

Welcome to the MO Bulletin

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Jessica Scantlebury, the editor for this issue, has brought together articles and news which I hope you will enjoy. I should remind everyone who reads this that the Archive is a public resource and if there is anything in the Bulletin that takes your fancy, get in touch about visiting to see more.

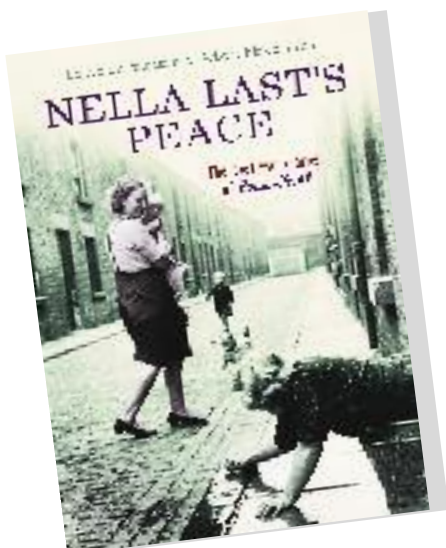
This year is a significant one for me because I have decided to retire from my full-time post at the University of Sussex Library. However, it is not yet goodbye to Mass Observation. I shall remain affiliated to the University's History department as an honorary professor and - to my delight - the Trustees of the Archive have invited me back on a part-time basis to work with my Special Collections colleagues specifically on developing Mass Observation and supporting the ongoing Project.

Dorothy Sheridan
Director

It never ceases to amaze me - when we come to sum up a few months' activities - just how busy the Archive is: new books, lots of researchers visiting and using us online, all kinds of research projects, coverage in the press and on the radio. At the same time we are constantly adding new material to the collection. Most importantly, the energy and commitment of all our writers continue to keep the Archive a living and relevant resource for the 21st century.

Nella Last's post-war diary

Nella Last's Peace: The Post-War Diaries of Housewife, 49, edited by Patricia and Robert Malcolmson, is due to be published later this year by Profile Books. They write here about their experience of editing Nella's diary.



Nella Last always wanted to be a writer, and Mass Observation gave her the opportunity to become one.

Her persistence as a diarist over almost three decades is remarkable. We have read everything that she wrote between mid 1945 and early 1950 (nobody, we believe, has read her massive diary in its entirety), which adds up to a mountain of perhaps a million-and-a-half words, some of them difficult to decipher. Almost every evening she retired to her bed and wrote a small essay - perhaps a thousand words, occasionally closer to two thousand words. Sometimes, when nothing much had happened, she wrote mostly about meals, the weather, aches and pains, and other mundane matters. This habit of writing meant that when interesting things did happen, or when she had significant feelings to explore, her pen or pencil was well poised to put on record her thoughts and observations.

As editors, our main challenge was to decide what to publish - or, perhaps more tellingly, what not to publish,

of all that she wrote between 1945-48. We chose to select passages that show Nella at her best as a writer - a writer who captured moments of hilarity and tragedy (she responded movingly to several suicides), described the Lakes poetically, complained testily about her husband and detailed the daily frustrations and disappointments of living in an England that had won the war but was virtually bankrupt. Sometimes she doubted the purpose of her life and she revealed a character that covered a wide spectrum of feelings, for she was prone both to melancholy and cheerfulness, to fairly venomous bitchiness (she acknowledged this once or twice) and warm, kindly generosity.

So, *Nella Last's Peace*, while only a sliver of the full manuscript diary, offers an opening into her life and mind. We hope that our edition allows her voice to be heard at its most compelling - intense, evocative, lucid, colourful, and astute.

***Nella Last's Peace* will be published by Profile Books later this year.**

MOA Trustee changes

In the past year the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive have welcomed three new members to the board.

Dr Claire Langhamer is a Senior Lecturer in History and co-director of the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research at the University of Sussex. Claire uses material from the early phase of Mass Observation (1937-50s) and from the contemporary Project (1981 - onwards) for teaching and research. She replaces Professor Al Thomson as the University of Sussex nominated Trustee. Al stood down as a Trustee in June 2007 in order to return to his native Australia and take up the position of Professor of History at Monash University, Melbourne.

Elizabeth Dunn is a solicitor specialising in copyright law and intellectual property. Elizabeth joined the Trustees for her first meeting in June this year.

Kitty Inglis has replaced Deborah Shorley (now Director of Library Services at Imperial College) as a Trustee and as the University of Sussex's Librarian. Before coming to Sussex, Kitty was the acting Librarian at the University of East Anglia.

The three other Trustees remain the same: Professor Ruth Finnegan, Jamie Muir, and Professor Brian Street.

Publications from the Archive

Our Longest Days: A People's History of the Second World War by the writers of Mass

Observation and edited by Sandra Koa Wing (Profile Books)



Our Longest Days chronicles life on the home front during the Second World War. Using previously unpublished Mass Observation diaries, this book brings together the unheard voices of men and women who were affected by six years of air raids and rationing. Against a vivid backdrop of war the day to day details of shopping, cooking, relationships and family dramas described by the diarists makes for an engrossing and informative read.

