



MASS OBSERVATION

Recording everyday life in Britain

The Mass Observation Archive Annual Report

1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024

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Public Benefit Statement

The Archive is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (registered charity number: 1179673) in the care of the University of Sussex as part of the University's Special Collections. The Archive seeks to benefit the wider community by providing the public with the opportunity to gain knowledge of everyday life in 20th and 21st Century Britain through access to the original Mass Observation social research organisation (1937 to early 1950s), and newer material collected continuously since 1981.

The Archive proactively engages in educational outreach with schools, Further and Higher Education institutions and the local and national community. This outreach provides the opportunity for intergenerational and interregional learning.

The Archive also provides the opportunity for people all over the UK to participate in the recording of their everyday lives, either through participation in the national Mass Observation Project and other related projects and partnerships or through the donation of their personal papers and diaries to a publicly accessible archive.

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1. Access

Research visits

54 individuals visited the Mass Observation Archive and made 266 orders for material (see fig.1 and fig.2 in the appendix).

Group sessions

The Mass Observation Archive hosted 50 group visits (appendix fig.3). 1428 people participated in these sessions. A list of groups who visited during 2023-2024 is available in Appendix fig.4. The Mass Observation team delivered these sessions online and in person.

Online Access

Researchers continued to be able to access parts of the Archive through the Adam Matthew products, Mass Observation Online and Mass Observation Project Online. The publishers have reported that the Mass Observation Online resource was accessed 25,287 times and the Mass Observation Project resource was accessed 38,039 times. See Section.4, Appendix fig. 5.

2. Engagement

We continued to offer opportunities to engage with the Archive both online and in person at The Keep.

Teaching and learning sessions have included:

- Varndean College 70 x 6th form students Oct
- MA Art & Design Middlesex 25th Oct
- Voices in the Archives English UoS 26th Oct
- Criminology MA UoS 30th Oct & 2nd Nov
- History MA 31st Oct (3 further visits)
- University of Brighton Visual Diaries 7th Nov
- MA Contemporary History, UoS 13th Nov & 20th Nov
- Education, History of Childhood 22nd Nov
- BA Geography 5th Dec
- PG Social Work 23rd Jan
- MA Geography 16th Feb
- BA Media x 5 sessions 19th – 23rd Feb
- BA Death and Dying, elective module 26th Feb
- Celebrating Literacy 29th Feb
- Education MA 6th March / 13th March
- Humanities UG Uni of Brighton 14th March
- Kings School Hove Year 9 20th March
- History of Emotions UoS 22nd April
- PGCE Uni of Brighton 24th April
- Varndean College 6th Form 30th April

- Doctoral School one-day workshop 23rd May
- PGCE UoS 5th June

The Engagement Manager also delivered outreach in HMP Lewes, talks for Evergreen and older people's group in Hollingdean, Micheldene WI and the Miners' Strike event at University of Sussex and hosted community visits for Fresh Start Portslade and for Speak Out, an advocacy group for people with learning disabilities, who are working on research project commissioned by the Open University looking at the history of learning disability.

Mass Observation Staff attended and hosted a stall at Senate House for History Day 23rd Nov 2023 – Awarded second prize for best stall voted by attendees. 200 attended.

The following events were hosted by Mass Observation as part of its public events programme;

- 1940's session for UoS History students, with clothes provided by Gladraggs, dance and make up workshop by Sussex Swing and vintage fashion, makeup and 1940's home installation on 12th December.
- MO Festive Diary event with festive themed 1940's home installation 13th December.
- Pins, Patches and Paper: Celebrating LGBTQIA+ History Month with Mass Observation 21st February.
- *Bad Taste* Zine-Making Session: Celebrating International Women's Day with Mass Observation 7th March.
- Talking to our past and future selves: workshop led by students on placement with Mass Observation on 10th April.
- What does Nature mean to you? Walkshop led by Lucy Dixon Sarah Macbeth on 13th July.

Resources are available on the Mass Observation Archive website for schools and community groups to engage with the collections and recorded talks are available on the MO YouTube channel providing introductions to the Archive.

Webinar Events

- *The Politics of Brexit Britain and Everyday Life in the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Emily Robinson & Jonathan Moss, University of Sussex and Nick Clarke, University of Southampton, Wednesday 1st May, In-person (University of Sussex) and Online

- *Everyday Life in the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Nick Clarke in Conversation with Ben Highmore, Thursday 2nd May
- What does Nature Mean to you? Lucy Dixon and Sarah Macbeth Wednesday 26th June

3. Projects and partnerships

Morgan Centre, University of Manchester

Mass Observation has worked closely with members of the Morgan Centre for many years, with academics having commissioned Directives for research. In July 2023 Kirsty Pattrick and Suzanne Rose met with Sociologists at the Morgan Centre, along with researchers and previous commissioners from Southampton, Kent, York and Sussex to discuss collaborative opportunities.

