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TEMPORALITIES, RITUAL, AND DRINKING IN MASS OBSERVATION'S WORKTOWN*

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ABSTRACT. *In Bolton's pubs at the end of the 1930s, the research organization Mass Observation pursued answers to big abstract questions about time by studying small concrete actions. Drawing on field notes, draft manuscripts, and published works, this article sets out the different understandings and experiences of time documented by the team of investigators. Outside the 'time-clock factory-whistle dimension of living' and inside 'pub-time', individuals bought drinks for their companions, drank at the same pace, and engaged with everyone around them on an equal footing. Mass Observation presented such behaviours as proof that the pub fostered a socially harmonious, egalitarian community from a pre-industrial age. However, this article shows that the pub study's archive contains material that goes against the published findings. Observers turned in reports about authoritarian conduct, hierarchical power structures, and the intrusion of contemporary politics. Blurring the research subject and object, it was sometimes the investigators themselves who broke the spell of the pub. These moments of tension, confusion, and contradiction offer insights into the observers' own perspectives on modern temporalities and subjective experiences of time. All the people in the pubs were caught up in a state of flux.*

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'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME' is a phrase that repeats throughout the second half of section II of T. S. Eliot's *The waste land* (1922). The barman's customary call marks the end of permitted drinking and punctuates a stream of dialogue between two female pub-goers.[1] In 'A game of chess' and elsewhere, Eliot's modernist masterpiece clashes and meshes the timeless and temporally bound rituals of the ancient and modern worlds with the demotic and commonplace.[2] For the documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings, the poem served as a reminder that 'curious primitive practices' had survived the 'industrialization of the world' and 'that these mysteries reside[d] in the humblest everyday things'.[3] Mass Observation – a research organization Jennings had created in 1937 with the poet and journalist Charles Madge and the anthropologist Tom Harrisson – also addressed the mysteries of ordinary life.[4] This article attends to their practice – and to the poetics of that practice. With greater scientific pretence than Eliot, Mass Observation's 'Worktown' project explored rituals and the rhythms of time while documenting public drinking in Bolton. Mass observer Bill Lee described one pub as a light shining in the darkness:

> A door clicked open…A little man with [a] snug little watch-chain strode out…He was inconsequent in the world. The warm island, lapped by the fawning shadows of the street, showed erect chimneypots against the sloping and faintly ragged sky…One face of leisure it was – lit pub and clock tower, men, calm evening weather of the town.[5]

The man observed leaving the pub was represented as being oblivious to the passing of time measured by both his watch and the clock. This image of momentary sanctuary captures the central thesis of Mass Observation's investigation into Bolton's pubs: drinking was somehow removed from the 'time-clock factory-whistle dimension of living'.[6]

Mass Observation was fascinated with 'time problems' in its pub study because time had become a problem by the 1930s.[7] Modern temporalities have been

[1] T. S. Eliot, 'The waste land', II: 'A game of chess', lines 153, 165, 168, 169, in *Selected poems* (1954; repr. London, 1986), pp. 56–7.

[2] Gorham Munson, 'The esotericism of T. S. Eliot', in Michael North, ed., *The waste land: authoritative text, contexts, criticism* (New York, NY, 2001), pp. 156–63, at p. 158.

[3] Humphrey Jennings, 'Poetry and national life', BBC radio broadcast, June 1938, in Kevin Jackson, ed., *The Humphrey Jennings film reader* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 279–81.

[4] James Hinton cautions that 'the influence of Humphrey Jennings has commonly been exaggerated'. James Hinton, *The mass observers: a history, 1937–1949* (Oxford, 2013), p. ix. The Mass Observation archive stopped hyphenating 'Mass-Observation' in 2006. We retain the use of the hyphen only in quotations and publication titles.

[5] 'The Grapes by day and by night', WRL, description of exterior of the Grapes during the day and at night, Worktown Collection (WC), box 3, file C, Mass Observation Archive (MOA), p. 2. It is not always possible to specify the authors and dates of reports as this information was not consistently recorded. Authors' initials are given as recorded on the original document.

[6] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people: a Worktown study* (London, 1943), p. 252.

[7] Ibid., p. 198.

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portrayed in the recent scholarship as a sensation of 'acceleration, expansion, narrowing, regeneration, compression, distanciation, splitting, fracturing, emptying, annihilation and liquefaction'.[8] For the agents of finance and industry, in particular, the modern world was always in process of becoming. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the next one, they looked to the future, seeking new investments and hedging against possible risks.[9] The steamships, railways, and telegraphs constantly moving people, goods, and information around the globe spurred haphazard efforts to co-ordinate the passage of time.[10] Technological change – such as artificial light that turned night into day, apparatus for the experimental study of light, and cinema with its temporal tricks – also prompted doubts about whether time was absolute. Artists, scientists, and those who fell somewhere in between explored time as a metaphysical, heterogeneous, and arbitrary system that functioned in a state of flux rather than continuous linear progression.[11] Novelists played with temporal modes by starting in the middle of a flowing stream of experience, cutting back and forth in time, and leaving endings open.[12] Philosophers contrasted the clock time of technology with the passage of time in the mind, where it is experienced as flow, flux, and the fusion of the past and the present.[13] Sociologists, who located the origins of public time in social rhythms, contended that people in different societies have different experiences of time.[14] Anthropologists recorded communal rituals where, in the minds of participants, temporal distance collapsed.[15] Physicists theorized that space and time are relative to motion, intimately connected, and elastic.[16] In an early example of physics envy, Mass Observation 'expect[ed]' that 'contemporary sociology' would make 'predictions' in the 'field of time' 'comparable to those made in time-physics by [Albert] Einstein and [Max] Planck'.[17]

[8] Christopher Clark, 'Time of the Nazis: past and present in the Third Reich', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 25 (2015), pp. 156–87, at p. 158. For the classic arguments on the transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' experience of time, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, NY, 2004); and E. P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 56–97.

[9] Vanessa Ogle, 'Time, temporality, and the history of capitalism', *Past & Present*, 243 (2019), pp. 312–27.

[10] Eadem, *The global transformation of time, 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

[11] Stephen Kern, *The culture of time and space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pp. 10–35.

[12] Idem, *The modernist novel: a critical introduction* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 3 and 101–25.

[13] Jimena Canales, *The physicist and the philosophers: Einstein, Bergson, and the debate that changed our understanding of time* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), pp. 30–7.

[14] Warren D. TenHouten, *Time and society* (Albany, NY, 2005), pp. 11–24.

[15] Mark Manganaro, 'Frazer's *The golden bough* and Malinowski's *Argonauts of the western Pacific*: anthropology in 1922', in Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., *1922: literature, culture, politics* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 261–76.

[16] Richard Staley, *Einstein's generation: the origins of the relativity revolution* (Chicago, IL, 2008).

[17] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 198. On the popular reception of the theory of relativity in interwar Britain, see Katy Price, *Loving faster than light: romance and readers in Einstein's universe* (Chicago, IL, 2012).

