# The National Panel responds: Mass Observation Directives 1939-1945

*Charles Madge:* What does he think?

*Tom Harrisson:* What do I think?

*Charles Madge:* What do you think?

*Tom Harrisson:* Mass-Observation aims to give the answer. We try and speak for you. Why don’t you help us and tell us about yourselves?

*From:* They speak for themselves Broadcast 1 June 1939[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Introduction

Mass Observation’s call in 1937 for volunteer writers to participate in a National Panel representing the ‘thinking’ British public marked the establishment of Mass Observation’s most enduring methods of survey. In one of their earliest publications Harrisson and Madge described the Mass Observers as becoming “the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life”*[[2]](#footnote-2)* a role which the National Panel of volunteers continued to fulfil into the 1950s and beyond. The first call for volunteers to contribute to Mass Observation requested that participants list everything they did from waking to sleeping on a given day, originally the twelfth of each month (tying in with the date of George VIs Coronation in May 1937) and then moving onto ‘special’ days such as Armistice Day and Christmas Day. Throughout 1938, the focus began to change from listing activities on specific days to requesting opinions on events so that by 1939 Mass Observation was sending out qualitative questionnaires that ‘directed’ the participants into providing in-depth commentary on various aspects of their lives. The questionnaires were sent out monthly throughout the Second World War and continued to be issued into the late 1940s before dwindling in number by the early 1950s. The questionnaires came to be known as Directives and provide some of the most wide ranging surveys undertaken by Mass Observation. They comprise Mass Observation’s largest and most consistent population, providing huge potential for longitudinal and qualitative studies and yet they were amongst the least used material by the original Mass Observation project. Even in the research undertaken using the Archive today, they appear to have a much lower profile than the diaries or material collected using ethnographic methods. Despite this lower profile, the information that they contain is amongst the most revealing and comparable available for the war time opinions and experiences of members of the British public in these years. Over 2000 people participated in the Panel at some point in its existence with nearly 150 archival boxes of their replies to Mass Observation’s questions still in existence. Numbers of responses vary from month to month and whilst there is every indication that the majority of responses have survived there is evidence of some gaps namely the responses for 1941.Whole batches of the 1941 Directive responses appear to have been damaged or removed before the Archive came to Sussex in 1970s although we do know they existed at some point as reports based on them are available in the File Report sequence.

This essay seeks to provide a brief introduction to the National Panel of volunteer writers and the Directives that were issued to them by Mass Observation specifically in the years between 1939 and 1945; by examining the Panel itself, the responses given and Mass Observation’s original motivations and practices it will highlight some of the themes and criticisms that can be considered and explored when using the data generated.

## What was the purpose of the National Panel?

In one of their first publications as Mass Observation in 1937, Madge & Harrisson stated that Mass Observation aimed to be “a scientific study of human social behaviour beginning at home”[[3]](#footnote-3). Alongside the establishment of a team of full time Observers who utilised anthropological and sociological survey techniques to report on everyday life in Britain, Mass Observation established a National Panel of volunteer writers. Whilst the full time MO team would provide the “WHAT” of what Britain was thinking and doing, Madge & Harrison saw the National Panel of observers as providing an “invaluable insight into the WHY”[[4]](#footnote-4) through qualitative and in depth written responses requested on various themes by Mass Observation. By asking the Panel questions that aligned with thematic studies being undertaken by the MO team, Mass Observation felt that the National Panel could operate as a “continuous check” in this work, providing indications of mass behaviour when trends in attitude appeared[[5]](#footnote-5), writing down the unwritten laws and making invisible forces visible [[6]](#footnote-6).

In order to undertake this exercise the Panel would be issued with instructions directing them towards themes to write on. The National Panel originally came under the direction of Charles Madge who with Humphrey Jennings headed the establishment of the original panel of volunteer writers whose contributions of Day Surveys of George VI’s Coronation Day were used in the ‘montage’ of experiences, extracts of which were published as part of *May the Twelfth* in 1937[[7]](#footnote-7).

