

Programme

- 9.45-10.15** Registration and coffee
- 10.15-10.30** **Abigail Knight**, Research Officer, Novella Food and Families, Thomas Coram Research Unit
Welcome, and why this seminar? Using narrative archival data to study food
- 10.30-11.00** **Professor Stephen Mennell**, University College Dublin
Theory-driven use of archives in food research
- 11.00-11.30** **Dr Polly Russell**, Curator, The British Library Archaeology or Social Research?
The Biography of an Archive
- 11.30-11.50** Coffee
- 11.50-12.20** **Professor Anne Murcott**, SOAS, London/University of Nottingham
On the strategic use of archives in sociological research about food
- 12.20-12.50** **Dr Libby Bishop**, UK Data Archive/Timescapes and University of Essex
Digital preserves: How do researchers use archived food-related data?
- 12.50-1.40** Lunch
- 1.40-2.10** **Helen Wakely**, Archivist, The Wellcome Library
Shopping around in the archives
- 2.10-2.40** **Dr David Smith**, Hon Senior Lecturer, University of Aberdeen
Do the sources employed by historians of nutrition science and nutrition policy making have anything to offer those concerned with the narrative approach to everyday food behaviour?
- 2.40-3.10** **Professor Peter Jackson**, University of Sheffield
'Sold with a story': food narratives from farm to fork
- 3.10-3.30** Tea
- 3.30-4.00** Sum up and questions to speakers from floor
Chair: **Dr Libby Bishop**
- 4.00-5.00** Optional Tour – British Library

The seminar is taking place at the conference centre of the British Library, an iconic building, which symbolises world-class knowledge and research. The day includes talks from experts, lunch provided by Peyton Events and an optional tour of the Library, including the King's Gallery, an impressive glass-encased bookshelf spanning from floor to ceiling across multiple levels.

Tales from the Archive: How do food researchers from different disciplines use archives?



The British Library Conference Centre
Monday 19th November, 2012
10:00 – 16:00

Libby Bishop - Peter Jackson - Stephen Mennell,
Anne Murcott - Polly Russell - David Smith – NOVELLA

Abstracts and biographies of speakers

Dr Libby Bishop

Abstract

There is a large and rapidly growing body of food-related data held at the UK Data Archive. It varies from very large social surveys, such as the Living Costs and Food survey (formerly the Expenditure and Food Survey) to diverse qualitative, specialised studies. Just a few of the topics covered include food provision in care homes, for the homeless and for the elderly; local sourcing of food; cooking skills; diet and exercise practices by ethnicity; school dinners; and attitudes toward genetically-modified foods. Recently, the UK Data Archive analysed how researchers are using data they have downloaded. This paper will present some of the creative uses to which researchers are putting food-related data. Like cooking (at least mine) sometimes the results are surprising.

Biography

Libby is the Research Liaison Officer at the UK Data Service, University of Essex, where she advises data depositors in areas of data management and sharing, especially ethical reuse of qualitative data. She also supports researchers and teachers by developing teaching resources, promoting thematic collections of data and conducting workshops on reusing data. Key activities include training on informed consent for archiving and consulting with large ESRC programmes and centres. She has published a secondary analysis of food data for a

study on convenience and choice. Her interest in food is not only academic: she is a neophyte gardener, a capable cook, and a seasoned omnivore.

Professor Peter Jackson

Abstract

This presentation will reflect on different uses of life history data by social scientists and oral historians. Drawing on a project from the AHRC-ESRC's 'Cultures of Consumption' programme, the presentation will discuss a range of practical, methodological and ethical issues that arose in relation to a study of food commodity chains, focusing specifically on the rebranding of their 'Oakham' chicken range by the British high-street retailer Marks and Spencer.

Biography

Peter Jackson is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield. He was Director of the 'Changing Families, Changing Food' research programme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust (2005-8), and is currently engaged in a project on consumer anxieties about food (CONANX), funded by the European Research Council (2008-12): www.sheffield.ac.uk/conanx. Recent publications include Changing Families, Changing Food (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and a new book on Food Words: essays in culinary culture (Bloomsbury) to be published next March.

