References to the state of civilian morale feature in both contemporary and academic accounts of the Second World War. However, it is also one of the most difficult concepts to define and research. As a result, although civilian morale is often referred to, its source and function is rarely analysed. This article will offer a new perspective for understanding the nature of civilian morale in working-class districts by arguing that fluctuations in morale can only be explained through an understanding of working-class culture during the 1930s and 1940s. Clearly, an insight into the internal dynamics of working-class communities during this period presents methodological difficulties. However, evidence gathered by the Mass-Observation (M-O) movement, which undertook extensive research into civilian morale during the blitz, provides the historian with an opportunity to reconstruct elements of working-class culture. Recent research into the formation of working-class culture has shifted analysis from traditional labour institutions and the emergence of mass commercial leisure to an investigation into the importance of the neighbourhood and informal working-class leisure pursuits. Although the workplace undoubtedly influenced civilian morale, in line with this recent research, the study will stress the importance of informal working-class institutions in shaping working-class attitudes during the war. This study will open with a brief investigation of the difficulties in defining ‘civilian morale’, and then examine the M-O organisation and the assumptions that underpinned its research. The remaining two sections argue that the pattern of bombing in urban centres and the continuity of working-class institutions helped shape and maintain morale during the critical period of 1940-1.

Civilian Morale: Some Methodological Problems

Doubts have been cast on whether it could have been the rhetoric and appeal of great statesmen on the one hand, or an increase in living standards on the other which somehow united a once class-ridden nation during the Second World War. For example, Morgan has recently noted that in many areas of the country, the war-time Prime Minister Winston Churchill was disliked rather than revered. Indeed, historians have begun to question the extent to which class unity and ‘social levelling’ occurred. The debate has focused on the war’s impact on class relations and standards of living. Thus, Calder has demonstrated that a powerful myth of class unity was absorbed into British popular culture following the blitz, whilst Summerfield has shown that the working class did not make any great economic and social advancement between 1939-45. An important dimension to the debate which has been comparatively under researched, however, relates to the nature of civilian morale. Thus although Calder investigates the image of morale presented to the public by the government...
and the media, analysis of the generation and maintenance of civilian morale went beyond his research parameters. However, the source of civilian morale is an important factor as it may shed light on whether statesmen really did play an important role in stimulating ‘good morale’. The omission of an in-depth study of morale is perhaps understandable given the nature of the evidence available to the historian. Unfortunately, the most ubiquitous source, oral testimony, has its limitations since people’s memories of the blitz are often shaped by powerful contemporary war myths.iv

Since oral history must be treated cautiously, government and M-O reports, alongside newspapers, form the basis of the extant primary source evidence. However, historians have looked upon this evidence with some scepticism, since the government and the M-O movement were unclear what morale actually was and how it should be defined.v Criticised at the time as the work of an uninformed ‘intelligentsia’,vi M-O focused upon people’s attitudes and behaviour in the aftermath of the raids and was concerned with immediate and specific considerations. Except at the most peripheral level, it did not concern itself with more sophisticated methodologies centring upon longitudinal or comparative studies.vii This was perhaps not surprising since it was not until 1943 that the Home Office itself came to recognise that the factors affecting post-raid morale must necessarily be located within a broad conceptual framework.viii Government officials also found it difficult to define the precise nature, and therefore variations in the level, of public morale. As Addison notes, ‘morale was the woolliest and most muddled concept of the war’.ix M-O’s observers relied upon a range of quasi-psychological and more general assessments of the public mood. Sometimes these were of a highly scientific nature relating to individuals while other assessments sought to summarise group attitudes and behaviour. Even with the benefit of hindsight, official histories of the Second World War acknowledged that morale ‘cannot be easily classified, let alone measured, especially by those who lack the perspective that only time can give’.x

