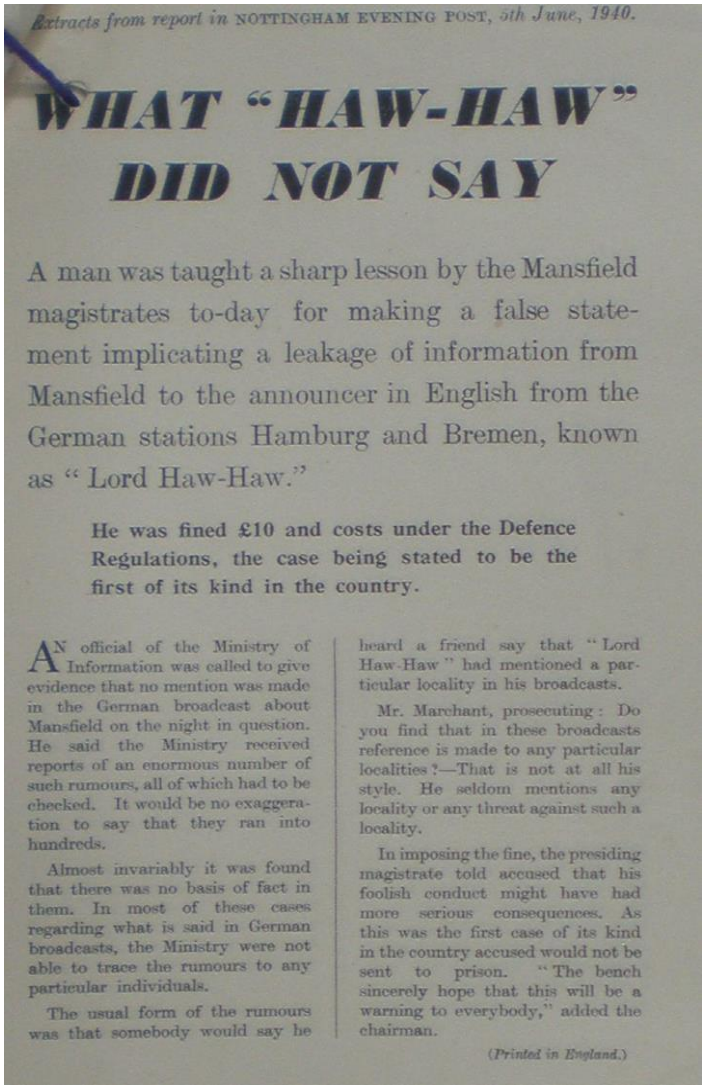
Confronting Lord Haw–Haw: Rumour and Britain's Wartime Anti-Lies Bureau

On 30 May 1940, Sidney House, a 54-year-old clerk at the Mansfield labour exchange, reported to the police that, three days earlier, he heard the German radio propagandist Lord Haw-Haw threaten the occupation of local schools by German troops. The authorities set about verifying House's account. The BBC Monitoring Service, which screened all foreign radio programmes throughout the Second World War, checked its transcriptions of German broadcasts. No such threat was issued by the infamous radio announcer. The police interviewed House again, this time warning him of the potential consequences of a false statement under the General Regulations of the 1939 Defence Act. House confessed that he did not personally hear the broadcast; instead he had 'overheard some people talking about it as they passed my garden'. When pressed, House admitted that he had invoked Haw-Haw's name in order to give his story force and legitimacy: 'it would have had more effect than if I heard it from someone else'. Asserting his patriotic credentials as a 'Britisher', House pleaded that he did not 'intend to harm anyone'. His pleas fell on deaf ears. House was charged with 'unlawfully making a statement which he knew to be false' and stood trial at Mansfield Magistrates Court in June 1940. [1] The case was the first relating to Haw-Haw broadcasts to be prosecuted under the provision about false statements within the Defence Regulations.

The prosecuting counsel focused on the proliferation of rumours generated by House's statement and the potential damage to public morale. Cecil de Sausmarez, a representative of Britain's Ministry of Information (MoI), presented evidence from the BBC Monitoring Service, and reported on the 'enormous number of such rumours' that had been swamping the Ministry. R.P. Marchant, for the prosecution, declared that 'unfounded rumours are much too prevalent throughout the country at the moment'. House was found guilty and issued with a £10 fine and five guineas costs to be settled within one month. The presiding magistrate, Mr G. Annable, expressed the 'hope that this will be a warning to everybody'. The Ministry of Information seized upon Annable's invitation and

[1] *The Defence (General) Regulations, vol. 1, 1939*, 13th edition (HMSO, 1943).

issued a leaflet on House's case (Figure 1), while local and national press carried news of the trial.[2]



Extracts from report in NOTTINGHAM EVENING POST, *5th June, 1940.*

WHAT "HAW-HAW" DID NOT SAY

A man was taught a sharp lesson by the Mansfield magistrates to-day for making a false statement implicating a leakage of information from Mansfield to the announcer in English from the German stations Hamburg and Bremen, known as "Lord Haw-Haw."

He was fined £10 and costs under the Defence Regulations, the case being stated to be the first of its kind in the country.

AN official of the Ministry of Information was called to give evidence that no mention was made in the German broadcast about Mansfield on the night in question. He said the Ministry received reports of an enormous number of such rumours, all of which had to be checked. It would be no exaggeration to say that they ran into hundreds.

Almost invariably it was found that there was no basis of fact in them. In most of these cases regarding what is said in German broadcasts, the Ministry were not able to trace the rumours to any particular individuals.

The usual form of the rumours was that somebody would say he heard a friend say that "Lord Haw-Haw" had mentioned a particular locality in his broadcasts.

Mr. Marchant, prosecuting: Do you find that in these broadcasts reference is made to any particular localities?—That is not at all his style. He seldom mentions any locality or any threat against such a locality.

In imposing the fine, the presiding magistrate told accused that his foolish conduct might have had more serious consequences. As this was the first case of its kind in the country accused would not be sent to prison. "The bench sincerely hope that this will be a warning to everybody," added the chairman.

(*Printed in England.*)

Figure 1: MoI publicity on prosecutions for spreading Haw-Haw rumours, 6 June 1940.

News of House's conviction broke on 6 June 1940, shortly after the completion of the British Expeditionary Force's evacuation from Dunkirk. Indeed, House shared the front page of the *Daily Mirror* with news from the Picardy beaches. At such a critical moment in the war, with the imminent fall of France

[2] False Story of "Lord Haw-Haw" broadcast', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser,* 6 June 1940, p. 4; 'Mansfield Clerk taught a sharp lesson', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5 June 1940, p. 5; 'Penalty for Spreading False Rumour', *The Citizen*, 5 June 1940, p. 5. The case was also reported in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5 June 1940, p. 7, *The Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 June 1940, p. 1, and on the front page of the *Daily Mirror*, 5 June 1940*;* 'First Chatterbug Squashed', *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1940, p. 7.

and the prospect of invasion, the British Government was concerned to eliminate any threat to public morale and invested considerable time and effort in collecting, analysing and tracing the source of rumours in public circulation, primarily through the establishment of an Anti-Lies Bureau within the MoI in 1940. The Bureau was established to track the influence of rumours, in particular those generated by the wartime propaganda broadcasts from Germany to Britain. It later played a central role in prosecuting individuals, including House, accused of spreading rumours under the 1939 Defence Act. This article examines the significance of the Bureau's work and is based on a little used but extensive collection of letters sent by the public to the Bureau, held at the National Archives and the BBC Written Archives. The Bureau kept, logged and responded to the hundreds of letters it received reporting rumours, so preserving an otherwise ephemeral and oral historical source.[3]

Some contemporaries and historians subsequently doubted the effect and importance of Haw-Haw's broadcasts. Martin Doherty, reflecting the narrative of patriotic resilience and national impermeability, concludes that 'all in all, the British were probably too stubborn, too phlegmatic, too pig–headed to be propagandised by Germans in wartime';[4] Jean Seaton asserts that 'on any empirical standards, he was 100% unsuccessful. He didn't persuade anybody';[5] Michael Balfour, who worked for the MoI during the war, characterised Haw-Haw's broadcasts as entirely ineffectual, cast into obscurity by a victorious BBC, with J.B. Priestley's *Postcripts* leading the charge.[6] Placing emphasis on the success of *Postscripts*, Sian Nicholas characterises the appeal of Haw-Haw as little more than an 'indictment of the quality of British broadcasting' in 1940. But there is more to public reactions surrounding the German subversive broadcasts to Britain than their failure to produce a collapse in home front morale. While Nicholas claims that the MoI 'entirely misjudged the nature of Joyce's appeal', she

[3] It is not clear how many letters the Bureau received. The Bureau did not keep a numerical record, and those selecting documents for the National Archives would only have kept a representative sample of the letters received.
[4] M. A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda. Lord Haw–Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 191.
[5] Jean Seaton, interviewed for *Every Case Tells a Story. Treason on Trial* (BBC Radio 4, 15 January 2016).
[6] Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939-1945* (London, 1979), pp. 141-142.

also alludes to an equally critical factor in explaining public reactions to the German wartime propaganda broadcasts: that patriotic sentiment potentially prevented individuals from expressing their deeper concerns about Haw-Haw's pronouncements and from revealing their emotional reactions to them.[7] This problem is compounded by the fact that, as Mass–Observation's Tom Harrisson recognised, the sources most frequently used by historians to reconstruct the national mood (such as Home Intelligence, Mass-Observation, Regional Information Officers' (RIO) and BBC Listener Research Reports) often reveal 'only a part of private opinion and only that part which… *dare* show itself at any moment… [Individuals] will not necessarily voice publicly, as public opinion, certain parts of… *private* opinion, which is a complex of feelings, often conflicting'.[8]

Such observations chime with recent histories of psychology that have drawn attention to the possibility that many emotional and psychological reactions to war were 'unrecognised, unreported, or unaccepted'.[9] While there is little evidence of widespread mental collapse, Mathew Thomson argues, 'fear, bewilderment, and temporary breakdown, were nevertheless common features of the British home front'.[10] Amy Bell's study of fear in wartime London convincingly demonstrates Britons' tendency to repress overt expressions of anxiety, deemed 'bad for morale and a social embarrassment', [11] a claim supported by Ben Shepherd's assessment that the wartime environment incited psychiatrists to support the notion that 'Britain Can Take It' and actively discouraged individuals to present with nervous symptoms.[12] Shepherd documents how, in order to circumvent the various barriers to expressing fear, individuals created and sought out activities that acted as safety valves, an explanation as to why underlying anxieties did not translate into widespread mental collapse.