Pure, Flawless Happiness by Michael Swaine (Marsh Harrier Books)

Based on Mass Observation accounts, this novel spans the length of a woman's life: as a girl swept up in the anticipation and outbreak of war, to an elderly woman looking back on a life



changed indelibly by the impact of war. This novel depicts the ways in which war blurred social convention and opened the doors for the advent of a woman's expression, freedom and sexual liberation. See www.pureflawlesshappiness.com

London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz by Amy Helen Bell (I B Tauris & Co Ltd).

In this illuminating volume, Amy Helen Bell explores the private feelings of Londoners living through the Blitz. Looking beyond the public face of Britain, Bell uncovers covert records of struggle, hardship and changing personal identity through intimate diaries, letters and memoirs, many of them draw from the Mass Observation Archive.

You & the NHS in 2008

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the NHS and to complement the material collected ten years ago, the Spring 2008 Directive asked the Mass Observers to reflect on their experience of health care since 1997. This Directive was produced in collaboration with Fran McCabe and Linda Lamont. Here are some extracts from the response to the Directive.

'All people have a right to basic health care, whether they have paid for it or not and whether we think they "deserve" it or not....After all, no-one asks and wants to be ill.' (female caseworker from Disley, T1843)

'Thankfully, we have seldom found it necessary to seek medical attention when the GP's surgery is closed, such as in the evening or at a weekend, but on the few occasions we have telephoned NHS Direct, the advice received has not been very impressive – of the "take 2 aspirin, go to bed, and see your GP on Monday" variety' (male retired trade mark attorney from London, T3686)

'Taking responsibility for your own health, admitting that obesity, smoking and drinking are detrimental, would be a great step forward. Everyone resident here has a right to health care, but if you are abusing your body, why should we invest in putting it right?' (female database manager from Liverpool, W3967)

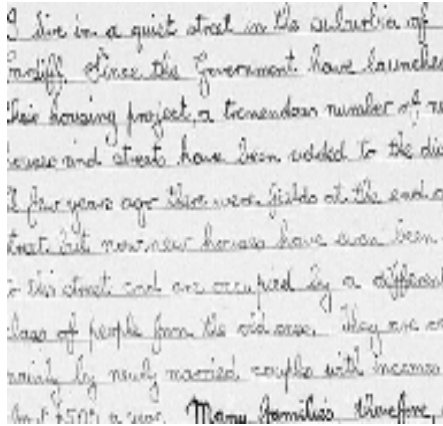
'I don't think the standard of care is high enough (partly because they are understaffed) ...[on her stay in hospital] it all seemed very dirty, dusty and disorganised. I felt like cattle, not a human being, it was a truly un-dignifying experience.' (female fundraising co-ordinator from London, C3210)

'Organ donation is of course a lifesaver and to waste healthy organs is foolish. We should not forget, though, that one person generally has to die in order to save another.' (female office worker from Attleborough, C2053)

'I get very cross when I hear people knocking the Health Service as I can remember the bad old days and am only too pleased that I can get a reasonable response to any problems that might arise, the service is being improved all the time and we should all be grateful to the pioneers who spent so much effort to obtain their ideals.' (male retired typesetter from Woking, H1806)

'Wales Observed'

The second series of 'Wales Observed' has just been broadcast on BBC Radio Wales. The programme used day diaries written for Mass Observation to explore what life was like for people living in Wales over 70 years ago. Here the programme's developer, Branwen Davies, considers her experience of adapting the words of Welsh Mass Observers for radio.



I first came across Mass Observation whilst reading Tim Moore's account of the history of Monopoly, *Do Not Pass Go*. The London version of the game started in the 1930s and Moore referenced Mass Observation's early contributions to build a picture of the city at the time. My main responsibility within Telegop, the production company where I work, is to develop programme ideas. This means that whenever I read anything, meet anyone, visit anywhere, I always wonder whether it or they can make good telly or radio! So, I made a note to myself to one day delve a little deeper into Mass Observation. A few years later and we have just finished the second series of 'Wales Observed'. In the programme we look back at day to day life in Wales through the writings of those who contributed Day Surveys to the Mass Observation project in 1937 and 1938.

So, for example, in the very first programme, we looked at a day diary written in 1937 by a 20 year old woman from West Cross. Local historian Gerald Gabb compared reading her diary to reading the musings of a character from a Jane Austen novel because at that time the diarist was a lady-of-luxury, living a fairly privileged lifestyle in a well-to-do Swansea suburb. To compare, we spoke to a 21 year old woman living in West Cross in 2007. Her life was

vastly different, having recently got married to an American and was about to join him to live in New York.

All the diaries have gems within them. Sometimes it's about the way the diarist expresses themselves, sometimes it's about the nuances of daily life they reveal - often, the extraordinary is in the ordinary.