Since M-O represented a middle-class interpretation of working-class reaction to the blitz, the final reports tended to reflect a pre-occupation with regional stereotypes, disregarding other possible facets of working-class life. This is not to say however that the evidence does not exist. Many of the preliminary findings of M-O provided useful insights into working-class morale during the blitz, but were overlooked in the final reports due to pre-conceived notions of working-class character. Despite their methodological limitations, the M-O reports do provide a useful basis upon which to analyse the public mood following periods of heavy air bombardment, particularly when placed within a comparative framework.xi The organisation’s network of local voluntary workers and small core of full-time trained personnel accumulated a formidable body of information. One of the great strengths of M-O was its independence, for as Harrisson noted, ‘units of trained investigators were sent anonymously to blitz-towns to make overall reports, prepared regardless of any official accounts, departmental feelings or published glosses’.xii Moreover, although difficult to clarify, M-O appeared to define ‘good’ morale as a feeling of confidence and optimism within a community or social grouping.
However, this article does not attempt to quantify civilian morale but rather works within the parameters set by M-O researchers. The study will examine how M-O collected and interpreted the evidence and suggest approaches that can identify the variables that affected civilian morale. Since M-O had little understanding of the nuances of working-class culture, their in-depth regional investigations of civilian morale appear disparate and anecdotal. To overcome this deficiency, this study will incorporate more recent research on the internal dynamics of the working community during this period and, consequently, offer alternative explanations for the generation and maintenance of morale in working-class districts. By drawing evidence from reports on blitzed cities in England, we will argue that the pattern of bombing and topography of a city centre, the significance of leisure institutions and working-class neighbourhoods were the most important variables in influencing civilian morale.

The Mass-Observation Organisation: Assumptions and Research during the Second World War

The M-O movement was founded by Tom Harrisson, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, three left-wing intellectuals from middle-class backgrounds who founded the organisation with the desire to develop a ‘science of ourselves’. The main focus for the research was the British working class, as Harrisson, like many of his middle-class contemporaries, felt he knew more about the ‘savages’ of Borneo than the ‘savages’ of Northern England. Whilst earlier social inquiries by researchers, such as Booth, Rowntree and Pember-Reeves, had been stimulated by concerns over working-class poverty, the M-O organisation emerged from the fear that there was an increasing dislocation between the people and parliament. As a result, in one of their first publications, Harrisson and Madge stated that:

It is the function of the 615 members of our democratic parliament to voice the wishes, feelings, wants, needs, hopes, opinions, grouses, aspirations and criticisms of 45,000,000 people. But this democratic system has broken down in other countries, and may break down in our own, because the 45,000,000 do not feel sufficiently strongly that they are able to speak through parliament. So they give it up as a bad job and resign themselves to being voiceless or get annoyed with the whole system.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Indeed, Madge and Harrisson’s investigation of working-class attitudes was motivated by the belief that their efforts would help to preserve democracy and ward off the growing threat of fascism. The assumption that official reports from the media and the establishment on the state of the nation were at odds with what people actually thought helped shape the research methodologies that M-O adopted throughout its existence. This mistrust of officialdom ensured that M-O employed largely two main research methods that were designed to tap into an undercurrent of the public’s thoughts and activities which lay beneath the establishment’s propaganda. The first technique comprised volunteers secretly noting down what they saw and heard, whilst the second relied on volunteers who were prepared to keep in-depth diaries of their activities and thoughts.\textsuperscript{xiv}
Although during the Second World War M-O continued to critique Britain’s political leadership for its remoteness, the organisation turned its attention towards producing maximum efficiency in government and industry. M-O defined ‘efficiency’ as gaining the maximum war effort from the population, an ambition which meant that M-O’s original objectives - the desire to examine exactly what the British people were doing and thinking - became of paramount importance. This did not go unrecognised by the ‘Home Intelligence’ section of the Ministry of Information which in 1940 commissioned M-O to survey the development and variations in morale.\textsuperscript{xv} The Government’s interest in civilian morale stemmed from the belief that intense German bombing would initiate a large exodus from London and the provinces and that widespread panic would ensue. Indeed, the civilian was compared unfavourably to the soldier who was thought to be disciplined and trained in stress management. In contrast, the civilian was perceived as ‘isolated, unattached and unorganised’ being more concerned with self-preservation than the national war-effort.\textsuperscript{xvi} The Government’s desire to prepare for episodes of mass panic encouraged the search for intelligence from non-official channels which, in turn, made them more sympathetic to consider the new research techniques that M-O could offer.

