

<b>Institution: University of Sussex</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Mass Observation and public engagement</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Mass Observation has encouraged public participation in the creation of knowledge since 1937 and pioneered the dissemination of social research to a mass audience. Active collaboration between Sussex historians and the Mass Observation Archive continues to shape popular understandings of modern British social history, specifically through work with the media. This partnership has also created an Open Educational Resource through which the public can gain a hands-on understanding of the very recent past. Working with the Mass Observations Project, Sussex academics encourage 'ordinary' people to write directly about their lives within a structured environment, creating historical sources for the future.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The Mass Observation Archive is a charitable trust in the care of the University of Sussex, awarded designated status by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council as having outstanding national and international importance. Its unique collection profoundly shapes our understanding of everyday life in modern Britain. It contains diary, questionnaire and survey material generated between 1937 and c.1960, and discursive 'directive' responses from a volunteer panel of writers who have contributed to the on-going Mass Observation Project (MOP). Over 4,500 people have taken part in the MOP since 1981; there are currently 500 volunteer writers. The underpinning research of this case study is a series of publications and digital resources that collectively reveal ordinary people's understandings of themselves and their social worlds, providing an empirical and conceptual underpinning to an ever-expanding public interest in social history.</p> <p>Langhamer uses material from mid-twentieth-century Mass Observation to unravel contemporaneous attitudes and feelings. Her monograph, <i>The English in Love</i> [see Section 3, R1], argues that a far-reaching emotional revolution preceded the sexual revolution of the late-twentieth century. This book has been widely, and favourably, reviewed in the popular press. It was Book of the Week in <i>The Sunday Telegraph</i> (25/08/13) and described by the <i>New Statesman</i> (22/08/13) as 'a wise and important book that deserves the attention of policymakers and opinion-formers as well as historians'. Other significant publications include an article on happiness [R2] that provides a historical context for contemporary government policy discussions and a further article on capital punishment [R4] that reframes our understanding of popular support for the death penalty. Langhamer also works with material from the Archive's Post-1981 Project. In 2001, she co-authored a directive on courtship. The responses are utilised in her article on love, selfhood and authenticity [R3] to demonstrate the dynamic role played by love in creating social change.</p> <p>The MOP also fundamentally informs Robinson's research on the 1980s [R6]. She selects key themes from the project and explores their representation in popular culture. Directives on 'Charity' and 'Retrospective on the Eighties' inspired her article that used charity singles to assess the relationship between popular culture and politics [R5]. 'Observing the Eighties' is a JISC-funded digitisation project. It brings together responses generated in the 1980s, oral histories from the British Library and the holdings of Sussex University Library's documents collection to produce a unique free-access holding and an open-access teaching resource. The documents have been deposited in several Open Repositories, including the ESRC Qualidata Archive, Humbox and JORUM. This is the first time that digitised MOP material has been freely available beyond those making their own archive visits. An additional aspect of this project is the Mimas project Scarlet+ (the second phase of the project Special Collections using Augmented Reality to Enhance Learning and Teaching). This has resulted in the development of an augmented reality application that includes archive material and interviews with students and staff to provide a public audience with greater understanding of how to use Mass Observation and archives more generally as a learning tool.</p>

The key researchers are Langhamer (Sussex since 1998), Robinson (2002), and Gazeley (1985).

### 3. References to the research

Key peer-reviewed outputs and research grants:

- R1** Langhamer, C. (2013) *The English In Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- R2** Gazeley, I. and Langhamer, C. (2012) 'The meanings of happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton', *History Workshop Journal*, 75(1): 1–31.
- R3** Langhamer, C. (2012) 'Love, selfhood and authenticity in post-war Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9(2): 277–297.
- R4** Langhamer, C. (2012) "'The Live Dynamic Whole of Feeling and Behavior': capital punishment and the politics of emotion, 1945–1957", *Journal of British Studies*, 51(2): 416–441.
- R5** Robinson, L. (2012) 'Putting the charity back into charity singles: charity singles in Britain 1984–1995', *Contemporary British History*, 26(3): 405–425.
- R6** Robinson, L. 'Observing the 80s', partnership with MO Trust and the British Library, £100,000 JISC Innovation Fund.

Outputs can be supplied by the University.

### 4. Details of the impact

Collaboration between Sussex historians and the broadcast media provides a platform for the delivery of public-facing social history. The Mass Observation Archive [see Section 5, C1] acts as a key archival resource for a range of broadcasts and has moulded the development of programme ideas. Enhanced public participation in historical study is achieved through the dissemination of existing archival material and public involvement in the creation of new archival material.