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[7] Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, 1996), p. 62.
[8] Tom Harrisson, 'What is Public Opinion?', *Political Quarterly* XI, 1–4 (1940), pp. 369, 373.
[9] Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects. Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 227.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Amy Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-45', *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), p. 175.
[12] Ben Shepherd, *A War of Nerves. Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London, 2002), p. 178. Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, p. 178-9.

Social psychologists have long argued that rumour acts as such a safety valve at times of crisis, a means of expressing repressed emotions, fears and anxieties. That the study of rumour might provide an opportunity to examine those feelings was recognised during the war itself. The American psychologist Robert H. Knapp suggested in 1944 that a study of rumour allowed for a 'circumvent[ion of] the resistances and defences of the public' in order to explain 'the deeper structure of public opinion'.[13] Whereas explicit statements of opinion may replicate socially acceptable viewpoints, particularly at times of war, rumour is embedded in inherent social behaviours. Rumour is created, argued Knapp, 'out of the impulse to interpret the world meaningfully and at the same time to gratify or give expression to human motives. Its function is both that of cognitive clarification and emotional expression'. Wartime rumours are, in short, imagined realities that capture individual understandings of conflict and responses to it. [14] As such, the construction and transmission of rumours cannot be interpreted as a pathological condition, as is often the case.[15] Rather, as the sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani argues, 'rumour is part and parcel of the efforts of men to come to terms with the exigencies of life', and so may be used as a means for understanding social structure and community interactions, and human behaviours, needs and emotions.[16]

War provides fertile ground for an examination of the significance of rumour. Scholars of rumour from all disciplinary backgrounds agree that rumour thrives in critical or uncertain environments. Shibutani postulated that rumours assume particular importance when news becomes scarce or is considered unreliable, and at times of 'sustained collective tension', where rumour functions as a mechanism for reasserting some degree of control when individuals perceive themselves to be powerless.[17] 'Since men under sustained collective tension are already aroused', he noted, 'attention is easily focused upon any object that is

[13] Robert H. Knapp, 'A Psychology of Rumor', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 8:1 (Spring, 1944), p. 28.
[14] Ibid., p. 31.
[15] Cass Sunstein, *On Rumours* (London, 2009). My emphasis.
[16]Shibutani, *Improvised News*, p. 62.
[17] Tamotsu Sibutani, *Improvised News. A sociological study of rumor* (Indianapolis, 1966), pp. 46-49.

likely to provide direction. A public has already started to form, and a rumour quickly sharpens its boundaries'.[18] Shibutani's thesis proposed that rumour formation was subject to a complex dynamic. It captures the notion that, at times, rumour sutures (sometimes unconnected) events together in an attempt at 'collective problem solving... [where individuals or groups] construe a meaningful interpretation... by pooling intellectual resources'; at other times, it fragments and challenges such conceptions, causing confusion and disorientation. Rumours sate the desire for information, becoming a platform for 'improvised news' where official confirmation does not or cannot exist. While not obviating a sense of foreboding, the practice of 'improvising news' provides a form of psychological stability in which events appear to be 'foreseen' or 'predictable'.[19]

Persistent rumour-mongering in wartime Britain was, in part, generated by popular suspicions that the authorities were withholding certain details about the course of the war. As a result, Britons turned to German broadcasts in the of winter 1939–40 through to late summer 1940, and again in the spring and summer of 1942, in order to glean the slightest piece of new information. The German broadcasts did indeed contain such titbits, but they were also infused with disinformation and propaganda, which in turn generated further speculations among British people. Moreover, passing on, elaborating and embroidering this information became a means of asserting control over an unpredictable situation. Reporting on the House case, the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury* accused the defendant of succumbing to 'one of the commonest motives for rumour-mongering in wartime. We all of us like feeling that we possess some exclusive piece of news which would create a sensation if revealed. It flatters our vanity and our sense of power'.[20] This was the potential destructive force of German radio propaganda. Consequently, the Government recognised that it had both to confront Haw-Haw's allegations and to close down the inventions and elaborations around them.

Given the possibilities of studies of rumour to assist understanding of how individuals reacted to war and uncertain environments, rumour should not be

[18] Ibid., p. 56.
[19] Ibid., *passim.*
[20] *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 7 June 1940, p. 4

dismissed as an assortment of fanciful and meaningless tales circulated by the 'unthinking masses'. Rather better means should be sought to understand what rumour represented, and its wider significance for complex historical events and processes. It is rumour's ability not only to reflect deeper attitudes which are otherwise often obscured by the limited sources documenting public opinion, but also its ability to shape behaviours that affect the polity that lies at the heart of this article. Rumours operated as a site for negotiation between the individual and the state. In wartime Britain, rumour was transformed into a tool for positioning the individual beyond false dichotomies of conformity and resistance, allowing for a more sophisticated definition of state control and how contemporaries experienced it. Government policy toward tracking rumour and the prosecution of rumour-mongers defined the limits of public acceptance of the principles underpinning the General Regulations of the 1939 Defence Act. Rumour was as much about dissent from as accommodation of government security policy, and popular reaction to this policy reveals much about individual and collective agency. As such, a study of the rumours surrounding the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw permits insight into the dynamics of power and how it is negotiated.

Confronting 'the Voice': Early Press Reaction to Haw-Haw and the Establishment of the Anti-Lies Bureau

William Joyce first broadcast on the German home service radio on 6 September 1939 and, according to MI5, to Britain from 18 September.[21] Known initially only as 'the Voice', he was employed as scriptwriter for and contributor to the *Concordia* stations (or the *geheime Sonderdienststelle*), established in October 1939. There were six regular or semi-regular stations broadcasting in English from Germany to the UK[22] and several temporary stations, with up to nine

[21] E. Shelmerdine to Mr Wakefield on Joyce's early broadcasts, 8 September 1945, TNA KV2/247. Transcripts of the BBC Monitoring Service, E189–214, Imperial War Museum, Duxford. These records have since been transferred to the BBC.

[22] These were *New British Broadcasting Station* (February 1940- April 1945), *Worker's Challenge* (July 1940–late 1944), *the Christian Peace Movement* (later renamed the Christian Peace Pledge, July 1940–February 1942), *Radio National* (July 1943–April 1945), and *Radio Caledonia* for Scottish audiences (July 1940–

transmissions daily of around 15 minutes.[23] In March 1940, the BBC estimated that the subversive stations attracted 6 million regular listeners and 18 million occasional listeners.[24] Joyce's broadcasts dwelt on sensitive subjects, such as Britain's plutocratic caste, slum housing, unemployment, class disparities, the excesses of Empire, and anti-Semitism. They extracted stories from the British Press for comment, released what they claimed to be 'censored news', and encouraged Britons to take matters into their own hands by forming local fifth-column units designed to topple the Government. The segment of the New British Broadcasting Station's programme entitled 'Between Ourselves' offered detailed instructions to potential fifth-columnists and *agents provocateurs*, including propaganda strategies and how to commit acts of sabotage. Given the potential for Joyce's words to incite subversive action and thought, the broadcasts were transcribed word-for-word at the BBC Monitoring Service; the Department for Publicity in Enemy Countries used the transcripts to prepare briefings for the War Cabinet, including analyses of themes, propagandistic pressure points, and potential strategies for countering enemy claims.[25]

During the early stages of the war, much work on the subversive stations took place behind closed doors. This led the Press to conclude that the Government, and specifically the MoI, had underestimated the threat to public morale posed by the German propaganda broadcasts. The *Daily Mirror*, already considered a radical influence by the Government, launched the most vociferous

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July 1942): Horst J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves. The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing* (New Haven, 1997), pp. 197–99, and Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda*, pp. 1–34.

[23] For example, the dedicated female station, *Polly on the Wire* (October 1940), *Welsh National Radio* (July and August 1940), *Free India Radio* (from February 1941), and *Station Debunk* to the United States (March 1942-1943), BBC Monitoring Service records, E189–214. Ogilvie to Stuart, 26 December 1939, HO 186/313. There is some suggestion that Joyce had been identified, however. See, for example, WAC R34/639/1. See also, 'Studies in British Propaganda: The Voice of Hamburg' BBC, 14 February 1940, TNA FO 371/24393.

[24] 'Hamburg Broadcasting Propaganda. Summary of the results of an enquiry into the extent and effect of its impact on the British Public during mid-Winter 1939/40', Listener Research Section, BBC, 8 March 1940, LR/98, HO 186/313.

[25] See, for example, 'Analysis of German Propaganda', January 1–15 1940, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for the war Cabinet, January 1940, FO 371/24393.

attack on the assumed official response to the subversive stations in June 1940, with the creation of its Anti-Haw-Haw League. The columnist Bill Greig accused the MoI of failing to '[raise] a hand… against' Haw-Haw, asking his readers to make a pledge: 'put your hand on that heart of yours and promise that: **you will never again listen to Haw-Haw or to one of his drivelling clan. You will refuse to hear any mention of his name. You will do all in your power, by derision and use of facts, to stop the spread of any harmful rumour, whether from Haw-Haw or not**'.[26] The newspaper issued flyers and stickers for readers' wireless sets (Figure 2). By 10 June, Greig claimed to have inspired an anti-Haw-Haw street (Leahurst Road, Lewisham), followed five days later by the proclamation of the first anti-Haw-Haw town, Woolwich, appropriately the home of the famous arsenal.[27] By 19 June, the League boasted 50,000 pledges. [28]

[26] Bill Greig, 'Join League to kill voice of Haw Haw', *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1940, p. 3. Bold in original.
[27] *Daily Mirror*, 10 June 1940, p. 3; *Daily Mirror*, 15 June 1940, p. 2.
[28] *Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1940, p. 2.

Figure 2: Anti-Haw-Haw League Radio Sticker, *Daily Mirror*, 6 June 1940.