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This article examines how Mass Observation pursued answers to big abstract questions about time by studying small concrete actions in the most quotidian setting. Drawing upon a range of methodologies, the Worktown team looked at the routines and rituals of social drinking to get insights into people's thinking. Based on their fieldwork for the pub investigation, Mass Observation identified three broad forms of time consciousness co-existing in the minds of Boltonians. Alongside the 'agricultural' and 'industrial' rhythms was a new one associated with 'mass culture'.[18] The football pools, Mass Observation argued, had 'changed the traditional trajectory of the week'. Those individuals who played had 'two or three days of looking forward, out of the present and the adjacent fact'.[19] The similarities between Mass Observation's three temporalities and the novelist J. B. Priestley's three geographies – 'the Old, the Nineteenth Century and the New' – are striking. In *English journey* (1934), which was published two years before Harrisson came to Bolton, Priestley concluded that 'these three were variously and most fascinatingly mingled in every part of the country'.[20] Despite claims to be solving problems 'entirely on a basis of observed and verifiable fact instead of abstract reasoning and expression of personal opinion', Mass Observation should be seen, among other things, as another interwar cultural commentator responding to experienced and anticipated change.[21] That said, the Worktown team's assortment of approaches did produce fresh and compelling thinking about that subject.

While there are various ways of looking at Mass Observation's foundation and early years, this article's focus is on the cultural and intellectual.[22] Moreover, it cannot claim to be a comprehensive evaluation of Worktown's pub study.

[18] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 336.

[19] Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *First year's work, 1937–1938* (London, 1938), p. 38.

[20] J. B. Priestley, *English journey: being a rambling but truthful account of what one man saw and heard and felt and thought during a journey through England during the autumn of the year 1933* (London, 1984 edn), p. 380.

[21] Madge and Harrisson, *First year's work*. p. 31.

[22] On the foundation and early years, see Hinton, *The mass observers*; Tom Jeffery, *Mass-Observation: a short history* (Brighton, 1999 edn); Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and everyday life: culture, history, theory* (Basingstoke, 2006); Angus Calder, 'Mass-Observation, 1937–1949', in Martin Bulmer, ed., *Essays on the history of British sociological research* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 121–36; Penny Summerfield, 'Mass-Observation: social research or social movement?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), pp. 439–52; Ben Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory: an introduction* (London, 2002), pp. 75–112; Jeremy MacClancy, 'Brief encounter: the meeting, in Mass-Observation, of British surrealism and popular anthropology', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1 (1995), pp. 495–512; Annebella Pollen, 'Research methodology in Mass Observation, past and present: "scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo"?', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (2013), pp. 213–35. On the Worktown project, see Ian Gazely and Claire Langhamer, 'The meanings of happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (2013), pp. 159–89; Jennie Taylor, 'Pennies from heaven and earth in Mass Observation's Blackpool', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 132–54; Peter Gurney, ed., *Bolton working-class life in the 1930s: a Mass-Observation anthology* (Brighton, 1988); Gary Cross, ed., *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and popular leisure in the 1930s* (London, 1990).

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Significant strands of that research – such as drunkenness, the spatial geography of the pub, and temperance – lie outside this article's analysis of how Mass Observation investigated time problems. Recent scholarship on drinking out provides a more complete understanding of the modern pub than that found in Mass Observation's publications and archives. This body of work, though, does not explore at length questions of temporality.[23] More generally, case-studies of how time was experienced within everyday life during the interwar period are rare. As Allegra Fryxell has done with her analysis of Egyptomania, this article raises further doubts about whether modern temporalities can always be conceived as homogeneous, linear, and acceleratory.[24]

The first of the four sections in this article goes beyond Mass Observation's oft-cited programmatic statements to sketch out the background to the Worktown project and the inspirations behind Mass Observation's approach. It also explains how the resulting, 'productively problematic', archive will be used.[25] The second section explores different understandings and experiences of time as documented in the Worktown team's investigative reports, draft manuscripts, and published findings. The third section studies representations of the pub as a pre-industrial survival: a socially harmonious, egalitarian community. The final section highlights the contradictory strands in observers' writings to reveal Mass Observation's preoccupation with authority and hierarchy, which was tied to the team's anxieties about the present and the future.

I

Harrisson directed the Worktown project in Bolton and Blackpool. The northern English industrial town was linked to his experiences on one of the South Pacific's 'cannibal' islands through Unilever – a company with its origins in Bolton and with interests in the New Hebrides.[26] Before the *New Statesman* had even published a letter calling for an 'anthropological study of

[23] David Gutzke, *Women drinking out in Britain since the early twentieth century* (Manchester, 2014); Richard Robinson, 'Off beat and in drink: impropriety and insobriety in Brighton's police, 1880–1921', *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 30 (2016), pp. 4–30; Paul Jennings, *A history of drink and the English, 1500–2000* (Abingdon, 2016); Anthony Cooke, *A history of drinking: the Scottish pub since 1700* (Edinburgh, 2015); Brian Bennison, *Heady days: a history of Newcastle's public houses*, I (Newcastle, 1996), and *Heavy nights: a history of Newcastle's public houses*, II (Newcastle, 1997). On roadhouses, see Michael John Laws, 'Turning night into day: transgression and Americanization at the English inter-war roadhouse', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (2009), pp. 473–94. On the early modern period, see Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and good fellowship in early modern England* (Woodbridge, 2014).

[24] Allegra Fryxell, 'Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and temporal enchantment in interwar Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28 (2017), pp. 516–42.

[25] Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory*, p. 77.

[26] Tom Harrisson, *Britain revisited* (London, 1961), pp. 25–6.

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our civilization', Harrisson had come to the 'wilds of Lancashire' in an effort to 'pick up the threads of mass life in Britain in much the same way as one does when visiting a little known country'.[27] He was not planning to apply the technology of colonial power-knowledge to the metropole, as was to happen in the post-war years with studies of race relations.[28] But Harrisson nonetheless was bringing professional skills of observation to Bolton.

The creation of Mass Observation at the start of the following year helped Harrisson to expand his research efforts. A four-book deal with Victor Gollancz and some sizeable donations covered the rent on a house and (some of) the expenses for a team of full-time and casual investigators.[29] '[A]ll the people who began this job', Mass Observation notes, 'had direct experience of working-class life and had earned their livings as unskilled workers'. However, as the project grew, those involved in carrying out fieldwork, analysing results, and writing up the material grew more diverse.[30] In an unpublished preface to *The pub and the people*, Harrisson wrote that among their number were

> a Fascist, a Communist, two rationalists, a fundamentalist, a Conservative journalist, a Transport House demi-mondain [sic], a Unitarian, several Pacifists, a militant Trotskyist, lesbians (2), two surrealists, two 'social realists', one good poet, an Austrian, a Russian, a Siamese, a Chinese, an Argentine, an Anarchist ex-policeman, a world-famous columnist, a Christian Scientist, a Catholic, plenty of undergraduates and dons, numerous sorts of psycho and sociologists, and eleven heterosexual liberals.[31]

The Worktown project had four strands, mapping on to the books on politics, religion, drinking, and holidays that had been promised to Gollancz.[32] Worktown was about what workers did when they were not working. As Selina Todd highlights, 'region, gender, and life cycle, as well as class' 'fractured' leisure access.[33] Nonetheless, ordinary people had more time, money, and opportunities for leisure than ever before.[34] The 'problem of what to do that is worth doing' took on new and pressing overtones for cultural critics.[35]

[27] Geoffrey Pyke, 'King and country', Correspondence, *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 Dec. 1936, p. 976; Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 7; Judith Heimann, *The most offending soul alive: Tom Harrisson and his remarkable life* (Honolulu, HI, 1999), p. 127.

