

## Welcome to the Spring edition of the Bulletin

In this issue of the Bulletin:

**Professor James Hinton on researching in the Archive**

**'What MO means to me' by a current Mass Observer**

**The Archive's Trustees introduce themselves**

**Extracts from a recent Directive on the current financial situation**

It has now been over four months since I began work as Development Director and although it is taking time to adjust to the new role, it has been a treat to be able to give two days a week to Mass Observation matters.

The main responsibility continues to be the Mass Observation Project. The Winter Directive went out last November and the Spring one comes out this April. We covered the current financial crisis (both at home and globally) in the Winter Directive and the responses are now ready for research. In the Spring Directive, we will ask the Mass Observers to write about the Second World War and the Internet. The third part of the Directive will be a general request for people's reactions to current events in the news.

Meanwhile, in consultation with the MO Trustees (whose profiles are included on page 2), work on consolidating the academic future of the Mass Observation Project has begun with the setting up of an academic advisory group at Sussex. This group includes historians, anthropologists, life history specialists and cultural studies scholars. The Trustees are arranging to meet with them in May of this year. We are also hoping to create a major database for the post 1981 material which will make it much more accessible for research. A big task, indeed!

**Dorothy Sheridan**  
Development Director

## Report from the archival front

**Professor James Hinton has published extensively on twentieth century British social history. Most recently he has been researching the history of Mass Observation. He writes here about his experience of ploughing through boxes of MO material.**



Tom Harrison when the MO papers came to Sussex in 1970

Researching a new history of Mass Observation, I have been ruthlessly overworking the Archive staff, ordering up an endless succession of box. Not my fault! The blame lies squarely with two people: Tom Harrison and Dorothy Sheridan. Tom, because MO ran more on inspiration than on system and there are none of those neat runs of executive minutes that historians usually rely on to guide them through the inner workings of an organisation. And Dorothy, because of the excellence of the on-line catalogue that she and her colleagues have produced over the years, making it possible to spot from afar the fragments of gold dust scattered at random through the mass of day-to-day material surviving in the Archive.

A lot has been written about MO's pre-war origins, but surprisingly little is known about its most active and fruitful period during the second world war. Piecing together the



fragments it is easy to forgive Tom for his lack of system. MO's co-founder, Charles Madge, who by the outbreak of war was already turning towards a more academic style of work, accused Tom of playing political games with MO, but it was these games that ensured its survival.

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# The Trustees

In 1975 the Mass Observation Archive became a charity directed by a board of Trustees. Original members of the board included Tom Harrison and the historian, Asa Briggs (now Lord Briggs). There are now five Trustees, who meet twice a year to discuss the business of the Archive.



**Elizabeth Dunn** studied chemistry at St Hilda's College Oxford before completing a law conversion course and training as a solicitor at the intellectual property specialist firm Rouse Legal. She is now adding to her specialist IP knowledge by training as a trade mark attorney in a well known practice.

Elizabeth joined the Trust board in 2008 with, unsurprisingly, a particular remit for the intellectual property aspects of the work of the Trust and is looking forward to contributing to the development of the Archive.

**Ruth Finnegan** started as a classicist at Oxford in the 1950s, she moved into social anthropology as a graduate, followed by fieldwork and several years of university teaching in Africa. She joined the academic staff of the Open University in 1969 where she served until her retirement in 1999 and continues as Visiting Research Professor.



Ruth has published extensively on the anthropology of communication and expression, including oral performance, literacy, and music-making in Africa, Fiji and Britain, and is especially interested in documenting the lives and stories of so-called 'ordinary' people, in researchers outside the university walls, and in 'hidden' and amateur activities – all linking into her strong support for MO.



**Kitty Inglis** studied European History and Spanish at the University of East Anglia (UEA), graduating in 1984. She completed her Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies at University College London in 1986, while working as Periodicals Librarian at St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College. Following posts in Bristol and London, Kitty returned to UEA in 1989 as History Subject

Librarian and remained there in a variety of different roles until moving to the University of Sussex as Librarian in 2008. As University Librarian, Kitty is Chair of the Mass Observation Archive Trust and is delighted to have an opportunity to contribute to the development of such a significant and prestigious resource.

**Claire Langhamer** is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sussex where she has worked for the last ten years. Her interest in Mass Observation began when she was researching for her first book, *Women's Leisure in England 1920-1960*. Since then MO has been central to her research and she has used it in articles on women and pubs during the Second World War, the meanings of home in mid-century Britain, adultery in the post-war period, and love and courtship. She is currently writing a book on 'everyday love' based on new and old MO.



**Brian Street** is a Professor of Language in Education at King's College London, and a visiting Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania. Brian undertook anthropological fieldwork on literacy in Iran during the 1970s, and taught social and cultural anthropology for over twenty years at the University of Sussex before taking up his post at King's. Brian has written and lectured extensively on literacy practices from both a theoretical and an applied perspective hence his interest in writing for MO. In 2000 he co-authored *Writing Ourselves: Mass Observation and Literacy Practices* (Hampton Press) with Dorothy Sheridan and David Bloome.



