

The Mass Observation Archive
University of Sussex Library
Collections Policy

January 2009

The Mass Observation Archive

1. Definitions and clarifications

- 1 **“Mass Observation” (MO):**
The original organisation set up in 1937. It may also refer more abstractly to the research traditions and methodologies of both the original organisation and the present-day activities.
- 2 **“The Mass Observation Archive (MOA) Trust”:**
The legal and financial institution set up in 1975 in the care of the Trustees.
- 3 **“The Mass Observation Archive”:**
 - (1) The physical collection comprising all papers generated by the original activities of MO, the material directly collected by the MO A since 1977¹ and all acquisitions to the MOA from other sources.
 - (2) The institution including the relevant activities of the Trustees, University of Sussex Library Special Collections staff and other individuals authorised by the Trustees.
- 4 **“The Mass Observation Project”:**
The revival in 1981 of an active collecting enterprise through the recruitment of a national panel. It also includes special projects (eg with schools) which bring in material closely related to the panel work. It is also referred to as a “the second phase”.
- 5 **Geographical note:**
The Trustees regard their geographical remit as being *primarily* England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, that is, the United Kingdom (UK). In the original Trust Deed of 1975 (see below) the geographical remit is cited as “Great Britain”. The Trustees prefer the term “United Kingdom” because it more accurately reflects the actual geographical coverage of both the early and the second phases of Mass Observation.

2. Aims of the Mass Observation Archive

- 1 The aims of the MOA derive from the responsibilities of the MOA Trustees who

“shall stand possessed of the Archive to hold and preserve the same in order to advance the education of the public with regard to the modern social history of Great Britain”

Mass Observation Archive Trust Deed 21 August 1975

¹ The first call for new material related to the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977 when diaries and street party accounts were collected. In 1981, the continuous Mass Observation Project was launched.

- 2 To fulfil their obligations, the Trustees will aim to
 - 1 Continue in the tradition of the original MO in documenting the everyday lives of people living in the UK
 - 2 Maintain and develop the role of the MOA as a centre of expertise in the care of life story materials and the study of everyday life in the UK
 - 3 Preserve the archive created by the original MO (1937-), and any new related collections subsequently acquired, in accordance with best practice archival standards
 - 4 Create a documentary record of everyday life in the UK as it is experienced and reported not by the media or by professional commentators, but by people in their own words and images
 - 5 Ensure that the MOA is as fully accessible as possible without jeopardising its physical or intellectual security
 - 6 Augment the original archive with new collections as specified in the Acquisitions Policy (see below)
 - 7 Promote the MOA as a resource for teaching and learning in both academic and non-academic contexts through publications, conferences, public events, digital media (including website) and the national and international media

3. Acquisitions policy

- 1 The MOA Trustees and their representatives will consider for acquisition the donation of life story documents produced by people in accordance with the traditions of MO and in the light of its operational selection criteria (see Appendix).
- 2 The Trustees of the MOA will make the final decision about acceptance in accordance with the agreed Acquisitions Policy and in the light of academic and professional advice. The decision-making may be delegated to authorised individuals by the Trustees.
- 3 If a collection is offered to the MOA which requires particular resource needs (eg storage space, conservation, cataloguing, special access facilities) and the Trustees wish to accept the collection, then the Trustees take responsibility for finding the appropriate resources and associated funding. However, although every effort will be made to conserve, catalogue and promote all new acquisitions as quickly as possible, no guarantees can be made to donors about how soon these procedures can be carried out. Any format will be accepted providing the MOA has facilities for appropriate physical care and full public access.

The Trustees will give preference to:

- 1 Unpublished material about everyday life created by people who might not otherwise have their papers archived.
- 2 Published material only where it constitutes a unique library relating to the themes of non-élite autobiography, biography or collective/community history.
- 3 Material relating to 20th and 21st century.

- 4 Material created within the UK or associated with living in the UK although the content need not be connected to any specific themes.
- 5 Material which can be made public immediately²
- 6 Material generated by life story related research projects when accompanied by copies of the “end product” (copies of books, films, theses, CD Roms, websites).

The Trustees will not normally accept:

- 1 Material on deposit/loan
- 2 Material where the copyright cannot be transferred to the Mass Observation Archive (information on copyright ownership and its transfer is included in the [Guidance for Potential Donors on the Mass Observation Archive website](#)).
- 3 Copies of original material
- 4 Newspaper cuttings or other printed materials which can be obtained elsewhere
- 5 Re-written, re-worked or edited versions of diaries, letters or other papers unless accompanied by the original version
- 6 Material which would, by virtue of its format, content or provenance, be more appropriately archived in another repository
- 7 Material generated outside the agreed date period (ie pre-twentieth century) or geographic region (UK)
- 8 Material which the appropriate professional and academic advisers consider could never constitute a useful research resource (eg because of its condition, its legibility or its legal status).

6. The Trustees reserve the right, **in exceptional cases**, to re-locate or otherwise dispose of material in accordance with good archival practice. The records or papers of institutions or organisations (other than of Mass Observation itself) will not normally be accepted.

² The imposition of fixed term embargoes on public access may be agreed with donors where material is of a particularly personal or sensitive nature

APPENDIX

Operational criteria to guide acceptance of personal collections by the MOA

The following system of scoring according to a set of criteria is designed to assist the process of evaluation of a collection.

1. Relevance for research/scholarly value to social history/life history

How close is it to the rest of the MOA material in terms of form, content, date period? For example, a full descriptive daily diary written over the period of WW2 and comparable to the MO diaries would score 10 as would a set of letters for the same period. If it was an appointments diary with brief entries, then score lower. It might depend also on the content of a whole collection. Some dross might be acceptable if there is a key gem within it though we would reserve the right to dispose of unwanted material.

2. Clarity of legal ownership

Score 10 for written proof or unassailable evidence of legal ownership eg donated by author/creator; score 9 for presumed evidence eg donated by person who is clearly the heir or executor and so on down the scale.

3. Donation not deposit:

Score 10 for donation and 0 for deposit.

4. Public access

Score 10 when 100% of collection becomes available immediately without conditions and take off a point for every five years of an embargo.

5. Ratio of unique to non unique

Score 10 for entirely unique eg letters, photos or diaries; albums with printed ephemera or mixed collections scored according to proportion of written commentary.

6. Explanatory material and context

Score 10 for full, clearly expressed, biographical and historical background with dates, people and other details.

7. Funds to support transfer & cataloguing

Score 10 for collections where the donors offers to arrange transfer and/or makes a contribution to costs. Transfer only scores 5.

8. Legibility especially of handwriting

Score sensitively since legibility maybe very subjective but has to be an issue.

9. Physical condition

Score 10 for material in good condition and good order.

10. Copyright assigned to the Trustees?

Yes=10; no=0