The Morgan Centre have increased their use of Mass Observation material for their teaching and actively promote its use for 2nd modules and 3rd year projects.

In 2024 a PhD scholarship was announced. Led by the University of Manchester in collaboration with Mass Observation. Funded by CASE with match-funding from Mass Observation, Kirsty Pattrick will be the non-academic supervisor. The successful candidate Neve Meats will explore visual submissions to Mass Observation with a sociological research lens. She will spend time at the archive with the team and produce a catalogue of this material.

Mass Observation Critical Series

The Mass Observation Critical Series is an interdisciplinary publication series published by Bloomsbury. The series aims to make Mass Observation's rich primary sources accessible to a wide range of academics and students across multiple disciplines, as well as to the general reading public. Recent publications include *Reflections on British Royalty*, edited by Jennifer J. Purcell and Fiona Courage (2024) and *Everyday Life in the COVID-19 Pandemic* by Nick Clarke (2024)

Mass Observing COVID-19

This Wellcome-funded project (for £178,353.00) is now complete. An open access resource makes available nearly 7,000 submissions from the Mass Observation COVID-19 collection. It allows researchers to select relevant documents through searches of meta-data, keywords and open text. It is then possible to export the data into research tools of their own choice for analysis.

This offers exciting opportunities across disciplines for research, teaching and learning. The collection comprises of diaries and narrative responses to open questionnaires (Directives) including drawings, paintings and photography. It

captures the minutiae of the everyday throughout the pandemic. People across Britain, of all ages, document their thoughts, feelings and opinions, as they make sense of events, moment-by-moment.

A multi-disciplinary Advisory Group and Project Team comprised of those from the University of Sussex, University of Warwick, University of Chester, University of Southampton and the Institute of Historical Research.

Mass Observation Project Online

The Mass Observation Archive entered discussions with AM Digital regarding extending the Mass Observation Project Online resource to include responses to Mass Observation Project Directives from 2010 to 2019. Work on this project will start in January 2024.

Good Space

Mass Observation continues to be part of the Good Space Heritage partnership. This partnership of 16 heritage organisations is supported by DCMS Volunteering Futures and funded by Arts Council England. The project partnership aims to foster an innovative approach to growing volunteering opportunities, with a focus on championing the positive impact of volunteering on mental health and wellbeing. To support partner organisations' volunteer recruitment, retention, training and delivery, improving diversity and breaking down barriers to engagement. Mass Observation has benefitted from Communities of Practice sessions, training and knowledge exchange with partner organisations. The pilot year for the project ended in March 2024 and the partnership completed an evaluation of its activities and achievements. Good Space is continuing from September 2024.

National Centre for Research Methods

The Research Manager is a member of a national Special Interest Group for participatory and collaborative research methods. This group co-delivered a Critical Conversations webinar on 9th November 2023 '*When collaborative and participatory research gets messy!*' and Kirsty Pattrick presented on the COVID-19 collection.

Living Histories

An NHS Heads On partnership project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Living Histories project aims to record experiences of those accessing or delivering mental health services as part of the Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust. This will include people's lived experience of mental health throughout their life course, or work, as well as during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Creative Community Resilience

An AHRC funded Creative, Community, Resilience project with University of Southampton and University of Brighton to research and record experiences of trans young people. Mass Observation will be delivering training and support to the research team and supporting engagement activities linked to 12th May to record and receive diaries.

University of Sheffield New Approaches to Appeasement

MO resources launched on Historical Association's website along with series of films to support teaching and learning in the classroom created in partnership with University of Sheffield.

4. The 12th May diary project

The Mass Observation Archive repeated its annual call for day diaries written on the 12th May 2024. 626 diaries were submitted to the Archive.

- 233 electronic diaries
- 50 diaries sent by post by individuals
- 343 diaries from Birchwood Grove primary school

As with previous years, participants were asked to share the copyright of their diary with the Archive. Invitations to take part were also sent out to schools, colleges, community groups and prisons and via social media.

This year the Archive partnered with organisations in different geographic parts of the country – Live from Worktown in Bolton and Take Shelter in Brighton in order to encourage the national reach of the Archive. MO staff also took part in a Heritage event at Take Shelter, which was part of the Brighton Fringe on 12th May.

