

## NOTE ON MASS-OBSERVATION

MASS-OBSERVATION IS AN independent, scientific, fact-finding body, run from 82, Ladbroke Road, London, W.II. (Part 6517.) It has a team of trained, whole-time objective investigators and a nation-wide panel of voluntary informants.

For five years it has documented the processes of social change, of political trend, of public and private opinion, in a series of books, bulletins, broadcasts and articles. It is concerned only:

- (1) with ascertaining the facts as accurately as possible;
- (2) with developing and improving the methods for ascertaining these facts;
- (3) with disseminating the ascertained facts as widely as possible.

Mass-Observation does not believe that social science can effectively operate only at the academic level. Its job is to study real life; and the people it studies are people who can be interested immediately in the results, which often directly concern their everyday lives.

Since it began with a handful of people and without any money Mass-Observation has become internationally known and recognized. Many political, social, commercial and official bodies have used it, in peace and war.

# THE PUB AND THE PEOPLE

## *A Worktown Study*

by

MASS-OBSERVATION

LONDON  
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD  
1943

TO

MARY ADAMS

who made Government and Parliament recognize the value of social science methods.

AND

EVERETT JONES

who saw the full implications that social research can and should have for the future.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WHEN TOM HARRISSON lent me the proofs of this book, and let fall that owing to blitzes they were the only copy in existence, I felt seriously alarmed to have them in my desk. For the work embodied in them is not merely interesting stuff about one of the nerve-centres of human behaviour—it is much of it unique, and now forever incapable of duplication. Far from being “out-of-date” (because the field work took place mainly in 1938) it represents, for that very reason, the diary of some travellers on perhaps the last excursion-trip made intelligently to a Lost World. Events have turned it, in the Accountant’s phrase, into “a Document of Record”.

There are two ways in which it can be read. I have once myself, by very different methods, tried to analyse the place of the public house in the working-class life of a great city.<sup>1</sup> It was therefore necessary for me to read this “Worktown” evidence as a serious contribution to an almost completely undocumented subject. Much of it astonished me. Sometimes I thought the mode of presentation so clear and so robust that Truth could hardly escape without a flea or two in its ear. But I had no doubt at the end that, even among those research-workers whom it heartily annoys, this book will stand as a permanent and irreplaceable source-work about the place of pubs in British life.

The other way to read it is as one would read *Vanity Fair*. Everyone is interested in people, especially if they are behaving discredibly. And here is a book that is a magic casement on a foaming fairyland of ale and cakes. It brings home, with the clarity of a dream, a world where there were lights and thoughtlessness and, above all, an absolute stress on private life.

You walk back into a warm bright room and marvel that in 1938 we never knew that those spittoons were in Arcadia.

I am grateful for this book to Mr. Harrison and his friends of Mass-Observation, and I think that, apart from its serious value, a good time will be had by most.

BASIL D. NICHOLSON.

<sup>1</sup> *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, Vol. IX.

## PREFACE

### BACKGROUND: 1938 TO 1942

I happened to spend the years 1932-35 exploring some of the most primitive and uncivilized parts of the world, including Central Borneo and the great chain of islands stretching down the Western Pacific. I spent also a year living among people who were still eating each other, on the island of Malekula in the New Hebrides Group. I found no difficulty in being financed by the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Society, the British Museum and other bodies to go anywhere in the world in search of rare or previously unknown birds from mountain tops, or to make notes on strange manifestations of human behaviour among peoples with coloured skins. It was gradually borne in upon me that the things I was doing, at great expense, in these difficult jungles, had not been done in the wilds of Lancashire and East Anglia. While studiously tabulating the primitive, we had practically no objective anthropology of ourselves, despite many "social surveys" on a statistical basis. I determined, therefore, to devote as much as possible of the rest of my life to studying the so-called civilized peoples of the world. With this object in view, on my return from the Pacific I went to the industrial North of England (until then strange to me) and spent many months working in different jobs, trying to pick up the threads of mass life in Britain in much the same way as one does when visiting a little known country. Early in 1937, when I had been doing this for six months, I met Charles Madge, then a newspaper reporter, who had many of the same aims in view, but thought the best way to make such studies was through a nation-wide system of voluntary informants, reporting upon themselves, rather than by specialized study on the spot.

