue the series. The first volume of the continuing series will cover the 1950s. Further details will be forthcoming from the BSI.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that *Baker Street Journal* Editor Emeritus Steve Rothman (“*The Valley of Fear*”) will be the BSI Trust’s annual lecturer for 2023. His online presentation will take place on Saturday, September 9. The title of Steve’s presentation will be announced soon, so please keep an eye on the BSI Trust website for details.

In the Spring 2022 newsletter I mentioned various new initiatives the BSI Trust is pursuing to promote the BSI Archives. These initiatives and others that are to come, however, will have little impact if few people know about them. Thus, it is imperative for the Trust to do all it can to effectively communicate what it is doing, why and how it is doing it, and ways people can assist its mission, either through donations of materials to the archives or through financial contributions. An effective communications strategy is imperative.

To assist in developing such a strategy, Ray Betzner (“The Agony Column”), Trust board member and editor of this newsletter, graciously volunteered to lead the effort to shape this strategy. He assembled several small focus groups to review the current communications process and produced a report that included several recommendations, including an outside review of the BSI Trust website. The BSI Trust board approved the report and its recommendations, particularly relating to the website

review. As a result, I will be assembling a small working group, which will include Ray Betzner and Randall Stock (“South African Securities”), the BSI’s chief technology officer, to move the process forward. I want to thank all of those who volunteered their time to serve on a focus group.

The Trust recently revised its Collection Guidelines for archival material to aid those who are considering donating their correspondence and other material relating to the BSI. If you have not viewed the guidelines on the BSI Trust website, I have included them here for your convenience:

The mission of the BSI Trust is to collect, preserve, and share the history of the BSI through documents, publications, photographs, video, and other media produced by or affiliated with the BSI and its members.

The following list is an overview of the types of records with long-term historical value that the BSI Trust seeks to collect. Within each category, the BSI Trust is interested in records that are both analog and digital.

(Before donating materials, please contact the board chair of the BSI Trust at <TrustChair@bakerstreetirregulars.com>.

- Correspondence
 - Among and from BSI members pertaining to the BSI
- BSI artifacts and ephemera, including BSI membership certificates, medals, objects produced for presentations at the BSI Dinner, and awards
- Production materials for *The Baker Street Journal*
 - Correspondence between contributors and editors
 - Manuscripts and drafts of published articles and letters
 - Artwork contributed to the *BSJ*
- BSI Press and Pamphlet House records
 - Correspondence between contributors and editors
 - Manuscripts and drafts of published essays
 - Artwork supplied for BSI Press volumes
- BSI Conference records
 - Planning meeting minutes
 - Programs and conference proceedings
 - Surveys
 - Publicity materials
 - Contracts
- Photographs
 - Official BSI Dinner photos
 - Unofficial photos of BSI Dinners, especially the early years
 - Photos of BSI Members and The Women
 - Photos of other BSI Events (e.g., BSI Conferences, field trips, various runnings of the Silver Blaze)
- Audiovisual records
 - Recordings of BSI Dinners

- Recordings of BSI Conferences
- Recordings of BSI field trips
- Recordings of BSI Members presenting on Sherlockian subjects in other venues
- Toasts, presentations, and speakers' notes for BSI events (e.g., the Distinguished Speaker Lecture)
- Deeds of gifts to the BSI
- BSI mission statement(s)
- Publicity materials

NOTE: The BSI Trust is NOT collecting material about the history of the various scion societies. The BSI Trust does NOT collect non-BSI publications relating to Sherlockiana, unless there is a significant BSI association or provenance.

However, non-BSI Sherlockian publications and other Sherlockiana will be accepted as donations in kind by the BSI Trust for resale to support the BSI Trust.

The BSI Trust is happy to respond to queries about donating materials or to assist with making provision in your estate to donate cash to The BSI Trust. Please contact the board chair of the BSI Trust at <TrustChair@bakerstreetirregulars.com>.

I hope you will consider supporting the BSI Archives with a financial donation or a gift-in-kind of materials for sale to support the various activities of the BSI Trust.

Past financial support has enabled the Trust to purchase collection materials for the archives and to promote the archives through such programs as a Research Fellowship program, a student internship at the Lilly Library to assist library staff in digitizing and cataloging of BSI archival material, and the production of a BSI Trust brochure.

Gifts-in-kind in the form of books, periodicals and ephemera also generate much needed funding through the tireless salesmanship of Denny Dobry, (“A Single Large Airy Sitting-Room”). Contact Denny at if you have items to donate for resale. He can be reached at <dendobry@ptd.net>.

Happy Spring to all.



Support the BSI Trust!

Thank you for donating to support of the Baker Street Irregulars Trust. Every tax-deductible dollar helps to collect, maintain and disseminate our Irregular history. By making a tax-deductible contribution, you can help ensure that BSI history will be available to historians, researchers and the Sherlockian community. Please donate now by filling out the form below and mailing it to:

Leslie S. Klinger, BSI, c/o Kopple, Klinger & Elbaz LLP, 10866 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1500, Los Angeles, CA 90024-4357

You may also donate using a credit card or PayPal via the BSI Trust website at <<http://www.bsitrust.org/2015/01/donations.html>>.

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