In 2012, Langhamer negotiated a year-long partnership between the Archive, Sussex historians and BBC Radio Four's flagship news programme *Today* [C2]. In the first broadcast, Langhamer explained the importance of using 'ordinary voices' to understand societal changes during the twentieth century (19 April 2012). In the second, Robinson argued that the responses of ordinary people provide an important alternative perspective on public events and, in particular, on the changing role and status of British royalty (30 May 2012). A third package considered what the public can learn about by studying the objects people keep on their mantelpieces at home (04 July 2012). Mass Observation also served as *Today's* guest editor on 26 December 2012 [C3]. Langhamer researched and delivered packages on Christmas in wartime and New Year resolutions, while Robinson participated in a live panel discussion. User response via Radio Four was positive: 'We had such terrific feedback for the Boxing Day programme, many people touched by what they heard'. A 500 per cent increase in traffic on the Mass Observation website followed, providing real evidence of sustainability. Of these visitors, 85.44 per cent were new to the Archive. Mass Observation gained an additional 300 Twitter followers immediately after the broadcast. The Radio Four profile was reinforced when Robinson appeared on *Making History* [C4] to explain how MOP responses can illuminate the more-distant past (15 January 2012) and when Langhamer was interviewed for *The World Tonight* [C5] about *The English in Love* (20 August 2013).

Other media activity further engages the public. Langhamer has appeared in *A History of Britain: Brighton, the First Resort* (BBC 2, 2010); *Is Marriage in Peril* (BBC Radio 3, 2010); *History of the Microphone* (BBC Radio 4, 2011); *The Rules of Drinking* (BBC4, 2012); *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC1, 2012) and *World Update* (World Service, 2013). Her research film on changing

attitudes towards love and marriage has received 1,850 YouTube hits. Robinson's research has featured in reports by the BBC News, BBC Sussex, BBC Somerset, Juice FM, *The Guardian*, *Global Post*, *The Argus*, *Third Sector*, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, *MusicFilmWeb*, and *BBC History Magazine*. She has spoken at the Battle of Ideas (2011), the Lesbian and Gay News Archive (2012) and the National Memorial Arboretum (2013). A Mass Observation public lecture series organised by Langhamer and the Archive in 2011–12 further facilitated public engagement.

Sussex research using Mass Observation has also informed the commissioning of broadcasting packages. The *Today* partnership is one example, but Langhamer also worked closely with the BBC on *The People's Coronation with David Dimbleby* (BBC 1, 2013), which attracted 3.8 million viewers and was widely reviewed in the press [C6]. The director, John Haynes Fisher, commended Langhamer's impact on the film's overall development in providing a framework within which 'apparently meaningless' colour footage of ordinary people's lives made sense.

The MOP provides a structured framework within which the public write for posterity. Langhamer, an Archive Trustee, hosted a cross-sector symposium at the Charity Centre in 2013 to encourage cross-sector commissioning of the directives to which the public respond. The transfer of older material to digital formats has enhanced public access to existing MOP materials. 'Observing the 80s' has produced a digital Open Educational Resource, with material available for the first time, under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 licence allowing for its repurpose [C7]. Engagement and dissemination strategies include a blog through which project materials can be accessed (6,781 unique visits to 31 July 2013); a Facebook page built by a 'Youth Ambassador' and YouTube channel. An introduction to the project has nearly 1,000 hits. The resource was profiled in *The Guardian* in February 2013 [C8]. In 2013, a group of international summer-school students enthusiastically tested the Augmented Reality application designed around 'Observing the 80s'. Further community outreach includes a workshop run in collaboration with the disability charity Oyster and a series of workshops at Lewes Prison. Inspired by the Project, several prisoners subsequently submitted day diaries to the MOP. Davison High School has redesigned its BTEch Textiles course around the resource: they design clothes inspired by a directive on 'Social Divisions'. User feedback is enthusiastic: 'I now know what an archive is and why people write', observed one student.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Mass Observation Archive: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/index.htm>
- C2** 'Mass Observation 75 years on', *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 19 April 2012: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9714000/9714405.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9714000/9714405.stm)
- C3** Boxing Day 2012: Mass Observation is guest editor of the *Today* programme: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9780000/9780825.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9780000/9780825.stm) Today Spring 2012  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9780000/9780829.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9780000/9780829.stm)  
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- C4** Making History: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pty41>
- C5** The World Tonight: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b038c8sd>
- C6** The People's Coronation with David Dimbleby: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b02qv2wr>
- C7** Observing the 80s: <http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/Observingthe80s>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp4go2qnofl&list=PLe2vIDxT6vu6NwQd3EGf5Cc2Rmg5h-Lyx8>
- C8** Joe Moran, 'The 1980s that time forgot': <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/24/1980s-time-forgot-digital-archive>