

All in a Day's Work

Dave Welsh*, editor of the recently published 260-page, large format, illustrated book, which is both an oral history and a guide to TU activity, describes the project behind it.

All in a Day's Work is the first in a series of new publications designed to highlight the role of London's working people over a period of fifty years. It draws on an oral labour history project which collected over one hundred interviews from 2009 to 2013 and a number of reminiscence interviews carried out at the History Talk project. The Britain at Work West London Project was launched at the House of Commons in 2009 with John McDonnell MP and Professor Nina Fishman. It set out to interview people who had worked (and usually lived) in West London during the five decades after the Second World War. The project aimed to find out about people's working lives, exploring the type of work they did, the conditions in which they worked, their pay and health and safety at work. It asked about people's trade union membership (or non-membership), involvement and activities, both on a day-to-day level and when involved in wider aspects like industrial action. It also wanted to know about the ways in which family background, migration, politics and culture affected working lives.

The project covered six west and north-west London boroughs (partly in Middlesex): Kensington & Chelsea, Brent, Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing, Harrow and Hillingdon. Background research was done in these boroughs, which was also used to provide a local context for work; examining, for example, factories, rail depots and offices. The research tried, where possible, to connect the interviews with the broader industrial and public sector developments in the post-war period. It focused on the great West London industrial belt, including the many famous factories on the Park Royal Estate, the Great West Road and Western Avenue, as well as the many smaller firms that were located in inner West London. But the project also aimed to explore the growth of the public sector: public services such as hospitals, schools, colleges, the Post Office, rail, tube and bus services. The interviews and research were to be placed at the TUC Library Collections website, part of the ongoing Britain at Work 1945-1995 national oral labour history programme.

The other noteworthy aspect of the project was the commitment of a number of volunteers and supporters who did many of the initial interviews, provided people willing to be interviewed and transcribed interviews. The interviewees themselves went out of their way to assist the project, not only by offering information, ideas and thoughts but also by donating or lending photographs, wage slips, union membership cards, leaflets and pamphlets which could supplement the interviews, not to mention the many cups of tea and the odd glass of whisky!

Realistically, the interviews and research can only provide a snapshot of a large area over a period of fifty years; and *All in a Day's Work* can do no more than skim the surface of the complex social and economic world of West London as it is largely built around the interviews themselves. A fuller and more detailed picture can be found on the TUC Library Collections website. Nevertheless, this is the first attempt to assemble first-hand accounts of both private and public sectors and it has uncovered many aspects of work, industrial relations and trade union activity. Many of the interviews are with people who have been called the 'militant minority' and who would be proud to be so named, arguing that trade unions have been the primary instrument for attracting workers' allegiance and realising workers' goals. All would probably agree that work and trade union history should be placed within a network of community associations, families, political parties and groups, employers, the economy and the state. This, we hope, will be within the scope of the next wave of labour history and within the capabilities of the next generation of labour historians.

****To buy copies of All in a Day's Work, please email Dave on:***

davidwelsh83@btinternet.com