

<b>Institution: The University of Edinburgh</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Listening to Britain: Public Understanding of the Home Front during the Second World War</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research at the University of Edinburgh (UoE) by Crang and Addison since 1998 led to the co-edited volume <i>Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May-September 1940</i>, published in 2010 to much public and academic acclaim. This case study demonstrates three impacts: i) significant transformation of popular understanding in the UK of the Home Front experience in the Second World War through extensive book sales and media coverage; ii) influence on the work of a prominent film maker, who created a widely-praised documentary about the Blitz (drawing on the book's subject matter), broadcast across Europe, Africa and the Middle East; and iii) effect on contemporary policy debates regarding energy and resources.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The two researchers involved in the development and publication of <i>Listening to Britain</i> are:</p> <p>Dr Paul Addison, appointed as Lecturer, UoE, in 1967 (then Reader and Endowment Fellow); Honorary Fellow 2005 – present.        Dr Jeremy Crang, appointed as Lecturer in History, UoE, in 1993 and as Senior Lecturer 2003 – present.</p> <p>Addison and Crang began working on the Home Intelligence reports in 1998 in connection with an international conference to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain that they organised at the UoE. Drawing on these reports, they contributed a co-authored chapter, entitled 'A Battle of Many Nations', to their co-edited volume of the conference proceedings, <i>The Burning Blue</i> (2000). This chapter examined how the ripples and shock waves from the battle affected different parts of the UK.</p> <p>A Home Intelligence department was set up shortly after the outbreak of war in 1939 as part of the new Ministry of Information (MOI), which faced the task of sustaining popular morale. In order to assist in this process, the department compiled daily morale reports May – September 1940 on the state of public opinion; these were replaced by weekly reports October 1940 – December 1944. The reports were declassified over 30 years ago and are among the MOI files in the National Archives, Kew. Covering all regions of the UK, these remarkable documents were compiled from a range of sources: Mass Observation investigations and the Wartime Social Survey; assessments from the MOI's regional information officers; questionnaires completed by organisations such as the London Passenger Transport Board, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, and the Brewers' Society; and material from Chief Constables, postal censors and telephone intercepts. A network of 'contacts' was also recruited across the UK, made up of such figures as doctors, shopkeepers, publicans, clergymen and shop stewards, who regularly reported on the views expressed by those with whom they came into contact.</p> <p>Addison and Crang realised these daily morale reports provided an unparalleled insight into the mood of the British people during a period that Churchill described as their 'finest hour'. Whilst specialist historians of the British home front had used fragments of the reports in their work, they remained largely untapped by scholars and had never been made available to the wider public. In 2008 the researchers began work on a co-edited volume containing an unabridged set of the daily Home Intelligence reports which was published as <i>Listening to Britain</i> in 2010. Running to 512 pages, the book includes a general introduction which outlines the origins of the Home Intelligence</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

department and provides a scholarly overview of the significance of the reports. The daily morale reports are then grouped into 19 weekly sections, each prefaced by a contextual introduction explaining the historical background to the main topics discussed in the reports that week. An extensive glossary defines and explains individuals and terms referred to in the text.

The historiographical significance of the volume lies in its capacity to test and challenge the mythology of the 'finest hour'. Folk memories of the period are still clouded by nostalgia for a period in which men and women from all walks of life supposedly came together to defy the Germans as the fate of the nation hung in the balance. The reports confirm a stubborn belief in ultimate victory, a constant public pressure for a more effective prosecution of the war, and a powerful sense of national consciousness, but they also provide a more streetwise picture of the British as quarrelsome and complaining, highly critical of government and military officialdom, suspicious of 'outsiders', and susceptible to pockets of anxiety and defeatism.

### 3. References to the research

#### Publications

P. Addison and J. A. Crang eds. *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May - September 1940* (London, The Bodley Head, 2010); listed in REF2. Reviewed in *London Review of Books*, 8 July 2010, by Bernard Porter as '[a] splendid and absorbing book'; and in the *Financial Times* by Juliet Gardiner as 'a matchless insight into the contradictory, confused and complex experience of living through Britain's "finest hour"'.

