

OLDHAM



HERITAGE STORIES



INTRODUCTION

Telling a story to each other is vital to maintaining the wellbeing of a community. Whenever we feel lonely or disconnected, familiarity and warmth can be found in recalling the memories and legends of those who have come before. Many of these stories can be found in our local archive services who collect and store a wide range of resources.

The Heritage Stories project sought to identify and record the important stories of three different communities in Greater Manchester. The intention was to bring together the interests of local people with the skills of their local archives thereby consolidating the life experiences of community members and extending the knowledge of those housing these memories. We wanted to start a dialogue. This publication will show examples of the activities carried out and act as inspiration for people to feel confident in recording their own heritage stories and to ask their archive and local studies centre for help.



The Oldham Archives had been interested in documenting the contribution of South Asian women to the town's business community for some time. They were partnered with the CHAI Project who work with South Asian women in Oldham and were also interested in recording the stories of their participants. In August we organised a heritage walk in Alexandra Park in the heart of the area where many South Asian families live. The intention was to trigger memories and to start conversations about the role individuals, mothers and sisters have played in running local businesses and supporting their families economically. A small number of women from the CHAI Project's walking group attended and stories began to be told. Shopkeeping, piecework, experiences of racism at work and current entrepreneurial aspirations became dominant themes the women wished to explore. Through a combination of further workshops, journaling and oral history interviews, the women recorded a variety of stories and memories that the archives were able to illustrate with photographs and to store for future generations.

HERITAGE STORIES

Corner shops and small enterprises are the lifeblood of a town and have been so important in establishing a role and a place for new communities trying to settle. For decades, men have been the more visible face of business, but behind closed doors, women have been central to keeping those enterprises and families afloat.

The Heritage Stories project has provided an opportunity for this arguably hidden part of the story to be identified and conversations to start. The following are some of the memories recalled by female members of the CHAI Women's Project, many of whom stacked shelves, run up the tills, sewn and had entrepreneurial aspirations for women in their communities.

Memories from Oldham

SHOPKEEPING

My dad started off with a very small shop [on Hardy Street]. My dad worked for my uncle as well. But then over the years he extended and extended, then he started the meat business and halal meat as well. Then he bought another business on the ground floor so he expanded the shops.

I worked in the shop after school, in the evenings and weekends. I helped out with stacking shelves. I enjoyed working in the shop because you met different people and were always busy.

I didn't enjoy working at the till....I remember selling some vegetables to a customer and I must have sold them at the wrong price, I sold them for next to nothing!

That business was hard work [my dad] was up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go to the market.....and sometimes he'd come home for lunch and nod off on the sofa! He did it for 30 years but then things changed, it just quietened down so much. It's a textile shop now. He sold it and retired. He came to this country when he was 15 or 16 and went to school for a few years then he just started his business from a very small shop and over the years expanded it. I think he did want his children to work there but obviously they didn't, and have gone on to do other things.

He sold mainly groceries, anything from loo roll to them little Tic Tacs. [he] used to have fruit and veg and then I think the freezers came in after with the milk and then the butchers came later. I think, for a lot of years that was what kept the shop going actually, because with the supermarkets opening, because it was a halal butchers that kept the shop going. They would come in for the meat and then buy fruit and veg, and whatever else they needed. It was British produce that we sold mainly

I think women working in shops allowed women to come out more. They could chat with us. Women could come out and do a bit of grocery shopping.

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PIECEWORK

I'd watch my mum doing the piecework, sewing at home for factories. It was very very low paid. I think it was like a penny a cushion! It was ridiculous! She used to do cushions, underwear, that sort of thing. But they had to survive large families [there were no] new benefits back then. Everyone had a big Singer sewing machine.

I remember during the day [my mum] used to like cook, clean and it was sort of evening when we were like either studying or asleep and when she used to be on the sewing machine sewing the nice cushions and underwear and shirts different things that that got dropped off in the home. Then during the day or the weekend we kids would help out as well. We turned the cushions inside out or we'd have more specific jobs. We weren't forced or anything, we wanted to help out in the house for, like I said the salary. The money we got was very low paid and it was something we wanted to do and enjoyed doing for just that little bit of extra income

We got the work through word of mouth. We all sort of knew each other. It was like a very small village with different people on different streets. My Dad built a tandoor out of an old chimney and all the women would get together to cook chapatti so I think that must have been a hub where they shared this sort of information and got work for each other

Neighbours were always in each other's houses.....especially for us in the Asian community, doors were always open.....I don't think we visit each other as much.

My mum used to sew factory clothes, like trousers and stuff, and we would help her out. We used to love helping her out, it was really nice. On the side, she would sew clothes for people that they would drop off, the material and stuff. There was a lot of factory work then.

Din Textiles used to give a lot of factory work out. Their families all lived along Park Rd. They would hand out the material and then come and collect.