Whilst it was clearly not the first time a large scale social survey had taken place in Britain[[8]](#footnote-8). However where previous studies looked at what Summerfield describes as specific areas of society using “carefully constructed statistical sampling of indices”[[9]](#footnote-9), Mass Observation sought to illicit data from a much wider spectrum of society. It sought to recruit from what it described as “all classes, from all localities and from every shade of opinion” with the intention of making this data available for scientists and researchers from all fields to interpret [[10]](#footnote-10).

Madge and Harrisson briefly swapped roles in 1940 before Harrisson finally took over sole leadership of Mass Observation in the second half of 1940 following months of argument between the two men. Madge had vehemently disagreed with Harrisson’s unilateral decision on behalf of Mass Observation to accept commissions from the Ministry of Information, something which Madge felt would compromise Mass Observation’s independence and ability to openly criticise the government; on top of their clear personal difference a split appears to have been inevitable. On Madge’s departure, Harrisson took over sole leadership of both prongs of Mass Observation’s work including direction of the National Panel. Within the boxes of archive material relating to the organisational history of Mass Observation, there is evidence of Harrisson’s direction of this part of the project.[[11]](#footnote-11)

## The Directives

### Development from Day Surveys

On 17 February 1937 twenty-five people from around the country participated in the first ‘Day Survey’ undertaken by Mass Observation. The survey requested that the participants recorded everything that they did between rising and going to bed on that date. The number of participants rose considerably over the next few months peaking with 259 accounts of daily life being sent into Mass Observation for 12 June 1937. At around this time Mass Observation started to include questionnaires on specific subjects such as dominant images or smoking and reading[[12]](#footnote-12), whilst the Day Surveys began to develop from simply being individuals’ accounts of their activities in the 12th of the month accounts to looking at specific days such as Armistice Day or Christmas Day with the last 12th day survey taking place in January 1938. During 1938 several more subject based questionnaires were sent to the Panel including reactions to the resignation of Prime Minister Eden in February 1938 and the Munich Crisis in October 1938 so that by January 1939, the surveys had become almost entirely subject based, and were described by Mass Observation as ‘Directives’.

The term ‘Directive’ had been adopted by Mass Observation in 1937 to describe the document sent out to the panel of respondents. Sheridan et al describe explain the use of this term as describing not a questionnaire as such, rather a method of directing the Mass Observers to specific subject areas that Mass Observation was studying at that point.[[13]](#footnote-13) The early Directives comprised a set of questions and any commentary on earlier Directive replies that had been received. An example of this dual reporting/questionnaire format of can be seen in the Directive sent out to the panel in June 1939 in which an analysis of responses to the May 1939 Directive was presented, followed by the set of questions for June relating to race and class[[14]](#footnote-14). The questions were designed to illicit personal and in-depth responses from the writers themselves detailing their own personal views and experiences but they also asked respondents to seek a wider view from their own communities. In March/April 1939 respondents were instructed to ask of “someone whose views you think are typical of public opinion” two specified questions[[15]](#footnote-15).

### Directives from 1939

At the outbreak of the Second World War Mass Observation asked its panel of respondents to start keeping war diaries in case of any disruption in instruction from Mass Observation HQ. Two mailings were sent to the Panel in September 1939, one entitled ‘Crisis Directive;’ and the other ‘Wartime Directive No. 1’. The ‘Crisis’ Directive[[16]](#footnote-16) instructed people to keep diaries of their everyday lives and the reactions of themselves and the people around, encouraging political comment to be kept to a minimum. These instructions were intended to last only for the next few weeks but within the month the ‘Wartime’ Directive[[17]](#footnote-17) was sent out instructing the Panel to keep up with their diaries. If their circumstances were pressing or if they were called up Panel members were encouraged to continue to ‘store up material for history by keeping diaries’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Despite these precautions, Mass Observation was able to continue issuing its monthly Directives throughout the War period and many Panel members settled into a pattern of keeping diaries alongside answering the questionnaires.