Abigail Knight

Abstract

This brief presentation will open the seminar by describing the 'Families and Food in Hard Times: Methodological Innovations' project, which is part of the ESRC funded NCRM (National Centre for Research Methods) Novella (Narratives of Varied Everyday Life and Linked Approaches) Node, based at Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. This project aims to advance knowledge about how to research the 'disconnect' between behaviour and constructed meanings in habitual family food practices in times of austerity by exploring the usefulness of narrative methods in food research and through the secondary analysis of archival data of different types, for example diary data and visual data. By focusing on three existing data sets, the study aims to examine both the cultural meanings of food in particular contexts at particular historical moments and the methodological issues in the analysis of secondary narrative data from different sources. The 'Tales from the Archive' seminar comes at the end of the first year of this project, in which we have focused on analysing narrative data from the Mass Observation Archive. This presentation will explain the reasons for the event and the questions that it aims to address.

Biography

Abigail Knight is a Research Officer at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, where she is the Core Researcher for the 'Families and Food in Hard Times: Methodological Innovations' project, which is part of the Novella Node. She has a background in history, sociology and social policy and worked as a Social Worker before becoming a qualitative researcher with children and families. She has published on teenage pregnancy for looked after young people, advocacy and service provision for disabled children and on the emotional well-being of young people seeking asylum. Her recent research experience and interests lie in sociological approaches to children's social lives and local belonging, intergenerational family relations and the linking of history and sociology in social research.

Professor Stephen Mennell

Abstract

I will begin by raising some questions about the historians' traditional distinction between primary and secondary sources, particularly in the light of John Goldthorpe's polemics against historical sociology in the early 1990s. Then I shall briefly mention a sotto voce dispute I had with the late Alan Davidson, concerning 'genealogical' studies of recipes. The main meat of my talk will concern how theoretical questions led me to the still grossly under-exploited Lords Steward's papers in the Public Record Office (or National Archives as it has been vulgarly known since the age of Blair).

Biography

Stephen Mennell is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at University College Dublin. His books include All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present (1985), The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture (with Anne Murcott and Anneke van Otterloo, 1993), Norbert Elias: Civilization and the Human Self-Image (1989), and The American Civilizing Process (2007). He holds the degrees of Doctor in de Sociale Wetenschappen (Amsterdam) and Doctor of Letters (Cambridge). He is a Foreign Member of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), Amsterdam, a Member the Royal Irish Academy and Academia Europaea, as well as a member of the board of the Norbert Elias Foundation, Amsterdam.

Professor Anne Murcott

Abstract

The point of departure for this talk is the view that there are documentary sources about social life in general and aspects of food in particular which sociologists have largely ignored or worse may even be ignorant of. It is part of a view that far too many sociological researchers mount projects using the same method as they used last time and failing completely even to think about designing their study. The absence of thought at this strategic level in part accounts for the neglect of documentary sources. Two projects will be briefly presented to illustrate the strategic value of archival material as sociological data. Both inspect commercially published archived items – cookery books and the trade magazine The Grocer to pursue investigation of images of kitchen technology and conceptions of shoppers respectively. Reference will also be made to the use of other types of archived material (in the Museum of London in Docklands and the Butetown

archive in Cardiff) such as photographs, street directories, port warehouse records etc examined for a short piece of work on food in port cities. The presentation concludes with the observation that such sources have to be treated with the same suitable circumspection as any other type of sociological data.

Biography

Anne Murcott is author of books, articles and papers in sociology on various aspects of food, diet and culture, and served as Director of the Economic & Social Research Council (UK) Research Programme "'The Nation's Diet": the social science of food choice' in the 1990s. In 2009 Dr Murcott received an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala in recognition of her contribution to the sociology of food. She is currently Professorial Research Associate, Food Studies Centre, SOAS, London and Honorary Professor at the University of Nottingham.

