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Welcome to the Autumn 2017 edition of the Bulletin

As you read through the Bulletin you will find that the Archive has been as busy as ever since the spring.

Looking back on 2017, this edition provides an update on our 12th May diary day, which once again was a great success. Thank you to all of you who submitted a diary entry this year.

On 10th-11th July 2017 we held the Mass Observation 80th Anniversary Conference at the University of Sussex. This saw four parallel sessions run for the duration of the conference, so as to accommodate the extensive and fascinating array of presentations received following our call for papers.

A conference report can be found on page 2.

In June we were saddened by the death of Brian Street, a former Trustee of the Archive. His obituary on page 3 details his long involvement with, and support of, the Mass Observation Archive.

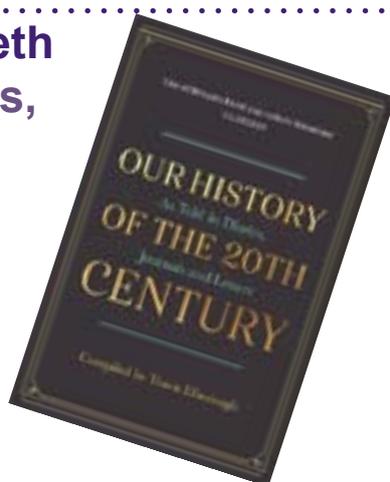
There are several articles about the Archive's current projects, including our education and outreach project Beyond Boxes. In 2016 we worked with Beyond Boxes to develop the Winter Directive on Homelessness and we have again collaborated with the Beyond Boxes team and their participants in producing our Autumn Directive on the subject of Prisons. An update on Beyond Boxes can be found below.

Joe Williams, Bulletin editor

## Our History of the Twentieth Century: As Told in Diaries, Journals and Letters

This newly published compilation draws upon the diaries of over one hundred people, including some who wrote for Mass Observation, to provide personal and domestic insights into life in twentieth century Britain. Diarists include the well-known such as Tony Benn and Alan Bennett in addition to many less-well-known individuals such as Gladys Langford and Kathleen Tipper, who wrote for Mass Observation.

Travis Elborough is the co-editor of two previous anthologies of diaries,



A London Year and A Traveller's Year. His other books include The Long-Player Goodbye, a hymn to vinyl records; Wish You Were Here, a survey of the British beside the seaside and most recently A Walk in the Park: The Life and Times of a People's Institution.

## Beyond Boxes

The Beyond Boxes project began in September 2016 and is due to be completed in September 2018. Over the past year, the project has organised and run 35 workshops within the local community promoting MO and the use of archives.

Our Autumn Directive theme on Prisons has been developed in consultation with project partners and participants. The unique nature of our specially commissioned directives with Beyond Boxes – the first of which was Winter 2016's Directive on Homelessness - ensures that

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## Beyond Boxes continued

participants' lived experiences are captured alongside the responses of the MOP panel.

This year, May 12th workshops took place at Blind Veterans UK, the Brighton Housing Trust and Lewes Prison where project participants contributed day diaries.

In 2017 Beyond Boxes staff have also conducted a series of creative writing workshops at Lewes Prison. This was in response to a survey carried out in the prison in which the men were asked what kind of sessions they wished to attend. Their contributions to 12th May Diary Day have been added to the Archive.

A Beyond Boxes Buddy scheme has been established and five volunteers have been recruited and trained. The scheme has been set up to offer additional 1-1 support and assistance to Keep users when visiting the reading and reference rooms. In the article below Sam Allen reflects on being a Beyond Boxes volunteer.

This year we will repeat our December 3rd diary day for International Day of Disabled People. Thank you to those who completed diaries last year. Please put that date in your diary and remember to record it for MO!

## Being a Beyond Boxes volunteer

When I began volunteering for the Beyond Boxes project I did not know what to expect. However, I have since learned that the Beyond Boxes project is about far more than helping service users with registering or using our services at The Keep. The

Beyond Boxes project allows people to explore their own stories, histories and interests in comfort and with a helping hand nearby should they need it. As a volunteer, I feel warmed and enriched by my time well spent at The Keep, not just in terms of guiding users through how to use the catalogue or navigate historic documents but also in getting to know our users and their stories.