Mass Observation continued to send out Directives to its panel once a month, initially covering one or two related subjects in each posting, however by January 1940, each monthly questionnaire covered a range of subjects. The questionnaires usually asked people to reflect on their attitudes and experiences of life around them, occasionally asking them to garner a wider view by interviewing people within their families or communities. The Directives were often divided into sections with given ‘priorities’, the first being for all to answer, the second level for those with extra time and the final for those with special information.

In August 1940, at the tail end of his relationship with Mass Observation, Madge wrote to Harrisson explaining his administration of the panel response. To those that wrote in asking to join, he would write a letter explaining the objectives and methods of Mass Observation and where they could read more. In terms of the responses to the August directive “when acknowledging these I answer their queries, and if they are suitable people I suggest they keep a diary, or if they mention a particular subject in which they are interested, I suggest they send us a report from time to time.”[[19]](#footnote-19) These ‘special reports’ are sometimes found filed in the larger thematic ‘Topic Collections’. An example is the writer Olivia Cockett, who submitted diaries under D5277, Directives under DR2465 and whose special reports on air raid wardens and the effects of air raids were filed in the Topic Collections on Air Raids at TC23/9/N[[20]](#footnote-20).

## Themes covered in the Directives

Throughout the Second World War themes were often related to conflict, asking people to record their opinions of national and international events, wartime privations and reaction to media reporting and government propaganda. But many questions also covered the more personal aspects of life including religious belief, sexual morality and dreams. Undoubtedly the response to many of these personal subjects would be tempered by the Second World War, providing a fascinating view of how conflict effected the most intimate areas of people’s lives.

Between January 1939 and December 1945 over 260 subjects were covered including some that were periodic repeats such as views of the past year and listing the top inconveniences of wartime. A brief glance through the subject listing[[21]](#footnote-21) illustrates the breadth of subject coverage and the contrast between the outfacing and the intimate. April 1942 for example directed panellists towards five subjects: traditional English Sunday; organisation of post-war education; the supernatural and experiences of the supernatural, clothes and the effects of rationing; feelings about the political truce and music. The range of themes in this single month illustrates the way in which Directives were used to illicit opinion and reactions to specific national and international events and situations as well as opinion on everyday personal life experiences.

Whilst the questions reflected Mass Observation’s research interests, they also provided a useful summary of what were considered to be the ‘issues’ of the day. By asking questions on themes such as leisure activities, sex, marriage and personal appearance Mass Observation was able to access areas of ongoing life, indicating whether the surrounding conflict effected them and if so in what ways. They provide a fascinating insight into the values held by the Panellists, seeking responses to questions on class, religion, and the roles of the sexes. At the same time subjects that were much more context specific were able to capture reaction to historic events or personalities that were involved, for example air raids, Churchill or Lord Haw Haw (Jan 1940).

Certain subjects were revisited over time, for example requests to list feelings about different nationalities were made at least 6 times between 1939 and 1945, whilst opinions on a list of national and international statesman were requested five times. Another theme regularly visited was that of morale. Whilst much could be gleaned on the state of an individual’s morale from responses to other subjects, Mass Observation also directly asked people about how they *felt* about the situation generally and their day to day life, repeating the question at the end of each year between 1939 and 1945.

## The National Panel

### The participants

Between 1939 and 1945, 2393 individuals responded to at least one Directive sent to them by Mass Observation. The number of respondents varied annually, perhaps not surprisingly at its highest in 1939 with 1037, and apart from a peak in 1942 with 938, the numbers of participants steadily declined throughout the War[[22]](#footnote-22). Some responded to only one Directive whilst others sent many more into Mass Observation, a handful responding to over 50 Directives. The most prolific respondent was DR1016, a housewife from Gateshead, Co. Durham who was born in 1887 and responded to 58 Directives as well as keeping a diary which she regularly sent to Mass Observation. In all 16386 responses to Mass Observation Directives between 1939 and 1945 have been catalogued, a testament to the wide reaching ambition of the project.