52 diaries were received from Bolton and Live from Worktown also used the opportunity to consult with their local community about culture and heritage in Bolton, which was named Greater Manchester's Town of Culture in 2024.

MO also delivered a life writing workshop in HMP Lewes on 8th May 2024.

5. The Trustees

Professor Claire Langhamer (Institute of Historical Research) left the board of Trustees in 2024. Professor Langhamer had been a Trustee since 2007.

Professor Hester Barron (University of Sussex) joined the board in Summer 2024. In 2021 she published a trade book (co-authored with Claire Langhamer) *Class of '37: Voices from working-class girlhood* which drew upon essays written by schoolchildren for Mass Observation in 1937.

6. Staff changes

Angela Bachini completed her role as Junior Project Archivist for the Mass Observing COVID-19 project funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Jessica Scantlebury (Mass Observation Archivist) was on maternity leave June 2023 – August 2024.

7. Volunteers and placement students

The Archive hosted several students and work experience placements during the year and is hugely appreciative of their hard work, enthusiasm and commitment.

Molly Reid, Queen Mary London UG History student undertook a placement with Mass Observation in Autumn 2023. This was hybrid enabling remote and in-person tasks such as transcribing, identifying relevant extracts for teaching and publicity, blog writing and supporting the staff stand at History Day in November.

Wei Wei, a University of Sussex UG English and Media student started a placement in September 2023 for 6 one-day sessions.

Ella Beales continues to volunteer with the Archive regularly and oversaw the social media strand of the MO85 Anniversary programme.

Emily Warwick MA student placement University of Brighton (February to August 2024 completed). Emily has secured a post at Lewes Library on completing her placement and MA course.

Lily Moreno-Sheridan BA student placement University of Brighton (February – April 2024 completed)

Hannah Cannon, Bronny Way, Tillie Lam, & Eleanor Philip UoS 3rd year English placement students (February to April 2024). Delivered event Writing to our past and future selves at The Keep in April 2024.

Former placement student Abby Hodges returned having graduated and completed her MA at UoS and is now working at the UoS Library. She founded the Bad Taste Collective which hosted event on 7th March for International Women's Day at The Keep.

Archive volunteers include Atheena, Libby, Emily (remote based in Scunthorpe) and Jean who have supported cataloguing, transcriptions, teaching and public events.

Four work experience placements were completed in July 2024. Shae, Sydney and Ryan from Shoreham Academy and Annabel from Priory School. Students gained experience in all aspects of the Archive and created content for the MO website to promote work experience placements for other students in the future.

8. The Mass Observation Project

The current panel size is 602

The panel was re-opened to new volunteers in May 2024.

Biographical Form

The response rate continues to be good, and these are available to researchers upon request. This captures additional biographical information on ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and religion.

Commissioners

Advice and support documents were provided throughout the year for academic research funding applications and internal ethics processes. Institutions included University of East Anglia, Bristol, Reading and York for bids to ESRC, AHRC and institution's internal funding.

9. Collections

The Location Finder Collection acquired from The Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University Middlesex. Comprises photographs, questionnaires and retail receipts of home interiors in 20th century.

10. Publications

Kirsty Patrick, Suzanne Rose and Angela Bachini

COVID-19: *Reflections from the archive*, Papertrails, UCL Press, July 2024

Walsh, K. (2023). Night-time bedroom soundscapes: embodied geographies of housing and home. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2023.2245800>

Clarke, N., & Barnett, C. (2023). Beyond compliance: Good citizenship during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Transactions - Institute of British Geographers* (1965), 48(2), 395–407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12587>

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Seaton, A. V. (2022). Life and Family Travel in the Time of COVID-19: Pandemic in England 2020. *Tourism and Hospitality (Basel)*, 3(4), 931–946. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp3040060>

Harper, T. (2022). Edward Owens. The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932–53. *New Historical Perspectives*. London: University of London Press, 2019. Pp. 446. \$65.00 (cloth). *Journal of British Studies*, 61(4), 1072-1073. doi:10.1017/jbr.2022.122

Feminist Animal Studies: Theories, Practices, Politics, Erika Cudworth, Ruth E. McKie, Di Turgoose, Taylor & Francis, 30 Dec 2022

McGlacken, R. (2023). Negotiating the necessity of biomedical animal use through relations with vulnerability. *BioSocieties*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41292-022-00295-3>

Parken, O. (2023). The politics of press astrology in wartime Britain, 1939–42. *Historical Research : The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 96(272), 243–262. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hisres/htac029>