However, the *Daily Mirror* campaign provided further publicity for the German subversive broadcasts, trading on Haw-Haw's notoriety and on public fascination with the nation's new anti-hero. Even before the advent of the League, Lord Haw-Haw had entered the British popular consciousness through both mainstream and more outlandish media. He was the subject of regular feature articles in newspapers and magazines, popular songs by the comedic duo the Western Brothers, pantomime jokes, and a highly-successful West-End show at the Holborn Empire starring Max Miller.[29] He featured in adverts to sell woollen vests and margarine (Figure 3),[30] as the focus of wall chalkings in Fulham,[31] and

[29] Advertisement for 'Haw–Haw!', *Daily Mail*, 14 February 1940, p. 8; 'Pantomime Report', Mass-Observation Archive (M-O A) File Report (FR) 45 (L.E.), March 1940.
[30] Advertisement for Wolsey, *Picture Post*, 11 September 1943, p. 2.
[31] 'Wall Chalkings, Fulham' (H.P.), 5 October 1940, M-O A Topic Collection (TC) 87/43.

as the namesake of an Indian Mynah bird who 'imitates the nasal tone of that humourist as he says "This is Germany calling. This is Germany calling"', the star of the caged bird exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall in February 1940.[32] Jonah Barrington of the *Daily Express*, who coined the pseudonym 'Lord Haw–Haw', claimed that within weeks of the 'Christening', Haw–Haw 'had become an international character'. Despite describing Haw–Haw's transmissions as 'pure poison', Barrington asserted that 'through the columns of the *Daily Express*, he has been transformed into a harmless (and widely popular) comedian'.[33] Barrington undoubtedly profited from association with Haw–Haw's infamy, and the *Daily Express*, having seemingly neutralised Joyce's propagandistic bite by mockery, could assert patriotic advantage over its Press rivals. For the *Daily Express*, capitalising on Haw–Haw was as much about commerce as counter–propaganda. A letter from J.L. Garbutt, the editor of the *Express*, to Frederick Ogilvie, Director General of the BBC, in December 1939 exposed the newspaper's intention to seek the 'scoop': suggesting that the BBC rebut Haw-Haw's claims through special broadcasts, Garbutt asked, 'Should this idea find favour, and eventually be adopted, may I say that my only request is that I be given first intimation of it, and allowed to publish the story exclusively'.[34] Journalists and advertisers were not immune to exploiting propaganda for profit; indeed, as Jay Winter noted of the First World War, the two were not mutually exclusive.[35] If, as Mass–Observation commented, Haw–Haw was 'the joint production of the German propaganda ministry and our own popular imagination', then the Press was complicit in its manufacture.[36]

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[32] 'Birds on the Air', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 1940, p. 6.
[33] Jonah Barrington, *Lord Haw–Haw of Zeesen* (Tiptree, 1939), p. 9.
[34] J.L Garbutt to Ogilvie, 27 December 1939, WAC R34/639/1.
[35] Jay Winter cited in James Aulich and John Hewitt, *Seduction or Instruction? First World War Posters in Britain and Europe* (Manchester, 2007), p. 115.
[36] 'Public and Private Opinion of Haw–Haw', M-O A FR 65, 29 March 1940. See also a Home Intelligence report which blamed the *Daily Mirror's* 'Anti– Haw–Haw League' campaign for an increase in listenership, 'Points from Regions (Bristol)', 12 June 1940, in Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain. Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour. May to September 1940* (London, 2010), p. 106.

Figure 3: Advert for Meadow Dairy Margarine, *Picture Post*, 11 September 1943,

Such publicity served to exaggerate the initial threat posed by the subversive broadcasts, generated further public speculation about the veracity of Haw-Haw's claims, and unwittingly made it difficult to measure their effect on morale, ultimately misleading officials attempting to develop counter-propaganda strategies. Press coverage operated at the extremes. Campaigns, such as that orchestrated by Greig, denounced all rumour-mongers as fifth-columnists and

traitors, while Barrington sought to portray Haw-Haw as a subject for popular ridicule and light entertainment. Humour was frequently mobilised by individuals to mask deeper feelings of insecurity induced by Nazi broadcasts. Mass–Observation, the anthropological movement established in 1937 to record a 'science of ourselves', remarked upon the public's ability to mimic the light–hearted approach adopted by certain journalists. Mass–Observation noted the 'striking… difference between their own [the public's] private view and what they think the public thinks… To say that Haw–Haw is worth listening to because he's so funny is the stock response, the social sterio [sic], neutralising or at any rate masking a private tendency to feel uneasy or depressed'. Mass-Observers concluded that it was 'unwise to underestimate Haw–Haw's final effect because it is the done thing to call him funny'. [37] Raymond Burns, writing in *The Evening News and Southern Mail* in January 1940, warned that 'as the emotional strain of this war increases, we may pay rather a price in nerves among some listeners for the mistake we made in hailing the broadcasts with glee', not least since the tendency to listen in to the Hamburg station revealed a mistrust of official news and the suspicion that important information was being censored.[38]

While the BBC pointed to the draw of the 'exotic', with the public seemingly unable to deny themselves the '"thrill" of hearing, from the comfortable security of one's fireside, the voice of one's would–be destroyer', its report into the Hamburg broadcasts accused listeners of 'ransacking the wavebands' in a misplaced 'desire to "hear both sides"' by 'a people that prides itself on its fair-mindedness'.[39] Setting aside the patriotic sentiment inherent in this statement, the BBC identified a link between the subversive broadcasts and wider public concern over the extent of censorship. A Regional Information Officer's report from Belfast on 29 June 1940 indicated that 'Many people are reported to think that there is some ground for Haw–Haw's attack on the BBC and British

[37] 'Public and Private Opinion of Haw–Haw', M-O A FR 65, 29 March 1940. 'Sterio' is reproduced in the original.
[38] 'Propaganda by the Fireside', *Evening News and Southern Daily Mail*, 27 January 1940, p. 4.
[39] 'Hamburg Broadcasting Propaganda. Summary of the results of an enquiry into the extent and effect of its impact on the British Public during mid-Winter 1939/40', Listener Research Section, BBC, 8 March 1940, LR/98, HO 186/313.

newspaper editorials for glossing over unpleasant facts'. [40] Fears over censorship were particularly acute with the revelation that in July 1940 the Government had withheld news of the sinking of the *SS Lancastria*, with numbers of those listening to the Hamburg station increasing in order 'to obtain a more correct version'.[41] Haw–Haw was not to be dismissed as an enemy propagandist peddling lies: rather he was regarded by the authorities as 'a well–informed syndicate', using 'material… taken directly and quite fairly accurately from British sources'. [42] Moreover, Mass–Observation overheard conversations that credited the broadcasts with offering 'tit-bits of truth' which were later confirmed by officials, adding to Haw-Haw's legitimacy as a news source.[43]

The perceived paucity of news on the progress of the war combined with popular mistrust of government reports and the suggestion that Nazi propaganda broadcasts were supplying withheld information created a fertile environment for the spread of rumour. As Shibutani argues, 'if the demand for news in a public exceeds the supply made available through institutional channels, rumour construction is likely to occur'.[44] The Press made every effort, on rare occasions as a result of encouragement from the MoI, to neutralise the importance and character of the Haw–Haw rumours. Reports either reduced the rumours to petty concerns, one example being John Walter's cartoon for *Punch* (figure 4), or provided counter-evidence, such as the *Daily Mail* article that sought to disprove Haw–Haw's claim that evacuees were undernourished by reporting on children's increased body weight since the start of the war.[45] While the content of Haw-Haw's broadcasts could be rebutted, speculations, abstractions, misunderstandings and rumour were far more difficult to control and quickly

[40] Home Intelligence Report, 'Points from the regions (Belfast)', 29 June 1940, in Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 167. See also, 'Reaction to Enemy Broadcasts, RIO Scotland to Home Division and HI, 22 May 1940, TNA INF 1/265/6.
[41] Home Intelligence Report, 'Points from the regions (London)', 31 July 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 288.
[42] Ogilvie to Stuart, 26 December 1939, HO 186/313.
[43] 'Radio Survey. Liverpool Street–Romford', 5 May 1940, M–O A TC 74/59–77.
[44] Shibutani, *Improvised News*, p. 57.
[45] 'Roast Lamb Lunch for Ten in Mrs Woods' Home', *Daily Mail*, 15 January 1940, p. 7; Andrew Stewart (Broadcasting Division) to Kenneth Clark, Mr Macadam, HI, and Miss Neville-Rolfe, n.d., INF 1/265.

became the authorities' primary concern. However, the officials of the MoI, Home Intelligence and the BBC soon realised that they were dealing with a curious and serious phenomenon: it was not that the public were simply repeating rumours broadcast by Haw-Haw – rather they were falsely attributing all manner of rumours to Joyce in order to lend credibility and authority to speculation, just as Sidney House had done before his prosecution in June 1940. In this context, the rumours were more likely to be believed and relayed, with potentially subversive implications.

Figure 4. *Punch*, 10 July 1940.

A Home Intelligence report of 30 May 1940 warned that, 'Haw–Haw continues to be regarded as the fountain–head of rumours…. Such is his influence that it appears that rumours attributed to him are far more readily believed than those which are said to have other sources'.[46] Britons credited the Haw–Haw broadcasts with providing specific information, information that the BBC

[46] Home Intelligence Report, 'Today's Rumours', 30 May 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 58.

Monitoring Service confirmed was not present in its transcripts.[47] Why did so many rumours in the period from January to September 1940 carry Haw–Haw's 'imprimatur'?[48] The Haw–Haw rumours were of a special character: since Haw–Haw attracted newspaper and government attention and was *en vogue*, the public projected wider concerns and anxieties on to the rumours attributed to Haw–Haw. This might explain why those who admitted to never having listened to Haw–Haw, such as House, continued to construct or repeat rumours which they ascribed to his broadcasts. Haw–Haw rumours became vessels holding a wide variety of public concerns. It was this process, rather than the public opinion of Haw–Haw per se, that formed the basis of the Anti-Lies Bureau's work.

Although the *Daily Mirror* claimed a pivotal role in goading the MoI into responding to Haw-Haw in its publicity campaign to encourage Britons to 'join the Silent Column',[49] the work of the Anti-Lies Bureau had been quietly under way for some time. The Bureau had been formed in early 1940 as part of the Foreign Division of the MoI in order to 'to counter German lies' by releasing 'certain material through the B.B.C and/or the Press'. From the outset the Bureau took the firm line that the materials passed to the media were not 'direct denials of idiotic statements'; rather 'information obtained is woven into general matter which may be disseminated abroad by various agencies'. Its publication, *Talking Points*, was the key mechanism for overseas counter-propaganda initiatives sent to 'chosen people abroad who are depended upon to give currency to the information contained in it'.[50] As a sub-division of the MoI, the Bureau became the victim of

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[47] Home Intelligence Report, 'Rumours', 11 May 1940 and Home Intelligence Report, 'Today's Rumours', 28 May 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 48.

[48] Letter from Shore Hall, Gloucestershire to H.C. de Sausmarez (MoI), 5 June 1940, INF 1/265.