[28] Jordanna Bailkin, *The afterlife of empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), pp. 23–54.

[29] Hinton, *The mass observers*, p. 19.

[30] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 327–8.

[31] Tom Harrisson, 'Preface', Typescripts of the Pub and the People, WC, 2/A, MOA, p. iii.

[32] Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (London, 1939), p. 227.

[33] Selina Todd, 'Young women, work, and leisure in interwar England', *Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 789–809, at p. 791.

[34] Claire Langhamer, '"Who the hell are ordinary people?" Ordinariness as a category of historical analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), pp. 175–95.

[35] Eric Gill, *Work and leisure* (London, 1935), p. 44. For an overview of the debate on leisure, see Robert Snape and Helen Pussard, 'Theorisations of leisure in inter-war Britain', *Leisure Studies*, 32 (2013), pp. 1–18.

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Priestley, for instance, identified modern leisure as a class leveller. The cinema and the radio were 'absolutely democratic' because they did not discriminate between consumers according to social status. 'The young people of this new England do not play chorus in an opera in which their social superiors are the principals', he wrote. 'They…get on with their own lives.' Revealing his own ambivalence, however, Priestley also noted that mass culture lacked a certain authenticity and spontaneity – and was being shaped by the powerful and exploitative forces of 'America', big business, and the media.[36] Leisure was an index of both progress and decline. Mass Observation believed it was well placed to register and respond to the problem of how spare time was being spent because it had the methodological tools to negotiate a requirement for scientific rigour and the inherent subjectivities of data collection and analysis.[37]

Mass Observation's 'data on the pub-goer' challenged the 'assum[ptions]' it had had at 'the beginning of the fieldwork'; the investigators did not just study older male mill workers. 'There are pub-goers amongst both sexes, amongst all adult age groups', concluded *The pub and the people*. 'Nor…are they restricted to any one social class.' Based on 'a large count over a long period', Mass Observation estimated that 16 per cent of Bolton's 60,000 pub-goers were female. This figure, though, hid how the gender balance varied across time and space. At weekends and in lounge rooms – 'a home from home' – 'it is often possible to find…quite half the drinkers are women'. Mass Observation found drinking to be gendered in other ways: women tended to consume more expensive bottled beer and to drink at a slower pace. When men joined their wives in the lounge, they performed masculinity differently, becoming 'women's men'. For Harrisson and his team, the experience of drinking out was gendered – but the experience of time in the pub was not.[38]

The pub investigation took place over 1937–8 and comprised the following 'stages':

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.

[36] Priestley, *English journey*, pp. 149 and 402–3.

[37] 'Analysis of political material available to 1st. September 1937', BB, 1 Sept. [1937], Former Mass Observers: Brian Barefoot, MOA, p. 3.

[38] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 106–7, 109, 143–8, and 154. For an exploration of female pub-going at this time, differences between Bolton and other parts of the country, and criticism of Mass Observation's calculations, see Gutzke, *Women drinking out in Britain*, pp. 52–69.

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e. Data from important people. 2 months.
f. Studies of statistics, organizations and published sources. 3 months.[39]

As one of the team would later acknowledge, this timeline showed how much contemporary social anthropology shaped the research.[40] Madge and Harrisson had urged readers of Mass Observation's first pamphlet to acquire the fifth edition of *Notes and queries on anthropology*.[41] The text book required a would-be observer to separate out 'facts' from 'theories', to treat the local population with 'real sympathy', and to avoid 'all appearance of "superiority"'.[42] Participant observation has a complicated genealogy, but Bronislaw Malinowski – who had been part of the committee that produced the fifth edition – made it into a serious method of inquiry through his research on the Trobriand Islands.[43] Malinowski had often highlighted the need for an anthropology of 'ourselves' as well as 'exotic tribes'. He chose to respond to the creation of Mass Observation by positioning himself as a mentor to the movement.[44]

Boltonians were not the first westerners to have the tool of participant observation turned on them and to be placed in the ethnographic present.[45] A dozen years before Harrisson began his work, Helen and Robert Lynd came to Muncie, Indiana, to, as the latter later put it, 'look at the life of a city objectively'. 'I hit', he continued, 'on the idea of trying to do what an anthropologist w[oul]d do if he studied an Amer[ican] community'. Following the British functionalist school, the couple structured their investigations around six 'major life-activit[ies]'. Such an approach shifted the focus away from the usual subjects of social surveys – the poor, immigrants, criminals, sex workers, and vagrants – and on to what Helen Lynd called 'ordinary people'.[46] The project was aiming to be about the normal and the whole, not about groups deemed to be problems or about particular parts of urban society.

The Lynds' work – published under the title *Middletown* in 1929 – helped inspire a group of Viennese researchers to study a nearby village that had lost all five of its factories.[47] Everyone who carried out the fieldwork in

[39] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 11.
[40] Transcript of interview with Dennis Chapman by Nick Stanley, 23 Feb. 1979, Former Mass-Observers: Dennis Chapman, MOA, p. 13.
[41] Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass-Observation* (London, 1937), p. 52.
[42] *Notes and queries on anthropology* (5th edn, London, 1929), pp. 17–19.
[43] Roger Sanjek, 'The secret life of fieldnotes', in Roger Sanjek, ed., *Fieldnotes: the making of anthropology* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), pp. 187–270, at pp. 207–8.
[44] Madge and Harrisson, *First year's work*, p. 103.
[45] On ethnography and time, see Kevin Birth, 'The creation of coevalness and the danger of homochronism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14 (2018), pp. 3–20.
[46] Sarah Igo, *The averaged American: surveys, citizens, and the making of a mass public* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), pp. 28 and 35–7; Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: a study in contemporary American culture* (New York, NY, 1929), pp. 4–5 and 7.
[47] Hans Zeisel, 'The Vienna years', in Robert Merton, James Coleman, and Peter Rosi, eds., *Papers in honor of Paul F. Lazarfeld* (New York, NY, 1979), pp. 10–15, at p. 11.