One of the major problems that M-O faced when assessing their morale report findings was to explain why there were variations in civilian morale. Since the researchers were largely from middle-class backgrounds they had little understanding of the internal dynamics of working-class communities. In many respects, the M-O researchers simply reflected contemporary assumptions on the nature of working-class life.\textsuperscript{xvii} Thus, in the 1930s after his social inquiry into the lives of working people in Britain, George Orwell concluded that ‘the Northerner has “grit”, he is grim, “dour”, plucky, warm hearted and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate and lazy’.\textsuperscript{xviii} The post-war sociologist Ferdinand Zweig, echoed Orwell’s sentiments when researching the British worker in concluding that ‘the worker in the North is like a hardy plant born against the background of a hard industrial struggle...what is called the “industrial proletariat” par excellence is known in the North, but there is little of it in the South’.\textsuperscript{xx} Writing in a similar vein after the war, Titmus implied that a certain northern endurance and hardiness may have explained the apparent good morale in Bootle during the Blitz:

Many of these people had never known standards of home life, of space, quietness and stability, which other people accepted as a matter of course. They looked out on a world of disorder and instability with different eyes, for had they not grown up with hardship by their side during the years of unemployment? To them, leaking roofs, broken windows, no schools and a nightly trek to the open fields in spring-time meant less than the loss of a job.\textsuperscript{xx}

It is perhaps of little surprise, then, when pressed to explain variations in civilian morale during the Blitz, M-O tended to resort to a-priori regional stereotypes and peculiar traits that the respective communities were reported to have possessed. For example, researchers recorded a high level of morale in Liverpool which was explained by the unique ‘hardy’ character of the city’s population:
Perhaps as important as the above conditioning, is Liverpool’s previous peacetime conditioning of toughness and hardness. For many years there has been economic depression on Merseyside. There is some of the worst poverty and chronic unemployment in the country. The tradition of the sea is another toughening character of Liverpool…apart from the general toughness associated with sea faring, there is a bi-product of some importance. Sailor’s wives are used to living alone, without their husbands, for long periods. This stands them in good stead as compared with the wives of Coventry munitions workers or Cockney bus conductors.\textsuperscript{xii}

Indeed, Tom Harrisson later wrote that in Liverpool, morale was preserved through ‘a hardy northern tradition of endurance, which had come to climax within most memories with mass unemployment in 1931’.\textsuperscript{xxi} Likewise, in assessing the initial response to the blitz in Southampton, a Mass-Observer concluded that:

\begin{quote}
the population of Southampton is to a high extent genuinely resident and locally interested. Southampton has deeper social roots than Coventry or Stepney. There is a certain tradition of local toughness, partly associated with the docks and the sea.\textsuperscript{xxiii}
\end{quote}

Another important factor which, according to M-O researchers, boosted civilian morale was the presence of the military. The ‘cheerful effect’ sailors and soldiers had on Liverpool were cited as possible influences on morale. It was found that the people of Liverpool welcomed the stationing of soldiers and sailors in the city as they ‘brought an atmosphere of revelry and holiday which they continued throughout air-raid warnings’.\textsuperscript{xxiv} Plymouth was also highlighted as enjoying high morale due to the impact that the navy had upon the town. One researcher described a ‘real cheerfulness everywhere’ in Plymouth and that:

\begin{quote}
Plymouth nightlife [can] best be described as ‘terrific’ mainly due to the navy. Pubs were open and crowded in the last hour. There was a great deal of singing, ‘Bless’em all’ being the dominant song as in Liverpool.\textsuperscript{xxv}
\end{quote}

By contrast, civilians who were not deemed to have possessed a ‘hardy’ character or experienced a military presence within a city were, according to M-O researchers, susceptible to long periods of low morale. Thus Coventry, which had undergone a period of prosperity during the 1930s, was considered to have lacked a tradition of endurance, whilst Manchester was deemed to have possessed a ‘background of softness’ combined with a ‘noticeable strain of selfishness and strict utilitarianism’.\textsuperscript{xxvi} These explanations for regional differences in civilian morale do not stand up to closer inspection once evidence from other areas is examined. For example, M-O had some difficulty in maintaining their thesis that regional characteristics and a military presence aided civilian morale after Southampton dipped to low levels of morale two weeks after the initial attack in November 1940.\textsuperscript{xxvii} Moreover, the M-O team were hard pressed to explain why Portsmouth, a city with a strong naval tradition that was deeply imbedded into civilian life,\textsuperscript{xxviii} appeared to suffer from low levels of
morale throughout the blitz. Six to nine days after the first blitz in 1941, it was reported that morale was 'not good':

Portsmouth morale is the more striking in a town with a tough sea tradition. There are too many indicators pointing in the same direction to leave any doubt that there has been a serious emotional and confidence disturbance here.