[49] Bill Greig, 'Murdered – for Doing Its Job', *Daily Mirror*, 26 July 1940, p. 10; for an account of the 'Silent Column' campaign and its implications, see Jo Fox, 'Careless Talk: Tensions within British Domestic Propaganda during trhe Second World War', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), pp. 936-966.

[50] Lee Ashton, MoI to T.B. Braund, Director of Public Relations at the Home Office, 12 September 1940, HO 199/462; MoI to Braund, Home Office, 14 September 1940, HO 199/462. The TNA records do not reveal when precisely the Anti-Lies Bureau was formed, although it is likely that it was established to coincide with the initial German broadcasts to Britain and the rumours that accompanied them.

inter-agency disputes and competition, failing to win the co-operation of other government departments and frequently subjected to take-over attempts by ambitious Departments seeking to expand their sphere of influence.[51] In monitoring and countering German radio propaganda activity in the UK, the Bureau became increasingly involved in tracking and tracing rumour. Indeed, this became the main aspect of its work, such was the volume of correspondence from the public it received. Rumours were logged and a response provided to the informer, as a personalised letter scotching the rumour and providing alternative information, although this was later abandoned due to the number of letters received.[52] The Bureau's logbooks permitted the Ministry to collate information about rumours, pinpoint their geography, trace their lifespan and transformation, and record any official action taken. Information was shared with key government agencies and fed into the discussions of the War Cabinet. The Bureau coordinated its activity with the Ministry's network of RIOs to combat rumour at a local level.[53] Following specific appeals in the Press and through the RIOs, the Bureau and the BBC Monitoring Service received hundreds of reports of Haw-Haw rumours in circulation in all parts of the country. Why did the public respond to such appeals on such a scale, and why were Haw-Haw rumours seemingly so prevalent?

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[51] See, for example, the disputes with the Home Office in September 1940: Lee Ashton, MoI to T.B. Braund, Director of Public Relations at the Home Office, 12 September 1940, HO 199/462; MoI to Braund, Home Office, 14 September 1940, HO 199/462. See also, Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London, 1953) for an account of inter-agency tensions. Inter-agency conflict – specifically who had control over communications – was a problem that dogged state wartime propaganda organisations in liberal democracies. The MoI's difficulties, with other government departments and with psychological warfare units (such as the Political Warfare Executive), were replicated in the United States. See Jo Fox, 'The Propaganda War', in R.J.B. Bosworth and J. Maiolo (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume II: Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 94-95.

[52] Records of the Anti-Lies Bureau, INF 1/265.

[53] MoI to T.P. Braund, 12 September 1940, HO 199/462.

Writing to the Bureau: Emotions, Identities and Agency

From the outset, the public were enlisted as participants in the Bureau's work. The Bureau and associated agencies (such as the Home Office and Home Intelligence Division) understood that the process of tracing rumour was labour intensive, and that the extent of rumour–mongering could only be captured through information supplied by the public.[54] The task facing the Bureau was complicated by three interrelated factors: responding to Haw-Haw's false claims was problematic; there was no pattern to the rumours; and the rumours circulated appeared to be unconnected to the actual broadcasts as transcribed by the BBC Monitoring Service.

Ministry officials were reluctant to refute Haw-Haw's claims: it was undesirable to convey the impression that 'the Germans are getting under our skin' by providing additional coverage on the BBC, and yet the Ministry had a responsibility to make the public 'fully aware that this is nothing but extremely active Fifth Column stuff'. [55] Letters to the Bureau frequently demanded official interventions, including calls for systematic jamming and for programmes taking apart Haw-Haw's arguments.[56] However, jamming simply fed popular suspicions over draconian censorship, and BBC involvement was awkward, not least since some members of the public and indeed official bodies blamed failings in BBC output for Haw–Haw's popularity. [57] Mary Adams, the Director of Home Intelligence, advised the Bureau that Haw–Haw was best combated through

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[54] Colonel Crutchley, Home Office, to Lee Ashton, MoI, 24 September 1940, HO199/ 462.

[55] Letter from MoI to N.J.F. Webb, 11 August 1942, INF 1/265; Miss Griffin to Mr Kirkpatrick, 28 May 1940, INF 1/265; Ronald Tree, MoI, to C.T. Culverwell, MP, 4 December 1940, INF 1/265. The deliberations as to how to undermine German radio propaganda can be found in the minutes of the Home Publicity Division meeting, 19 December 1939, WAC R34/639/1.

[56] Home Intelligence Report, 'Points from Regions (Nottingham)', 12 June 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 105. This was also suggested by the Press. See, for example, 'Time to Jam Haw–Haw', *Everybody's Weekly*, February 1940, WAC R34/639/3.

[57] This interpretation has also been forwarded by Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, p. 45.

'[improved] reception of BBC programmes… and official news bulletins'. [58] The BBC's attempt to discredit the broadcasts in a February 1940 radio documentary, *The Ear of Britain*, was met with a mixed response. It also alerted the public to the fact that the BBC Monitoring Service transcribed Nazi propagandists' every word, resulting in an increased demand for copies of the transcripts from members of the public wishing to check the official account of the subversive stations' content.[59]

Unsurprisingly, letters to the Bureau peaked at times of uncertainty (during the phoney war, for example) or crisis (May–September 1940 and with the renewed raids of spring 1942, the so-called Baedeker Raids, and several significant military set-backs, such as the loss of Singapore in February 1942 and Tobruk in June 1942, the difficulties in the Burma campaign in the same year, and the paucity of news from the Eastern Front).[60] These periods were also the most intense for the spread of Haw–Haw rumours. While the tone and content of rumours remained relatively consistent across peak periods, the Bureau noted that there was no distinct pattern in the location of such rumours – they circulated in all parts of the UK, in rural and urban communities – nor in their trajectory, reflecting the cumulative and non-linear properties of rumours. In such circumstances, the Bureau struggled to trace the source of particular rumours and to explain their extent in terms of location and frequency.

The most persistent and widespread rumour related to claims that Haw-Haw mentioned that town hall clocks were running late or displayed an inaccurate time, suggesting the presence of local fifth-columnists or infiltration of German spies. This rumour resurfaced in different locations and at various points in 1940 and 1942. In June 1940, Home Intelligence reported fears that 'Lord Haw-Haw is

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[58] On public encouragement for the BBC to broadcast on Haw–Haw, see Home Intelligence Report, 'Today's Rumours', 29 May 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 53; C.N. Edge, 'How to Combat Haw–Haw', Letter to Editor, *Picture Post*, 24 February 1940, p. 53. These views were also reflected in letters to the MoI, some into January 1941 (Letter to Duff Cooper, 3 January 1941, INF 1/265); Mary Adams, to Andrew Stewart, 28 November 1940, INF 1/265.
[59] 'Listener Research, *The Ear of Britain*, 4 February, 1940', WAC R19/292.
[60] On listenership and the paucity of news from the Eastern Front, see Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda*, p. 134, and, on the effect of the fall of Singapore on British morale, pp. 138–9.

alleged to have stated that the Darlington Town hall clock is two minutes slow, which in fact it is'.[61] Greig's Anti-Haw-Haw League column further perpetuated this rumour by suggesting that similar utterances had been heard as part of the 'three clocks yarn in Silvertown, Cambridge and Wolverhampton'. [62] It was replicated in relation to the Grand Stand at Ascot in March 1941[63] and Harrogate Town Hall in May 1942.[64] While these rumours persisted throughout the war, they were considered 'trivial' compared to the development of a new genre of rumour that 'deal entirely with threats to particular districts… the Anti-Lies Bureau has heard that alleged threats to bomb particular factories or areas are having a very wide and disturbing effect'.[65] Through careful comparison between the rumours and the transcripts of the broadcasts, it became clear that Haw-Haw was not in fact making threats to specific districts;[66] rather he made general inferences (for example, 'it is merely necessary to drop a few powerful bombs on Crewe, Rugby, Leicester, Birmingham and Doncaster to render rail transport completely useless').[67]

Why did so many Britons falsely attribute rumours to the subversive broadcasts? The answer may lie in reading the letters to the Bureau through a sociological and psychological lens. The sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani regarded rumour as an act of 'collective problem solving' and a means of coping with ambiguous or uncertain situations, where appropriate actions remain ill–defined but individuals feel compelled to act.[68] Rather than a passive anxiety response, rumour construction and transmission became a 'collective transaction, involving a division of labor among participants, each of whom makes a different

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[61] Home Intelligence Report, 'Today's Rumours', 5 June 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, p. 83.
[62] 'Your Job to Kill Haw Haw Panic Stories', *Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1940, p. 2.
[63] Walter Bumbely to MoI, 6 March 1941, INF 1/265.
[64] D.S Willberby to MoI, 18 May 1942, INF 1/265.
[65] Neville-Rolfe to Macadam, 10 September 1940, INF 1/265. This observation was confirmed by Home Intelligence Reports, for example, that of 12 September 1940, and informed by others, that of 13 September 1940, Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, e.g. pp/ 414, 418. Neville–Rolfe uses language taken directly from this report in his letter to Macadam.
[66] Statement by MoI on Haw–Haw rumours, 26 May 1940, INF 1/265.
[67] MoI to A. Woodhouse, 3 June 1942, INF 1/265.
[68] Shibutani, *Improvised News*, pp. 9, 17, 62.

contribution, acting as, for example, evaluator, speculator, 'messenger…, interpreter, … sceptic,… protagonist,… agitator… [and] decision–maker':[69] such roles were to be found in the letters to the Bureau. Moreover, since rumour is frequently constructed outside an 'institutional framework', he argued, 'there are opportunities for spontaneity, expediency, and improvisation'. [70] Such improvisation included the tendency of individuals to shape and tailor rumour to particular needs or anxieties, including false attribution to gain greater attention from the authorities by those in a powerless and unstable situation. At times, emotional and psychological need drove the decision to write to the Ministry; at others, the practice was far more instrumental.