I believe the key to encouraging access to the collections at The Keep is in getting to know our users, be that in exploring what they are looking for in the archives or simply listening to their stories. In almost every interaction that I have had so far everyone who comes to The Keep has a story or is looking to fill in the blanks of one, be it of their family history or to aid academic pursuits. In this way, I believe that the Beyond Boxes project sits hand in hand with Mass Observation. It appears that people are increasingly looking to inform their own knowledge of the past. I am more than glad to lend a hand where I can in helping our users to find, access and record their stories, even if that simply means showing them how to access software on a computer or help hunt around the reference room for a book or index. In any of these interactions I am invited into their story, search or pursuit.

My hopes as a Beyond Boxes volunteer is to share that excitement with any user that walks through the door, particularly those who may not normally seek out our services because those are often the most interesting stories and are certainly contemporary voices that deserve being heard, recorded and talked with.

Sam Allen

## Mass Observation 80th Anniversary Conference



In July 2017 we held a two day conference at the University of Sussex to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Mass Observation's foundation. The conference was well attended with over 100 delegates from across the UK and internationally, and from all career stages. They were welcomed to the event by Adam Tickell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex.

Delegates were presented with a rich and varied programme; one which highlighted the diversity of disciplines working with Mass Observation material and showcased new research. Fifty-six papers were presented, ranging from the early days of Mass Observation to its purpose and potential eighty years on.

The conference opened with the first of our well-received plenary papers, from Professor Joe Moran of Liverpool John Moores University, titled 'Notes of a shy mass observer.'

Day One also explored the Mass Observation Project database and the representativeness debate; technological developments and the digital domain, and how Mass Observation data can be used to understand voluntary action. The first day of the conference closed with Dr Lucy Noakes on 'Mass Observing the First World War: Memory, Gender and War in the 21st Century.'

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## Anniversary Conference continued

Day Two of the conference began with Professor Matt Cook's 'Archives of Feeling: AIDS in the UK, c.1987.' Papers on Day Two covered subjects as diverse as sensory histories; measurements of happiness across time; household financial management as uncovered in the Mass Observation Archive and leisure in 21st century life.



Delegates also enjoyed an 'in conversation' in which Professor Dorothy Sheridan looked back on her time at the Mass Observation Archive with Dr Lucy Noakes. We were pleased to welcome Nick Stanley to the conference, whose presentation reflected on his interviews with early Mass Observation participants.

Our conference keynotes, along with the 'In conversation' between Dorothy Sheridan and Lucy Noakes, can be found on the homepage of our website: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/podcasts>

The Mass Observation team appreciated the support offered by a large and enthusiastic number of Special Collections staff and volunteers who ensured the event ran so smoothly. We are also grateful to our sponsor Adam Matthew Digital.



*It was a total pleasure, definitely a highlight of my time studying in Brighton. Isabel (Volunteer)*

*We could do this all day: THANK YOU. I had a very interesting two days, that's given me the motivation and inspiration to write my MA dissertation over the summer. Lisa (Volunteer)*

## Obituary: Brian Vincent Street, 1943-2017

Between 1998 and 2012, Brian was a Trustee of the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex. He is, of course, rightly celebrated for his pioneering achievements in anthropology and literacy studies but we also should ensure that his decades-long enthusiasm and support for Mass Observation be included in his luminous record.

His connections to Mass Observation (MO) go back to the 1970s, long before he became a Trustee. When the Archive was officially opened at Sussex in 1975 by the Vice Chancellor, Asa Briggs, Brian was one of the new young lecturers from Social Anthropology who was invited to the launch party. It was there that he met Tom Harrison, founder of MO, who had brought the papers to Sussex. Tom was eager to make contact with the anthropologists at Sussex and they, in their turn, were curious about this unusual adventurer. Harrison's time at Sussex turned out to be unexpectedly brief - he

died suddenly in a road accident in Bangkok less than a year after the Archive launch. It gave Brian a particular insight into the work of MO and meant he was one of the few people with whom I could share memories of Harrison.

