

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 28 (History)		
Title of case study: The Spirit of the Blitz: Deepening Public Understanding of the British Home Front during the Second World War		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Jeremy Crang	Professor of Modern British History	1993 – present
(the late) Paul Addison	Honorary Fellow (previously Reader)	1967 – 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No.		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Drawing on the research for their two major co-edited volumes (<i>Listening to Britain</i> and <i>The Spirit of the Blitz</i>), Crang and Addison were deeply involved in the production of a widely-publicised and well-received four-part television documentary series on the Blitz for the BBC. This series has transformed public understanding of the bombing, as evidenced by viewing figures of 1.506 million (average across the episodes for the first showing of the series), enthusiastic reviews by television critics, powerful contemporaneous online responses to the programmes by viewers, and a prestigious BAFTA nomination in the ‘Specialist Factual’ category.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>During the Second World War the morale of the British people was clandestinely monitored by Home Intelligence, a unit of the Ministry of Information that kept watch on the attitudes and behaviour of the public and eavesdropped on their conversations. Intelligence from a wide range of sources and every region of the United Kingdom was collected and analysed by a small team of officials, based at the Senate House of the University of London, who compiled regular reports on the state of popular morale. Issued daily from May to September 1940, and weekly thereafter until Home Intelligence closed down in December 1944, they provide us with a unique and extraordinary window into the thoughts and emotions of the British at war. This treasure trove of reports, which are among the MOI files in the National Archives at Kew, read like the collective diary of a nation.</p> <p>Where historians of the British home front had previously only used fragments of these daily Home Intelligence reports in their work, in <i>Listening to Britain</i> [3.1] Crang and Addison made available for the first time in published form an unabridged set of reports running from May to September 1940 and covering the period of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the early part of the Blitz. Featuring a general introduction which traced the origins of the Home Intelligence department and provided a scholarly overview of the significance of the reports, the volume offered unparalleled insights into the mood of the British people during what Churchill termed</p>		

their 'finest hour'.

In 2012-2013 Crang was awarded an AHRC Fellowship to co-edit with Addison a follow-up volume to *Listening to Britain*. This sequel, entitled *The Spirit of the Blitz*, includes a complete set of the weekly Home Intelligence reports for the period of the Blitz running from September 1940 to June 1941 [3.2]. The book's introduction explores in greater depth the history of the Home Intelligence department and the ways in which the reports contribute to our understanding of the British home front. It also traces the links made by Home Intelligence between the material and moral factors that were deemed to influence popular morale as well as deeper assessments of the character – or as we now say, the national identity – of the British people. The book was published in September 2020 to mark the 80th anniversary of the Blitz.

The historiographical significance of these two volumes lies in their capacity to test and challenge the mythology of Britain's 'finest hour', and the experience of the Blitz in particular. The mass bombing of civilians posed, or so it was thought, the greatest of all threats to civilian morale. The reports confirm that morale was never broken but reveal that reactions to the Blitz depended on a range of factors such as the resilience of individuals, the pattern and intensity of the raids, the size and topography of the cities attacked, and the efficiency or otherwise of the civil defence measures. They also strip away the nostalgia that has grown up around the period, reminding us instead of the sufferings and sacrifices, the many frustrations and difficulties of daily life, the administrative bungling, and the endless grumbling and petty rivalries. As the evidence in the volumes demonstrates, collective stoicism, rather than patriotic fervour, was the prevailing spirit of the Blitz.