Instrumental practice, whereby those who reported rumour used institutional mechanisms for their own benefit, is prevalent in letters to the authorities. This practice features heavily in Jean Noel Kapferer's explanation of rumour as a form of currency with a distinct 'commodity value', contending that 'the immediate re–diffusion of a rumour… can be compared to consumer behaviour in countries where the local currency depreciates rapidly: people spend their money as soon as they receive it in order to capitalise on its monetary value'.[71] Information possesses a specific value at a given time, and rumour transmission results in rewards and gratification, characterised frequently by the lessening of 'cognitive dissonance' through the reduction of anxiety or as a form of catharsis. Kapferer's thesis might explain the speed and scope of rumour transmission in wartime Britain. The value and currency of information regarding potential air–raids in the summer of 1940 and again during renewed raids in 1942 was particularly high, especially where there was a 'paucity of official news'.[72] The Bureau was so inundated with letters during the 'Baedeker Raids' that it appealed to other departments for assistance, warning that they were not dealing with 'one or two individuals claiming to have heard the threats, but widespread rumours'.[73]

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[69] Shibutani, *Improvised News,* pp. 13–15.
[70] Ibid., p. 23.
[71] Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors. Uses, Interpretations, and Images* (New Brunswick, 1991), pp. 51–52. See also Knapp on rumour and gratification, Knapp, 'A Psychology of Rumor', p. 23.
[72] Adams to Stewart, 28 November 1940, INF 1/265.
[73] Jellicoe to Parker, 13 May 1942, INF 1/266.

The nature of the letters to the authorities suggest that individuals were seeking to exchange information on the Haw–Haw rumours for official knowledge of potential raids, correlating with Kapferer's suggestion that 'rumours [may] not *take off* from the truth but [they certainly] *seek out* the truth', or rather what is *perceived* to be the truth.[74] In short, creating or repeating a rumour is a 'purposive behaviour'.[75]

That the public thought the Government *knew* of future raids and was deliberately withholding details from the population further emphasised the popular mistrust of the authorities and news reports. The majority of letters were individually tailored requests for details of government information about local raids – in particular individual requests for information about the letter-writers' own streets or towns, or about buildings or local businesses they frequented. In many cases, individuals wanted to protect themselves from the effects of raids but also from the deleterious effects of the rumours themselves. One letter, from McSymonds' Stores, a steamship furnishers based in Liverpool, lamented the loss of business due to the rumour that the store had been razed to the ground – they sustained damage in a raid but continued to trade. Postal censors prevented the store from contacting clients to scotch these rumours, which intensified the speculation, not only in Britain but in ports around the world, demonstrating the ability of rumour to travel. McSymonds subsequently lost significant amounts of income.[76] Rumours were not confined to the threat of bombing, however; they extended to unemployment, financial collapse, fear that employees would not be paid, Hitler's 'plans' to intensify sleep deprivation workers, and war profiteering, all of which led the Ministry to fear widespread defeatism among war workers. Holmes Brothers, specialising in precision woodwork, was concerned that its trading name had been brought into disrepute following a rumour accusing the firm of 'profiteering at the expense of the workers'.[77] Oldham, Holland and Co.,

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[74] Kapferer in Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumour and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, 2000), p. 84.
[75] Robert Paine, 'What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis', *Man* (1967), pp. 278–285.
[76] McSymonds Stores to Honey, 21 February 1941, INF 1/ 265.
[77] Director, Holmes Brothers, precision woodworkers, to MoI, 20 September 1940, INF 1/265

chartered accountants, contacted the Bureau to verify workers' claims that they had overheard Lord Haw-Haw announce that last Friday's payroll would be the last for employees at a factory in Morden and threatening increased sleep deprivation in coming months due to aerial bombardment. This, the company's chairman claimed, could affect the 150 workers who were 'engaged on the war effort'.[78] For businesses, the financial and reputational consequences could be significant.

Businesses were often quite open about their financial and operational motives for contacting the Bureau. Numerous businesses reported that staff declined to turn up for work, following suggestions of a potential raid on a factory or workplace, with a negative effect on profits. Company directors were keen to rebut any specious claims that enemy broadcasts had identified specific factories as a target, requesting copies of newspaper reports, details of successful prosecutions for careless talk, and BBC Monitoring Service transcripts for distribution among the workforce.[79] On occasion, the transcripts were to be used as the basis for disciplinary investigations, as managers 'armed with [the Ministry's] assurance' attempted to 'nail down… unfortunate rumour-monger[s] in the factory'.[80] The concern over the effect of Haw–Haw rumours on wartime productivity led the Ministry to consider despatching its staff to factories to 'very tactfully to interrogate witnesses of this kind'.[81] Fears over being singled out by Haw-Haw threats, and the potential financial consequences of the resultant rumours, led to some firms wishing to be publicly disassociated with government.[82] Just as businesses feared that they would be targeted as a result of involvement in government affairs, local communities distanced themselves from

[78] Accountant at Oldham, Holland and Co, Chairman of a Factory near Morden, to MoI, 2 September 1940, INF 1/265.
[79] Managing Director of Monotype Corporation Limited to Nicholls (BBC), 25 November 1940, INF 1/265; F.W. Clark. Director, Ward and Goldstone Electrical Engineers, to Director General (MoI), 6 July 1940, INF 1/265.
[80] Accountant at Oldham, Holland and Co, Chairman of a Factory near Morden, to MoI, 2 September 1940, INF 1/265. See also F.W. Clark. Director, Ward and Goldstone Electrical Engineers, to Director General (MoI), 6 July 1940, INF 1/265.
[81] Miss B.L. Hornby to R.E.L. Wellington (both MoI), 27 November 1940, 1/265.
[82] M. Geoffrey Woods, Managing Director of M.G Woods, Propelair Works, Colchester, to MoI, 4 June 1940, INF 1/265.

official initiatives. In Dorking, following a petition from townspeople, a proposal to exhibit a Messerschmidt to raise money for the local spitfire fund had to be postponed 'on the grounds that Lord Haw-Haw had said that every town in which a German 'plane was shown would be bombed'.[83]

Individual members of the public wrote in to allay fears, share anxieties, and, like businesses, elicit specific information as to whether they were to be in the line of fire. Here, the language of citizenship was frequently put to work to emphasise the patriotic intentions of the author: most letter-writers were keen to state that they did not engage in rumour-mongering and that they refrained from listening to enemy broadcasts.[84] If Amy Bell is correct in her conclusion that Britons sought to repress overt expressions of fear, deemed 'bad for morale and a social embarrassment', [85] then the letters reporting rumour – at a remove, with unpatriotic panic attributed to others – became a socially acceptable means of communicating anxieties. While there was a reported case of a 53 year–old woman who gassed herself after listening to Lord Haw–Haw,[86] for the majority, fear existed below the surface and, from time to time, needed to be expressed and released. The Ministry's solicitation of reports on rumours led some to write in seeking reassurance and asking the state to intervene in order to strengthen personal resolve. A Miss Verney reported her isolation from her fellow factory workers due to her reluctance to engage in rumour-mongering: 'they call me alsorts [sic] of fools for believing in <u>you</u>, and I find that nine out of every ten of them listen to Lord Haw-Haw, saying that they can get more truth from him, and they want me to do the same'. Verney concluded that she was buckling under the social pressure, pleading with the Bureau's staff to offer information to prove that the rumours were false.[87]

Others seemingly sought to assert their – perhaps superficial – resilience in the face of enemy propaganda provocations, a resilience generated in part by the false sense of security engendered by attempts to predict the future. Following

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[83] Russell Hickmitt, to Director General (MoI), 5 December 1940, INF 1/265.
[84] R. Horrocks to the anti-lies bureau, 7 June 1940; D.S. Willobey to MoI, 18 May 1942, INF 1/265.
[85] Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear', p. 175.
[86] 'Heard Haw–Haw, Killed Herself', *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1940, p. 3.
[87] Verney to the Anti Lies bureau, n.d, INF 1/266.

intense aerial bombardment in September 1940, Home Intelligence reported a significant increase in listening to Haw–Haw by those intent on '[picking] up hints about coming events'.[88] A letter in December 1940 reported 'harmful rumours' around Winchester suggesting that Haw-Haw was 'threatening […] you Winchester people […with] destruction in the near future'. The author requested specific details on the threats or an official refutation: 'should I be wrong in my conviction', she wrote, 'I should be glad to know the truth whatever it is. I can "take it", and am not likely to repeat it'.[89]

As these examples suggest, letters used linguistic devices associated with a certain level of intimacy with the recipient, with underlying suggestions of faith and trust. But the meaning of this language is ambiguous: on the one hand, such gestures could be a performance, replicating the language of the state's appeals in order to extract information or for personal reassurance; alternatively, they could speak to a deep commitment to the protection of the national community at a time of crisis. Most letters underscore the role of rumour as a 'safety valve' for repressed emotions, particularly episodes of anxiety.[90] Ben Shepherd's analysis of psychiatrists at war has pointed to the contemporary neglect of repressed emotions at times of crisis, suggesting that some psychiatrists had succumbed to the "Britain Can Take it" mood of 1940–1. The renowned psychoanalyst Edward Glover went so far as to suggest that 'the pre-war neurosis myth was replaced by "the opposite myth that no neurotic reactions are produced by air-raids which is equally fallacious"'.[91] Yet some wartime psychologists wrote extensively on public emotional reactions and in particular on the distinction between fear and anxiety. The latter was associated, according to F. Bennett Julian, author of a manual for post-raid psychological 'first–aid', with

> insecurity. It is directed more towards what may happen than towards what has happened or is happening. It is directed towards a potential rather than an actual danger. Anxiety requires thought and reflection – at least in their primitive form. The stimulus comes, not from perception of

[88] 'Points from Regions (North–Eastern)', 14 September 1940, Addison and Crang , *Listening to Britain*, p. 421.
[89] Gand to HI, 8 December 1940, INF 1/265.
[90] Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 46.
[91] Glover quoted in Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, p. 178.