P. Addison and J. A. Crang (eds), *The Burning Blue: a New History of the Battle of Britain* (London, Pimlico, 2000), to be supplied on request. Reviewed in *International History Review* by Tami Davis Biddle as 'a notable contribution to the literature' and in *THES* by Brian Holden Reid as 'a first class piece of work, stimulating, informative and concise'. Includes the co-authored essay 'A Battle of Many Nations' drawing on Home Intelligence's daily morale reports.

#### Grants

AHRC Fellowship, 2012-13 (PI: J. Crang) £89,938, 'Despatches from the People's War'; Ref no: AH/1027401/1. To produce a follow-up volume to *Listening to Britain*.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### *i) Public knowledge and discourse*

*Listening to Britain* appeared in paperback in 2011 and is now available in Kindle form; to date it has sold 6,105 copies (2,752 hardback and 3,353 paperback). As well as receiving extensive coverage in the literary press (see 5.1), it was the subject of three feature articles in the popular press: *Daily Express*, '1940: Britain on the Brink', 17 April 2010; *Yorkshire Post*, 'Inside our Finest Hour: the Hopes and Fears of a Nation Fighting for Survival', 19 May 2010; and *Sunday Sun*, 'From Spies to Poetry: What Really Worried Us During our Finest Hour', 21 November 2010 (5.2 and 5.3). It was 'book of the week' in the *Mail on Sunday* (Craig Brown, 'On a Whinge and a Prayer', 16 May 2010).

Addison and Crang gave interviews to BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme (approx. 7 million listeners), BBC Radio Scotland's Kay Adams show, BBC Radio Humberside's Lara King show, BBC Radio Sussex and Surrey's Danny Pike show, and BBC Radio Northampton's John Griff show, and were interviewed by Radio Free Europe (approx. 20 million listeners in 21 countries). The book featured prominently in the *BBC History Magazine*, the country's best-selling History magazine with approximately 70,000 readers. A co-authored article, entitled 'In Search of the Dunkirk Spirit' (May 2011), was published in the magazine to coincide with the launch of the paperback edition. In conjunction with this, Addison and Crang were interviewed for a BBC *History*

## Impact case study (REF3b)

*Magazine* podcast (approx. 50,000 downloads of this edition) (5.5). The Editor of Bodley Head confirms that 'in terms of publicity and review coverage the book received the widest possible exposure'. (letter to Crang, 20 April 2012) (5.6).

*Listening to Britain* has significantly contributed to improved public understanding of the experience of the 'finest hour'. Appraisals of the volume in non-academic journals have invariably highlighted how the reports challenge conventional wisdom and offer the reader surprising insights. *The Tablet*, for example, commented that: 'events recorded in this book seem to have been forgotten less because they are irrelevant to our historical narrative than because they flatly contradict it. It therefore comes as something of a shock to read that Britain – a country one is accustomed to thinking of as a scourge of wartime fascists and their racism – was not immune to moments of bigotry itself, and in all social strata, as shown by the 13 June report noting that "evangelical old ladies in Tunbridge Wells satisfied at bombing of Italian Catholics"'. (Catherine Nixey, 'Pay Close Attention', 11 September 2010).

There is also generous testimony from informed independent commentators to support the perspicacity of the research. For example, Len Deighton has described the volume in the following terms: 'A gripping and important history book. The work of Addison and Crang takes 1940 Britain to the analyst's couch and provides a corrective to the barrage of nonsense that has been written about this time and place. By eschewing modern memories in favour of recorded emotions of the time, they restore the objective balance that the "finest hour" needs so badly.' (letter to Crang, 27 August 2010). This endorsement was subsequently used by the publisher to publicise the paperback edition of the book. The views of the general reader – especially those who might have lived through the period but did not fully appreciate the events unfolding around them (or that the government was eavesdropping on them) – are also apposite here: 'My wife and I, both in our eighties, are enjoying this book as much of it is relevant to our young life. At the same time, much of it we were not aware of. A real eye-opener.' (reader review posted on Amazon website, 25 June 2010).