I moved to Oldham in 2001. And my sister was with me. I didn't work but my sister was in a factory where she worked as a machinist and a piece worker. At the time I remember she got 20p a piece, like trousers, cardigans and shirts. One day I went to visit with her and just worked one hour and just stitched one piece. The next day, I decided I don't want to go with it because I don't have any interest in sewing. But my sister worked for two years. And the pay was very low, but she has to apply for her husband's visa.

There was another kind of industry [of men] that would come out and fix sewing machines. They were just local Asian men who had trained themselves up. They were in high demand because sewing machines would break down quite a lot. Electric sewing machines.



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

You know what we did? The CHAI project went to Pakistan, to the mountains to do charity work and we gave them sewing machines, electric and hand ones, so that they could set up their own businesses.

I don't think our mothers had any idea [that their skills would be useful] When my Dad came over in the 60s it was to work in the cotton mills....but the salaries weren't enough. They worked hard, they were grafters.

And they would have to save, to send home to their parents in Pakistan. That money went a long way back there.

I think the men were ok with their wives working because they were at home, in a safe environment.

My idea for a business...when me and my friends sit down [we talk about our Dads being in business].....we want to own a business, not be in a job..... rather than working for somebody. So we were thinking what we should do is an idea that no one else has done in this area.....stuffed paratha. Because in Pakistan [someone] has started a naan business. So they have started making Fatayer naan, cheese naan, Nutella naans. So I thought why can't we [do something like that]?. In our community women are restricted...so let's do something for ourselves. Leave a legacy for our children and make a franchise.

The problem is, I know one thing, I'm not going to get support from my house. As a woman....I don't know lots of things so I need support...like applying for money, finding a location...I know my husband's not going to help, he already has a job. But I want this, I really, really want this.

The problem is the timing. There is nothing during the school time.

It's all about making opportunities for women.



HOW TO RESEARCH AND SHARE



If you have a story to tell, here is how you can use the resources at Oldham Local Studies & Archives to support your research

What is the role of the local studies & archives in your area?

The role of Oldham Local Studies and Archives is to collect, preserve and make available material considered to be of historical importance to the area covered by Oldham Council. We are open six days a week, access is free, and staff are always on hand to help.

What kind of resources do you host and how can the public access them?

Our resources encompass books, maps, photographs, newspapers and collections of archives covering everything from the cotton industry to The public can access items in person and through our on-line catalogue <https://calmview.oldham.gov.uk/calmview/>

YOUR OWN HERITAGE STORIES



What was your interest in the Heritage Stories project and what did you hope would come from participating?

Some years ago we participated in a project called 'Cotton, Curry and Commerce' based upon the archives and stories collected from the Oldham Asian Business Association. As the stories were predominantly from men we thought the Heritage Stories Project was a good opportunity to gather stories from Asian women who contributed so much from behind the scenes. From participating in the project we would hope to obtain stories that would complement those retrieved as part of 'Cotton, Curry and Commerce'.

Do you hope to inspire more people to tell their stories and how can people share them?

History is fundamentally a collection of stories and we hope the project will inspire people to record their own stories. Every story matters in telling the history of an area and its community, and everyone has something to offer to ensure that that history is not forgotten.

PARTICIPANTS

Oldham Local Studies and Archives

With thousands of maps, photographs, books and an extensive collection of archives recording the history of the borough, this is a unique resource that defines what Oldham is today. Explore your family history; find out how Oldham has changed with the development of new communities; uncover the story of Oldham from village to cotton capital of the world. Whether its family or local history you're interested in Oldham Local Studies and Archives brings the stories of the past to life.

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Opening hours

We are open Mondays and Wednesdays to Fridays, 10am–5pm, Tuesdays 10am–2pm, and Saturdays 10am–4pm.

Women's CHAI Project CIC

Women's CHAI Project was founded in 2011 by Najma Khalid over a cup of chai/tea. CHAI stands for Care, Help And Inspire and that is what they aspire to do. The Women's CHAI Project cares about its members and the community, helping and inspiring them to make a difference. The aim of the project is to empower women to function at maximum levels as mothers and females. It also raise's awareness of women's wellbeing and ensure mothers are better equipped to make a difference to their children, themselves and the community. Currently there are 5 CHAI groups reaching out to about 60 women a week. The CHAI Project runs a variety of activities from arts and crafts, theatre to seminars with Doctors. The CHAI Project has worked locally, nationally and Internationally over the years reaching out to thousands. The project is based in Oldham. For further information please see twitter page @CHAI_Project

Manchester City of Literature

Manchester City of Literature manages the City's UNESCO designation on behalf of Manchester City Council, the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and over 30 literary partners. We want Manchester to be a city where diverse voices and stories are celebrated, creative talent and industries are nurtured and where literary activity changes lives.

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