The highlight of making the series has been finding a relative of the diarist. We have used a genealogist to trace the family trees via electoral roles, births, deaths and marriages and so on. We haven't always found people, but when we have it has been invaluable to the programme. Invariably, the relatives haven't known that their relative took part in Mass Observation and reading the diary has always been special for them. We have been able to take grandchildren and children back to family homes and even help complete the missing pieces of family jigsaws.

It has been a real privilege to work with Mass Observation material and to have been given access to the diaries, the worlds within them, and those which arise beyond them.

In Autumn Telegop will be producing a third series of 'Wales Observed'. This series will focus on some of the diaries written in Wales for Mass Observation during the Second World War. See radio listings for updates.



Angus Calder 1942-2008

On 5 June 2008 Angus Calder died in Edinburgh at the age of 66. Angus was an eminent historian, a poet, a renowned raconteur, and a highly respected literary scholar. The first of his many substantial books was *The People's War*, a monumental work which has remained in print since 1969 when it first appeared. It is still considered to be the best history of the home front in Britain during the Second World War. He was also one of the foremost champions of the Mass Observation Archive as a historical resource.

It was while researching for *The People's War* that Angus first came across the Mass Observation papers. They were stored, unused and probably almost forgotten, in the premises of MO (UK) Ltd. Seeing the potential of the papers, he decided to contact his former DPhil supervisor at the University of Sussex, Professor Asa Briggs (now Lord Briggs), suggesting that the papers be brought to the University. By 1970, the Mass Observation papers were safely at Sussex and Asa invited one of the original founders of MO, Tom Harrison, to establish the collection as a resource for historical research. In 1975, Asa, (by then the University of Sussex's Vice Chancellor), formally opened the Archive to the public.

Angus and Dorothy Sheridan jointly edited the first anthology from the Archive, *Speak for Yourself* (Jonathan Cape, 1984) and Angus remained an ardent supporter of Mass Observation all his life.

Donations to the Scottish Poetry Library are invited in his memory.

Life History Research at Sussex University

The University of Sussex currently offers both full and part time study for an MA in Life History Research: Oral History and Life Story Documents. The MA explores the generation and uses of life stories and students learn how to design, carry out, and analyse life history projects. Modules on this course include 'The Theory and Practice of Oral History' and 'Critical Approaches to Mass Observation'. For further details about the course visit <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhr>

Celebrating Sandra

A pair of seats commissioned in memory of Sandra Koa Wing have been installed in the reception area of Special Collections at the University of Sussex Library. Sandra, who died in May 2007, was the Mass Observation Archive's first Development Officer and had edited an anthology of wartime Mass Observation diaries, *Our Longest Days: A People's History of the Second World War*, which was published in March 2008 by Profile Books.



The seats, which are constructed from English oak and copper, were designed by Brighton based artists, Marcus and Cath Laffan, and purchased using a fund established to celebrate Sandra's life and commitment to Mass Observation.

The money raised by the fund was kindly donated by Mass Observers, Friends of the Archive, and Sandra's colleagues, friends and family. In May this year, the Trustees of the Archive hosted a reception to

celebrate the publication of *Our Longest Days* and to thank everyone who had contributed to the fund.

The fund is now closed. Anyone wishing to make a donation in memory of Sandra may wish to consider donating to Macmillan Cancer Support.

Join the Mass Observation email discussion list

Anyone interested in discussing Mass Observation related matters or just keeping in touch with the latest news from the Archive, can sign up for free to the Mass Observation e-mail discussion list.

To join the list, simply go to www.jjscmail.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@jjscmail.ac.uk.

You can also keep in touch with us by checking our website www.massobs.org.uk



You & Gardens

The Summer 2007 Directive focused on gardens and gardening. The Mass Observers replied to the Directive with stories about their own gardens and gardening experiences, tips about growing plants and vegetables, and descriptions of their ideal outdoor spaces.



Image by B3968 (male from Eastbourne)

'The soil in my garden is excellent. 99.9% success rate. Stick it in the soil, water it and leave it to grow.' (male learning support worker from Barnsley, J3312)

'I have a compost bin and I put all my sensitive mail in there... My husband likes to shred his letters, so I use that for hamster bedding, which then goes into the compost bin. Let's see a forger get round that!!!' (female manager of a florist shop from the South East of England, D156)

'My ideal garden would come complete with gardener.' (male retired LGV driver male from Basildon, R470)

'I'd love my garden to be full of space, and shadows too – sunlight and hidden parts, mysteries and warm expanses. It would have a backbone of wonderful trees that moved with the wind, and shrubs, and lots of colour at

different times of year – not necessarily bright colours – not bright bedding – but more subtle, and lovely colours and many different greens.' (female administrator from East Sussex, G3042)

'I don't currently have a garden and I miss it horribly... I have a small balcony with some things growing on it but its not the same and I am desperate at least to get my own allotment so I can recoup some of the delights of owning a garden.' (female charity worker from Middlesex, Z2276)

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 produced periodically. 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 or email moa@sussex.ac.uk

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