In a memo written to Harrisson in August 1940 just as his involvement with Mass Observation was drawing to a close, Madge describes how the National Panel continues to grow, with 33 new members being recently recruited having read *War Begins at Home, Britain,* or various articles in magazines etc.[[23]](#footnote-23). Members of the Panel were recruited to Mass Observation largely through interest raised by its publications, broadcasts and related publicity, immediately slanting recruitment to those most likely to purchase or read that type of material or listen to those types of radio programme. Recruits were also aware that their material may be quoted from in a public arena – indeed there is evidence in the diaries of National Panel members eagerly awaiting Mass Observation publications to see if any of their material has been used[[24]](#footnote-24). This consciousness may in turn have had an impact on what they wrote or the way they wrote it.

The single unifying feature for all members of the National Panel was their willingness to participate in this voluntary project receiving no payment or reward for their contributions; these were people motivated by some sense of social consciousness to make their voices heard and express opinions of those they felt were not represented in any other fora. The nature of Mass Observation as a written project required a level of literacy and education that would have placed strands of the populace out of reach. It also required a significant input of time meaning that those with little free time would find it hard to participate. Summerfield puts forward the hypothesis that the tendency for female Mass Observers to be either single of older married women with grown up children reflected how the time constraints of childcare could limit younger mothers’ participation[[25]](#footnote-25).

So why did people participate in what could potentially be a time consuming activity with little material reward for the individual? Summerfield describes the ‘educative urge’ as an important motivating factor for many of the participants[[26]](#footnote-26) perhaps reflected in the other interests and pursuits which they mention in their writing. These reflect parallels with socialist movements and organisations, and common audiences for Mass Observation, the Left Book Club and consumption of literary productions such as the Penguin Specials series[[27]](#footnote-27).

One of the main features and indeed criticisms of the use of the National Panel immediately becomes apparent from this social and political position, particularly the reliance on acquiring respondents through specific publications. People who volunteered were generally those who read the publications immediately defining a population with a specific commonality. An interesting parallel example of this specific ‘public’ can be found within two studies on reading undertaken by Mass Observation in 1943 & 1946. In these studies the role of the Penguin paperback book was examined in the context of the wider reading general public. Mass Observation identified what they defined as a specific ‘Penguin Public’: readers who were identified as more likely to be under 40, middle class, to have had a secondary education, to believe that their ideas and opinions had been affected by the books they had read, to belong to public libraries and to be more interested in anything to do with books generally, being more knowledgeable about authors and publishers and buying all kinds of books[[28]](#footnote-28). Penguin’s, including the ‘Specials’ series were marked out within these studies as being informative books that were affordable and it is perhaps no small co-incidence that Mass Observation’s best selling publication *Britain by Mass-Observation* was issued as a Penguin Special in 1939. Whilst the nature of Mass Observation lent itself to the readership of Penguin, it could equally be said that the broadcast of Mass Observation to the Penguin public through the channel of the Specials series increased the likelihood of such a population volunteering to participate in the project.

### Representativeness

The social make up of the Panel, requires a much deeper analysis than the remit of this paper will allow, but several authors have covered some of the issues arising including a useful introduction to criticisms at the time in Jeffrey’s short account of the history of Mass Observation[[29]](#footnote-29). Although the respondents themselves did not always make overt references to their socio-economic status, some estimation can be made using indicators available in certain thematic directive in questions.

Nick Stanley undertook a detailed analysis of the National Panel from 1937 to 1945 in his 1981 DPhil thesis[[30]](#footnote-30). He concluded that the majority of writers were aged between 19 and 44 with a higher representation of writers from the South East. Representation from other regions was broadly proportional according to the national demographic whilst in contrast nearly twice as many men as women participated. Not all respondents stated their occupation, but where given Stanley’s analysis reveals that the ‘clerical faction’ made up the backbone of the male Panel members. This naturally declined as conscription became more widespread, whilst the number of manual workers in manufacture remained consistent reflecting the occupational movements of a population in wartime. Reflecting Summerfield’s hypothesis mentioned above, the female panel was dominated by women who termed themselves as ‘housewives’, with the remainder of female panellists being largely clerical workers or teachers; the teachers appear to have been particularly committed to Mass Observation returning more Directive responses per individual than other professions[[31]](#footnote-31).

