Use pictures, not just descriptions / questions

The document that Viviane sent through seems to suggest that a questionnaire might be a good opportunity to gather maybe a larger amount of data from a wider range of respondents, than would be feasible to do by interview.

**Possible Questions for Oral Histories**

Background  
  
*As a background, you need to explain you are doing a PhD on the topic of chemicals and their users in the British home ca 1930s-1980s, on an AHRC CDA at Brookes in collaboration with the Science Museum*   
  
  
*There is one big issue here that will need to be dealt with, to deal with it, namely to ensure that our interviewees have a clear idea of what are ‘chemicals’. You could ask them to define what they understand by the term but I am not sure if this would really be useful. Perhaps you would prefer to give them a definition at the outset and they then answer questions about chemicals as defined. Similarly you are going to have to define the kind of branded household products you are interested in which will depend on the direction you decide to take. The questions on the household products will therefore be more specific than the ‘chemical’ ones which should be kept as general as possible.*   
  
 CR -  this is going to have to be clear in the recruitment and selection process, as well as reiterated in the interview.   
  
Contact with Chemicals *CR - contact sounds like covering yourself with them - try to rephrase this.*   
How did you come into contact with chemicals? Did you work with them at all? Did you come into contact with them at work or at school/university? Was your only contact at home?   
  
Assuming you had some chemicals at home, how did you obtain them? From the chemist (pharmacist)? A shop or grocery store? A department store? An ironmonger (drysalters) or DIY store? A plant shop or garden centre? From work or school/university? From neighbours or relations who had access to chemicals? If you obtained them from a chemist did you buy them off the shelf or did you obtain them from the pharmacists themselves? Did the pharmacist order them for you? Did you order any chemicals through the post?   
  
What did you use chemicals for? Did you use them for medical purposes (such as poultices or indigestion)? For personal hygiene? In the kitchen for cleaning? For use in the garden (weedkillers, insecticides, fertilisers)? Did you use dyes for clothes or in cooking? [There will have to be more specific questions, according to the initial answers given.] **How did you know what chemicals to buy and how to use them?** From parents, relations or neighbours? Books of household tips or management? Newspapers or magazines? From the packet?   
  
If you were a child (or had a child), did you use them for play (playdough, crystal growing, crystal gardens) or for experiments? Did you have a chemistry set? Do you remember what it contained? Do you remember doing any interesting (or dangerous!) experiments? Did you buy any extra equipment for your experiments and where did you buy them?   
  
Do you remember any warnings about using chemicals? Where were these warnings? On the packet? In a book or newspaper? From the person selling it? From a parent, a relation or neighbour? Did you take any heed of them? Did you have any accidents with chemicals? Did they harm you in any way?   
  
Did you connect the chemicals you used with chemistry as a subject/science in any way? Did you associate them with the chemical industry and if so, any particular company or companies? Were you prompted to buy any chemicals by advertisements in newspapers or magazines? What would you say were the most common chemicals in general use in the 1950s [1940s, 1960s as appropriate]?   
  
Did your use of chemicals [for whatever reason] change over time? Did it decline? Why did it decline? Did you find chemicals harder to obtain? Were chemicals less effective? Were they more dangerous in your view? Is there any particular event or watershed in your memory? When did you ~~suddenly~~ realise that you were not using as many chemicals or that they had become harder to obtain? Are there any chemicals you regret no longer using or not being able to obtain?   
  
Branded Products  
What were the branded household products that you use in the 1950s [earliest period of interviewee]? Where did you buy them from? A grocery store? A department store? A supermarket? An ironmongers? [etc.]  
  
To what extent in this period [e.g. 1950s] did you use branded products rather than chemicals or soap? To what extent did these branded product replace chemicals or soap that your parents used before the war? To what extent were you persuaded to switch to branded products by advertisements, newspapers, television, neighbours etc? *What do you think influenced your choices?*   
  
How did you decide what brands and what kinds of products to buy? Were you influenced by advertisements or newspapers/magazines? Parents, neighbours and relations? From shop displays or advice from the shopkeeper? Were you influenced by promotions (e.g. free gifts) at all? Were you loyal to certain brands or did you switch brands frequently/indifferently? What made you switch from one brand to another? [This could have been something quite specific such as a different type of washing machine or indeed getting a washing machine for the first time.]  
  
How did you use these branded products? [This seems a bit obvious but it would be interesting to know e.g. how they wash clothes in the given period.] How often did you use them? How did you know how to use them? From parents, neighbours or relations? From advertisements? From the shopkeeper? From the packet?   
  
Did you use branded products for purposes other than for what they were intended? What gave you this idea?

[An newspaper or magazine article? Books of tips? Relations or neighbours? Your own idea?]

Did you have any accidents with or adverse reactions to these products? [Did they harm you in any way?]  
  
Do you remember any warnings about using these products? Where were these warnings? On the packet? In a book or newspaper? From the person selling it? From a parent, a relation or neighbour? Did you take any heed of them?   
  
  
  
What appliances did you have in your house? (woul[This is a useful question even if we do not focus on cleaning products for example.] When did you first get a vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, washing machine etc?   
  
Were you aware of the identity of the companies making these products? How much did you know about these companies? Did you associate specific products with their manufacturers? Were you more inclined to buy products from one manufacturer rather than another?   
  
New Products  
Did you use more branded products in the 1960s [1970s] than in the 1950s [1970s]? Did your use of chemical products decline in this period? Why?   
  
Did you change the branded products you used over time [e.g. between the 1950s and 1960s]? When did you change your brands/products and why? Did your home change? Were new products now available? Were you influenced by shopping in a supermarket rather than a grocery store? When did you switch from a grocery store to a supermarket? Did this change make you more aware of what products were available? Were more products available? Were you influenced by advertising, neighbours, store promotions? As more products became available did you become less brand-aware or brand-loyal?   
  
Did your view of branded products change during this time? Did you regard them as more effective/less effective? More hazardous/less hazardous? Did you worry about the effect on the environment? The effect on your family/children? When did you begin to worry and why? Is there any particular event or watershed which sticks in your memory?   
  
To sum up: Looking back from the vantage point of today [or say the 1990s perhaps in the case of the older interviewees], what would you say were the major changes in your use of chemicals and branded products? When did you first start to use branded products rather than chemicals or generic products? When did you use of branded products or specific brands change markedly? Are there any particular changes or watersheds that stand out in your memory? How do the products you use today different from the ones in the 1950s [1960s, 1970s]?   
  
Has your attitude to chemicals changed during your lifetime? Has this change affected how you think about chemistry or how you regard the chemical industry? Do you think the chemical industry and its iconic firms have largely disappeared during your lifetime?  
  
*Perhaps you could send out the questionnaires first, taking the opportunity of people responding to ask them if they wouldn’t mind being interviewed on aspects that you would pick beforehand as being best suited for oral interviews?*  
  
  
*So you would add as a last question something like: ‘Would you like to be able to talk more about your experiences of chemicals in the home? If so,  please let me know if you would you be willing to be contacted for an interview by providing contact details.’?*  
  
CR - a questionnaire would need to be short, a lot shorter than this. It could be quite useful for a general survey, as well as to select interviewees for more indepth questioning. I have generally felt less enthusiastic about doing interviews where the interviewee has prepared things in an almost script-like way, they might as well have just written their answers down.