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Marienthal participated in local life by finding ways to support struggling families. The project's core concern was with how chronic unemployment had impacted upon people's everyday lives. One strand of the research, for instance, examined how the meaning of time had changed for former labourers now that they no longer had shift work to structure their day and their week. Investigators gathered data on this problem by, among other things, timing how quickly pedestrians were walking and asking people to report on how they spent their time. Through this mix of the quantitative and the qualitative, the team sought to bridge what they saw as the gap between plain official statistics and impressionistic literary representations. They concluded that men had reverted to a 'primitive' experience of time, while women had been kept in a modern temporality by having to keep the household running.[48]

For Mass Observation, the Muncie and Marienthal studies offered models to adopt and adapt. The two projects held a more basic appeal, too. Young people, who had little previous experience and who were often making things up as they went along, had been able to research and write books that had brought them fame and fortune. Harrisson, as he would later admit, had 'ambition[s]' for 'publicity', 'money', and 'prestige'; delivering a British *Middletown* to Gollancz would have brought him all three.[49] Like a start-up business, Mass Observation was competing in what Malinowski described as 'the din of the open market' to show that it could get better results than anyone else.[50] Madge and Harrisson argued that their 'new instrument' would produce knowledge of how 'ordinary people' thought and acted that was more accurate and reliable than that presently provided by politicians, newspaper editors, cultural critics, opinion pollsters, and market researchers.[51] In pamphlets such as *Britain*, Mass Observation contrasted tabloid claims that the public were all agreed on how an event should be seen against the complex, varied, and shifting responses its investigations had found.[52] Harrisson dismissed George Orwell's efforts to document everyday life in the industrial towns as 'old eton group slumming'.[53] Mass Observation trumpeted having 'some two thousand…observers' on the front cover of *Britain* because, as Angus Calder points out, this number was the smallest sample size used by the British institute of opinion polling.[54] The competition between Mass

[48] Marie Jahoda, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel, *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975 edn), pp. 83–92 and 134.

[49] Heimann, *The most offending soul alive*, p. 179.

[50] Madge and Harrisson, *First year's work*, p. 84.

[51] Idem and idem, *Mass-Observation*, pp. 36 and 61.

[52] Idem and idem, *Britain by Mass-Observation*; Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory*, pp. 85–6.

[53] Transcript of interview with Charles Madge by Nick Stanley, 23 Mar. 1978, Former Mass-Observers: Charles Madge, MOA, p. 2.

[54] Angus Calder, 'Introduction to the Cresset library edition', in Madge and Harrisson, *Britain by Mass-Observation*, p. x.

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Observation and market researchers was more direct, with both sides pitching for some of the same business.[55] A final set of competitors were typically presented by Madge and Harrisson as allies rather than rivals: 'Organisations with Similar Aims'. Oscar Oeser's social psychology group at the University of St Andrews, for example, had embedded observers in the field over a year before Harrisson got to Bolton.[56] At a paper given to the 1936 conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Oeser set out how the Marienthal study had inspired the research and called his project 'Anthropology at home'.[57] Here, writes Liz Stanley, was 'an idea that had found its moment'.[58] Mass Observation was involved in a race to market.

Why, then, did Harrisson fail to deliver three of the planned Worktown books and only complete the fourth years later? Mass Observation otherwise published books at an impressive rate. During the autumn of 1938, Madge and Harrisson produced the draft of *Britain* in around two months (Madge was the main author). Gollancz expected the novelist John Sommerfield, who was the lead writer for the pub book, to turn in a well-written, professionally prepared manuscript on time.[59] According to James Hinton, Mass Observation's tighter focus on the threat of fascism – which publishers shared – accounts for the 'thin results'.[60] Ben Highmore, however, speculates that the delays which led to the gathering storm blowing the Worktown publishing process off course were brought about by systemic problems. Harrisson and his team had embraced the objectivity of an ethnographic approach while at the same time they also recognized and struggled with its contradictions.[61] Highmore's insight can be taken further, as the Worktown project did not just apply the methods of British social anthropology. Harrisson's 'experiment' took from psychology and sociology, too. All three of these fields were, as Mass Observation noted, 'in an early stage of development'; scholars had produced fresh techniques for studying everyday life, but most of these techniques had not yet become embedded in the everyday practices of the disciplines.[62] Without that endorsement, it could not be taken for granted that the new tools just worked. Harrisson and his collaborators therefore had a range of concerns and conjectures about the meaning, nature, and purpose of the methods they were employing. Did participant-observation overcome alienating class distinctions? Can change be documented in the ethnographic present? Where did

[55] Joe Moran, 'Mass-Observation, market research, and the birth of the focus group, 1937–1997', *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (2008), pp. 827–51, at pp. 831–2.
[56] Madge and Harrisson, *Mass-Observation*, p. 61.
[57] O. A. Oeser, 'Methods and assumptions of field work in social psychology', *British Journal of Psychology*, 27 (1937), pp. 343–63.
[58] Liz Stanley, 'The archaeology of a 1930s Mass-Observation project', *Manchester Sociology Occasional Paper*, 27 (Manchester, 1990), p. 20.
[59] Hubble, *Mass-Observation and everyday life*, pp. 135–6.
[60] Hinton, *The mass observers*, pp. 55–60.
[61] Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory*, pp. 87–8, 98, and 101–2.
[62] Madge and Harrisson, *Mass-Observation*, pp. 35–6.

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the balance lie between subjectivity and objectivity? Should all the tools used comply with an overarching theory or not? Was Bolton representative enough to generalize out the findings? How much of 'the rich, varied, ever-shifting, and sometimes tangled fabric of human affairs' could these techniques capture?[63] The Worktown project was hamstrung by what Joel Isaac, writing about post-war American social science, has termed 'tool shock'.[64]

These epistemic struggles contributed to Mass Observation failing to fulfil its book contract; but they also open up possibilities for later scholars. The archive records the process of finding new ways of thinking about and responding to ordinary people's experiences in a particular time and place. Following Highmore's suggestion, this article approaches the Worktown material as 'productively problematic'.[65] It explores moments of tension, contradiction, and confusion that happened when the subject and object of the enquiry became indistinct and when the practicalities of research undermined the methodology. These moments offer valuable insights into the observers' perspectives on modern temporalities and subjective experiences of time.

II

Harrisson's *Savage civilisation* (1937) presented public time as a modern construct. He claimed to have found in Malakula, 'men free of the speed and the clocks and wires which we were once free of'.[66] Their consciousness of time, in this evolutionary reading, was older, not unique to their society. When he arrived in Bolton, Harrisson discovered everyday life for the natives there was structured by the 'endless cycle' of the industrial week. This constantly repeating seven-day sequence was part of the local 'mentality': 'Man as a fly on the ever-rotating band of time is an idea that Worktowners are conditioned to respect'. Boltonians anxiously anticipated not just the end of the working week, but also the conclusion of each workday. Cotton workers fixated on closing time at the factory, spending the last half-hour awaiting the flashing red electric bulb that indicated the 5.30 p.m. end to the shift. An 'obsession' with time, Mass Observation argued, meant that workers were always looking forward: 'the *end* of any prescribed period always becomes a complex in Worktown mentality'. To the astonishment of those observers who were 'painters and poets', workers could not even 'escape…from time' when on their 'summer holiday'.[67] In Lancashire, as in Malakula, the observer and observed appeared to be in separate temporalities.