This is an old story, just worth recalling in this rather personal way, because this was the origin of Mass-Observation, which has (I think) become in a very small way a significant feature on the intelligent landscape of British democracy. During the past five years we have worked with increasing support, and have at

several points been able to exercise some constructive pressure by supplying relevant facts, not available elsewhere, about ordinary people to Government departments, voluntary bodies, M.P.s, periodicals, factories and informal groups. The structure of Mass-Observation remains very much as it was at the beginning—a team of whole-time paid investigators, observing others objectively; and a nation-wide system of voluntary observers providing information about themselves and their everyday lives. Madge, alas, has since the war been engaged on other work, so that the responsibility for both sides has rested mainly with me. The trained investigators operate from London (82, Ladbroke Road, W.11), though of course they are at any one moment distributed about the country on different studies. But for three years this team concentrated its whole attention on one town in the North, "Worktown".

We have called it Worktown, not because we take it as a typical town or as a special town, but because it is just a town that exists and persists on the basis of industrial work, an anonymous one in the long list of such British towns where most of our people now earn and spend. For three years in Worktown we lived as part of the place. For the first two years we were practically unnoticed, and investigators penetrated every part of local life, joined political, religious and cultural organizations of all sorts, worked in a wide range of jobs and made a great circle of friends and acquaintances at every level of the town structure from the leading family through the Town Council to the permanently unemployed and the floating population of Irish dosshouse dwellers.

The original team of investigators came in simply because they were enthusiastic for the idea of making an anthropological survey of ourselves. We presently received generous and entirely disinterested support from two Northern industrialists, Sir Thomas Barlow and Sir Ernest Simon, for whose early confidence in our initial efforts we cannot be sufficiently grateful. Further help then came from Dr. Louis Clarke (now Curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), from the late General G. H. Harrison, from Mr. Michael Higgins and from an anonymous senior civil servant (who constantly came to our assistance in days of need). Then Mr. Victor Gollancz gave us sufficient support to enable us to work on a proper basis preparing a series of four volumes on Worktown life, of which this is the first—the others

being more ambitious and extensive volumes on politics and the non-voter, on the religious life of Worktown with its numerous sects, and on that tremendous climax of the industrial year, the week's holiday in Blackpool. The present volume was in proof when the war began; the others were in draft. The war necessarily drew Mass-Observation on to other problems. We are therefore forced to leave completion of the other volumes until after the war, when it is our intention not merely to produce them, but to produce them with additional material, bringing them up-to-date and showing the changes which the war has brought about in the institutions studied—politics, religion, leisure.

In the meanwhile, we offer this volume with some diffidence. As a matter of fact, I had adopted the view that it would be better to leave it over, too. It was not until, by chance, I showed it to Mr. Basil Nicholson (who has written the most intelligent study of the pub in his section of the *New Survey of London Life and Labour*) that he strongly urged it should be published now; he has contributed his own views on this subject in an introductory note. It did seem, thinking about it again, that as well as the possible interest of the field material, a useful purpose might be served after three years of war by recalling in this particular way one small section of the thing we are fighting for, or away from. Moreover, plans are being made about the future of Britain, and these are often being made as if the prejudices and habits of ordinary people can be ignored; publication might serve some constructive purpose in reminding the planners, in their valuable work, of one of the habits they most often ignore. I say this with some feeling myself, as since the war my family have lived at Letchworth Garden City, one of the key towns of the planning movement, and one of the few places in England where no pub is allowed: this book could not have been written at all if Worktown had been Letchworth.

The book speaks for itself. And through it some of the people of Britain speak for themselves too. For the extent to which we fail to appreciate the real quality of that large section of the community who do not write to the newspapers—often do not even vote in a General Election—is so great that the full integration of our democratic culture is endangered. There remains in Britain a gulf between the top people, the leaders, and the rest, the led.

One of the basic institutions in British work life is the public

house. Many books have been written about it; they are referred to and listed in this volume. But there has been little attempt to make an objective, unbiased appraisal of the pub, and especially of how the pub works out in *human* terms of everyday and every-night life, among the hundreds of thousands of people who find in it one of their principal life interests. Mass-Observation has no interest either in proving pubs are good or pubs are bad.