The most recent volume, *The Spirit of the Blitz*, which incorporates in-depth reports on the effects of the bombing (including special reports on provincial towns and cities that suffered particularly heavily such as Hull, Clydebanks, Merseyside, Portsmouth and Plymouth), has received warm praise from academic reviewers. Professor Richard Overy described it as 'invaluable in seeing how the British people actually responded to the Blitz as it was going on' (endorsement for OUP book cover), while Professor Julie Gottlieb commented in the following terms: 'Covering those traumatic months when civilians were under Nazi fire, the Home Intelligence reports are a much needed reminder of the drama and diversity of experience, as well as the quotidian, the petty and the mundane'. 'Students of history', she writes, 'will be grateful for it as a reference work and treasure trove for many years to come' ('Not Keeping Calm', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 October 2020). Likewise, Professor Daniel Todman praised the book as a 'valuable source' and noted that 'anyone who enjoys reading published wartime diaries - a popular genre - will also find pleasure in the way the episodic structure captures the immediacy of events and reactions and just how confusing the whole thing was to those who experienced it' ('Beneath the Bombs', *History Today*, December 2020).

3. References to the research

3.1. P. Addison and J. A. Crang (eds) (2010 & 2011). *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May - September 1940*. The Bodley Head, 2010; Vintage, 2011. ISBN: 9780099548744 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/1086939/listening-to-britain/9780099548744.html>

3.2. P. Addison and J. A. Crang (eds) (2020). *The Spirit of the Blitz: Home Intelligence and British Morale, September 1940 - June 1941*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780198848509 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-spirit-of-the-blitz-9780198848509?cc=gb&lang=en&>

4. Details of the impact

In 2016, Wall to Wall, a prominent UK TV production company which prides itself on strong social-historical programme making, and whose credits include the long-running 'Who Do You Think You Are?', approached Crang and Addison to act as academic consultants for a major new BBC series on the Blitz. The producer had read *Listening to Britain*, was aware of the research being undertaken for the forthcoming *Spirit of the Blitz*, and wished to draw on the researchers' expertise in the field in order to offer audiences a new perspective on the Blitz. Covering the East End of London, Hull, Clydebanks and Bristol, the four-part series was to tell the story of the impact of a single bomb on a specific family or community in order to create a wider narrative about how the ripple effects of the Blitz helped to shape Britain's social, political and geographical landscape.

Crang and Addison worked closely with the programme makers over many months and provided extensive advice both on matters of historical detail and on the overarching historical themes of each programme and the series as a whole. This advice drew on the evidence in the Home Intelligence reports about the reaction of the people of London and provincial cities to the bombing, and the response of the authorities to the challenges of the Blitz, as well as the researchers' wider knowledge of the political, social and military history of the home front. They also reviewed, and provided detailed comments on, the shooting scripts for each hour-long episode. The producer acknowledged these contributions in the following terms:

'Their work and collaboration provided significant historical and expert authority, reassurance for the programme makers, and credibility for a highly regarded specialist factual series...Wall to Wall would like to thank Dr. Addison and Crang for their incredible work with us. It is very important to recognise that their work in this series provided us with support that we felt no other academic or expert in the field could manage with the same depth, breadth and detail of expertise' [5.1].

'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain' was first broadcast on BBC 2 at 9.00pm-10.00pm between Thursday 23 November and Thursday 14 December 2017 and attracted an average audience of 1,506,000 viewers for each episode [5.2]. These figures placed the series among the top twenty most-viewed programmes on BBC2 over the weeks it was broadcast, with the first episode being placed number seven [5.3]. The series was repeated on BBC 2 in August 2018 and again in October 2020. It was 'critic's choice' / 'pick of the week' / 'best TV' in a number of national newspapers, including *The Independent* (multiplatform monthly reach [hereafter 'MMR']: 28,225,000), *The Sunday Telegraph* (MMR: 759,000), *i* (MMR: 7,669,000), *Scottish Daily Mail* (MMR unavailable), *The Guardian* (MMR: 29,215,000), and *The Sun* (MMR: 36,502,000) [5.4]. It also received excellent reviews. As examples:

'Blitz: The Bombs That Changed Britain doesn't just show you history. Through unflinching first-hand accounts and clever use of archives it makes you feel it'. (*Daily Mirror* [MMR: 32,049,000], 24 November 2017) [5.5].

'Demonstrates how applying imagination, intelligence and dynamism to a very familiar subject – the Blitz – can reap tangible dividends'. (*The Times* [MMR: 14,975,000], 23 November 2017) [5.6].

