

THE SCHOOL MEALS SERVICE

PAST, PRESENT - AND FUTURE?

Welcome to our newsletter!



This month, the team met for an away-day at the University of Wolverhampton to share progress updates across the three strands of the project. Our April newsletter provides a snapshot of some of our most recent work as we near the end of our data collection phase. It's been a quieter month in terms of events with the beginnings of data analysis and transcription work keeping us busy!

Strand 1: Policy history

Our colleagues working on Strand 1 of the project at University College London have been focusing on archive data collected from the National Records of Scotland this month. They have found documents dealing with key themes within the policy history of the School Meals Service, relating to nutrition, the expansion of the service, and the 'social training' of school children.

Key emerging questions include:

- How far were children increasingly viewed as consumers in the post-1945 period?
- To what extent did certain actors or groups come into conflict with the educational aims of the School Meals Service?
- Why was the uptake of free school meals not universally successful?

Strand 3: Ethnographic study

The University of Wolverhampton team have been hard at work analysing the data collected from their fieldwork visits to our four partner schools across the UK. Initial findings from this research suggest:

- A call for greater input from children, parents, and schools in decision-making processes around school meal policy.
- There are demographic differences in the uptake of school meals.
- Children value a choice of school meals highly.
- Food education - from cooking, growing food, and learning about its nutritional value - is important from an early age to inspiring children to enjoy and make healthy choices around food.

Strand 2: Social history

In April, the University of Sheffield team completed the last of our oral history interviews. We have now spoken with 68 participants to understand the experiences of people who interacted with the School Meals Service in the past, whether as pupils, teachers, lunchtime supervisors, caterers, or parents! The map below shows the locations of our participants' schools in England, Scotland and Wales.



This month we also visited the Sound Archives in the British Library, listening to interviews recorded in the 1980s and 1990s, and scoped out teachers' experiences of school meals during wartime in diaries archived with Mass Observation online.

Upcoming events

We have several events coming up in the next two months. First, the Sheffield team will be presenting a paper at the Life Cycles Seminar Series at the Institute for Historical Research in London in June. This is free to attend and available for joining online, please let us know if you are interested!

In July, the whole team will be presenting at the **Children's History Society Conference** at the University of Newcastle. The following week, our colleague from Strand 1 Dr Laura Newman will be presenting at the **Social History Society Conference** at the University of Durham.