The representativeness of Mass Observation’s National Panel has come under frequent criticism both at the time and in subsequent years, but as Stanley suggests it is not age, sex or regional distribution that is the focus of this criticism but class and political representation. By its nature, a voluntary project will only attract those who are willing, able and attracted by its stated objectives to participate. It was therefore a specific element of the population who were drawn to participate in Mass Observation’s National Panel rather than a representative cross section of British society and whilst this has caused some to question the usefulness of the data, others have turned this to advantage. Summerfield discusses whether Mass Observation better described as a social movement rather than social research[[32]](#footnote-32) whilst Savage suggests that the Mass Observation Panel should be read not as a representative sample but as a cultural movement of the educated middle class[[33]](#footnote-33). To illustrate this Savage analysed the self defined class representation of the Panel through the various directives relating to class and social status that were periodically revisited by Mass Observation. Examining the responses to the June 1939 directive on class, he concludes that the majority of respondents defined themselves as middle class with 22% claiming for upper class and 15% as working class[[34]](#footnote-34). The majority of respondents also related to left wing causes. Savage remarks on the respondents sense of “disidentification from the ‘staid’, wealthy industrialist middle class, instead carving out separate roles as intellectual, active thinkers[[35]](#footnote-35). This image supports the view of panellists as writers with a heightened social awareness and a perception of their separateness from other parts of society. Savage illustrates this in an example of “double positioning” displayed by a respondent who describes his ill ease with local public school acquaintances whilst being equally aware of the contrast between his social and intellectual position when with labouring workers. Instead he identifies himself as being most at ease with “well read, travelled and life experienced members of the technically trained classes”[[36]](#footnote-36).

Savage also perceives an interesting change in views on social status expressed by the Panel over a ten year period. The socially conscious panel of 1939 alluded to their desire for the status of the masses to be raised; by 1949 there is a definite change in tone, described by Savage as ‘priggish‘. Some Panellists allude to an unease in the post war social changes that have created a more affluent working class in comparison to the middle class intellectual thinkers who now found their jobs were increasingly less well paid. The perceived bias of the Mass Observation panel members towards the educated middle class meant that many of these writers experienced this change, and assumed what Savage describes as a ‘self-avowed cultural superiority’ to counter their own sense of unease. Savage’s paper illustrates how Mass Observation’s perceived short comings in terms of its representativeness can indeed be turned to advantage, providing an insight into the changing attitudes and status of a section of the population within wider British Society during this period.

## Responses themselves

The role of the National Panel was described by Madge and Harrisson in their 1939 publication *War Begins at Home* as subjective reporters who provided data that could not be obtained in any other way. Due to the confidential and anonymous nature of their submissions Mass Observation’s belief was that the Panel were “therefore prepared to give us the most detailed, candid and personal reactions” that may not have been achieved through face to face interviews.[[37]](#footnote-37) Whilst criticisms have undoubtedly been voiced with regard the National Panel, I would suggest that the value of the responses lay not so much in the representation of a national voice, but in the depth of individual expression within the responses themselves that allows the researcher a view of personal belief and experience that may otherwise be hidden from the historical record. Anonymity was an important factor in terms of the National Panel as stated in Madge and Harrison’s first publication in 1937[[38]](#footnote-38), a factor enlarged upon in Harrisson’s retrospective study 1970s, *Living Through the Blitz* he explains how anonymity was an important factor in allowing participants to be open and candid in their responses without fear of reprisal or consequence at a time when expressing feelings of defeatism or panic could have been viewed as unpatriotic[[39]](#footnote-39). Whether it was the veil of anonymity that encouraged Panellists to be more revealing of their inner selves can be debated, however it is clear in the responses that many of the writers were prepared to be candid about their lives and opinions, particularly in terms of more intimate subjects whilst others restrained themselves to unemotional responses. The responses themselves range from short, factual answers to discursive essays in which participants are prepared to reveal much about their opinions and lives under the cover of anonymity.