James Hinton's article continued...

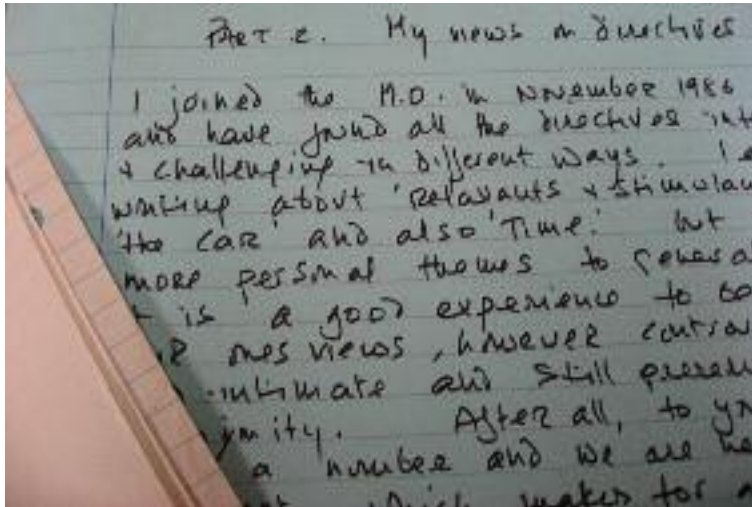


Charles Madge and Tom Harrison

Tom's correspondence and office memos reveal a man of intuitive genius and boundless energy, most at home on the radical fringes of power, jockeying for commissions to keep his full-timers in work, furiously campaigning to convince the Ministry of Information that effective wartime mobilisation was impossible without accurate information about popular attitudes and experience, cultivating links with editors, businessmen, scientists, politicians, and the unlikely bunch of left-wing advertising men who did most to keep MO afloat after Tom's ally in the Ministry of Information, Mary Adams, herself wife of a maverick Tory MP, was pushed out. Running affairs (in more than one sense!) from MO's headquarters in his wife's house in Notting Hill, issuing daily orders from his morning bath, talking on three phones at once, lunching with the great and the good in the Cafe Royal, or leading MO's 'blitztown' flying squad to observe the Luftwaffe's latest site of destruction, Tom never stopped.

Beneath the urgent politicking and the opportunism, Tom Harrison showed a steely determination to keep the non-commercial research and the volunteer panel going in order to build up an archive from which, eventually, the people's history of the war could be written. During the war itself he could find little use for the richest material of all the war diaries sent in by 400 observers. But in the long term his persistence paid off, as we now know from Nella Last and the other edited versions of the diaries published in recent years. It was working on the diaries for my own book, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (to be published by Oxford University Press later this year), that convinced me of the need for a new history of the organisation itself. So, more boxes please....

## What writing for Mass Observation means to me by D1602 (Male, 66, single, S.W London, retired executive)



Mass Observation has been part of my life for more than 20 years now, and yet I still get a frisson of excitement when I see the familiar brown envelope arriving through the letterbox.

What subjects will we be invited to write about this time? Will there be any where I can draw upon personal experiences and perhaps write page after flowing page – or will there be one or two that need me to explain what is on my mind, although my opinions are not always apparent to me until I've found I've written them down in response to a directive!

Like many MOers I suspect (and certainly the few to whom I've spoken to at open days), I was always good at essay-writing at school; at home I was encouraged to write letters (as one did in the 50s and 60s), and only last month I was told by an elderly lady with whom I regularly correspond "your letters are a delight."

In adult life business letters were an important part of my career, and then in the early 80s I began writing promotional pieces for various publications to the extent that I got used to (even blasé about) seeing my words in print.

When I took early retirement a few years ago, I volunteered to work in the MO office at Sussex University, and once a fortnight would drive down to Brighton for an interesting day's work with friendly people and in congenial surroundings. While cataloguing some books on three separate occasions, I was genuinely thrilled to discover that the authors had included extracts from some of my responses to previous directives. This was a source of special delight for me, and I remember those first feelings of exhilaration to this day.

Recently I've been going through copies of some of my earlier contributions to MO - I've had tears in my eyes as I've relived some of the raw emotions I'd expressed when writing about death and other sad times in my life; I've laughed out loud at memories of some of the more humorous events and I've reflected on people I've met, situations I've been in and places I've visited. Often I've been surprised at some of the opinions I'd expressed years ago, because they don't necessarily agree with those that I hold currently, now that I'm older (and hopefully wiser).

I've thoroughly enjoyed, and benefited from writing for MO all these years and I like to think that I've made a wide-ranging and worthwhile contribution to the Archive. I'll go on writing for as long as I am able, and who knows? In a few year's time a publisher or Radio 4 producer might stumble across my various offerings – and I could be the new Nella Last. But don't hold your breath!

**If you are a Mass Observer and interested in writing something for the Bulletin please get in touch!**

## English Anxieties

Those of you in easy reach of South Wales may be interested to hear about an exhibition that has opened at the Turnerhouse in Penarth. The exhibition was produced by the artist Tim Brennan.