We do not suppose, of course, that Worktown pubs are "typical", any more than Professor Malinowski considers the Trobriand Islands typical. The object of our studies in Worktown was to take the whole structure of the place and analyse it out. This cannot be done in more than one town at once, and the inter-relationships *within* the town, irrespective of relationship to other towns, were the broad basis of our study problem. The obsession for the typical, the representative, the "statistical sample", has exercised a serious limitation on the British approach to human problems and is largely responsible for the generally admitted backwardness of social science in this country. The real issues of sociology can only be faced if the sociologist is prepared to plunge deeply under the surface of British life and become directly acquainted with the mass of people who left school before they were 15, and who are the larger subject-matter of British social science. The issues cannot be fully viewed by statistical interviewing, the formal questionnaire, and the compilation of data on the library level. That, at least, is Mass-Observation's view, the incentive of our particular line of approach. There is room for every sort of sociology in this country, because there is so little of any one sort. There is no need to criticize other sorts; but it is necessary to stress that at present the social sciences are still rather one-sided and rather more academic than the subject itself requires and deserves.

The reader will notice that in this volume there is not, for instance, any attempt to make a statistical sample of interviews. There is not one single direct *interview* in the whole book, though there are many reported conversations with informants of all sorts. There are plenty of statistics; they are nearly all statistics of *observation*. Mass-Observation, as its name implies, considers that one of the clues to development in the social sciences is the actual observation of human behaviour in everyday surroundings. We cannot afford to devote ourselves exclusively to people's verbal reactions to questions asked them by a stranger (the interviewer)

in the street, without running a grave risk of reaching misleading conclusions. What people say is only one part—sometimes a not very important part—of the whole pattern of human thought and behaviour.

Main stages in the Worktown survey were thus:

- a. Public house reconnaissance and description; preliminary penetration. 3 months.
- b. Penetration by observers into all parts of Worktown pub life. 2 months.
- c. Observation without being observed. 10 months.
- d. Work conducted more openly; active co-operation with all sorts of people in all spheres of local life. The study of individuals, letters, diaries, documents. 3 months.
- e. Data from important people. 2 months.
- f. Studies of statistics, organizations and published sources. 3 months.

In preparing this book for publication, a source of difficulty has been the dispersal of the unit which originally undertook the main part of the Worktown investigation. John Sommerfield, who led the fieldwork, has been two years serving in the Royal Air Force, is now stationed overseas. Bruce Watkin was first in the R.A.F., and is now engaged on special scientific research. Walter Hood won the first Trades Union travelling scholarship and left the Worktown unit, to be caught by the war in Australia, where he remained and is playing his part. Woodrow Wyatt is a Staff Captain in the army, Brian Barefoot a doctor, Herbert Howarth in Egypt, Gertrude Wagner works in the Ministry of Information's Wartime Social Survey, and so on. This has produced complications in proof reading and in the checking of certain points. Every care has been made to ensure accuracy in this respect, but minor errors may perhaps be forgiven on that account? It is a matter of the greatest regret that the superb pub photographs taken by Humphrey Spender cannot, under present conditions, be reproduced.

The picture ends with the war. The book stands, with trivial modification, as completed in 1939. No attempt has been made to cover the wartime period which is bringing many significant new developments. The consumption of beer has increased very considerably in Worktown since the war, and the social structure

of the pub is subject to great new pressures. The last war transformed pub-life. There were drastic restrictions upon the hours during which pubs could be open, drastic increases in the price of drink (between 1914 and 1921 duty on each barrel of beer rose from 7s. 9d. to 100s.), a considerable weakening of beer's alcoholic content, a considerable decrease in the amount of beer drunk, and a 600 per cent fall in the number of convictions for drunkenness. These changes, brought about by the war, remained. They became accepted as pub normality. Numerous local and other restrictions (such as the "no treating" rule which was an attempt to alter the basic pattern of pub life) were temporary, and produced no post-war effects. A competent and well documented account of these restrictions is to be found in Arthur Shadwell's *Drink in 1914-1922*. Further changes are now afoot.