An example of the two approaches is evident in a question asked of the Panel in October 1942 on fear; what were the respondents’ everyday fears and what were their fears about the future? The question had been asked a year previously, although there is no evidence that Mass Observation ever analysed and published a comparison of the results. Many of the writers were candid about their fears including one 26 year old recently married woman who stated:

“A near future fear is that my husband may be sent abroad and tied up with that is the fear that, if he is, I may not be able to have start baby [sic] during his embarkation leave. This is really just a present moment aspect of my greatest personal fear that I may not be able to have the home that my husband and I want with children and good health and the happiness that we always have when we are together.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

Others responded with less personal fears for example, a 25 year old single male in the forces whose chief present fears were not gaining his transfer and the possibility of catching the mumps from one of his colleagues. His main longer term fear was to be sent abroad to fight with the potential for wounds and death, followed by friends and family being hurt. He rounds up his list of fears for the future with,

“There is the fear of the war lasting so long that the years of my youth will be past when it’s over (I am 25 now, I might be 30 when it’s over and at 30 one is getting too old for a good many activities I suppose). “[[41]](#footnote-41)

In April 1944 Mass Observation asked about individuals’ impressions and opinions of sexual morality over recent years, again illustrating the varying extents to which respondents were prepared to be revealing. Protected by the veil of anonymity and in the interest of social research one young woman from Winchester felt able to reveal:

“I myself had sexual intercourse with my husband before we were married and I think that it is a good thing to do, especially when two people cannot get married for some years. Our parents feel very very strongly against such intercourse, and would be horrified if they knew about us.” [[42]](#footnote-42)

Both the questions and the responses illustrate the political and social sensibilities of the time, particularly in terms of nationality, religion, class and gender roles. The June 1939 Directive on race directive asked respondents to vote in order of preference which ‘races’ (interestingly even European neighbours such as the Irish and French are described as other races) followed by a series of questions including whether they would use a clean handkerchief if it belonged to a Jew, whether if they knew a ‘negro’ they would care to be seen out in public together, and if they would shakes hands with a Nazi in uniform[[43]](#footnote-43). Whilst some of the language used may be shocking to our 21st century eyes, the questions and the responses reflect the acceptability of such expressions in the Britain of 1939. The description of the Mass Observation population as generally being the socially conscious, thinking educated is borne out in many ways through a quick scan of the responses. Although the language displays its 1930s and 1940s antecedents the majority of responses are thoughtful and considered observations on what respondents witnessed in their communities and on opinions they formed through their own experiences and observations of the media.

Responses to themes that were periodically repeated such as attitudes to nationalities or political and international war leaders who figured throughout the Second World War, provide an interesting track on how opinions changed throughout the War; the effect of media coverage or government reaction to events and how this effected respondents’ attitudes and morale. In the early years of the War, many of these responses challenged the perceived attitudes of the public, giving voice to the section of the public (as described by Savage) that would wish to challenge the official or governmental version, but had little chance to do so in any other way. Mass Observation provided the potential for personal expression and in turn through its publications and broadcasts, a voice on the public platform.

## How MO originally used responses

The National Panel generated a vast amount of material; over a third of the entire Mass Observation Archive currently held at the University of Sussex comprises the diaries and directives sent in by the Panel. Both Madge and Harrisson placed great emphasis on the value of having such a large survey population yet there is very little evidence that much of the material gathered in this way was ever used. In his short history of the early days of Mass Observation, Jeffrey acknowledges that little use has been made of the material gathered from the National Panel since the publication of *May Twelfth[[44]](#footnote-44).* Other than the short period that Mass Observation was under commission from the Ministry of Information, during which time some of the material from the Panel responses was used to prepare reports, Harrisson acknowledged that ninety-nine percent of the material was never touched[[45]](#footnote-45).

## Contemporary value

Whilst extensive use of the Directives may not have been made by the original Mass Observation organisation the collection has much potential for use in both research and teaching in a range of contemporary studies. Although the diaries are often the initial instinctive starting point for many researchers, the Directives are an easier starting point with which to access the writings of the National Panel. The nature of pre set questionnaires gives a basic index of themes unlike the diaries in which the potential range of subjects that can be covered in a single day is infinite and as most writers followed the structure of the questionnaire in their responses, themes are much easier to locate and track. Whilst many subjects were one offs, several were periodically revisited allowing the researcher to take a longitudinal view of how opinions and experiences developed within this particular section of society throughout the years of World War Two and beyond.

