

The Trustees launch a new phase



Jessica and Dorothy working in the Archive

As you will know, the six Archive Trustees normally meet twice a year to review our progress. At their last meeting in June they decided the time had come to plan in a concerted way for the Archive's long-term future at the University of Sussex. My retirement from the main Library in September provided them with an opportunity to re-think how they might use my newly freed up time in a different way.

Our aim is to ensure that we have a long-term strategy to sustain and develop the full range of MO activities including deciding what new material we should collect, consolidating our work with local and national communities, ensuring that we can go on collaborating over new books, films, radio and TV programmes and contributing to education and research at all levels. At the same time, they want to be sure that the material itself is as secure and available as possible so that it can be read and enjoyed for many years to come. Part of the idea is to establish much closer links with the academic departments of the University.

As part of this strategy, the Trustees have employed me for two days a week as Development Director. I started on 3 November and am mostly based in the Library as before. I am still responsible for designing the Directives and, with Jessica, for managing the current MO project. I am also engaged in discussions with my colleagues in History, reviewing the Archive's various policies and, importantly, exploring long-term funding possibilities. It's a great pleasure to me to be able to devote myself fully to the Archive again and I am looking forward to a year of interesting and fruitful activity.

Dorothy Sheridan
Development Director

A small goodbye, a big thank you

Dorothy Sheridan retired from her full time position as Head of Special Collections and Research Services on the 30th September 2008 after 34 years of service at the University of Sussex. Here we look back at her career and celebrate her dedication to the Mass Observation Archive.

Dorothy's association with Sussex began in the late 1960s, when she joined the University as a student.



After graduating, she was employed by Tom Harrisson (one of the founders of MO) as an assistant to the Mass Observation Archive. After Tom Harrisson's death in 1976, Dorothy continued to work for the Archive and in 1981, with Professor David Pocock, she launched the new Mass Observation Project and became the Director of the Archive in 1991.

In 1984 Dorothy published *Speak for Yourself* with Angus Calder. This was the first in a long line of books and articles that have been written and edited by Dorothy using MO material. *Wartime Women*, a respected MO anthology of women's experiences of the Second World War has remained popular and is soon to be re-issued for the fourth time by Orion.

Dorothy was instrumental in the creation of the MA in Life History Research and enjoyed a successful teaching career at Sussex.



In 1998 she was presented with a University of Sussex Teaching Award "for her interactive and creative style of teaching and her achievements with a wide range of students, especially in developing their sensitivity to using documentary material and their ability to learn independently."

As well as researching, writing and teaching, for many years Dorothy has been the public face of Mass Observation.

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Can any mother help me?

The Cooperative Correspondence Club (CCC) gained notoriety through the publication of *Can Any Mother Help Me?* (edited by Jenna Bailey, Faber and Faber, 2008). Now the story of the CCC is making the transition from page to stage.

The CCC has humble beginnings. In 1935, under the nom de plume Ubique, a young mother wrote a letter to the popular magazine, *The Nursery World*:

'Can any mother help me? I live a very lonely life as I have no near neighbours. I cannot afford to buy a wireless. I adore reading, but with no library am very limited with books... I get so down and depressed after the children are in bed and I am alone in the house. I sew, read and write stories galore, but in spite of good resolutions, and the engaging company of cat and dog, I do brood, and 'dig the dead'... Can any reader suggest an occupation that will intrigue me and exclude 'thinking' and cost nothing?'

At a time when a mother's place was in the home, Ubique's words were familiar to the magazine's readers, and women from all over the country replied sympathetically directly to Ubique. Struck by their response, Ubique suggested they form a private correspondence magazine. This became the CCC.

The CCC magazine was published twice a month and there was only ever one copy of each edition. Correspondents would write an article and mail it to the magazine's editor, who would compile all the articles in an embroidered linen cover. The magazine would then be sent round from one woman to the next until each member had received it.

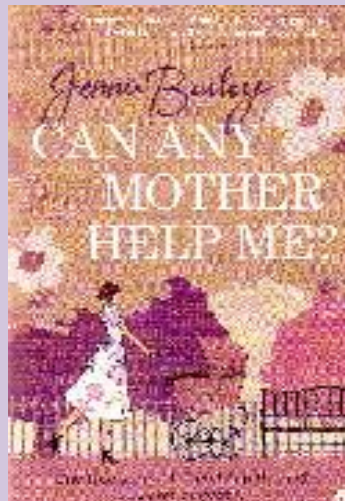
The articles written by the correspondents were startlingly candid. On the pages of the magazine authors shared intimate details about every aspect of their lives - their experience of childbirth and motherhood, the challenges of marriage and broken hearts, employment, and dreams for a better life.

The magazine started in 1935 and continued until 1990. In 1997 the CCC papers and magazines were donated to the Mass Observation Archive by Rose Hacker (a member of the CCC).

Earlier this year, Faber and Faber published a book, *Can Any Mother Help Me?*, using the donated CCC material. The book received excellent reviews in the press and continues to be read and enjoyed by a large readership.