Clearly, contemporary analysis and interpretation of blitzed cities by M-O researchers has its limitations. The following section will investigate the impact that the pattern of bombing had upon civilian morale.

**Effects on Civilian Morale: The Pattern of Bombing and the City Centre**

Since working-class communities and associated institutions were based near the centre of most cities during this period, the nature of bombing raids on the city centre was an important variable in influencing working-class civilian morale. Although Manchester received only three blitz scale attacks, they were concentrated in the heart of the city, seriously affecting key institutions such as public houses, cinemas and public utilities, along with transport infrastructures which linked Manchester's centre with its suburban areas. An M-O report noted that the:

utility services were much more affected than those in Liverpool; the transport was seriously affected and is still inefficient on many routes. The importance of transport in keeping up morale cannot be over-emphasised.

The 'uncoordinated' and 'overlapping' design of Manchester's city centre also ensured that just two severe bomb raids caused maximum devastation to the city's infrastructure and familiar landmarks. The morale weakening effects that the destruction of Manchester's city centre had upon the population was described by an M-O volunteer:

The concentration of damage, including town centre, is suggested as an important factor in reducing morale in Manchester, the damage has been less concentrated in Liverpool.

Also the raids occurred on the Sunday and Monday before Christmas which, according to observers 'gave a tragic bitterness to the whole affair'. Coventry's topographical features also ensured that the city's essential amenities were badly damaged. Commenting on the differences in topography between Coventry and London, one observer noted that in Coventry:

the compression of damage in the city centre struck many as especially impressive. Here and there where social nuclei like the Cathedral and shopping centre were destroyed, there was a powerful duel impact: a first sense of tragic loss, closely followed by a quite passionate interest, growing readily to pride. Again, London's size and scatter masked the effect: while many of London's oldest
focal buildings never were destroyed...in a place like Coventry the lot could go in one night. This struck at the heart of the community.\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

Similarly in Hull, the raids of June 1941 resulted in ‘heavy damage’ both to its centre and severe damage to the docks and the Eastern side of the city. An observer noted that:

Hull’s business and shopping centre has certainly suffered more intensely than the West of London. Much of the damage is obvious work of fire through the twisted wreckage of what had once been steel and concrete buildings confirms that some extremely heavy bombs must have been used...whole streets of working-class houses are down.\textsuperscript{xxxv}

Indeed, it was reported in Hull that the dislocation of public utilities resulted in a loss of morale in several districts. In some instances, police intervention was called upon to diffuse disturbances by people waiting for bomb-damaged shops to open.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} In Portsmouth the bombing of the Guildhall, a centre of local activity, was particularly felt, and caused M-O to note that:

Whenever an air raid smashes into the city the effect appears to be much greater in terms of morale than where the damage is on an industrial or residential district.\textsuperscript{xxxvii}

It also noted poor social services which offered inadequate feeding arrangements. Moreover, the severe damage to Manchester and Coventry’s shopping infrastructure ensured long queues, a factor which made life extremely difficult for women munitions workers.\textsuperscript{xxxviii} The negative effects on civilian morale of badly damaged shopping areas were not under-estimated by the government. In 1941, a Ministry of Food official quoted an extract from a German magazine on the ‘queue problem in Germany’, clearly implying that the same circumstances might develop in Britain:

Where there is a queue people imagine there is scarcity; where scarcity is presumed irrational appetite arises. Scarcity causes more queues, queues increase the urge to try to get ‘just one more’...There has in fact developed the professional queuer, a malignant and odious breed.\textsuperscript{xxxix}

In Portsmouth the opening of a new Woolworth created an upsurge of morale. In its report of March 1941 M-O noted that quite a crowd gathered for its opening. Comments that were overheard stressed that it made people feel like things had some life in them.\textsuperscript{x}\textsuperscript{i}

By contrast, Plymouth and Southampton’s topography ensured that the destruction of important working-class amenities did not reach the proportions recorded in other cities. Since Plymouth was effectively an amalgamation of three towns, Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse, essential services and institutions were scattered across the city. The bombardment during Spring 1941, as a report noted at the time, was heaviest in the city centre and dockyard workers’ residential area of Stonehouse.\textsuperscript{xii} In Southampton it was noted that the wide area of park lawn and open space around the centre of the city had meant that it did not suffer the devastation experienced by more condensed city centres.\textsuperscript{xiii} Similarly, one observer noted that Liverpool’s town centre had not been ‘completely
shattered or very seriously scarred', and that 'in terms of morale the effect is undoubtedly great'. An M-O report remarked that in other towns the dislocation of utilities was ‘found to have a major effect in lowering morale’. In Liverpool these consequences were limited to a few areas and a few days. Significantly, the report noted that Liverpool’s city centre landmarks were not destroyed during the blitz:

There is a subtle psychological tie-up between the citizens, however apathetic, and the centre, the heart of their city. Quite an important factor in Liverpool is the comparatively good lay out of parts of the town, and the exceptional wide streets in many areas. This greatly reduced the dislocation of transport, which is a very important factor in keeping up the morale of big towns, especially among shoppers and industrial workers.xliii

Thus, the preservation of the public utilities in Liverpool eliminated the practical problems that were evident in Manchester and Hull, whilst the undamaged city centre landmarks provided a physical manifestation of continuity. The premise that civilian morale was in some way generated by a unique feature of ‘hardness’ in Liverpool’s working-class is further undermined when the suburban areas of Liverpool are considered.

Although, Liverpool’s town centre escaped serious dislocation, extensive damage to the Merseyside area disrupted suburban social and economic infrastructures. Indeed, intensive bombing in these areas meant that civilians were forced to sleep in fields on the outskirts of the city, isolated from their neighbourhoods and traditional institutions, such as the corner shop and the public house, which helped to generate and maintain morale. Significantly, under these conditions, which were familiar to the people of Manchester and Hull, civilian morale suffered also, but a sense of alienation manifested itself in outward hostility to the government and officialdom. In May 1941, a Home Office report on the morale of civilians forced to sleep on tarpaulins in open fields, warned that morale had dipped to dangerous levels and ‘the grimness of the people has a menacing note’. The observer noted that:

the expressions of revolt do not come from the submerged tenth but from the average person. There have been disturbances in the rougher districts and it has been reported that private cars could not travel with safety in certain districts. Amongst the working class comment is more severe...after an hour listening to the remarks one is left with a feeling of dread. Openly expressed opinion that living under hard conditions under a government that knew how to organise its services would be better than being herded into fields like cattle...these people are respectable workers, wives and families, and not slum dwellers.xliv

Thus by restricting their research to Liverpool’s city centre where relatively few key social institutions were destroyed, M-O overlooked a whole area of Merseyside where there existed similar conditions and responses to those found in Manchester and Hull.

In order to make sense of the often contradictory M-O reports and pseudo-scientific interpretations of variations in regional civilian morale, it has been argued that analysis should be directed to the impact
the raids had upon the functioning of a working community. Clearly, air attacks on city centres which provided essential amenities to close by working-class communities severely damaged civilian morale in these areas. However, perhaps one of the most important factors which generated and maintained high civilian morale were leisure institutions and the working-class neighbourhoods they served.

**Effects on Civilian Morale: Leisure Institutions, Working-Class Neighbourhoods and the Workplace**

Evidence suggests that good civilian morale in working-class districts depended upon the community continuing to operate and function as close to pre-war times as possible. Indeed, the pre-war institutions within the working-class community, such as the neighbourhood, public house, music hall, club and co-operative were significant frames of reference for many working people and became vital in maintaining a collective purpose during war-time conditions.

In Britain generally, the importance of recreational institutions was belatedly recognised by the authorities. In the anticipation of a massive aerial attack, many public places in Britain were closed down on the outbreak of war. However, as Thorpe has discovered, 'in the midst of air attack people were to look for entertainment despite or because of their troubles'. The importance of working-class leisure institutions was recognised by contemporaries. A Home Office report on propaganda noted that 'in post blitz situations the function of entertainment in keeping up morale has sometimes been vigorously ignored'. Recreational institutions, then, were an important form of escapism from the harsh realities of war. An analysis of M-O reports on working-class leisure reveals a positive correlation between the survival of leisure institutions and high civilian morale. This was particularly the case for the working class who tended to identify in their leisure pursuits traditional cultural icons and a collective purpose during a period of increasing danger and uncertainty. Indeed, this collective purpose can be juxtaposed with the individuality of the middle class during this period. In their report on war-time Oxford, M-O noted that working-class clubs such as the Cowley Workers Social Club experiencing ‘greater demands than ever’, whilst the middle-class Conservative club was experiencing a decline in membership. There was a marked tendency for the middle class to retreat from their leisure activities in a time of crisis and the working class to increase their dependence on them. A good example of this was the British Legion where M-O noted it had:

> No difficulty in welcoming members from other branches. Here no doubt the club habit was already well developed, a ready-made link existed in all being members of one legion.

