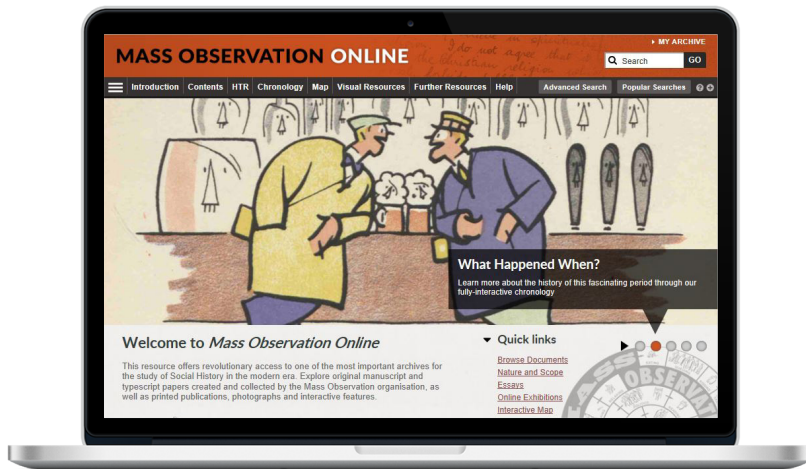


Mass Observation Online at the University of Bristol



SOCI20064: Investigating the Social

The *Investigating the Social* module, open to second-year Sociology students, focusses on introducing different empirical research methods as well as the planning and undertaking of research using qualitative methods. Working closely with the university's Social Sciences librarian, course leaders were introduced to *Mass Observation Online* and looked to build the resource into the course.

Adam Matthew's Mass Observation Online collection includes unique diaries written by volunteers. Each is anonymous and diarists were encouraged to simply record their lives, feelings and opinions without a delegated structure or guide.

In one example of use, students were asked to find a diary related to a topic they had already chosen for a future assignment. Students were also asked to share this diary choice with class to discuss their experience in researching with qualitative historical data. After some initial struggles understanding the navigation of a digital resource, students become more familiar with processes for finding material as well as the patience and skill needed when studying handwritten primary sources.

Students are also tasked with interrogating *Mass Observation Online* as a general research source. A task designed to promote independent critical thinking about the pros and cons of diary writing as a social research method.

- *Mass Observation Online* has been a featured resource in the teaching of this module every year since 2016
- Students and lecturers noted that *Mass Observation Online* served as a unique and engaging resource
- Using a digital resource encouraged students to become researchers themselves and adopt a critical analysis of sources
- Students gained an understanding of the benefits and cost of research methods for complex material
- Many students recognised the limitations of diaries and how a lack of structure makes them difficult to analyse with qualitative methods.