In 1975, Brian himself had only recently returned from research in Iran. As his interests increasingly focused on literacy practices (see *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 1984), his awareness of all the writing, by 'ordinary' (that is non-professional writers) contained within the boxes just across the campus from his office at Sussex became just too tempting. I remember him saying with great glee one day at the Archive: "But there so much writing here! How can we use it?". During the 1980s, we taught together on undergraduate courses using MO (including "Social Exploration and Mass Observation" with another new Anthropology lecturer at Sussex, Sue Wright) and it was during that time that he developed the idea of an application for a grant to the ESRC to look at the ways in which people were participating in the contemporary version of MO which had been running since 1981. The application was successful and we were privileged to be joined in our work by an eminent colleague of Brian's from the USA, Professor David Bloome. Between 1991 and 1993, the three of us trawled the material which had been very recently received. Then David and Brian set out to conduct face-to-face interviews with a selection of Mass Observers about the meaning that writing for MO had for them, and the ways in which it fitted into their daily lives. The MO writers, for their part, were delighted to feel that what some called "their scribblings" were taken so seriously. It was during this project that Brian took on the ubiquitous critiques of MO

**Obituary continues on the next page**

## Brian Street continued

as unreliable and 'unrepresentative'. His anthropological understandings of methodology, of the value of 'telling cases' and of MO as ethnography, were crucial in supporting and encouraging the work of later scholars of MO. See *Writing Ourselves: Mass Observation and Literacy Practices* (Sheridan, Street & Bloome)<sup>1</sup>. There was a growing interest and respect for the early MO material (1937-49), Brian's scholarly interest in the contemporary project helped establish the material we had collected since 1981 as a social resource which was just as valuable as the original collection.

Even before we worked together on MO, Brian and I had known each other as activists in our respective campus unions. Our friendship underlined our academic collaboration and enabled us to establish, during the 1990s, all kinds of useful networks and events. This included an MO Occasional Paper series and a weekly seminar series which recruited international scholars as speakers but also provided an opportunity for postgrad students and other new researchers using MO to present their ideas and discuss the challenges of MO analysis and interpretation in a supportive environment. The seminar series ran for several years, eventually developing into the Centre for Life History Research which still exists at Sussex as the Centre for Life History and Life Writing.

Brian left Sussex in 1996 to

take up his chair at Kings<sup>2</sup>, but his involvement with the Archive continued. In 1998 he became a Trustee (one of the two Trustees appointed by the Royal Anthropological Institute). His contribution to the development of the MOA was always so much more than the formality of trusteeship: not only did he succeed in promoting the Archive as a significant resource for 20th and 21st century historical and anthropological research, but also, importantly, he was a key figure in establishing the Archive as a centre for debate, discussion and inspiration<sup>3</sup>. Seminars (as he often said) were his thing!

Dorothy Sheridan

<sup>1</sup> Papers from this study will be soon available for research at the Keep

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Language and Education, Kings College London

<sup>3</sup> See forthcoming his entry on MO: "Anthropology close to home: the case of Mass Observation in the UK" in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Hilary Callan, (London: Wiley 2018).

## May 12th 2017

Our 12th May Diary Day once again attracted interest from individuals and organisations across the UK, and also further afield. Over 1100 diaries were received in total, including sets from schools, prisons, community groups and care organisations. We were thrilled that organisations new to us got involved on the day, along with those with which we had direct communication in advance.

Young people were well represented, through school diaries but also via extracurricular clubs such as Thetford's 'Teenage History Club' and Brownies. Participants in our Beyond Boxes project also submitted diaries for 12th May.

The project will be repeated next year. 12th May 2018 will be a Saturday: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/write-for-us/12th-may>

As well as our normal 12th May project, we asked the Twitter community to get involved using the hashtag #12May17. Some of this social media activity can be found here: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/news/155-12may17-12th-may-2017-as-it-happened-on-twitter>

## Become a friend of the Archive

The Archive depends on donations for many of its special activities. Since 1991, the Friends of the Archive scheme has provided essential financial support for the Archive's activities.

Without the support of the Friends scheme, the Archive would struggle to collect new material from 'ordinary' people documenting everyday life in Britain. Friends' donations in 2016-17 supported the purchasing of specialised equipment, to assist those with a visual impairment in accessing the Archive. This equipment can enlarge or filter the colour of documents without damaging them, which makes them easier to read.

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 1960s), and newer material collected continuously since 1981. The Archive is in the care of the University of Sussex and is housed at The Keep with the University of Sussex's Special Collections. 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 and edited by Joe Williams. 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)

