Planning and recording Oral Histories

* Make sure your machine is working, that you know how it works and that its got enough battery power. Practice with it at home so that you’re familiar.
* Make comprehensive list of things you’re interested in, you want to ask. You don’t have to cover all of these, but the list will be a useful prompt.
* Confirm the date you have arranged.
* You might ask if you can use your interviewee’s electricity if the interview is to be done in their home – that has to be your judgement.
* Chat a bit to your interviewee. Some people are nervous, so just talking about anything off mike might help. Talk about the Clearance Form – it can be signed either before or after the interview .... but don’t forget it! It’s a form intended to reassure people, and it’s a legal necessity if HitP is ever challenged.
* Place your recorder near your interviewee. (some people clip mikes on to clothing, but if people fiddle or move a lot that tends to be the predominating sound).
* Try to interview away from extraneous sound (ticking clocks, washing machines, noisy traffic etc)
* When you start the tape introduce yourself on it; your interviewee; say where you’re doing the recording and what the date is.
* Ask open questions – eg not ones with ‘yes’, ‘no’ answers.
* If something interests you particularly, make a note of it and go back .... don’t interrupt, let your interviewee speak.
* If your interviewee goes completely off-piste, gently bring them back to what interests you.
* After the interview, send your interviewee a letter thanking them. If possible send them a CD of their interview.
* Listen to the interview at home and write a précis of what was talked about – this will help your memory when it comes to including pieces of info. in your street history.
* Send a copy of the printed street history to your interviewee.

Good luck ... it’s a lot of fun

Catherine