Last year, Tim was commissioned by Ffotogallery and Photoworks to produce a piece of artwork about MO. To research the exhibition, Tim spent many hours in the Special Collections reading room looking at material collected by the wartime Mass Observers.

The exhibition is designed to create an alternative archival space for MO and explore the cultural problems and social possibilities of using art to display everyday life.

The exhibition runs till 26 April 2009 and it is hoped that it will tour the UK later in the year. You can read more about the exhibition on Ffotogallery's website: [www.ffotogallery.org](http://www.ffotogallery.org)

## We Are at War



*"Charlie and I heard the announcer tell us that we were at war. We sat there with our attentions riveted....This crisis has made us all realise how much we mean to one another. I am thankful that today is Sunday. We have been let down more lightly than if we had our work to think of."* (Pam Ashford in *We Are at War*)

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Second World War in September, Ebury Press is re-publishing the hugely popular *We Are at War*. Edited by Simon Garfield, the book brings together the diaries of five people writing for Mass Observation at the start of the war. The new edition of the book will be in bookshops from September.

## MO books to be re-published



The first edition of *Britain* was published in 1939

Twenty-five books were published during Mass Observation's first phase of activity. These publications brought together material collected by the organisation's dedicated panel of observers and diary writers. They now offer an extraordinarily vivid glimpse of a time which will soon not be accessible to living memory.

In recent times the books have been out of print and hard to get hold of. Now, thanks to an extensive reissue programme by Faber, the books will be able to reach new audiences.

From the coronation of George VI to the drinking

habits of people in Bolton's pubs, the themes the books cover are diverse. Titles included in the re-issued are: *Britain*, *First Year's Work*, *May the Twelfth*, *The Pub and the People*, *War Begins at Home*, *War Factory*, *Meet Yourself on Sunday*, *Meet Yourself at the Doctor's*, *Puzzled People*, and *Report on Juvenile Delinquency*. To find out more about how to purchase these books please visit Faber's website [www.faber.co.uk](http://www.faber.co.uk)



*Britain* by MO in 2009

## Join the Mass Observation email discussion list

Anyone interested in discussing Mass Observation related matters or just keeping in touch with the latest news and activities at the Archive can sign up for the Mass Observation e-mail discussion list for free. To join the list, simply go to <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/massobs> and follow the instructions

You can change your subscription settings at any time after signing up. If you have any queries about the discussion list, contact [massobs-request@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:massobs-request@jiscmail.ac.uk).

You can also keep in touch with us by checking our website [www.massobs.org.uk](http://www.massobs.org.uk)



## The world financial crisis

In recent months the media has been dominated with news about the current situation of the world's economies. In the Winter 2008 Directive, we asked the Mass Observers to write about how they are experiencing the recession.

'I hope this debacle will lead to a return to simpler ways of living, but I fear it won't as long as the media and the advertising industry continue to encourage young people to indulge themselves without thinking about their bills.' (female volunteer receptionist from London, D996)

'I don't have a pension. They have always failed in my eyes. It seems the large corporations/government can spend the pension money as they like when it is coming in with no protection for the individual if the company goes bust. That doesn't seem like a good business model to me! I prefer to spread my bets, and invest my money in as many ways as possible.' (female drugs prevention educator from Northamptonshire, A3573)

'I'm empathetic towards anyone out of work, but they will have to adapt, take a lower wage, shop in the less 'trendy' stores, sell the prized BMW and use public transport.' (male learning support worker from South Yorkshire, J3312)

'Switch on the television in the morning and the programmes are littered with advice on economy and making one's income stretch by good management. Surely after all the excess this is a positive outcome.' (female retired nursery teacher from Coventry, M3408)

'Regarding the government's handling of the crisis I must admit to being baffled. I don't think a crisis caused by too much borrowing can be cured by borrowing your way out of it.' (male retired Quality Engineer from Bracknell, B1426)

'We have been saving for a few months now and do wonder if we would be better off putting it in a sock under the bed!' (female primary school teacher from Grimsby, M4130)

'My list of those to blame would certainly start with Margaret Thatcher, then continue with banks (not just the UK ones, for they have been imprudent in most countries), the international financial system and finally human greed.' (male retired teacher from Fareham, W2322)

The Mass Observation Archive specialises in material about everyday life in Britain. It contains papers generated by the original Mass Observation social research organisation (1937 to early 1950s), and newer material collected continuously since 1981. The Archive is in the care of the University of Sussex and is housed in the Library in the Special Collections department. The Mass Observation Archive is a registered charitable trust (no 270218) and is recognised by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council as having outstanding national and international importance under the Designation Scheme.

The MO Bulletin is edited by Jessica Scantlebury. It is distributed to Mass Observers and members of the Friends of the Archive scheme. Why not join our Friends scheme - not only will you be kept up to date with the latest MO related news, but you will also help to support Mass Observation's activities. See our website for further details: [www.massobs.org.uk](http://www.massobs.org.uk) or email [moa@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:moa@sussex.ac.uk)

For research enquiries and visits, please contact Special Collections library.specialcoll@sussex.ac.uk or tel 01273 67 8157.