The words of the CCC membership are soon to find a new audience. The Foursight Theatre Group (whose past productions include, *Thatcher - The Musical*, *Hecuba*, and *Welcome To My World*) are working closely with editor Jenna Bailey to adapt the publication into an evocative piece of physical theatre, bringing the words of these women to life.

The play will make its debut in early 2009 and is scheduled to tour the UK. As this bulletin goes to print details of the tour are yet to be confirmed. For updates, please check local listings and <http://www.foursighttheatre.co.uk/>



Making waves...

You may have heard mention of the Mass Observation Archive on BBC Radio 4 over the past couple of months with MO featuring on a number of the station's flagship productions.

In August, Dorothy Sheridan was interviewed on 'IPM' (the interactive version of 'PM') and asked to comment on one-day blogs commissioned especially for the programme. You can listen to the recording online and read the blogs by logging on to the 'IPM' website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ipm> and scrolling back to August.

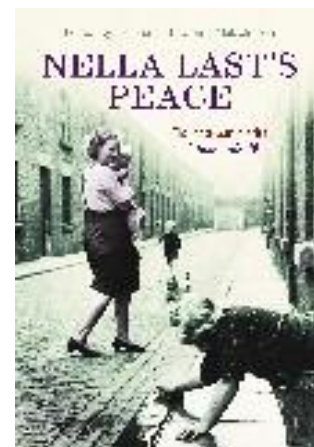
The photographs taken for Mass Observation by Humphrey Spender in the 1930s were the inspiration for one of Radio 4's afternoon plays. 'Worktown', written by Michael Symmons Roberts, used poetry, dialogue, monologue and music to explore and provide an insight into what life was like for people living in an industrial town in the late 1930s.

Dorothy was on Radio 4 again in September. This time it was on 'Women's Hour' and Dorothy was talking about the latest publication from the Archive, *Nella Last's Peace: The post-war diary of Housewife, 49*. Dorothy was interviewed by Jane Garvey and was joined by the historian David Kynaston. We know that many of you particularly enjoyed this feature from the feedback that we received. Thank you for that.

And finally, *Nella Last's Peace* will be Radio 4's

Book of the Week the week beginning 15th December. The book will be read by the actress Imelda Staunton and it will

be broadcast Monday till Friday at 9.45am and repeated each night at 11.30pm. It will also be available for a week after broadcast on Listen Again on the Radio 4 website.



Secret smoking

In 2007 smoking in public spaces was banned in England. Current Mass Observers documented this historic moment by responding to the Spring 2007 Directive, 'The new smoking ban and the pub'. In this article **Donna Hetherington** describes how she used the responses for her research.

I first came across Mass Observation in a London gallery in 2001 when I was studying conceptual art. The exhibition was by Fluxus artists from the 1960s and 70s who used everyday ephemera such as match-boxes as containers for tiny sculptures and intricate text pieces. One text that caught my attention detailed the smoking and drinking habits of pub-goers in the late 1930s, down to how many sips it took to drink a pint and how many draws to finish a cigarette. I assumed this rather pointless yet fascinating exercise the work of one of the artists and not, as I was led to believe, from a real social research group called Mass Observation. Not only was the organisation authentic however, it was still going strong, accumulating masses of everyday life gems on seemingly ordinary people's lives, and archiving them at the University of Sussex Library. And, as well as being available for research it was also possible to study the collection and its history through a Masters course in Life History at the university, which is what I decided to do.

I started the course in 2005 and it proved to be everything I hoped for: well organised, challenging and inspiring. I sifted through the material in the Mass Observation Archive for much of my time, for enjoyment and in search of ideas for my dissertation. Then the ban on smoking in public places was announced. A topical issue



I thought, and one which needed documenting to gather public opinion. Also, both smoking habits and the pub were themes which Mass Observation had covered before, making a comparable study possible between 1937 and 2007. Once decided upon, I received nothing but support and advice from the Archive staff, especially with the designing and issuing of the Spring 2007 Directive on the New Smoking Ban and the Pub.

The responses to the Directive started to come in almost immediately and by July there were over 300 on which I could base my research. I was drawn to the women's replies more so because of my research interests in general and also because I found something there that I wasn't expecting. This was women who smoked secretly. One woman in the 1937 replies declared:

I began illicit smoking, aged thirteen, saving up to buy a packet of five Players Number One, leaning out of my bedroom window late at night, puffing away, or taking them out with me when I went for my solitary walks on the beach. (3308)

And in 2007 another woman admits:

I took a nud end from one of the numerous ashtrays round the house and when my parents were absent, tried it out for myself. Feeling quite good it didn't take long for me to have another go and from there I would smoke in my bedroom, window open, nud ends stuffed into necks of ornaments and vases until I had the chance to dispose of them. (H1703)

When youthful initiations such as these continued, a number of women said they hid what they felt was a habit to be ashamed of later on in life as well. Yet, in secret their one cigarette a day or a week, often in a secret location, was time to themselves, when they were no-one's mother or wife.