This structured nature compliments the unstructured diary entries. For the many writers who kept both a diary and responded to Directives, the researcher can often gain an increased depth of understanding for that individual; the responses to the Directives can provide a wider and more structured context to the personal outpourings within a diary, or in contrast the reserved recordings of daily life in a diary can be animated by the responses to pointed, almost intrusive delving of MO’s monthly questionnaires. Commenting on an individual respondent who submitted both diaries and directives to Mass Observation, Hinton contrasts the depth of response acquired through Directive questions in comparison to diary entries crediting Mass Observation’s “intrusive regime of monthly questionnaires” with extracting discussion on the private life of an emotionally reserved man[[46]](#footnote-46).

Taking into account the social-economic bias in the representation of the observers, as has been acknowledged it can be difficult to draw conclusions on the views and moods of the British people as a whole from this body of material, however as Savage and many other researchers have illustrated, it does provide an intimate insight into a specific population that would otherwise be lost. When used in conjunction with other archival and historic sources, the Directives can provide both context and detail in a similar way to other case studies such as oral histories or personal memoires although in a much vaster number than would be available in such sources. For this group of people, the Directives provide a thematic index of opinion and belief that compliment the diaries recording day to day life and experience.

Highmore states that “ethnography practised at home meant that the most ‘banal’ of everyday activities could have potential for revealing cultural meanings” [[47]](#footnote-47) and accordingly, the material submitted by the National Panel can be used to chart the social and cultural changes experienced by the Panel members and those in their immediate communities that they observed in their work for Mass Observation. The inevitable changes to everyday life in wartime are documented in these pages giving valuable insights into areas such as the changing roles of women. As many female panellists moved into new working roles including the serving in or supporting the Forces or working in industry to support the war effort their activities and opinions are recorded. These individual testimonies can be used as case studies of how women’s lives may or may not have changed between 1939 and 1945 but as the same questions were asked of men as of women, they can also be used to look for evidence of men’s attitudes to the roles women were taking on. This is just one theme of many that can be looked at, providing a unique contemporaneous and qualitative account of the everyday amongst Mass Observers.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the potential research strengths of the data gained by the Directives is the fact that of all the Mass Observation methods that were resumed in the new phase of the project established in 1981, it was the Directives that were resurrected. Since 1981, the practice of sending out questionnaires to a panel of volunteer writers has continued with nearly 100 questionnaires being sent out covering 300 themes. Over 4000 people have participate in the Project over the last 30 years providing an in depth view of changing life in Britain in the latter part of the 20th and early 21st Century. The responses to these ‘new’ Directives are stored alongside those from the 1930s to 1950s and can be used alongside each other as they chart life in Britain since 1937.