[63] 'Mass-Observation in Bolton: a social experiment', n.d., WC 1/C, MOA, 1–2.
[64] Joel Isaac, 'Tool shock: technique and epistemology in the postwar social sciences', *History of Political Economy*, 42 (2010), pp. 133–64, at pp. 135 and 154.
[65] Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory*, p. 77.
[66] Tom Harrisson, *Savage civilisation* (London, 1937), pp. 366–7.
[67] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 16–17, 122, and 198. Original emphasis.

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Investigators looked to identify temporal patterns related to drinking behaviour. One technique was to make an itemized chronology of patrons' movements and interactions over a set time. A report on drinking at the Peel Hotel, for example, tracked and recorded drinkers' behaviour at intervals of one to four minutes between 8.15 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. Times were listed in a column on the left of the report with qualitative observations detailed on the right.[68] Where the Marienthal researchers had calculated the speed at which people were walking, Worktown observers chose to time how fast people were drinking. A report on a Saturday night at the Star and Garter charted consumption rates:

> Three men drink pints, two of them together. One took 13 and 11½ minutes before closing time and 12 [minutes] after…Single man drinks gill in 8 minutes, pint in 8… Five young men come in together at 9.42, and drink with abandon, ordering ahead of requirement. First round, first man finishes in 2mins…others in 2½ and 3½ and 3½. Then the fastest man of that round does 5 mins., the second fastest does 4½ mins., the rest 5½–6. The third round, 4 in 18 mins.[69]

Acknowledging a host of potential economic, social, and environmental variables (tested and untested), Mass Observation calculated that on average gills (half-pints) of beer were consumed around two-to-six-minutes faster on Fridays and Saturdays than any other day. Drinking-rate measurements confirmed the 'trend' of other data indicating a 'weekly cycle'.[70]

Harrisson instructed observers to compare weekday drinking to weekend drinking and to 'pick on a few "control" pubs and get counts throughout the week, and hour by hour'.[71] His team discerned a marked increase in pub attendance from Friday through to Sunday, peaking on Saturday evenings. The last hour of service (9.00 p.m.–10.00 p.m.) saw a spike in numbers. Arrests for drunkenness – of both sexes – also increased on Saturdays: 'more people are run in for being tight on Saturday night than any other'. *The pub and the people* speculated on possible explanations for these patterns, concluding that an 'economic' rationale was at least partly responsible. Friday night's relative popularity corresponded with pay-night in most of Bolton's mills. During weekends, workers were moneyed, whereas Monday through Thursday were 'hard-up days'. Concentrated drinking likely reflected limited disposable income: 'drinkers may only be able to afford to spend an hour in the pub'.[72] Budgeting factors, however, were less satisfactory when it came to explaining

[68] 'Peel Hotel', observations and overheard conversations and comments, JAS, 28 Feb. 1938, WC, 3/D, MOA, p. 1.
[69] 'Star and Garter', observations and conversations, THH, 29 Aug. [?], WC, 3/D, MOA, p. 1.
[70] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 122–3 and 170–6.
[71] Untitled document, guidelines for pub observers, n.d, WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1.
[72] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 109–18 and 121–2.

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why Saturday evenings proved more popular than Friday or why people preferred the final hour over any other.

In an article for *The Manchester Guardian*, Mass Observation declared that this puzzle was 'more complicated than it appears'.[73] Here was something for Harrisson and his team to pick at in the hope of freeing the thread that could unravel the meaning of everyday life. Drinking patterns, they ultimately concluded, reflected 'the week-end complex of leisure rather than the mere direct economic complex which dominates food and credit habits'. 'Saturday is the highspot of the week's trajectory because then things *are* open, people not tired (as on Friday pay-night), and there's no need to get up early next morning.'[74]

The cyclical nature of the working week – *The pub and the people* conjectured – was fuelling 'the glorification of what has been'.[75] Many conventions encouraged a romantic attachment to the pre-industrial past in the patrons. Some Bolton pubs preserved traditions such as Oak Apple Day at the end of May, even though the commemoration of Charles II's restoration had officially ceased to be a holiday as far back as 1859. Oak branches and apples were adorned and paraded to mark the young king's escape after the 1651 battle of Worchester. Under the heading 'Customs', *The pub and the people* described the Park View Inn's display of 'Charlie' – an eccentric-looking, 'possibly Mexican carved wooden painted figure' – on 29 May, and the elaborate rituals performed by the pub-goers in the object's honour.[76] Whatever its origin, the decorations made the past materially present.[77]

Making reference to James George Frazer's *The golden bough* – a classic work of anthropology that had influenced Eliot and other modernist writers – Mass Observation drew a parallel between the customs associated with Oak Apple Day and with ancient 'heathen religion'. All were declared 'dead or dying'.[78] Frazer argued societies developed in evolutionary stages from primitivism to modern civilization, with aberrations from that norm interpreted as 'survivals' from an earlier period.[79] The advancement of humanity across time was more-or-less universal across different cultures and societies. According to John Vickery, *The golden bough* imposed a cyclical predictability on the dynamism of human development. 'As we watch the seemingly endless round of dying and reviving gods move across Frazer's pages, time, history, and human life appear

[73] 'Social diversions in a cotton town', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Mar. 1938, WC, 3/A, MOA.

[74] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 119–20 and 122–3; untitled report, observations of staff and customers in an unspecified pub, undated, WC, 3/C, MOA, p. 1.

[75] Ibid., p. 122.

[76] Ibid., p. 210.

[77] Fryxell, 'Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and temporal enchantment', p. 529.

[78] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 214.

[79] James George Frazer, *The golden bough: a study in comparative religion* (2 vols., London, 1890).

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to be on the verge of being drawn into a static cycle'. Yet *The golden bough* conveyed 'a sense too of the precariousness of the past, of its inevitable erosion by the advancement of time and mortality'.[80] Mass Observation expected that pubs could not keep the past alive for much longer. When Harrisson came to write the preface to *The pub and the people* in the summer of 1942, he assumed that 'much that is described here is part of history'.[81]

Pubs provided a space where people could experience not only times past but also timelessness. Beer, according to *The pub and the people*, adjusted the mind's 'tempo' to such a degree that the worker was 'physically and psychologically emancipated'. Drinking was 'in this subtle sense a philosophy and ideology almost on its own account'. Indeed, 'its feelings are not far from some of those in religion.[82] One observer explained this mindset as a state of 'remoteness to the worries of life' and a kind of 'forgetfulness' which 'makes the machine fade out'.[83] In the autumn 1938 issue of *New Writing*, Madge published a poem entitled 'Drinking in Bolton', which presented that experience as universal.

> So night falls and the Bank of England opens
> And in this hour are crowded all men's lives,
> For, as they drink, they drown. So final night
> Falls, like a pack of cards, each one of which
> Is fate, the film-star and the penny pool.
> You sit there waiting for the spell to break.[84]

That hour at Madge's Bolton pub saw time contracted – for a moment – in the chance coming together of what had been and what could be.