At present she is editing 'The Handbook of Food Research' with Peter Jackson and Warren Belasco (Bloomsbury). She is also co-editor with David Evans and Hugh Campbell of 'Waste matters: new perspectives of food and society' (The Sociological Review Monograph) and co-editor with Jakob Klein of 'Food Consumption in Global Perspective: Essays in the Anthropology of Food in Honour of Jack Goody' (Palgrave). She serves as a member of the UK Food Standards Agency's General Advisory Committee on Science.

Dr Polly Russell

Abstract

The British Library's collection of over 250 oral history recordings with food producers are a valuable, and, as yet, relatively underused resource. Drawing from the experience of collecting recordings and working as a British Library Curator, this talk will draw connections between the structural factors which determine the content of an archive and the influence these factors have on how recordings are used in research.

Biography

Polly Russell works as a Curator in the Social Science Department of the British Library. She has responsibility for the library's Human Geography collections and has research interests in food production and consumption and feminist history.

Dr David Smith

Abstract

Parts of my own past research efforts have explored various nutrition policy making episodes, mainly from 1910s to 1940s, in which the claims of enthusiasts for the 'newer knowledge of nutrition' (ie knowledge of vitamins) were often prominent. I have also looked at a variety of dimensions of the corned beef and typhoid affair of the 1960s (which focussed on the Aberdeen typhoid outbreak of 1964). My sources have been public records (for example of the health and agricultural ministries and the Medical Research Council), institutional and personal archives, government reports, and the published work of scientists and activists, newspapers, oral history etc. I have generally neglected the impacts of policies in terms of everyday food practices, although the research of some colleagues in this area, focusing for example on milk, has been more comprehensive in this sense. Some scientific activists and food reformers have assumed that dietary habits can be changed simply. Others have highlighted the 'resistance' of populations, which they

have interpreted in either moral or more dispassionate terms. But despite the hand-wringing of such actors, food practices and food vocabularies do change, in response to a variety of stimuli. It is easy to think of examples such as the advent of cheap mass produced chicken, or microwave ovens. And from about the 1980s fat consumption fell quite dramatically. This coincided with the revival of a political food movement, the formation of scientific and medical consensus, the adoption of new official policies, and the increasing development, visibility and sales of low fat products. Now, however, there is much anxiety about an emerging 'obesity epidemic', and concern in some quarters that some aspects of the recent prescriptions of scientists, activists and policy makers may have been misconceived or even counter-productive. Some commentators have condemned and rejected approaches based on nutritional guidelines as 'nutritionism'. In this light, the focus of the organisers of this conference upon food narratives as a means of gaining insights into why families and individuals eat as they do may have a new and special contribution to make. In my contribution to this conference I will ask whether the archive that I am familiar with has anything to offer this research enterprise. But I will also suggest that the narrative approach can potentially complement research focusing on the rarefied concerns and conflicts of activists, scientists, and policy makers, by demonstrating the impacts, lack of impacts, translations and other connections between their activities and the daily lives of individuals and families.

Biography

David Smith is Honorary Senior Lecturer in the history of medicine at the University of Aberdeen. He edited Nutrition in Britain (1997), co-edited Food, Science, Policy and Regulation in the Twentieth Century (2001). He is currently collaborating with Elizabeth Neswald (Brock University, Canada) and Ulrike Thoms (Universitätsmedizin, Berlin) in preparing for publication a further collection of essays on the history of nutrition science, based on an international workshop on 'Setting Standards', held in 2010. He co-authored Food Poisoning, Policy, and Politics: Corned Beef and Typhoid in Britain in the 1960s (2005).

Helen Wakely

Abstract

This talk will consider some of the difficulties inherent in tracing archival evidence of everyday family food practices in the past, and offer up for discussion some potential strategies using source materials in the Wellcome Library.

Biography

Helen Wakely is an Archivist at the Wellcome Library with a special interest in promoting engagement with the library's collection of early modern recipe manuscripts. She is currently working on a crowd-sourcing collaboration to build on the digitisation of the library's 17th-century recipe manuscripts, and developing ideas for a food-themed interactive space within the library's Reading Room as part of the forthcoming Wellcome Collection Development Project.