1. From a script of radio programme delivered by Tom Harrisson & Charles Madge to BBC regional radio available in <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Search/filereport.aspx?documentid=239445> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Harrisson, T.H. & Madge, C. 1938 *First Year’s Work 1937-1938* London: Lindsay Drummond [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Harrisson, T.H. & Madge, C. 1937 *Mass-Observation* London: Mueller, 20 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/contents/publication.aspx?documentid=282972> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harrisson, T.H. & Madge, C. 1940 *War Begins at Home* London: Chatto & Windus, 20 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/contents/publication.aspx?documentid=284720> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Harrisson & Madge *War begins*, 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Harrisson, TH & Madge, C. 1938 *First Year’s Work* London: Lindsay Drummond, 8 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/Publications.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See leaflet inviting submissions in FR A4 at <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/filereport.aspx?documentid=239423> and the ensuing publication *May the Twelfth* at <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/publication.aspx?documentid=283015> http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/publication.aspx?documentid=283015 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Charles Booth’s Victorian survey of London Poverty and the New London Survey of Life and Labour 1929-31 are two such examples. The archives of both these collections are currently held at the London School of Economics Library, Archives Division. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Summerfield, P. 1985 Mass-Observation: Social research or social movement in *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol20 p.439-452, 440 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Harrisson & Madge *Mass-Observation*, 32 & 34 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/contents/publication.aspx?documentid=282972> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The collection of material in SxMOA26 ‘Mass Observation: Organisation and History’ available at the Archive provides interesting evidence of the administration of the various MO activities including internal memos and correspondence between Harrisson, Madge and other Mass Observation personnel. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Responses to these early surveys are catalogued under their themes within Topic Collections: Dreams TC28/1/A-B; Smoking TC63/1-3; Reading TC20/1/C+E [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sheridan, Street & Bloome, 2000 Writing ourselves: Mass Observation and Literacy Practices, Hampton Press, 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. MO Online File Report A19 available at : <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/FileReport.aspx?documentid=239438&imageid=321249&sectionid=239921> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Questionnaire available at: <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/ColourImage.aspx?colourimageid=12&documentid=300982> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Image.aspx?documentid=239444&imageid=321512&sectionid=240188> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Image.aspx?documentid=239444&imageid=321513&sectionid=240188> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. FR A25 See MO Online: <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/contents/filereport.aspx?documentid=239444> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mass Observation Organisation & History SxMOA26/1/1/5 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Search/diary.aspx?documentid=110186> An edited version of Cockett’s Mass Observation Wartime diaries and directives, is available as *Love and war in London: the Mass Observation wartime diary of Olivia Cockett* ed. Robert Malcolmson & published by The History Press 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See MO Online: <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/directives.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Numbers of individuals who sent in at least one Directive responses each year: *1939*-1037; *1940* – 696; *1941* – 3 (responses for 1941 are unavailable due to being lost or damaged prior to the Archive coming to the University of Sussex); *1942* – 938; *1943* – 688; *1944* – 448; *1945* - 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Memo CM to TH 12/08/40 in SxMOA26/1/1/5 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. D5324 writes in her diary of 10/02/1940 how she and her sister have been sent a copy of *War Begins at Home* and how thrilled they are that they both have several quotations within the book. <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/Image.aspx?documentid=111033&imageid=393377&sectionid=111040&vpath=search> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Summerfield 1985, 443 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Summerfield, 442 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Jeffrey: Mass Observation a Short History <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/essays/content/shorthistory.aspx> for discussion of the Mass Observation audience’s political positioning [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See *Penguin Report* in Topic Collection on Reading Habits 1938 – 1949 TC20/9/G <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/Image.aspx?documentid=192725&imageid=0&sectionid=633658> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Jeffrey, T. 1999. *Mass-Observation: a short history* [*http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/essays/content/shorthistory.aspx*](http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/essays/content/shorthistory.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A detailed analysis of the Panel’s statistical representation is available in chapter 3 of Stanley, N.1981. *The extra dimension: a study and assessment of the methods employed by Mass-Observation in its first period, 1937-1940.* PhD Thesis Birmingham Polytechnic, [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Stanley, N.1981, 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Summerfield, 1985 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Savage, M. 2008 Affluence and social change in the making of technocratic middle-class identities: Britain 1939-55 in *Contemporary British History* 22:4, p. 457-476, 459 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Savage, 461 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Savage, 465 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Savage, 464 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Harrisson, T. & Madge, C. 1939. *War begins at Home* London: Chatto & Windus [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Harrisson. T.H. & Madge, C 1937 *Mass-Observation* London: Frederick Mueller, 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Harrisson, T. 1978 *Living through the Blitz.* London: Penguin, 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Directive Respondent 1346 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Search/Image.aspx?sectionid=413443> [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Directive Respondent 1264 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Image.aspx?documentid=302856&imageid=0&sectionid=412413> [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Directive Respondent 1346 <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Search/Image.aspx?sectionid=729475> [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/ColourImage.aspx?colourimageid=9&documentid=301356> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Jeffrey, 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Jeffrey, 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Hinton, J. 2009.Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self, OUP*,* 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Highmore, B. 2002. *Everyday life and cultural theory: an introduction*. London: Routledge, 88 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)