The working-class evacuee also found him or herself at home in the public house. M-O noted that the evacuees in Oxford public houses were ‘fairly popular, spending money freely and joining in the singing with gusto’. Drink had a considerable effect on morale, since in a survey of a Plymouth pub
the talk of raids decreased from 80 per cent to 40 per cent as more alcohol was consumed. Where public houses were shut the effect was generally negative on working-class morale. For example, after the severe raids on Plymouth in March 1941, it was reported that the absence of night life had cast ‘an expectant gloom over the whole city’. This was also the case in Portsmouth whose post-blitz reaction was to keep public houses shut. By contrast in Southampton it was noted that the public houses in the working-class districts were doing very good business at both night and midday.

Another important recreational institution was the music hall which provided the opportunity for familiar entertainers from pre-war Britain to raise morale significantly. One observer noted that ‘unlike the cinema, the music hall has been affected little if at all, by the war. Indeed at the moment the industry is experiencing a minor boom’.

The possible effects did not go unnoticed by the establishment. For example, the Ministry of Information regularly contemplated the role of performers in increasing civilian morale, thus:

There are a considerable number of first rank stars who do recitation and orations of a semi-comic nature which generally contain a great deal of topical material and undoubtedly have a considerable impact. Perhaps most effective among these are the Western Brothers, Nosmo King, Ernie Lotings, Jack Warner, Bill Bennett.

The available evidence suggests however, that where performers tried overtly patriotic material there was little laughter in response. Indeed, a war-time survey on popular entertainment in music halls concluded that sketches that included ‘sexual references’ and ‘lavatory humour’ were the most popular, whilst jokes with references to Germany and the war, on the other hand ‘were not on the whole successful’.

A further important source of working-class morale was derived from the neighbourhood. In pre-war England, working-class communities revolved around the neighbourhood in which standards were set, social support provided and communication networks established. Generally, most social support mechanisms were organised by women, thus clothes, food and sometimes money were re-distributed within working-class communities. The prominent role of women in the neighbourhood was reflected in the large numbers of women that belonged to local guilds and clubs. For example, in war-time Oxford, M-O reported that:

it seems that clubs have a very great importance in the lives of these women...This tremendous desire on the part of Oxford working-class women to hear lectures and attend class is the most strongly emphasised fact found in the course of this investigation. There are probably in war-time Oxford well over 5,000 women organised into known clubs.

Since the neighbourhood was usually a geographically and socially stable unit, working-class families turned to it for support during times of crisis. Tebbutt has shown that the neighbourhood performed a
vital role in supplying information, an issue which became increasingly important during the blitz. Thus Tebbutt argues:

Various forms of retailing such as the corner shop, pawn shop, markets, street stalls, chip shop, wash house, door to door traders, were, in fact, the arteries through which information vital to the local population was regularly pumped.\textsuperscript{iv}

Despite suffering heavy bombardment, community networks were still able to function and continued to facilitate the generation of morale. For example, in Hull a small working-class neighbourhood which had undergone an enemy attack was commended for its cheerfulness and good humour. Although in one long street almost every house bore the scars of the raid, the residents had elected to remain in the area to ‘clean up’, despite the fact that ‘other people were rushing out of the city’. An investigator questioned a group of women residents on whether they were going to evacuate and noted their response:

although their houses were damaged, they were not. They had nowhere to go, they said, and they might just as well keep busy at home. To those who have experienced or seen the shattering dislocation of a bomb-wrecked home, it might demonstrate a courage of no mean order to keep busy ‘cleaning up’ on the eve of a night that might mean a return of the bomber.\textsuperscript{v}

Thus, the absence of ‘trekking’ in this area helped to ensure that the neighbourhood continued to perform an important role in maintaining a sense of collective purpose.