Even for those of us who took part in the investigation, there is something strange and remote about reading the results again now. Will the highly technical cult of pigeon-racing ever reappear? Shall we see again the esoteric rites of the Buffaloes? And the strange way they play dominoes in Worktown? And the elaborate class structure of the pub, which changes every week-end? Swiggling, standing rounds, the spittoon, the complex system of bookmakers' runners, the annual booze-up on Trinity Sunday, the "Diddlum Clubs", the trend towards bottled beer—what of all these things now? Already it is probable that much that is described here is part of history, the past. If so, we shall indeed have done one of the principal jobs which we set out to do five years ago, when we determined to attempt to describe and record history as it was made. The first Mass-Observation book, published by Faber & Faber in 1937, was a detailed study of the Coronation. Since then we have learnt a lot in the technique of collecting and presenting material in logical patterns. But since then also we have tried to follow the main social changes of our time. During this war, while engaged in doing immediate, war-helpful jobs of social research, we have been able at the same time to put down week by week files of detailed material on how the events of this war—greatest crisis in the story of civilized mankind—have impacted upon ordinary people. To ensure the carrying on of this long term side of our activities we have a small office in the country, Mass-Observation's *War Library*. The War Library collects not only the verbal and behaviour reactions of people from day to day, but also the documentary story of the

war, in posters and postcards, wrappers and pamphlets, menus and bills, programmes, Christmas cards, war books, popular tunes, film scripts, sermons and public speeches.

While in these years of energetic work we have never been successful in obtaining one shilling of support from academic quarters, we should like to take this opportunity of thanking individuals in Universities and elsewhere who have given us invaluable help and advice at many stages. We should like especially to thank Mrs. Mary Adams, Kingsley Martin, Prof. P. Sargant Florence, Prof. T. H. Pear, Dr. E. O. James, Prof. John Hilton, Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell, H. G. Wells, Tangye Lean, Dick and Zita Crossman, Tom Driberg, Everett Jones, Lord Horder and Max Nicholson. Without their moral support and critical guidance at many points, we should have deviated from the job in hand even more often than we have done; it is not their fault we have not done better.

For guidance as regards technique of investigation, we have turned principally, when puzzled ourselves, to field work that has been done in America, where sociology is so much in advance of anything yet seen in Europe. Here we should like to acknowledge our indebtedness particularly to Prof. E. W. Burgess and the Faculty of Sociology in the University of Chicago, which has published several fundamental studies in this field; also to the work of Dr. Dollard, Dr. Elton Mayo and their associates. We were fortunate, in the later stages of our Worktown study, to be visited by several American sociologists who were most helpful and we should particularly like to thank Prof. H. C. Brearley of South Carolina.

Finally, we owe more than we can ever show—more, indeed, than we can ever know—to the people of Worktown. I think I speak for most of the 80 people who came especially to Worktown to help in these studies, when I say that we found an almost unfailling pleasure, honour, hospitality, among the hundred thousand people of this great, smoky, anonymous industrial town. Whatever we thought of the pubs individually, all of us found there friendliness and the company of British working life. There are many other sides to Worktown's story not dealt with in this study of the pub though fully analysed in the other studies in the series. Whatever these people's limitations, and whatever our own, there emerges unmistakable through this research a basic goodness of heart in the individual, confused with an

indecision of purpose and function in the community, which provide the ground both for hope and for concern about a future which can and surely must be based on the satisfying of the normal, social, psychological and physical needs and hopes and dreams of the ordinary people who drink and laugh, occasionally fight, cry and die in the pages that follow.

The main work on this study was done by *John Sommerfield* and this is really his book. *Bruce Watkin* also did a great deal of the hard work. Only the circumstances of war have prevented them seeing it through into publication more easily and effectively than I have been able to do the job. My own effort to edit and correct have been completed in a barrack room shared with 29 other privates and without any minutes of privacy. It has been particularly difficult to revise the first three chapters. It is possible to start reading at Chapter IV. (page 67) without seriously damaging the continuity, because the preceding chapters are by way of background and basis to what follows.

August, 1942.

TOM HARRISSON.

## CONTENTS

Note on Mass-Observation	Page 2
Introductory Note	5
Preface	7

## THE PUB

I. The Pub	17
II. Drink	26
III. Drink-Servers	52
IV. Drinking Places	67

## THE PEOPLE

V. Drinkers	109
VI. Drinking	168
VII. Drunk	222
VIII. Singers and Pianists: Bookies and Prostitutes	255
IX. Sub-Group Pub Groups	270
X. Sports, Games and Gambling	284
XI. Non-drinking	314
XII. The Last Hour!	336
Bibliography	345