> an object which threatens, but almost entirely from fantasy or imagination. The physiological pattern of anxiety is therefore not innate but acquired. [92]

Haw–Haw, and the publicity surrounding his broadcasts, undoubtedly fuelled the popular imagination, explaining in part why rumours may have been falsely attributed to him, and creating a state of constant suspense during periods of intense aerial bombardment.[93] John Langdon Davies, former journalist turned military instructor for the Home Guard, concluded that it was in the aftermath of raids that individuals were more likely to return to primitive, subconscious behaviours. 'The air raid stuns the man's power of conscious thought', he asserted, 'but not his body's power of action, nor his unconscious needs tying him to his fellows'.[94] The psychological disruption following intense raids, not necessarily by those experiencing them, but more frequently by those who had not, and the attempt to forge communal bonds may explain the extent and nature of the Haw–Haw rumours. Individuals' emotional needs, which could not necessarily be met by sharing anxieties given the constraints of the need to share patriotic sentiments, were performed through rumour, which functioned as a means of expression at one remove. Kampferer identified rumour transmission and confirmation as a 'first step to blowing off steam' in order to 'reduce anxiety' by inviting

> interlocutors… to prove… that the rumours are groundless or meaningless…. And as hearsay has a guilt-diffusing function – always supposed, as it is, to come from someone else – it allows for the freest expression of repressed and unavowable drives. One thus understands why they arise in situations and environments with a high degree of moral censorship: rumours are anonymous letters that anyone can write with total impunity.[95]

The letter writers perceived the Ministry and BBC as primary interlocutors whose function was to defuse rumours, uphold morale, and reassure the public, a

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[92] F. Bennett Julian, *Psychological Casualties in Air Raids and their First–Aid Treatment* (London, 1940), p. 9.
[93] John Langdon Davies, *Air Raid. The Technique of Silent Approach: High Explosives: Panic* (London, 1938), p. 106.
[94] Ibid., p. 138.
[95] Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 46.

function that stood in tension with popular mistrust of the authorities and fears of the extension of wartime executive powers. Moreover, rumour allowed individuals to reduce personal cognitive dissonance by sharing concerns within a 'safe' environment, where reports had been actively solicited and sanctioned as a patriotic gesture, freeing individuals to release deeper anxieties at a remove and in the service of others. This benefited both the individual and the State. For the authorities, reporting overheard rumour channelled such anxieties into safe bounds, while the individual could attribute (unpatriotic) fear to others, some authors suggesting that they were writing to the authorities in order to assist 'nervous people'.[96]

Given that much psychological work before the war concentrated on the effects of aerial bombardment,[97] the authorities were pre-conditioned to expect fear and anxiety to be the normal public response. It is unsurprising that these negative emotions feature so heavily in the Bureau and Ministry records. But it is equally important not to minimise more positive or neutral motivations for sharing rumours. Anti-aircraft command headquarters reported to Lieutenant General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, adjutant to the Forces at War Office that rumours that followed the subversive broadcasts could alleviate the endless wait for military instruction, even though the consequences were uncertain.[98] More powerful still were the rumours generated by hope. From December 1940 to May 1942, the Bureau and the BBC received requests from families who had heard a rumour that details of POWs were being broadcast on enemy stations.[99] Families desperate for news of loved ones requested to see BBC Monitoring Service transcripts after rumours circulated in local communities that sons, fathers, brothers and husbands had been mentioned by name. Local police reports

[96] Evelyn M Grant to the Minister of Information, 20 November 1940, INF 1/276.
[97] Michal Schapira, 'The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21:1 (2013), pp. 31–57.
[98] HQ anti-aircraft command, to Lieut- Gen Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, adjutant to the Forces, War Office, WAC R34/639/1.
[99] David Sinwell to MoI, 27 December 1940; 'Haw–Haw Query: Prisoner of War', JD/KD, 4 January 1941; Overseas General Division (MoI) to H. Furby, 29 May 1942, INF 1/265. There is evidence that the subversive stations broadcast supposed messages from POWs in 1944, see broadcast 'Messages from British Prisoners in Germany', 1 September 1944. Broadcast reproduced on CD in Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda.*

confirmed a marked increase of interest in broadcasts when 'names of survivors from the British submarines which were sunk recently, were reported to have been broadcast',[100] and that 'revived' interest in the subversive stations could be 'attributed to the increased desire for information about British prisoners'.[101]

Equally, involvement in scotching rumour afforded local communities a prominent place in the unfolding national story. Local initiatives to combat rumour, such as the suggestion in May 1942 that RIOs 'send out a loud-speaker van',[102] offered the local authorities a greater sense of status, authority and position.[103] Birmingham's *Evening Despatch* celebrated its RIOs as 'seven people with a big task but – they know the answers to Lord Haw-Haw',[104] such attention sharpening the levelling effect of national publicity campaigns. Empowered by the rhetoric of the 'People's War', individuals too attempted to carve out a role in the wartime drama and invested themselves with especial historical importance, while capitalising on the social advantage of 'being in the know' and in possession of secret and privileged information. This information could be deployed for the national good and in service of the war effort or to derive a sense of self-importance. In this respect, there was paradoxically little distinction between the act of reporting a rumour and the temporary prestige derived from spreading the rumour to others. The *Falkirk Herald* of 29 May 1940 identified that 'some of these people invent and spread rumours because they feel that it gives them a sense of power, the power which comes from secret knowledge. It is a method of attracting attention, and it is a marvellously potent way of gaining a momentary importance for some one who would not otherwise be noticed'.[105]

This was not simply narcissistic behaviour, however. Individuals may well have used rumour-mongering to psychologically contain and respond to events seemingly beyond their control, events that provoked deep emotional reactions intensified by a sense of personal impotence. In a report sent to Mary Adams in February 1941, Tom Harrisson observed that 'ordinary people feel that they are

[100] Summary of Police Reports, 20 January–3 February 1940, M-O A TC/54/0/57.
[101] Summary of Police Reports, 11–25 May 1940, M-O A TC/54/0/57.
[102] Jellicoe to Parker (MoI), 13 May 1942, INF 1/265.
[103] Paul Atkins, Lydd, Kent, to MoI, 4 June 1940, INF 1/265.
[104] *Evening Despatch*, 29 February 1940, p. 7.
[105] 'Casual Comments by "Argus"', *Falkirk Herald*, 29 May 1940, p. 4.

caught up in a process of war which is largely beyond their understanding and entirely beyond their control – if, indeed, it is within any kind of control (their feeling)'. Harrisson connected this powerlessness to the reduction in 'voluntary choice' by the state, increasing 'compulsion' in everyday life, and 'uncertainty about the future'. He diagnosed that the result was 'passive citizenship', and advocated for an 'emotional or dynamically logical urge' to heighten morale. [106] It is possible that such an urge was being played out through rumour. Harrisson's diagnosis is redolent of Shibutani's claim that rumour functions as a mechanism for coping with uncertain situations, where a solution is ill–defined but individuals feel obligated to act.[107] By circulating rumours, individuals potentially countered passivity and apathy by regaining some influence and agency in an alienating and limiting environment. This had particular potency in the context of the popular perception that the state had eroded democratic freedoms, albeit in pursuit of national security and ultimate victory over despotic regimes.

All such reactions may be read by historians as indicators of the deeper emotional landscape of wartime Britain. Reports of rumour circulation in letters to the Bureau also reveal individual self–projection, and how self-perception and attempts at social positioning intersected with notions of community and citizenship. Harold Nicolson, then Director General at the MoI, was concerned about British philosopher Cyril Joad's declaration that the Haw–Haw effect would be felt purely on the 'untrained mind'.[108] Joad's view was repeated in letters to the Bureau. The originator of a Haw–Haw rumour at Holmes Brothers' precision woodworking factory, for example, was described by the firm's Director as 'a rather simple type of person i.e. unintelligent in the extreme without actually being imbecilic'.[109] In almost all cases, the identification of a rumour-monger was, once again, coupled with a form of disassociation – that the individual reporting the rumour was sufficiently intelligent to be able to identify the propagandistic nature of the rumour and therefore was impervious to its intended effects. Conversations overheard by Mass–Observation in 1940 displayed similar

[106] 'Morale in 1941', 15 February 1941, p, 58-9, FR 568, M–O A.
[107] Shibutani, *Improvised News*, pp. 9, 17, 62.
[108] Harold Nicolson, diary entry 1 January 1940, Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Diaries and Letters* (London, 1967), p. 50.
[109] Director, Holmes Brothers, to MoI, 20 September 1940, INF 1/265.

distancing practices, regardless of class or educational achievement: 'M A 38: "To people, unlike myself, who are not accustomed to questioning the correctness of supposedly authoritative statements, such as BBC announcements, I realise the Voice may have a somewhat disturbing effect'"… M C 40 "some people have minds like blotting paper, will soak up anything. They're incapable of thinking for themselves and believe anything they hear"'.[110] Declaring immunity from rumour and distinguishing oneself from the 'vulnerable' was a means of confirming or raising one's social or intellectual capital, just as admitting listening to Haw–Haw held a certain 'cachet' once it became publicly acknowledged that the educated and politically conscious apparently constituted his core audience.[111] Denouncing rumour, then, could bring similar cognitive rewards to the process of reporting or transmitting rumour in the form of individual 'prestige enhancement'.[112]

Significantly, assumptions about intellectual capacity were frequently connected with gender in descriptions of susceptibility to the broadcasts and to the subsequent rumour generation. The BBC radio programme *The Ear of Britain*'s dramatised sequence of a family listening into enemy broadcasts made plain men's ability to process information logically without emotional engagement. In one scene, the men wait for the women to depart for the kitchen before tuning in to Haw–Haw, so as not to 'upset them'. The women return to express their fury at the presence of the enemy in the living room. The man calmly explains, 'Funny, I've noticed that he generally makes women very angry… A man has a different outlook from a woman. His interest is to see what sort of a performance the other side's putting up. He likes to watch out for the mistakes. And at the same time he likes to credit where the chap's been a bit cleverer than usual. Men downplay the effect; women consider it serious'.[113] Such a view permeated letters to the Ministry and to the BBC. Women were thought to be especially sensitive to the subversive broadcasts and more prone to pass on rumours, the BBC's Glasgow

[110] 'A' was characterised by M-O as being of higher social class and educational achievement and 'C' as lower down the scale. Overheard conversations, Mass-Observation, M-O A TC 74/59–77.
[111] Hamburg Broadcasting Propaganda. Summary of the results of an enquiry into the extent and effect of its impact on the British Public during mid-Winter 1939/40', Listener Research Section, BBC, 8 March 1940, LR/98, HO 186/313.
[112] Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 53.
[113] *The Ear of Britain* (BBC, February 1940), 10:11.

office pointing to the fact that 'men… are mixing more in the life of the community, and have an answer to most of the subtle propaganda coming from Germany'.[114] This was not an isolated view. Raymond Burns, writing in the *Evening News and Southern Daily* Mail, echoed the male characters in *The Ear of Britain,* claiming that 'women, who are, in the main, utterly incompetent in their approach to politics (for the reason that their judgements are governed very largely by emotionalism) are those who will be the easier prey of the foreign propagandist'.[115] J.J. Craik, prospective Conservative Party candidate for North East Leeds, similarly warned the Leeds Women's Conservative Association that they were 'more open' to Haw-Haw propaganda than men, due to 'wishful thinking, sentimentalism and propaganda'.[116]

Yet, paradoxically, women were also seen as vulnerable due to their increased participation in, rather than alienation from, public life, with large groups of women in the workforce creating an environment where rumour was perceived to become rife. In his letter to the BBC, the General Manager of CEAG Limited, manufacturers of miners' lamps in Barnsley, noted that 'rumours of this kind, although they can be discounted by sensible people, will I am sure, have some effect on young girls'.[117] CEAG's managers were '[not at all] concerned about the effect [of the rumour that the factory was to be bombed] on people outside, but we are concerned about the effect… on girls working in the factory'.[118] Letters to the authorities adopted an infantalising tone when characterising the circulation of rumour among women, alluding to female carelessness and stupidity as opposed to male cunning and political manipulation.

