

The Mass-Observation Project

Spring 2002 Directive

Part 1: Having a laugh!

In February 1942, the wartime Mass-Observers sent out a directive on jokes. This is a repeat of some of their questions but we've added some new ones.

We would like to find out about all kinds of humour in your everyday life, from shared jokes in conversation to comedy on the television, radio and stage. Include as much detail as you can, and talk to people you know about what they find funny and why.

As usual, please remember to start your reply with a very brief mini-biography: your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Comedians and comedies on radio and television (and in films)

What comedians do you like on the television or the radio? Can you say why?

Do you have any favourite comedy shows?

When answering, please feel free to go back in time and talk about people or shows that made you laugh when you were younger as well as those you enjoy now. Please give names and titles of programmes and comment in as much detail as you are able. Include as wide range of programmes as you think relevant (eg cartoons, satire, sitcoms, shows, stand-up comics, spoofs). If you would like to include favourite funny films, please do.

Which comedians/comedies do you dislike? Can you explain why?

Are there any advertisements on TV that make you laugh?

Comedy and serious issues

Recently there was some controversy in the news about a comedy series that touched upon the subject of paedophilia. What do you think of comedy that addresses serious, sometimes controversial issues? For example, do you think that there are certain subjects such as death or war experiences about which it would not be acceptable to make jokes?

How do you react to comedians (or comedy shows) whose political views are clear from their jokes?

Humour is sometimes seen as a form of release from tension - in your experience have you known of situations where people have laughed or made jokes in response to traumatic events?

Humour in books, papers and magazines

Can you apply the questions on the previous page to books and newspapers? That is, describe what you find funny or not funny.

Do you have any favourite cartoonists or strip cartoons you follow?

Any advertisements that make you laugh?

Humour on stage

Have you ever been to any places to see live comedy: the theatre, cabaret, comedy clubs? Please describe. What did you enjoy and why?

E-mail & internet humour

Have you received or sent humorous e-mails or visited joke websites. Please describe.

Telling jokes

This section is more about the jokes we hear about us rather than those of professional comedians.

Do you tell jokes yourself?

Do you often hear jokes? In what kinds of situations?

What kind of jokes do you find funny? Here are some jokes themes to prompt you:

politics	war	women	men	regional
feminists	ethnic minorities	religion	social classes	"sick"
sex	sexual orientation	toilet habits	disability	

Tell us why. If not, why not, and who do you think finds them funny? One of the main omissions from the replies to the 1942 directive was jokes about sex;

What's the earliest or oldest joke you can remember? Can you place it in time?

Has your appreciation of humour changed over time?

Practical jokes & teasing

Have you ever played a practical joke on someone or had one played on you? Please describe.

What do you think about teasing?

Comedy notebook

Would you keep a detailed "comedy notebook" for a week. You could either take it around with you or at the end of each day, think about things that made you laugh or you found funny. Note down jokes you've heard; snippets from conversations you might have overheard (tell us where the conversations took place).

Tell us about your private jokes or "insider" jokes that few understand.

Do you have family jokes?

Please be sure to include anything else that you think we may have left out.

Part 2: The Royal Family in 2002

Mass-Observation's earliest major survey was of a royal event -- the Coronation in May 1937 of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (after 1952, the Queen Mother). Now, this summer, we have another royal celebration ahead -- the Golden Jubilee marking the fifty years on the throne of their daughter Queen Elizabeth II. Will this Jubilee be marked by the same outpouring of communal feeling that Mass-Observers noted in their accounts of street parties during the Silver Jubilee of 1977?

The Queen's Golden Jubilee

Have you any plans to celebrate the Golden Jubilee? Do you know of any?

Have the royal divorces and the annus horribilis of 1992 affected how people feel about the Queen herself and the constitutional monarchy?

As usual, Please start your reply to Part 2 on a new piece of paper and remember to include at the top a very brief mini-biography: your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

What differences do you notice between now and the mood at the time of the Silver Jubilee? The papers seem to be suggesting there is less loyal feeling now than in 1977. They also suggest that all the regulations and insurance liability problems of the "compensation culture" are going to hamper party organising and may spoil the fun. Do you agree?

The Death of Princess Margaret

Were you affected by the death of Princess Margaret? Do you think the media over-reacted? Did the royal family get it right in insisting on a low key private funeral?

Prince Harry

Prince Harry's experimenting with drink and drugs. Do you think Prince Charles and the media took the right tack? Tony Blair and Jack Straw "shut down" media coverage of their sons' problems in this area. Should there be there different rules for the coverage of children of politicians and royals?

This summer BBC Radio 4 is planning a series "Crown and People" presented by Robert Lacey and featuring some of the opinions and experiences recorded by Mass-Observers about the monarchy and the royal family from the Coronation of 1937 to the present day.