This spell was not broken when the clock struck the solemn hour. Despite legal requirements and policing, the calling of 'time' in Bolton's pubs could extend to ten minutes beyond the official closing hour of 10 p.m., with people lingering until service ended and glasses were cleared. Drinkers told observers that 'regulars' could access a clandestine, afterhours 'back door service' – but as 'stranger[s]' Mass Observation could not 'verify' such accounts.[85] Reports contain numerous examples of virtually uniform disregard for closing time. At the Waterloo Tavern, 'time is called, and almost everyone in the place drinks up, *and asks for another*'.[86] On a Friday evening, there was 'not much fuss at closing time' among the patrons of the Grapes. When the 'prop.' of the Walkers Arms 'called time at ten, no one took any notice. At 10.20 there was still a big

[80] John B. Vickery, *The literary impact of the golden bough* (Princeton, NJ, 1973), p. 26.
[81] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 12.
[82] Ibid., pp. 167 and 199.
[83] Untitled report, observations of staff and customers in an unspecified pub, undated, WC, 3/C, MOA, p. 1.
[84] Charles Madge, 'Drinking in Bolton', *New Writing*, 1 (1938), p. 47.
[85] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 194–7.
[86] 'Waterloo Tavern, Folds Road', conversations with customers, 8 June [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1. Italics replace underlining in the original.

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crowd'.[87] On 'the edges of the "last hour"', they could continue to 'feel…good, personally and socially'.[88]

III

While the cinema and the football pools 'say that I am I, and you are you', claimed Mass Observation, the pub emphasized the 'fact that you are living among your fellow men'.[89] Drinking was a communal experience, not a solitary pursuit. Men drinking alongside companions were obliged to 'shout' rounds and parties of women paying for their own drinks often bought rounds.[90] In the context of a 'wage-earning personal-advance society', standing rounds operated on the 'truly "democratic" assumption' that fellow drinkers had the same resources. The custom extended to virtually every aspect of social relations within the pub. Popular pastimes such as cards, dominoes, and darts typically involved a reward or penalty system based on 'standing' drinks. Men who won money on the pools were expected to buy rounds: an example of how the pub acted as 'a sort of bridge between the older institutions and those new ones catering for people strictly as individuals, but on a mass basis'. Musicians, singers, and other voluntary performers were treated to drinks in return for their showmanship. Bolton's 'amateur prostitute[s]' would engage in sexual activity on the town's dark streets in exchange for being 'stood drinks'. The 'possibility of paying for the girls', commented one observer about an overheard conversation between three men, 'was something outside the range of their ideas'. According to *The pub and the people*, treating was 'the most fundamental and regular of all pub rituals'. It 'was a ritual rather than a habit because of the strong social compulsion for its observance, the stigma attached to those who do not carry it out, and the resentment expressed by anyone accused of doing so'.[91] In the Three Tuns, the unusual event of a woman ordering a round for a mixed group was considered a 'ritual transgression'. The observer rationalized the act by noting that the woman was considerably older than her companions and that she appeared to be engaging in a celebration of some kind.[92]

Mass Observation found further evidence of communal spirit in pub-goers' habit of synchronizing beer consumption to match their fellows ('drinking

[87] 'Pubs', brief description of interiors and customers at the St George Vault, the Balmoral, the One Horse Shoe, the Grapes, and Yates Wine Bar, JS, 23 Apr. [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 2; 'Pubs Moses Gate', observations at the Walkers Arms, the Moses Gate vault, the Railway Hotel, and the Walkers Arms big lounge, 7 May [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 3.

[88] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 167.

[89] Ibid., pp. 218–19.

[90] 'Paying turns, treating', account of arrangements for paying for rounds of drinks, TH, undated, WC, 3/C, MOA.

[91] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 143, 177, 180–3, 256, 267–8, 312, and 336.

[92] 'Pubs', observations in the Three Tuns, Moor Lane, and the Dog and Partridge small lounge, JS, 5 May [?], WC, 3/C, MOA, p. 1.

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level'). A report on patrons in the parlour of the One Horseshoe referred to three men who 'sit together, *drinking level*. (This is most important)'.[93] *The pub and the people* noted that a mixed party managed to drink level even though most of them were likely blind. When in company, pub-goers tended to keep pace with the person responsible for standing the next round by drinking level with them.[94] One report described how three patrons in the taproom at the Dog and Snipe displayed 'wonderful anticipation in drinking equal amounts so that all three glasses register the same level after each drink'.[95] *The pub and the people* questioned the observer's use of the word 'anticipation' – insisting that the levelling phenomenon was unlikely to be 'a wholly conscious process', but closer to a natural reflex.[96]

A fascination with the crossovers between ancient, 'primitive' cultural practices and drinking conventions ran through the whole pub study. These connections were especially stressed in the final chapter of *The pub and the people*, entitled 'The last hour!'. Here, the physiological and psychological release provided by weekend drinking and drunkenness was presented as a natural and universal human need. Both pre-industrial and modern societies imposed controls on behaviour: the former primarily through 'religion, magic, and convention', the latter increasingly through economic conditions. Both kinds of restrictions were '"unnatural"' because they worked 'to repress, constrain, and modify powerful instinctual urges'. Unlike pre-industrial cultures, though, modern life lacked a formalized structure of 'sanctioned' occasions for the temporary 'breakdown' of social controls and personal inhibitions such as carnival. That said, Bolton's pubs remained tied to the past and thus ensured an outlet for uninhibited 'human' instinct. They provided a space for people to behave 'without formality, swear with impunity, meet strangers and talk about anything, and maybe spit on the floor'; a space where even 'very respectable' women could complain about how 'they shit on you', 'laugh loudly' about dogs urinating on the bed, and tell 'bawdy' stories 'about little men and copulation'. Pub-based leisure illuminated the 'fundamental contradictions of a society' that resulted from 'two very different aspects of social organization, pulling the "human mind" and the "animal body" in the dimension of time'.[97]

Bolton's communities of pub-goers interacted with each other in ways that observers usually took to be harmonious. Reporting on the Waterloo Tavern, Harrisson described 'a spirit of bon-homie that can be found nowhere else,

[93] Untitled report, observations at One Horseshoe parlour, 18 June [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1. Italics replace underlining in the original.

[94] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 170 and 176–7.

[95] 'Dog and Snipe, Folds Road', description of interior and customers, 8 June [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1.

[96] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 169.

[97] Ibid., pp. 147, 265, 312, and 336–8.