Assumptions as to who was most likely to be spreading rumours extended to class. The February 1940 BBC Report on the potential effects of Haw-Haw's

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[114] BBC Internal Memo – Glasgow, from S.D. to D.T, H.O, 16 November 1939, WAC R 34/639/1.
[115] 'Propaganda by the Fireside', Raymond Burns, *Evening News and Southern Daily Mail*, 27 January 1940, p. 4.
[116] 'Women who admire "lord Haw-Haw", *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 5 January 1940, p. 1.
[117] Edwin Lyon (CEAG) to the BBC, 26 June 1940, INF 1/265, my emphasis.
[118] Edwin Lyon (CEAG) to the BBC, 26 June 1940, INF 1/265. See also the letter from British Fondants Ltd: Managing Director of British Fondants Ltd to MoI, 11 November 1940, INF 1/265.

broadcast identified three particularly vulnerable categories, categories that were distinctly class-bound: the 'proletarian in the slums, the middle–class business man, and the post-war intellectual'. These categories, claimed the BBC, were 'most likely to be malcontents and here the sociological types are supplemented by psychological types'. The proletarian, 'impulsive [and] revolutionary-minded, would find himself defenceless against anti-Semitic propaganda and the promise of social revolution, forgetting that this was not the cry of the 'second or third international'. The middle-class listener would seek out assurances that his own comfort would be maintained, watching for mention of an 'increase [in] income tax and trade', while the intellectual would find ideological sympathy with Nazi condemnations of British imperialism and the failure of the League of Nations.[119]

Frequently, authors asserted their authority as legitimate commentators on working-class opinion to press the validity of their claims. A BBC internal memorandum on the effect of subversive broadcasts on the working classes emphasised the Tyneside Council of Social Service's 'very good opportunities of hearing working class (and particularly lower working class) opinion, and they have been telling me for some weeks that "Lord Haw-Haw", from being listened to and laughed at as a curiosity, is beginning to have some little influence on not inconsiderable numbers', [120] bolstering an earlier assumption by the Corporation that 'Hamburg becomes progressively more popular with each step down the income scale'. [121] Just as women were perceived to be unable to deploy sufficient analytical skills to distinguish between information, propaganda and rumour, or had not been exposed to the political sphere, so too the working classes were deemed to be gullible, narrow-minded and especially vulnerable to passing on damaging rumours. One writer contacted the Home Intelligence Division in June 1940 to recount his activities in tracking the rumours of the 'working and cottage classes, who are extremely parochial in their outlook and whose lives and thoughts centre around the immediate district in which they live… [They are] only

[119] 'The Voice of Hamburg', BBC Report, 14 February 1940, FO 371/24393.
[120] BBC Internal Memo – North Region, Newcastle Director to C (PR), 6 February 1940, WAC R19/292.
[121] R.J.E. Silver, 'The public's attitude towards the BBC and the extent of listening to Foreign Stations', 17 November 1939, WAC R 34/639/1.

too prone [to misinterpret events around them, with the result that] rumour becomes rife'.[122]

Where gender and class coincided, the perceived dangers multiplied exponentially. A letter to Lord Vansittart at the Foreign Office expressed concern about the effect of Haw–Haw's broadcasts 'among the working classes in this part of the country, particularly their women folk. As Manager to a very large firm in this City employing over 600 hands, and with over 40 years close contact with the working classes, I am appalled at the accumulating and increasing interest taken by them in this swine's broadcasts… Even my own maids and charwomen are becoming tainted'.[123] Servants had an alarming tendency to spread Haw–Haw's word, wrote Lady Swan to Sir Stephen Tallents, with 'one of them remark[ing] the other day that there was probably something in what he said. And there are thousands who, like these maids, listen in daily and find themselves influenced by malicious lies'. [124] Just as letters mobilised nationalistic language to assert authority, class networks were deployed to catch the ear of those in positions of influence. Addressing her observations on Haw–Haw rumours directly to Sir Stephen Tallents, the Countess of Harrowby's letter reminded him that 'when I was a little girl I knew your mother and her family quite well', before swiftly moving on to make suggestions for combatting enemy broadcasts.[125]

The letters to the Ministry about the spread of rumours attributed to Haw-Haw, then, reveal much about the deeper emotions and instinctive behaviours that the subversive broadcasts encouraged, and of Britons' perceptions of one another and acknowledged divisions in the community. But rumour may also serve to bond communities, as the anthropologist Max Gluckman suggested, by 'maintain[ing] the unity, morals and values of existing groups', especially at times when such values are at the heart of national debates regarding the relationship between the individual and the state and how such a relationship is to be negotiated.[126] By adopting this approach to the study of rumour, historians may

[122] Holdsworth to Balfour (HI), 4 June 1940, INF 1/ 265.
[123] Percy E. Gough, Leeds, to Sir Robert Vansittart, Foreign Office, 2 March 1940, WAC R34/639/3.
[124] Lady Swan to Tallents, 29 December 1940, WAC R34/639/5.
[125] Countess of Harroby to Tallents, 22 February 1940, WAC R 34/639/3.
[126] Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963), p. 309.

test 'the boundaries and bonds of a community'.[127] Nowhere was this more visible than in prosecution of rumour-mongering in the courts. Law defined civil rights and responsibilities, and the public keenly observed how authorities applied the law, using moral authority to point to the limitations of the State.

Rumour on Trial

The Bureau's direct appeal for public assistance not only had the potential to tap into the individual desire for precise (and personally beneficial) information, it also invited the citizen to become an 'actor' in national events rather than a passive 'spectator'. Reports of rumours were frequently met with an invitation to assist the State in tracking down rumour-mongers, confronting them about their behaviour, or, in serious cases, reporting them to the Police. The Bureau replied to reports by asking individuals to obtain '(1) the name and address of a first-hand witness; (2) the date, time, wave length of the broadcast on which he first heard it; (3) some indication or guidance as to the reliability of the witness'. [128] It encouraged reporters to 'trace the culprits' and 'interrogate witnesses'. In order to gain cooperation in this task, the Bureau frequently deployed the language of responsible citizenship: 'it would be greatly appreciated if you would continue to exercise the steadying influence on public opinion that you are obviously doing';[129] 'we are most grateful when responsible members of the public such as yourself cooperate in checking such stories'.[130] In this task, the Bureau was assisted by appeals by the Press. Even Bill Greig, normally a critic of the MoI, entreated members of the Anti-Haw-Haw League to 'pin down anyone who tells you something you have not read in a newspaper. Force him to disclose the source of his information. Make him produce a newspaper containing the facts he states. If he cannot do so, he is either a traitor or a fool – and a fool can do almost as much harm as a traitor'. [131] Although Greig killed off the League following the

[127] Luise White, 'Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumor and Gossip', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 20 (1994), pp. 72–92.
[128] Bureau letter, 1 June 1940, INF 1/265.
[129] Bureau letter, 27 Nov 1940, INF 1/265.
[130] Bureau letter, 22 July 1940, INF 1/265.
[131] *Daily Mirror*, 20 June 1940, p. 2.

MoI's 'Silent Column' publicity campaign in July 1940, [132]claiming that the League had achieved its objective of galvanising the MoI into action, a new wave of bombing in December 1940 inspired him to encourage his readers to take affirmative action: 'if anyone tells you that Haw-Haw has threatened your town, march him to the nearest policeman and charge him with attempting to undermine the morale of the public by spreading false information. He will deserve anything he gets'.[133] RIOs also encouraged residents to report 'wild rumours' to the police, appeals that were frequently repeated in local press.[134]

In exceptional cases, the information gleaned from such reports was used to prosecute malefactors, and the Bureau played a central role in court. Bureau officials provided evidence from the BBC transcripts implicating individuals in the creation of defeatist rumours. Those giving evidence often found it difficult to offer precise details. Testifying in a trial of a Bath man accused of spreading the rumour that Haw-Haw had promised to bomb the city in May 1942, the Director of the BBC Monitoring Service found it 'particularly difficult… to give evidence owing to the rather vague nature of the rumour', and he urged the MoI to invest more effort into tracing the source.[135] Despite the difficulties associated with such prosecutions, the Bureau persisted, since it believed that widely publicised 'example' cases would do more to deter rumour-mongers than exhortations to join the 'Silent Column'.

There were five major prosecutions directly related to spreading Haw-Haw rumours, including that of Sidney Hawkins House. Offenders were charged under the General Regulations of the Civil Defence Acts 1939, clause 2A 1 (assisting the enemy, or prejudicing public safety, the defence of the realm or the efficient prosecution of the war) or 39b (1) (endeavour by means of any false statement, false document or false report to influence public opinion (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the defence of the realm or the efficient prosecution of the war). A successful conviction resulted in a term of penal servitude (from months to life, dependent on the severity of the

[132] See Fox, *Careless Talk*.
[133] *Daily Mirror*, 6 December 1940, p. 10.
[134] 'The Latest "Haw Haw" Canard!', *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, 13 June 1940, p. 1.
[135] Burns to Mrs Jellicoe MoI 28 May 1942, INF 1/265.

offence) or a fine or both. The Act invested considerable powers in the Secretary of State, notably the judgement as to whether an act was 'calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution to a successful issue of any war in which His Majesty is engaged'.[136]

Techniques used by the Court to make an example of the accused depended on the severity of the offence. ARP worker and Senior Fire Watcher Frank Carle of Bath was denounced by the Bench as 'more of a fool than a knave' after stating that he had heard Haw-Haw make threats against the city in the aftermath of the Baedeker Raids.[137] Carle claimed that he was simply mentioning the matter to others to check whether anyone else had heard it and to assuage his own fears. He received a £5 fine with £3 3s costs .[138] Although Bacup couple John Henry and Sarah Elizabeth Riley were acquitted of 'unlawfully publishing a statement which was likely to cause some alarm or despondency', 'the Bench said they wanted everybody to take the case as a warning. People did not seem to realise the enemy was on the doorstep. The best thing was to say nothing'.[139] The outcome was more severe for Albert Leslie Tuckworth of Handsworth, Birmingham, who was given the option of paying £10 in fines or serving 31 days in prison for making a 'false statement to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the Defence of the Realm and the efficient prosecution of the war'. M.P. Pugh for the Prosecution denounced Tuckworth as a 'danger to the community', while the Chairman, George Bryson, said Tuckworth had 'offended through the vanity of the spoken word' and threatened that 'further cases of the kind would be met with stronger action'.[140] The case of Sidney Hawkins House of Mansfield was singled out for particularly wide publicity, featuring in Ministry leaflets and in the national and local Press.

