Environment and Climate Crisis (ECC) Special Interest Group (SIG) Presentations 2025-2026

24.09.2025

Nina Laurie, School of Geography and Sustainable Development University of St Andrews presented:

'El Niño' a phenomenon with opportunities? Inspiring the next generation of Peruvian chroniclers through education.

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This presentation drew on UK AHRC funded research (2019-2022) on 'El Niño desert livelihoods' in northern coastal Peru. Part of a larger field-based interdisciplinary project with climate scientists and human and physical geographers, the original intention was for the research team to collect climate memories about the impact of El Niño on communities in the Sechura Desert using archival and oral history methods. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020 research in Peru took a new direction. Working with the Sechura Schoolboard and Peruvian NGO PRISMA, research team-led oral histories were replaced with on-line classes teaching students how to conduct these themselves. The students learnt new digital, oral history and presentation skills which were integrated into the school curriculum. In the classical style of Peruvian chroniclers, they provided detailed accounts of how this important cyclical event has historically impacted their community over generations. The partner school went on to win prestigious national level education innovation prizes and their engagement fundamentally changed the course of the research. The success of this shared experience and the co-produced outputs it generated suggest that the time is ripe to engage more seriously with school-based education about the climate crisis. In the hands of young chroniclers, oral history has much to offer this agenda.

10.12.2025

Kathryn Nasstrom presented:

The Tibetan Land Speaks: Oral Histories of Political Violence and the Land

This presentation is situated at the juncture of two important trends in recent oral history research: 1- oral history and political violence; 2- oral histories of the land and environment. I take a case study approach by focusing on Tibet, which has been subjected to political violence and environmental degradation through China's invasion, dating back to the 1950s, and its ongoing occupation. I draw on a large body of oral history interviews conducted with Tibetan elders living in exile to make two related points: first, the importance of viewing environmental impact and degradation as a form of political violence;

second, the urgency of thinking about alternatives to this violence. In the Tibetan case, environmental protection as rooted in Tibetan Buddhism.

Kathryn Nasstrom is an oral historian, writer, editor, and Professor Emerita of History at the University of San Francisco in the United States. She is a past editor of the Oral History Review and was one of the founding series editors for Oxford University Press's oral history book series. Working within the interdisciplinary fields of oral history, life history research, and autobiographical studies, she brings textual research methods to bear on oral historical analysis.

22.01.2026

Leslie McCartney, University of Alaska Fairbanks presented:

Gwich'in Climate Events Database: exploring drives of climatic, ecological and social change

This database draws together a wealth of oral history testimonies from Elders and knowledge holders to explore key drives of climatic, ecological, and social change in the Gwich'in traditional territory in the Northwest Territories in Canada, from a Gwich'in perspective. The database explores themes identified as important to the Gwich'in, including the changing climate and environment, plants, animals, birds and fish, Gwich'in lifeways, cultural change and the impacts of development and industrialization.

05.02.2026

There is No Planet B: Oral History of the Environmental Movement in the UK (1970-2020)

Dr Toby Butler and Dr Saskia Papadakis from Royal Holloway, University of London reported on a recently completed three-year project recording 100 life stories for the National Life Stories Collection at the British Library. The talk will include playing several clips from the collection and personal reflections and insights gained from working as interviewers on a large-scale, national oral history project.

Project website: www.rhul.ac.uk/ohem

If anyone would like to follow up and find out more you can go to the project website www.rhul.ac.uk/ohem and Oral Histories of the Environmental Movement: Making an Activist Archive is an open access article in the 100th issue of History Workshop Journal has just been published online.

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14.04.2026

Mac Downes presented:

'I was only a Volunteer' An environmentalist's journey through Kingston

As one of the themes of the Project was "Voices Less Heard", I decided I wanted to focus my research on meeting people who often state "I was only a volunteer" and as a result often become excluded from narratives about the tasks they perform, skills they offer (or gain) and satisfactions they often receive from, or offer to, other community members. As one gentleman recently pointed out, he was not up to lying in the street in protest, thereby not making the news, but was interested in joining environmental causes that worked within the community and offered some environmental benefit.

During the summer of 2025 I interviewed 10 people and visited 7 groups and attended 3 meetings all related to environmental volunteering in the borough. My greatest wish is that the following stories and personal reflections make an impact upon the 'productivity at all costs' juggernaut that contributes massively towards the adverse effects of climate change.

09.07.2026

Molly Graham presented:

NOAA Voices: 2,700 life experiences from a changing environment

Molly Graham, of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States, gives an overview of the vital work of NOAA Voices, which provides public access to more than 2,700 oral histories documenting first-hand accounts of changing oceans, coasts, weather, and the environment across the U.S. The collection, built in partnership with researchers, universities, historical societies, and community organizations, preserves knowledge, traditions, and lived experiences that might otherwise be lost.