'The BBC is to be congratulated on a superb history series currently going out on BBC – Blitz: The Bombs That Changed Britain... [a] brilliantly researched and executed series'. (*The Liberal Democratic Voice*, 29 November 2017) [5.7].

Extensive online feedback from viewers revealed the deep impact of this series on the general public, bringing home the social and emotional reality of the Blitz and its social-historical complexities. Twitter posts [5.8] include the following:

- 'Watching Blitz: The Bombs that Changed Britain on BBC and I'm in pieces. Seeing the emotions of the Blitz survivors. God Love them.' (GigiMoloney, 30 Nov 2017)
- 'I've really enjoyed (maybe the wrong word) BBC's Blitz: The Bombs That Changed Britain. Each episode has made me cry and astounded me with people's courage and love through awful times.' (LouiseJones1403, 14 Dec 2017)
- 'Stunned watching #Blitz. Such an important, if heartbreaking, series.' (ClareToHere, 11 Dec 2017)
- 'The BBCTwo series Blitz: The Bombs That Changed Britain is brilliant – expertly researched, fascinating, harrowing and moving. A must-watch.' (Seanhannam, 14 Dec 2017)
- 'The BBC series #Blitz is really something special. A complex and compelling portrayal of events encompassing the most intimate details with the shifting tectonic plates of war policy.' (JoWarner01, 18 Dec 2017)
- 'Can't commend this series highly enough – fascinating piece of social history that will inform the way I teach this subject in the future.' (Seahiggins, 12 Dec 2017)
- 'Blitz: The Bombs That Changed Britain is such great telly: amazingly well researched, touching, surprising.' (GuardianHeather, 30 Nov 2017)
- 'Almost worth the licence fee alone. Astonishing detail, brilliant, compelling TV.' (JamieWom, 7 Dec 2017)

One viewer commented that the series 'should be compulsory viewing for all children between the ages of nine and sixteen years of age' [5.9].

In April 2018, 'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain' was nominated for a British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award (BAFTA) in the 'Specialist Factual' category [5.10]. These prestigious nominations are determined by the votes of BAFTA members (a community of leading creatives and professionals across the industry) and ranked by specialist BAFTA juries. They recognise outstanding achievement in programme making. This is further powerful evidence of the public and critical impact of the series, and its influence in re-shaping popular discourse - away from the well-worn historical clichés that have inveigled public memory of the Blitz and towards a more complex and authentic story about reactions to the bombing.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Producer. *Wall to Wall*. (testimonial letter, 5 April 2018).

- 5.2. Producer. *Wall to Wall*. (testimonial email, 9 April 2018).
- 5.3. BBC 2 comparative viewing figures for 'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain', Nov-Dec 2017.
- 5.4. Selection of 'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain' as 'critic's choice'/'pick of the day'/'best TV' in national newspapers, and the respective newspapers' reach figures.
- 5.5. I. Hyland (24 November 2017). Jungle Trial is no Blitz. *Daily Mirror*.
<https://www.pressreader.com/ireland/irish-daily-mirror/20171124/282054802341168>
- 5.6. G. Tate (23 November 2017). Viewing Guide. *The Times*.
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/whats-on-tv-tonight-vzgkj27hc>
- 5.7. P. Walter (29 November 2017). Superb TV programme: The Bombs that changed Britain. *The Liberal Democratic Voice*. <https://www.libdemvoice.org/superb-tv-programme-the-bombs-that-changed-britain-55987.html>
- 5.8. Screen shots of Twitter comments: to corroborate impact of the television series 'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain'.
- 5.9. Letter from a viewer, published in *The Northern Echo* (8 December 2017).
https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/opinion/letters/15710217.Blitz_bombings_documentary_should_be_compulsory_viewing_for_children/
- 5.10. 'Blitz: the Bombs that Changed Britain', nomination for a British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award (BAFTA) in the 'Specialist Factual' category, 2018.
<http://awards.bafta.org/award/2018/television/specialist-factual>