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[136] *The Defence (General) Regulations, vol. 1, 1939*, 13th edition (HMSO, 1943). Interestingly, many of the British-born broadcasters on the Concordia stations (with the exception of Joyce and John Amery, who were convicted of treason), were eventually charged with the same offence after the war.
[137] 'Bath Case about what Haw-Haw did NOT say', *Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald*, 30 May 1942, p. 9.
[138] 'Haw-Haw didn't say it', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 27 May 1942.
[139] '"Haw-Haw" and Burnley Story', *Burnley Express and News*, 20 July 1940, p. 5.
[140] 'Haw Haw Quoted for News He Never Knew', *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 June 1940, p. 4.

Despite the Bureau's hopes, prosecutions had precisely the opposite effect than that intended. As with disastrous 'Silent Column' campaign, [141] the Bureau failed to recognise that the public conflated rumour and gossip. Just as scholars find it difficult to distinguish between the two, the MoI seemed to be taking a heavy-handed approach to an activity that many regarded as intrinsic to national life – the right to complain and gossip, a natural human behaviour fulfilling important emotional and psychological needs at a time of crisis. Regional Information Officers frequently described public alarm at prosecutions under the Civil Defence Act. This was particularly true for so-called 'example cases', such as that of Sidney Hawkins House.[142]

A particular point of contention was the Bureau's suggestion that rumour-mongers should be reported to the police.[143] This was seen to be disproportionate, representing an unwelcome intrusion into private lives. There were limits to state authority, especially when that authority conflicted with individuals' sense of civic rights and responsibilities and upset the balance between them. Public reaction to prosecutions and the Bureau's appeals to investigate fellow citizens sketched out the limits of public participation in such investigations. Demands for names and addresses of those claimed to be the originators were often met with refusal, an act of relative bravery when the interrogator was the accused's employer, although some obviously revelled in the officially sanctioned power that the Bureau invested in them to 'frighten the originator'.[144]

Assertions of moral superiority as a citizen by the accuser were occasionally met with reminders about the citizen's right to point to the excesses of the state and the authority of the individual within it. Upon receiving the request from the Bureau for assistance following her report of rumours in circulation, one correspondent, Mrs Collins, explained her reluctance to participate in direct interrogations: 'My first instinct was to take it on for myself, but on second thoughts, I realised I have no authority for cross-questioning others. Also I am a "foreigner" here, ordinarily resident in London, and thus do not belong to the life

[141] Fox, 'Careless Talk'.
[142] 'What Haw-Haw did not say', MoI leaflet, HO 199/ 462.
[143] Ministry letter, 23 July 1940, INF 1/268.
[144] Bureau letter, 14 November 1940, INF 1/265.

of the village'. Mrs Collins' solution was to 'have somebody appointed by the Ministry of Information living in the district, authorised to investigate each rumour, trace it back either to thin air or to its source'. The idea that this action may have been excessive was not lost on Mrs Collins: 'I know it is a Hitlerish, idea but we have to out-Hitler Hitler!' Yet there were limits as to her own involvement in the task, implying a moral restriction to personal intervention in the lives of others: 'I do not apply for the job, as I should collapse in horror at the thought of it!!' Like other authors, she was especially keen to distance herself from notions of individual gain or reward: 'So, you see, I am writing in a spirit of indignation and a genuine desire to see this evil stemmed, without any gain (monetary or glorious) to myself!!'[145]

Broader concerns regarding proportional actions against offenders were reflected in further correspondence with the Bureau. After an extensive investigation within the Ward and Goldenstone electrical engineering plant in Manchester in July 1940, the originator of a Haw-Haw rumour was found to be a young female record clerk, who had simply made some casual remarks to her co-workers, possibly in an attempt to allay her own anxieties. The Director and Chief Control Officer rejected the suggestion that the matter should be reported to the local police, stating that, following 'a very severe talking to', 'the girl' was in 'a state of abject fear as to what is likely to happen, and we think that she has had punishment enough'.[146] Evelyn M. Grant wrote to the Ministry to confirm that she had 'threatened to report two people who spread the most outrageous tales – and I believe they stopped doing so – but in this last report one poor soul nearly collapsed, as she has a small baby – and her husband is in the army'.[147]

The public expressed a preference for these matters to be worked out on the ground, within the community, and through other means. As the case of Ward and Goldenstone suggests, a sharp, condemnatory word, combined with public scolding, was often felt sufficient. Mrs Collins suggested 'post[ing] up the result [of investigations] in the village, including the names of those responsible for

[145] Mrs A. B. Collins to Home Office, marked for Police action, 4 June 1940, INF 1/265.

[146] Letter from Ward and Goldenstone to the Bureau, 10 July 1940, INF 1/ 265.
[147] E.M. Grant to the Minister of Information, 20 November 1940, INF 1/265.

spreading it', an idea that held some popular appeal. An article in the *Lancashire Daily Post* raised the question of whether rumour-mongers ought to be publicly shamed: there was a need 'to punish, to expose the culprits to ridicule and contempt, to make gossipers realise that harmful chatter is unpatriotic… **The time has gone for warnings. The known offenders should be brought to book, and made to realise that rumour spreading and scandalous whispering help the enemy**'.

Figure 5: *Lancashire Daily Post*, 7 June 1940.

A respondent to the article suggested a return to ancient forms of social humiliation" 'public opinion in the old days was expressed through the stocks and the pillory'.[148] His suggestion prompted the newspaper's cartoonist to illustrate his idea (figure 5).

[148] 'Beware of the Chatterbugs', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 7 June 1940.

How rumour-mongers were to be tackled and by whom revealed the precarious balance between a popular conception of justice and values and the desire for more interventionist policies. While acknowledging the importance of the threat of prosecution to regulate behaviour, many preferred to exercise the moral pressure of the immediate social circle and the local community rather than pursue the matter through the courts, frequently citing the distinctions between liberal democratic and authoritarian government.[149] Such evidence supports Gluckman's assertion that rumour functioned as mechanism for articulating and cementing community values and prevalent morals, enacted from below rather than enforced from above.

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Debates surrounding the spread of rumour, who was authorised to stop this activity, and the community response reveals the wider reach of the politics of rumour, opening up questions on the relationship between the individual, the local community and the state. The public was not simply the passive recipient or horizontal transmitter of rumour as numerous governments during the war had assumed: it was an active partner in the tracking and scotching of rumour, using rumour as a means of social communication on matters of concern, to express anxiety, fears or hope, or to make sense of the events of the war as a form of collective understanding or narrative construction. Rumour gave agency to citizens, and, within the highly-regulated environment of wartime Britain, it became a means of asserting control by those who felt powerless, constructing explanations that anchored the present, and offering the opportunity to devise solutions to national problems. Rumour, as Shibutani identified, is best characterised as a form of collective problem solving, an indirect contribution to the commonwealth. Such acts could be selfless and in the national interest, but were also motivated by more egotistical concerns. The public was adept at deploying information regarding rumours for individual gain, self-gratification, and prestige enhancement. At the height of summer 1940, information had

[149] Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal' *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963), p. 309.

become a commodity. Rumour was a means of asserting control and power. To present oneself as being 'in-the-know' was to establish one's place in the social hierarchy and in history. Information was a much sought-after wartime commodity, and was at the heart of a transaction between the individual and the State: certain kinds of knowledge (such as the rumours in circulation) was shared in exchange for information that individuals believed the authorities possessed (such as details of raids).

Recognition that rumour is a dialogue between political and social strata is fundamental, offering insights into the dynamics of power and the shifting nature of political representation. How government and local communities tackled the problem of rumours supposedly emanating from the subversive enemy radio broadcasts exposes the tensions between the public's reliance on the authorities, with frequent requests for official intervention, and a deep desire to limit the powers of the state, displayed in the unease over public prosecutions for rumour-mongering. The Government response had to be proportionate and in line with shared liberal democratic values. The public eschewed the excesses of the General Regulations of the Civil Defence Act for community self-policing, with social humiliation and ostracism as the weapon of choice. Here the bonds of community were solidified by collective action against malefactors without the assistance of national law or official intervention. But it was a divided community. Rumour became a means of consciously or unconsciously expressing or revealing identity and how individuals projected the self in relation to others. Public and private evaluations of rumour-mongers reinforced rather than broke down some barriers. Determining who was responsible for rumours and who was vulnerable to them revealed gender and class prejudices. Such prejudices were magnified where gender, class, and educational attainment intersected.

Rumour was a mechanism that allowed for deeper emotional expression, particularly emotions –such as fear, anxiety, despondency and despair – that ran counter to expected behaviours in wartime. The creation and transmission of rumour was the search for stability, certainty and explanations, a means of seeking out the 'truth', rather than finding it. The pursuit of 'truth' and understanding is of considerable importance, since it reveals the psychological needs of the nation at war. It is unsurprising that rumour peaked at times of crisis and fundamental

instability, just as it is unsurprising that those conditions produced a critical mistrust of official sources, generated conspiracy theories, and exposed vulnerabilities. But this does not mean that rumour should be defined as a pathological condition. Far from it. Rumour is a common human behaviour. In many ways, understanding wartime societies as complex emotional communities provides a better guide to behaviours than the often superficial and polarised readings provided by some public opinion sources. Evaluations of public opinion may well operate at the extremes, as Michal Shapira has claimed – simply categories of "low" or "high" anxiety' or simply 'comparing "myth" with reality"'[150] – and are governed by what an individual feels s/he is able to say in a public arena. The latter may be conditional upon patriotic gesture, public performance, or fear of social ostracism. If we accept that rumour represents a strategy by which agency is sought and that those who pass on rumour do so in order to fulfil a psychological need, then rumour offers a means of probing human behaviours, motivations, and mentalities. It becomes a creative tool for 'reconstructing' past mental maps and understanding how societies interpreted the world around them. From 1940, Britain's Anti-Lies Bureau was interested in who started the rumour, but they left a remarkable resource for historians to explore who shares it and why, ultimately the more significant and revealing question.

[150] Schapira, 'The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War', p. 33.