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Clarke, N., & Barnett, C. (2023). Archiving the COVID-19 pandemic in Mass Observation and Middletown. *History of the Human Sciences*, 36(2), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951231152139>

Lyon, D., & Coleman, R. (2023). Rupture, repetition, and new rhythms for pandemic times: Mass Observation, everyday life, and COVID-19. *History of the Human Sciences*, 36(2), 26–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951221133983>

Pollen, A. (2023). 'There is nothing less spectacular than a pestilence': Picturing the pandemic in Mass Observation's COVID-19 collections. *History of the Human Sciences*, 36(2), 71–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951221134002>

Clarke, N., & Barnett, C. (2023). Seeing like an epidemiologist? Mobilising people against COVID-19. *History of the Human Sciences*, 36(2), 49–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951231170574>

Collier, P., & Connolly, J. J. (2023). Time shifts: Place, belonging, and future orientation in pandemic everyday life. *History of the Human Sciences*, 36(2), 105–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951221139377>

Kirby, J. (2022). The stress of work and work of stress in Britain in the late twentieth century. *Contemporary British History*, 36(4), 622–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2022.2081549>

Hurdley, R. (2023). Literary allusion in sociological analysis: Mass Observation mantelpiece reports as epic and drama. *Qualitative Research : QR*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941231176944>

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Field, C. (2023). Mass Observation, Religion, and the Second World War: When 'Cooper's Snopers' Caught the Spirit. In M. Snape & S. Bell (Eds.), *British Christianity and the Second World War (Studies in Modern British Religious History)*, pp. 99-116). Boydell & Brewer. doi:10.1017/9781800108783.006

van Emmerik, C. (2023). Ethical Reflexivity, Care, and Slippery Data: Lessons From Working With the Mass Observation Project. *Sociological Research Online*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804231164486>

Blain, J., Stevens, D., Taylor, L., Kingston, P., & Watts, G. (2023). Views about Euthanasia and Dementia: Exploring Perceptions Utilising Evidence from the Mass Observation Archive. *Healthcare (Basel)*, 11(18), 2552-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11182552>

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Purcell, J. J., & Jones, B. (Eds.). (2023). *Mass-Observation: Text, Context and Analysis of the Pioneering Pamphlet and Movement*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Davies, L. L. (2022). Representing the Poor: Interwar Documentary Film, Mass Observation, and Victor Gollancz Ltd. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 68(1), 1-24.

Goldsmith, R. (2023). Mass-Observation and Vernacular Politics at the 1945 General Election. *Twentieth Century British History*, hwad047.

McGlacken, R. (2022). Constrained, contingent, and conflicted: Complicating acceptance of animal research through an analysis of writing from the UK Mass Observation Project. In *Transforming food systems: ethics, innovation and responsibility* (pp. 245-250). Wageningen Academic Publishers.

11. Events, talks and conferences

Suzanne Rose

Miners' Strike Event *with Kirsty Pattrick*, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 19th March 2024

Michelene WI, Monday 5th February 2024
Evergreen, 31st October 2023

Kirsty Pattrick

National Centre for Research Methods e-Festival, 7th November 2023
Mass Observing the Everyday

with [Angela Bachini](#) Concept Quest Event, University of Sussex, 11th March 2024
Generating narrative data with Mass Observation: the possibilities for concept Analysis

With [Suzanne Rose](#) Roundtable Event on Working with Sensitive Material in Research, Teaching and Public Engagement, Institute of Historical Research, 22nd April 2024

Appendix 1

Fig. 1 Number of visits made by individual researchers 2018-2024

Year	To MOA	% of all visits to Special Collections	% of all visits to The Keep
2023-2024	54	30	5
2022-2023	118	20	7
2021-2022	70	46	9
2020-2021	42	77	8
2019-2020	226	49	9
2018-2019	317	51	10

Fig. 2 Number of documents issued from the MOA to researchers at The Keep 2018-2024

Year	Number of documents
2023-2024	266
2022-2023	257
2021-2022	436
2020-2021	342
2019-2020	430
2018-2019	882

Fig. 3 Group visits 2018-2024

Year	To MOA	Attendance
2023-2024	50	1428
2022-2023	53	1072
2021-22	51	846
2020-2021	30	561
2019-2020	42	456
2018-2019	83	1834