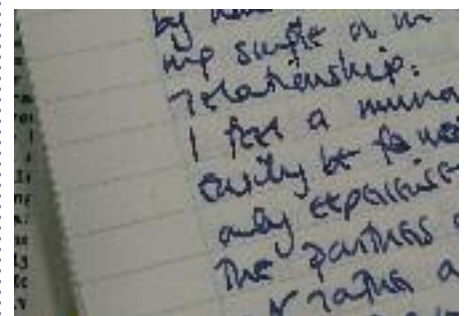
As one woman says in 1937:

I smoke now because I like it, because it is a relaxation, because at times it can mean a regaining of self-possession.

Sentiments that again are echoed in the 2007 directive:

I have a luxurious seditious cigarette in an Italian Cafe opposite the college I attend on a Monday morning. As ridiculous as it is for a woman of my age I feel like it is part of my emancipation, doing something I oughtn't to be doing. It is something no one else knows about in my everyday real world, it is just for me. It has nothing to do with being a good mother or wife, daughter or colleague, and it makes me feel wickedly free and a bit naughty and rebellious I suppose. (M3401)

Secret smoking was only one theme I covered in the dissertation and there is no room to expand on others such as motherhood and the pub, only to say that my research would not have proved as interesting a subject to study without the Mass Observation writers.



Conference series

Special Collections hosted a conference organised jointly by the Sussex Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research and the University of Manchester on 11 November. The focus was on the use and re-use of archives and the relationships between academic researchers, archivists and the people who create the archives. Fiona Courage, Special Collections Manager, and Dorothy Sheridan contributed to the sessions and delegates were given the opportunity to view some of the material in the Mass Observation Archive

This conference was part of a series.

For more information

www.cresc.ac.uk/events/archiveseries/seminar34.html

Post Up: The War of Images

As part of this year's Brighton Photo Biennial, the Mass Observation Archive has been working on a educational event called Post Up: The War of Images with the artist Anthony Lam, pupils from Patcham High School, and World War Two veterans.

The aim of the project was to encourage an intergenerational discussion about war and to consider the way in which memory and media images affect modern day understanding of conflicts.

In October, we hosted a series of workshops with the pupils and veterans. To stimulate discussion, participants looked at a range of materials from the Archive, including diaries written at the outbreak of the Second World War, propaganda posters collected for the first phase of Mass Observation, and responses to Directives on the most recent war in Iraq and the September 11 terrorist attacks.



The project culminated with a public event outside Brighton's Jubilee library. The event included a parade, a peace wall, and a 'speakers' corner' with short soapbox style presentations from the war veterans and students.

Post Up: The war of images was supported by the Their Past Your Future 2 programme and was funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. You can read more about the event on the Brighton Photo Biennial website <http://www.bpb.org.uk>

Doing Family History Research

Family history research seems to be an increasingly popular pastime. TV programmes such as *Who do you think you are?* are enjoyed and millions of people are researching their family history over the internet or in archives. In 2008, we asked the Mass Observers to share their thoughts about family history research.

'It is in my nature to document, to record, to set down and save the trivia and ephemera of my life. Unfortunately, I don't have the time to do it justice. I'm a horder; a recorder. That's why I keep a diary and that's why I write for MO.' (male, age 67, from Bedford, G3126)

'My sister and I have often talked about finding out about our great-aunt, who was supposedly a white witch of her village but the time has never been right. I do know quite a few stories about our family history and at the moment I am happy to keep them as just stories.' (female, age 29, living in Cardiff, P4002)

'The rise in popularity, I feel stems from a need to relate to a sense of belonging, in a modern world, where identity is sometimes lost.' (male, age 52, from Wigan, P4287)

'I know of a chap who had a reputation for "putting it about a bit". Bet his family don't have much trouble in seeing where he has been because he has webbed feet, which shows up in the various children he has fathered. So they don't need to do FHR!' (female, age 64, living in a village near Exeter, R1227)

A small goodbye continued....

Dorothy can frequently be heard on both television and radio discussing her research and promoting the Archive. Since the new MO Project began in the early 1980s, thousand of MO correspondents have come to associate her with the place they send their writing to and many have come to regard her as a friend and confidant.

In recognition of her scholarly achievements and work for MO, she was awarded with an honorary doctorate from the Open University in 2007 and earlier this year the University of Sussex made her an honorary professor, affiliated to the History department.

At a celebratory retirement event on 26 September, colleagues from the past and present gathered to mark the occasion and wish Dorothy well for the future. Professor Brian Street, a Trustee of the Archive, spoke about her long career of publication and publicity for MO and the University of Sussex Librarian, Kitty Inglis, publically thanked Dorothy for her work as part of the Library's management team.

Luckily, this was not a final goodbye. Whist Dorothy has retired from her full-time position at Sussex she has accepted the MOA Trustees' proposal of working for the Archive part-time as the MOA Development Director. Speaking about Dorothy's new role Fiona Courage, Special Collections manager, said "Dorothy is a mentor and an inspiration to us all and we look forward to working with her in her new capacity. "

Recording Leisure Lives

The University of Bolton will be hosting the annual Recording Leisure Lives conference on the 7th April 2009. Inspired by Humphrey Spender's photographs taken for MO in the 1930s, this conference will explore sporting and leisure activities in 20th century Britain.

For more details visit: www.bolton.ac.uk

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 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.