ii) *Film-making and commissioning*

In 2010 the managing director of Testimony Films, a leading UK independent film company, read *Listening to Britain* and thought that the Home Intelligence reports relating to the Blitz, and the fact that the government was eavesdropping on the public during these crucial months, would make the basis of an innovative documentary film on the experience of the bombing. He also believed that the programme would provide new 'angles' on the Blitz with which very few members of the viewing public would be familiar. As a result, Channel 5 commissioned Testimony Films to make the documentary. Crang was invited, alongside witnesses of the Blitz, to act as the sole 'expert talking head' in the hour-long programme and help 'interpret' the morale reports for the viewers. *Secrets of the Blitz* was broadcast on Channel 5 at prime time, 8.00pm-9.00pm, on Thursday 20 January 2011 and attracted an audience of 1.04 million. The documentary clearly made an impression on the critics. In the words of the Managing Director of Testimony Films, 'It was pick of the day in most of the national newspapers including the *Telegraph* ("a deeply moving and important story"), the *Daily Mail* ("an untold story of great interest revealed for the first time") and *The Times* ("a deeply emotional tale"). It was regarded as one of the documentary highlights of the year by Channel 5 and a clip of the programme was shown by them at the Sheffield International Documentary Festival [2011]' (letter to Crang, 24 April 2012). *Secrets of the Blitz* was subsequently acquired by the Discovery Channel and was broadcast across Europe, Africa and the Middle East in 2013 (5.7) The media response to the programme is in itself further evidence of the reach and significance of the research in shaping public discourse.

iii) *Contemporary policy debates*

A further impact relates to the role of *Listening to Britain* in informing and influencing policy debate. In January 2011 the leader of the Green party, Caroline Lucas MP, launched the party's 'New Home Front' policy initiative at the Imperial War Museum. This aimed to harness the lessons of Britain's wartime past in order to mobilise the nation - and convince the coalition government – to confront more vigorously the challenges of climate change, energy insecurity and scarce resources. The centre-piece of this policy initiative was the publication of a report by Andrew

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

Simms (fellow, New Economics Foundation) entitled *The New Home Front* (5.4). This explored, among other things, the ways in which wartime campaigns to cut waste, encourage energy conservation, substitute cultural pursuits for material consumption, and promote a spirit of 'fair shares for all', enabled the British people to live within their means. The author drew on the evidence in *Listening to Britain* (as well as Bernard Porter's extensive review in the *London Review of Books*) to support his case. For example, *The New Home Front* quoted a pertinent extract from the Scottish section of the Home Intelligence report of 18 June 1940: 'It is suggested that Government should order all private gardens to grow at least 50% foodstuffs.' (*The New Home Front*, p. 26). The *Green (Living) Review* suggested that a copy of *The New Home Front* be sent to every household in Britain.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**Web sources

5.1 Review of *Listening to Britain* by Bernard Porter in the *London Review of Books*, on quality of the research:

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n13/bernard-porter/were-not-jittery> or  
<http://tinyurl.com/nrpqcg7>

5.2 Feature article, 'Britain on the Brink', *Daily Express*, 17 April 2010:

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/169820/1940-Britain-on-the-brink/> or  
<http://tinyurl.com/o2qrhmz>

5.3 Feature article, 'From Spies to Poetry', *Sunday Sun*, 21 November 2010:

<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/spies-poetry-what-really-worried-1422973> or  
<http://tinyurl.com/oaz8cze>

5.4 *The New Home Front*, on policy debate:

[http://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/reports/the\\_new\\_home\\_front\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/reports/the_new_home_front_FINAL.pdf) or  
<http://tinyurl.com/nltcrae>

People

5.5 Editor, BBC History Magazine: to corroborate download figures for the BBC podcast.

5.6 Senior Editor, The Bodley Head: to corroborate publicity, review coverage and sales figures for *Listening to Britain*.

5.7 Managing Director, Testimony Films: to corroborate the influence of *Listening to Britain* on the creation of the film *Secrets of the Blitz* and its subsequent impact.