

# The Mass Observation Project

## Spring 2009 Directive

### Part 1: The Second World War

The Second World War features strongly on the public air waves, especially around the time of anniversaries. This directive is about what impact it has had on your life in particular, from childhood to the present day.

Please note that this directive is NOT aimed only at those Mass Observers who lived through the Second World War in Britain but at *all of you*, whenever you were born and wherever you were living.

However if you were around between 1939 and 1945, it would be very useful if you could start by explaining where you lived, whether you were old enough to be directly involved and provide a bit of background information about any involvement by members of your family.

As usual, please start each part of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

### What does it mean to you?

Before you start answering the more specific questions below, please could you jot down TEN separate words or phrases that conjure up the Second World War for you.

### Remembering

Have memories of the Second World War featured in your family?

Did any of your family who were alive in the Second World War talk about it to you?

Were there some things that could be talked about and some things that couldn't? Please give examples and explain why you think this might have been the case.

How did/do family recollections of the war make you feel?

Did you/do you observe Remembrance Day?

If so, has this been at home, at school, at a place of worship, at a war memorial, or elsewhere? Describe how you have observed it at any time in your life. Do you connect it with the Second World War or other wars?

### The traces of the Second World War

Have you ever encountered any of the visible traces of the Second World War -eg bombsites, pill boxes, air raid shelters, disused air fields? Please describe.

How about things like military uniforms, gas mask cases, or Utility clothes and furniture?

What sense of the Second World War did these things give you?

## Films and TV programmes

A huge number of films about the Second World War have been released. Do you remember seeing any of these films at the cinema?

Did you go with a family member who had been in the war?

Many of the 40s and 50s films like *Went the Day Well*, *In Which We Serve*, *The Dam Busters*, *Dunkirk*, *Carve Her Name with Pride*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, have been shown on television.

Have you seen them on television? How did they make you feel when you first saw them? Later? Have your feelings changed over time?

What about more recent films like *The Land Girls*, *Schindler's List*, or *Saving Private Ryan*?

Which were/are your favourites and why?

There have been many radio and television programmes about the Second World War, comic and serious. Examples include *Dad's Army*, *The World at War*, *Secret Army*, and *Foyle's War*. Do any of these programmes stand out in your memory? Again, what impression of the Second World War did they give you?

## Books

Some books about the Second World War contain gruesome details, like *The Scourge of the Swastika* by Lord Russell of Liverpool published in 1954. Some of them were made into films, e.g. *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monsarrat, *The End of the Affair* by Graham Greene, *Carrie's War* by Nina Bawden, *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman, and *Atonement* by Ian McEwan.

Do any books about the Second World War stand out in your memory? What impression of the War did reading them give you?

Have you read any books based on the Mass Observation diaries such as *Nella Last's War*? If you have, what picture of the war do you get from the MO accounts?

## Information about the Second World War

Were there other ways in which you found out about the Second World War? Did you study it at school? If so, how was that?

You might also want to think about: comics and magazines, playing war-related games, building model aircraft or ships, listening to wartime music and dancing wartime dances, using wartime recipes, visiting museums or memorials, wearing wartime clothes for parties or as retro-fashion, collecting wartime memorabilia.

## Second World War events/activities

Have you taken part in any national or local events including re-enactment events, oral history projects (either as a collector of other people's memories or giving your own) or contributed to websites like the recent BBC's People's War website which called for memories of the Second World War? If so, please tell us about it.

## Last but not least.... A Special Task

Would you record all the references to the Second World War that you notice, on the television, in newspapers, in conversation etc, for one complete week. Doesn't matter which week – and if there's no mention, that's fine but please tell us.

## Part 2: Using the Internet

Again this directive theme is for everyone – whether you have a computer or not. We want to know what you think of the internet.

Please start both Part 2 and Part 3 of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number and a brief biography (see page 1).

### Your daily life

Please list any of the ways you think your everyday life is now affected by the Internet. Include everything you can think of that might be relevant whether it's related to your own home or your work place or in public places.

### Getting information

Do you use the Internet to get information? Please explain if you do (health, leisure activities, education, TV iplayer and radio listen again, information about people, family research, bookings for holidays or entertainment, recipes, travel info, banking and financial affairs, community activities). Do you trust the information you find?

### A force for good or ill?

What do you think about the Internet? What do you think about its benefits? Its dangers? Give examples if you can to illustrate your answer.

### Are you on the Internet?

Have you ever looked yourself up on the Internet? What did you find? Was it a surprise?

Do you have a website or are you involved in a group/organisation with a website?

Do you have a blog? Have you thought about joining any online social networks like Facebook?

## Part 3: Issues in the news: Spring 2009

From time to time, we ask you to record your reactions to and reflections on very current issues in the news. We can never be really up to date – even if we wanted to be - because sometimes we are writing the directive well in advance of it reaching you. And of course you may be answering the directive weeks or even months after you receive it.

However there have been a number of big news stories since January – for example, the election of Barack Obama as US President, the impact in the UK of the heavy snows, the financial crisis and the various stories linked to it about different banks and financial companies, the discoveries of fraud, the pay-offs to financial figures, the impact on ordinary people's lives and the increase in unemployment and house re-possessions.

There have also been other news stories – the BBC's decision not to broadcast the appeal for aid to Gaza, for example, the media coverage of stories like Jade Goodey's illness or the death of David Cameron's little boy - by April there will be more like this I am sure. These issues link into Mass Observation's general concerns with how the media chooses and handles the news, but also with issues of health and illness, with the treatment of celebrities and with how we react to the current political situation..

Perhaps because we are so deluged with news I am aware in writing the above that by April the issues mentioned above may be faint memories. Or maybe not! I hope you'll have a think about what YOU think are important issues and give your views.

Please remember too, that MO isn't an opinion poll. What we really want is your own thoughts, any relevant experiences you've had, any conversations you think have been important and what the views are of people around you at home, at work, in your community.

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Please post your response to:

**The Mass Observation Archive, FREEPOST BR 2112, The Library, University of Sussex,  
Brighton BN1 1ZX**

Or by email to: [moa@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:moa@sussex.ac.uk)