Fig. 4 Group visits made to the MOA in 2023-2024

Date	Name of group / institution/organisation	In person or online	Number in group
12/10/2023	Speak Out	In person	7
17/10/2023	Varndean College	In person	70
25/10/2023	MA Art & Design Middlesex Uni	In person	45
26/10/2023	Voices in the Archive, Uni Sussex	In person	14
30/10/2023	MA Criminology, Uni Sussex	In person	26
31/10/2023	Evergreen	In person	30
31/10/2023	MA Contemporary History, Uni Sussex	In person	9
2/11/2023	MA Criminology, Uni Sussex	In person	26
6/11/2023	MA Contemporary History, Uni Sussex	In person	7
7/11/2023	Visual Diaries, Uni Brighton	In person	10
7/11/2023	National Centre for Research Methods	Online	33
9/11/2023	National Centre for Research Methods	Online	98
13/11/2023	MA Contemporary History, Uni Sussex	In person	7
20/11/2023	MA Contemporary History, Uni Sussex	In person	3
22/11/2023	History of Childhood	In person	22
23/11/2023	History Day at Senate House	In person	200
5/12/2023	Geography, Uni Sussex	In person	21

12/12/2023	History, Uni Sussex	In person	20
13/12/2023	Festive MO public event	In person	30
23/1/2024	Social Work, Uni Sussex	In person	12
1/2/2024	UCL Record Keeping	Online	25
5/2/2024	Micheldorf WI	In person	70
7/2/2024	Speak Out	In person	5
9/2/2024	Media, University of Sussex	In person	8
21/2/2024	LGBTQI History public event	In person	30
22/2/2024	Media, University of Sussex	In person	8
22/2/2024	Media, University of Sussex	In person	10
22/2/2024	Media, University of Sussex	In person	8
23/2/2024	Media, University of Sussex	In person	9
26/2/2024	Social Work Death & Dying, Uni Sussex	In person	30
29/2/2024	Celebrating Literacy, Uni Sussex	In person	15
6/3/2024	MA Education Uni Sussex	In person	17
7/3/2024	International Women's Day public event	In person	10
13/3/2024	MA Education, Uni Sussex	In person	25
14/3/2024	English, Uni Brighton	In person	25
22/3/2024	Kings School Hove	In person	80
10/4/2024	Writing to past and Future selves public event	In person	12
27/4/2024	History of Feeling, Uni Sussex	In person	12
24/4/2024	PGCE Uni Brighton	In person	8

30/4/2024	Varndean College	In person	12
1/5/2024	Politics of Feeling Webinar	Hybrid	30
2/3/2024	Nick Clarke 12 th May Webinar	Online	12
8/5/2024	HMP Lewes workshop	In person	10
12/5/2024	Take Shelter Brighton Fringe Open Day	In person	200
5/6/2024	PGCE Uni Sussex	In person	10
26/6/2024	What does Nature mean to you? Webinar	Online	6
5/6/2024	BHASVIC 6 th form college	In person	15
13/7/2024	What does nature mean to you? Walkshop	In person	9
27/7/2024	Fresh Start Portslade	In person	12
17/9/2024	Micheldene WI	In person	15

Fig. 5 Access to Mass Observation Online 2018-2024

Year	Sessions	Number of sessions from members of the University of Sussex	Number of sessions made from The Keep
2023-2024	25,287	1806	73
2022-2023	28,391	2,286	83
2021-2022	32,497	1,726	87
2020-2021	25,372	1,202	32
2019-2020	18,790	2,525	110
2018-2019	27,018	2,048	288

Fig. 5 Access to Mass Observation Project Online 2020-2024

Year	All sessions	Number of sessions from members of the University of Sussex	Number of sessions from The Keep
2023-2024	38,039	442	0

2022-2023	41,421	449	3
2021-2022	636	556	0
2020-2021	1,141	368	1
July – September 2020	10,672	22	0

Fig.6 Directive themes 2023-2024

Date	Topic	Commissioner	Funding	Response
Autumn 2023 (No 129)	Everyday living with multiple long-term health conditions	Sue Bellas, University of Manchester and Newcastle	£7,500	147 (26%)
	Seasons	In-house		145 (26%)
	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict	In-house		133 (24%)
Spring 2024 (No 130)	Retirement	Helen McCarthy, University of Cambridge	£10,000	192 (33%)
	Mystery	James Hodgeson, University of Manchester	£10,000	182 (31%)
Summer 2024 (No 131)*	Everyday oral health	Paul Kingston, University of Chester	£4,000	112 (19%)
	The General Election	In-house		110 (18%)
	Singing	In-house		108 (17%)

*Responses to these Directives Directive are still arriving at the Archive.

January 2024: This report was written by Kirsty Patrick and Suzanne Rose with support by Jessica Scantlebury