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where perfect strangers chat, discuss, and argue with such a perfect understanding and familiarity'.[98] In the vault at the Lord Ashley, another observer noted that 'as the chaps come in they greet each one another [sic] "Hullo Jim" etc.…There are no definite groups – they continually break up and reform.'[99] In the taproom at the Waterloo, 'all are friendly, and it is like a group in somebody's home rather than a public room'.[100] Indeed, for a number of workers, the pub provided 'a kind of second or alternative home'. One man would habitually visit the same pub, where he would retrieve his spectacles from a cupboard in the wall of the taproom and read a newspaper for several hours. Regulars often addressed landlords and landladies by their first names. *The pub and the people* recorded one landlady sitting down for a drink with female pub-goers in the 'Best room'. Sometimes the relationships were so strong that no words needed to be exchanged. A barmaid was observed 'kissing' a party of men 'goodnight'.[101] At the Union Arms, an elderly man 'does not say anything, but is a regualr [sic] and has a pint drawn for him right away'.[102] A seasoned male pub-goer was able to provide Mass Observation with the occupations and personal details of other patrons. His extensive knowledge was presented as further proof of the 'highly developed "community" among regulars'.[103]

IV

Timeless and universal, communal and egalitarian: Mass Observation preferred to see a drink at the pub in these terms. With the present time marked by anxieties about what was happening in Britain and beyond, the observers could escape into the past or imagine a better future grounded in real communities. Harrisson and his team, though, sometimes saw things that went against the traditional image. At the Park View Inn, the 'mostly Victorian and sentimental songs' sung during Oak Apple Day celebrations were interrupted by 'a different note…struck by a fat, red-faced, cheerful looking middle-aged woman'.[104] Another report recalled how an elderly man was singing about his '[h]appy days' in a 'very melancholy' tone when he fell off his stool. Fellow pub-goers

[98] 'Waterloo Tavern', 1 July [?], THH, observation of customers and explanation of the 'curio' idea (a raffle) at the Waterloo Tavern, THH, 1 July [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1.

[99] 'Pubs round Brownlow Fold', observations in the Lord Ashley vault, the Swiss, the pub with no visible name, the Mount Street Tavern, and the Poplar, JS, 23 July [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1.

[100] Untitled report, description of pub interior, observations, and overheard conversations at the Waterloo taproom, 22 June [?], WC, 3/C, MOA, p. 1.

[101] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 56, 134, and 146–7.

[102] Untitled report, observations and conversations at the Union Arms vault, the Waterloo vault, and the Grapes vault, JS, 21 June [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1.

[103] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 139.

[104] Ibid., p. 212.

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pulled the man back up and 'pat[ted] him on the back a lot, as if he was a dog, saying "Come on oldtimer".'[105] At the One Horseshoe, a pair of men were overheard 'telling each other what fine chaps they are, what they did in the past etc'. Their 'reminiscencing [sic]' was 'rudely disturbed' by a woman storming into the pub and yelling at her husband '"Come on out of it you dirty stop out all night."'[106] Minds flowing through times past were abruptly pulled back into the present time.

The Worktown investigators recorded some patrons taking actions that indicated that their minds stayed in the present throughout their visit to the pub. An 'apparently contradictory' element of pub culture, in Mass Observation's view, was the Royal and Ancient Order of Buffalos. The 'buffs' met in Bolton's pubs, used passwords and coded language, and practised ceremonial rituals. The society was based on an elaborate system of leadership tiers and was therefore 'governed by motives of exceeding and beating the other man'. Hierarchical organization was spotted in pub games and sports. Many competitors not only wanted to exceed and beat their opponents; they also wanted to get 'something for nothing' in the form of a trophy, a prize, or a beer. Betting based on alcoholic rewards conveniently fuelled the drinks trade. For Mass Observation, the backing shown to such exchanges was just one example of a commercial 'artifice' in the pub that represented 'an evil running all through the profit system of society'.[107]

Investigative reports found that people at the pub could be in conflict as well as in competition. One observer suggested that every bar had 'those meddlers, agitators who upset everything'.[108] In *The pub and the people*, Mass Observation listed various anti-social pub 'types' – but stressed that they were avoided by wary patrons. The 'silent regular' did not 'seem to *belong* in any active sense'; the 'pub bore' 'always has some relative in a high position' and 'knows more about a subject under discussion than any other chap, and won't be crushed'; and the 'pint hole oracle' was prone to launching into aggressive and philosophical rants about any given subject.[109] On a Wednesday evening at the Nelson, an observer was informed that a 'little [N]apoleonic man with a bowler hat' was an archetypal pint-hole oracle. The man spoke at volume, 'using long words pretty carefully, like a stage drunk'. In a group discussion about a local plumber who thought highly of himself, the man with the bowler hat got 'indignant', gesticulated wildly, and banged on the table, 'endangering the observer's beer'. He began a tirade: '"I like to meet these clever

[105] 'One Horseshoe vault', observation of customers and details of argument at the One Horseshoe vault, 21 Jan. [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 4.

[106] 'Bother', account of incident between wife and husband, TH, 7/10/1937, WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1.

[107] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 312.

[108] Untitled report, observations of staff and customers in an unspecified pub, undated, WC, 3/C, MOA, p. 5.

[109] 'Pint hole' referred to a pub's vault. Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 149–50.

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chaps, barristers and solicitors and suchlike…I like to meet these clever fellows (he's getting very sarcastic now) who *think* themselves clever.'"[110] The peace of the pub was not just threatened by monologues. *The pub and the people* described a physical fight between 'Jack', 'Peter', and 'Peter's woman' – and how a female 'rescue party' ended it.[111] In the vault at the Hen and Chickens, Sommerfield observed a row between two men 'quarrelling about politics': 'One keeps saying "If ee don't like the country why don't ee go away. No one stops me getting a living". Then he suddenly shouts "Why should they be there?" "I'll not argue that". They begin to shout.' The drinkers in the pub were not a self-regulating community that night, as the landlady had to step in at this point to tell the men to '"shut up"'.[112] Pub staff often found themselves having to exercise their authority – imposing discipline, restoring friendly relations, and preventing possible violence. Observers struggled to rationalize such interventions. In a report on how an argument ended at the Waterloo Tavern, one observer interpreted the landlord's actions as an effort 'to retain the goodwill of *all*, and favour no one'.[113]

On occasion, the behaviour of the observers themselves broke the social harmony of the pub and alienated their fellow drinkers. The Worktown project aspired to be scientific. The reports in many ways reflected that goal: each one was headed by a date, a descriptive title, and the initials of the investigating observer; the accounts of what happened were written in the third person; and most reports contained the systematic recording of a particular action. However, as the reports were not 'cleaned up' through editing processes nor overlaid with secondary analysis, the human agents behind the prose are exposed. And observers could be all too human.[114] Despite having seen how political discussions could pull in other drinkers and become heated, observers sometimes could not help themselves. The research subject and object became blurred. At the Woodman Inn on a Saturday night, two investigators involved other patrons in their conversation about the 'Spanish situation' – but not without passing judgement on the 'appalling'

[110] 'Pubs', [NOTES], 26 May [?], WC, 3/D, MOA, p. 2.

[111] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 242.

[112] 'Hen and Chickens vault', observations and conversations overheard, JS, 10 June [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1. Italics replace underlining in the original. *The pub and the people*'s only example of a 'Political' argument was one about the ideas of Robert Owen and Charles Darwin. Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 189.

[113] 'Waterloo Tavern, Folds Road', conversations with customers, 8 June [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1. Italics replace underlining in the original.