However, when the evacuation of a neighbourhood was unavoidable, the working class lacked the support mechanisms of the local community and were subjected to a more hostile environment. The absence of a collective ethos was perhaps most apparent in the transportation and accommodation of evacuees outside the city boundaries. A survey conducted in Portsmouth noted that of thirty-two cars that passed a bus stop in a ten minute period, twenty were occupied by two or less people.\textsuperscript{vi} Significantly, the long queues of working-class people that had formed at the bus stop began to show resentment towards middle-class car owners. M-O noted that the general feeling amongst the working class stranded at the bus queue was that middle-class car owners were morally obliged to stop and offer lifts to people waiting to leave the city:

middle-class car owners are now going out of the city more than ever. There are still many cases where cars have empty seats and little seems to have been done to stir up the consciences of such citizens. Bus stops are crowded with people trying to get out of town.\textsuperscript{vii}

Working-class hostility to middle-class car owners was not unique to Portsmouth. In Plymouth, the local press noted a similar situation when commenting on the plight of the trekkers:

One knows it is hopeless to criticise and blame this state of affairs on lack of organisation, but the suffering of these tragic people could be alleviated however,
if a selfish section of the community would realise in war there is only one motto
‘help thy neighbour’. lviii

In fact in Plymouth, it took police intervention to persuade motorists to provide transport for evacuees leaving the city. lx

Both the press and M-O recorded that working-class evacuees sometimes received a hostile reception in out of town areas. In the Spring of 1941, the Western Evening Herald reported that a middle-class home-owner refused to accept working-class people into his house. According to the newspaper, he stated that ‘having such people in my cottage would only lead to trouble’. lx Similar, after knocking on a door of a middle-class home outside Plymouth, an evacuee with her two children was told to go away. As the woman left she overheard the owner say ‘it’s all very well you know, but if I let you and those dirty children come in they would ruin the carpet’. lx The social support mechanisms that were present in working-class neighbourhoods did not, therefore, extend to the countryside. The Home Office, recognising the widespread hostility to evacuees, commissioned a report which revealed that many billeting officers had difficulty in persuading affluent home-owners to take in people from blitzed areas:

It is frequently suggested that the owners of large country houses are shirking their responsibilities. This is said to be the ‘cause of perpetual minor grievances in many districts’. Stories are told of billeting officers who say: ‘If this goes on, I shall have to start on some of the big houses’...Complaints however, are by no means confined to large houses. Enquiries in one area suggest that ‘there is far more persistent difficulty and resentment regarding the 5-7 bedroom type of house...’. lxi

The importance of the neighbourhood and leisure is confirmed by contrasting it with the workplace as a source of morale during the blitz. There can be little doubt that in many vital industries the workplace was not a stable environment. For example, in Coventry the shortage of labour encouraged workers to commute from the surrounding districts to highly paid engineering positions. Moreover, it was not uncommon for workers to move to more successful firms within the city for the sole purpose of gaining higher wages. Furthermore, the shortage of labour and pressure to increase output strained industrial relations. Immediately after the war Inman recognised that the workplace had, if anything, a detrimental effect on morale. In his official history of Labour in the Munitions industry, Inman noted an increase in strike activity during the war period, rising from 332,000 days in 1939 to 1,048,000 days in 1944. lxii According to Inman, one of the major causes of this loss of working time was a ‘lack of cooperation in the workplace’. lxiv Likewise, M-O noted the particularly bad workplace relations in areas such as Clydeside with a historic tradition of industrial conflict. Indeed the mythical war time spirit was unable to dislodge long established tensions in the workplace. Inter-war resentment by workers against employers could not be overcome even in the face of the threat of invasion. M-O noted a chronic distrust based on job insecurity, which only re-armament had temporarily abated. According to M-O:
the employers felt worried about their men and hated them for striking, the men were equally sceptical about the good intentions of the employers and did not feel like they were fighting a war. Lastly the bosses hated their men as much, if not more than they hated the fascists.\textsuperscript{lxv}

Here, however, M-O fell back on their geographical explanation that there was a ‘big physical distance and a bigger psychological distance separating Glasgow from the rest of Britain’.\textsuperscript{lxvi} Clearly this explanation is only partial and, as we have shown, there are limitations with such a theory. Still less satisfactory is the idea that Glasgow was in any way the exception to the rule as far as Britain was concerned. Whilst the city was the centre of communist activity even M-O recognised this factor could be overplayed in the context of Glasgow, thus:

there has been a tendency in some quarters to exaggerate the degree of communist influence in the shop steward movement. It is certainly safe to say that the shop stewards are more genuinely representative of contemporary feeling among the men than most representatives of public opinion.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight, subsequent historians have broadly supported this assumption. For example, Croucher has argued that ‘the difference (between Glasgow and the rest of Britain) was fundamentally one of quantity not of quality. Clydeside was “worse” but its attitudes were often sharply expressed variants of views which could be heard elsewhere in Britain’.\textsuperscript{lxviii}