[114] The publication of Malinowski's diary in 1967 would show that even 'the doyen of the discipline had been exposed to temptation, had displayed the frailties of boredom, malice, frustration, longing for his own kind, and gave his most petty miseries full expression'. Raymond Firth, 'Second introduction 1988', in Bronislaw Malinowski, *A diary in the strict sense of the term* (London, 1989 edn), p. xxix.

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'ignorance displayed'. After the observer 'devastate[d]' his opponents' arguments with a 'wordy victory', the exchange of views ended abruptly and 'a strange period of quiet' followed.[115]

Even when observers kept their discipline in the pub, they could still give in to the temptation to set out a winning argument or to deliver a withering put down in the report. At the Packhorse Restaurant on a Saturday night, Harrisson listened in to a crude conversation between two men. He described one as being 'over six foot and thin [and] the other thickset boxer style'.[116] Throughout his report, Harrisson referred to the latter as 'Thickset' or 'thick wit'. The pair asked the waiter for cheese,

> choosing gorgonzola, and (it seems to obs., by now a bit prejudiced against thick wit) that he chose this cheese because it had an *a* at the end of its name (culture, knowledge, which gorgonzola's values has [sic] been emphasised by sanctions and Abyssinia; man looked like a pot[ential] fascist, of [a] type we need to study especially and which seems to have been much produced by Bolton school about 7–10 years ago.[117]

In Harrisson's view, a penchant for Italian cheese – or words ending with the letter 'a' – was enough evidence to conclude that an individual was a latent fascist. Here was an observation which displayed the wit of the staircase rather than the impartiality of the social scientist. But it also suggests how much Harrisson was worrying about current affairs. The prospect of war confronted observers with the idea that time was running out on the timelessness of the pub.[118]

Harrisson was not the only member of the team to reveal a preoccupation with hierarchy and authority. Sommerfield wrote of a barmaid at the Fleece who stood 'like a priestess making ceremonial movements'.[119] Pushing the analogy one step higher, another observer noted the apparent 'prestige' of the head barman at the Pack Horse Hotel: 'those under him seem to think he's a God'.[120] Authoritarian behaviour was more military than pious at the Yates Wine Lodge, where the manager was spotted 'instructing barmen like a general directing troops'.[121] Such representations of the Worktown project's subjects effectively undermined one of the major contentions of the pub

[115] 'Woodman Inn, Carlyle St', observations and overheard conversations, 25 June [?], WC, 3/A, MOA, p. 1. Italics replace underlining in the original.

[116] 'The Packhorse restaurant', observations and overheard conversations at the restaurant, 31 July [?], WC, 3/D, MOA, p. 3.

[117] The report contains typographical errors and missing letters which we have edited for grammatical coherence. Ibid.

[118] When Sommerfield returned to Bolton's pubs after the war, he found 'the fundamental *rhythm*' 'unchanged'. Harrisson, *Britain revisited*, p. 188.

[119] 'Pubs', observations and conversations at the Fleece lounge bar, JS, 28 Apr. [?], WC, 3/D, MOA, p. 1.

[120] 'Survey of pubs, Bradshawgate', EL, 7 May 1937, WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 2.

[121] 'Pubs', observations at Yates Wine Lodge, JS, 22 Apr. [?], WC, 3/B, MOA, p. 1.

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study: that social drinking provided an egalitarian alternative to the inequities of modern life. As Alexandre Campsie has highlighted, Mass Observation, among other things, was the leader of a wider movement studying the everyday so as to build socialism up from concrete foundations.[122] The observers at the Park View Inn for Oak Apple Day even thought 'Charlie' looked 'exactly as if it was giving the "popular front salute"'.[123] That line linking the pub's communal rites with the struggle against fascism made it into *The pub and the people*; the descriptions of managers and bar staff who exalted themselves above their subordinates did not.

According to one observer, pub-goers could not escape from work worries and could not refrain from boasting about their occupational prowess:

> what hero's [sic] they become in conversation. It's a pity to spoil that self satisfied look when the gentleman with the ear is impressed by the show of bravado or ability. Other people besides these honest simple folk have this craving to be big, but the foolish world rolls on…Where in the mists of the past does the cause of dissatisfaction come from[?] Craving for wealth [is] not all the story but rather a desire for notice, to be above someone else.

Far from experiencing a release from temporal constraints, the 'honest simple folk' that flocked to Bolton's pubs could not cast off an ingrained inferiority complex. In an adjunct to the same report, the observer offered the following: 'Naturalists assure us that all animals are sagacious in proportion as they are removed from the tyranny of others.'[124]

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The Worktown project's photographer, Humphrey Spender, captured how Mass Observation saw the relationship between organized religion and social drinking in an image featuring young children peeping through a fence. They look down on rows of beer barrels and a distant cathedral – the only things that stand out against the industrial gloom.[125] Despite their differences, the pub and the church were institutions from an earlier time and their survival made it possible to experience older ways of relating the past, present, and future to each other. Addressing time problems was a means for Mass Observation to explore both how ordinary people thought – 'conscious[ly] or unconscious[ly]' – and how 'so much of [their] behaviour' was 'determine[d]'. Harrisson and his team found the pub to be regulated by and liberated from

[122] Alexandre Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, left intellectuals, and the politics of everyday life', *English Historical Review*, 131 (2016), pp. 92–121, at pp. 95–6.

[123] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, p. 210.

[124] Untitled report, observations of staff and customers in an unspecified pub, undated, WC, 3/C, MOA, pp. 2–5 and 7.

[125] See Deborah Frizzell, *Humphrey Spender's humanist landscapes: photo-documents, 1932–1942* (New Haven, CT, 1997).

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the public time that usually governed life in Bolton. Drinking patterns were tied to the rhythms of the factory and the weekly pay day, but observers were otherwise struck by the remarkable fluidity of time. Boltonians did not just experience time as linear and acceleratory. Inside 'pub-time', drinkers performed rituals based on instinct and social convention.[126] Treating rounds and drinking level ensured that patrons interacted with each other on an equal footing. Mass Observation interpreted these behaviours as evidence that the pub fostered an egalitarianism and community spirit from an earlier time. To an extent, the timeless rituals of pub-based leisure encouraged a glorification of the past and nostalgia for pre-industrial life.[127] Yet this image was undermined by investigative reports concerned with displays of undemocratic behaviour, hierarchical power structures, and the intrusion of contemporary politics. The archival material breaks down the orderly classification presented in the published work to offer richer and more varied glimpses of the tangled fabric of time. Mass Observation's findings brought the pub into closer alignment with newer forms of commercial entertainment. Like other late 1930s leisure institutions, the pub provided an arena for confronting and articulating present uncertainties in response to both cultural change and a volatile political climate. The pub was part of a society in transition, not set apart from it; both the pub and Britain were neither anchored to the past nor fixed on the future, but instead caught up in a state of flux.

[126] Mass-Observation, *The pub and the people*, pp. 198, 213, and 330.

[127] On nostalgia as a response to the modern experience of time, see Svetlana Boym, *Future of nostalgia* (New York, NY, 2002).

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