The workplace for many people, then, did not generate ‘good’ morale or encourage workers to become involved in the war effort. In M-O’s War Factory report of 1943, researchers found that the attitude of the women workers was one of indifference, thus ‘the majority of them are so little interested in the war that they do not care whether their work is important to it or not’.\textsuperscript{lxix} Importantly, Harrisson noted that morale was chiefly generated from outside the workplace thus:

here is considerably less gossip about each others affairs than one would normally expect in such a gathering. Most of the gossip and anecdotes one hears are about people known to the speakers at home not in the factory’.\textsuperscript{lxx}

Taken together, therefore, one does not get the impression that the workplace was a source of morale in the same way as the neighbourhood and leisure institutions were.

Conclusion

The evidence marshalled in the preceding sections has emphasised the importance of geographical and cultural factors in shaping civilian morale in working-class districts during the Blitz. It is too simplistic to attribute the high levels of morale exhibited in some regions as the product of the idiosyncrasies of the human character. In the terminology of the social scientist,\textsuperscript{lxxi} structure both
‘enables’ and ‘constrains’ human action. Translated into historical discourse, this suggests that the geographical landscape and community networks had an extremely important influence on the collective psyche of the working-class during the blitz. Of course, investigations into traditional working-class communities generated since the M-O researchers undertook their research, has enabled the historian to sensitise M-O’s rather unsophisticated explanations of the human condition. This is not to deny that when analysed within a comparative framework, M-O offers a unique insight into the generation and maintenance of civilian morale during the Second World War. When explaining the nature of civilian morale, M-O’s final reports tended to rely on regional and social stereotypes, however many of the preliminary reports did show a sensitivity and awareness that was lacking in official documentation. This article has highlighted the major aspects of civilian life - the symbolic significance of the city centre, the survival of recreational institutions and working-class neighbourhoods - which appear to have played an important role in preserving civilian morale. This in itself has important implications for wider debates relating to the nature of working-class life during the twentieth century. Overall, one is struck by the continuities of life in British society before and during the War rather than the changes. Indeed, the continued importance of traditional working-class institutions casts doubt on the assumption that the Second World War was a watershed in the development of working-class culture in England.


iv. M-O did explain in their report on Glasgow that ‘by morale we mean primarily not only determination to carry on, but also determination to carry on with the utmost energy, a determination based on a realisation of the facts and with a readiness for many minor and some major sacrifice including life itself. Good morale means hard and persistent work, means optimism, maximum unity, reasonable awareness of the true situation and absence of complacency and confidences which are not based on fact and which are therefore likely to be terribly let down as time passes’. Mass-Observation File Report 600, ‘Morale in Glasgow’.


xvii. The origin of regional stereotyping can be traced back to the Victorian era see Dellheim, C. 'Imagining England: Victorian Views of the North', *Northern History*, 22, 1986, pp. 216-230.


xxxii. *Ibid*.

xxxiii. Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, p. 244.


xxxvi. PRO, HO/199/326, 'Report on the effects of heavy air raids Hull June 1941'.


xxxix. Ibid., p. 260.


xliii. PRO, HO 199/326, 'Report on the effects of heavy air raids on Hull June 1941'.

xliv. PRO, HO 199/427, 'Report on Air Raids in Liverpool and Merseyside 8 May 1941'.

xlv. U-P, Thorpe, A. Britain p. 30 (off print collection n.d.).


xlix. Mass-Observation, Live Entertainment and the War, Box 3 File C, 'Music Hall and the War'.


lv. PRO, HO/199/45, ‘Post War Organization Hull July 18 1941’.


lviii. Western Evening Herald, 25 April 1941.

lix. Ibid., 1 May 1941.

lx. Ibid., 2 May 1941.

lxi. Ibid., 25 April 1941.
lxii. PRO, INF 1/292, ‘Evacuation 18-25 June 1941’.


lxvi. *Ibid*.

lxvii. *Ibid*.


