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'All human life is there': the John Hilton Bureau of the *News of the World* and advising the public, 1942-1969

For a thirty year period, the John Hilton Bureau was one of the best known advisory services in Britain. It emerged from a series of BBC radio broadcasts on coping with life in wartime given by Professor John Hilton during the early years of the Second World War. Thousands wrote in to Hilton via the BBC asking for individual help, and the Bureau was established in 1942 to provide answers to them. The Bureau operated under the auspices of the *News of the World*, a national Sunday newspaper. At its peak, the Bureau dealt with 150,000 cases a year, handled by a team larger than the newspaper's editorial team.¹ For the newspaper's readers, the Bureau was a means of gaining advice and help with a wide range of personal matters for free. For those with an interest in public morale, its columns and statistical breakdowns seemed to provide vital insight first into how wartime regulations and later how the welfare state shaped everyday life.²

The John Hilton Bureau merits attention for three reasons, as I will now discuss in turn. First, it offered legal advice as part of its service, and thus is part of the evolution of legal provision in this period. Aside for some support for the very poorest in the High Court, those who were unable to pay for legal services before the mid-twentieth century were obliged to seek what help they could from the *pro bono* offerings of the profession, such as

¹ B. Abel-Smith and R. Stevens, *In Search of Justice: Society and the Legal System* (London, 1968), p.163. News International Group Archives, John Hilton Bureau Papers, London (hereafter NI/JHB) Box 2 Staff files and Who's Who of founding members of the Bureau team. Interregnum 1943-5. Clipping by C.E. Griffin, 'Please can you tell me?' Leader, 14 July 1945, p.15.

² *New Society*, 24 October 1968, p.592 'Memo to Maxwell'.

advice at the London Police Courts, sessions of the ‘Poor Man’s Lawyer’ or trade union and political party legal clinics.³ Following the recommendations of the Rushcliffe and Cameron Reports (1945), the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 introduced a legal aid system in England and Wales and the Legal Aid and Solicitors Act 1949 in Scotland. In England and Wales, the scheme was administered by the Law Society. In that scheme, legal aid was initially offered to those on low to middling incomes (up to £420 in income per annum), who were helped for free or made contributions on a sliding scale. The legal profession were reimbursed for up to 85 percent of the fees for any work that they did under the scheme. Legal advice could be had for a payment of 2s 6d.⁴ As Morgan outlines, these Acts followed campaigns to make both the civil and criminal laws more accessible from before the First World War. Whilst the criminal law was reformed with little controversy, civil law reform was caught up in distaste for divorce – the main reason for people of all backgrounds to seek legal advice in the interwar period – and a sense that the poor needed to be prevented from instigating frivolous actions. Thus the Lawrence Committees of 1919 and 1925 and the Finlay Committee of 1925 failed to offer any substantial recommendations change to the *pro bono* structure; the Rushcliffe Committee offered a blueprint for making legal aid and advice in England and Wales more accessible without suggesting any changes to the profession. The Rushcliffe and Cameron Committee reports of 1945 presented schemes in which those on lower and middling incomes could get statutory support for certain kinds of legal cases, with the legal profession reimbursed for any such work undertaken or advice provided.⁵ Nevertheless, the introduction of legal aid schemes in England and Wales and Scotland failed to eradicate the

³ J. Davis, ‘A Poor Man’s System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century’, *Historical Journal* 27 (1984), pp.309-35; J. Mervyn Jones, *Free Legal Advice in England and Wales* (Oxford, 1940), pp.7, 79–80; *Committee on Legal Aid for the Poor, Final Report*, Cmd. 3016 (London, 1928) p.18-9.

⁴ A. Paterson, *Legal Aid as a Social Service* (London, 1971), pp.13-14; G.R. Thomson, ‘Legal Aid in Great Britain’, *Western Political Quarterly*, 3 (1950), pp. 28-37, at pp.34-6

⁵ R. I. Morgan, ‘The Introduction of Civil Legal Aid in England and Wales, 1914-1949’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5 (1994) pp.38-76. It is important to note that the legal profession, within and without government, used the term ‘poor’ to refer to those who were in receipt either of these statutory provisions or those who attend free legal advice clinics, up to the post-war period. The term appears to derive from the Poor Laws and refers to income specifically below a set level. It is not synonymous with social class in this strict definition, whatever its application in practice. See H. Levenson ‘Legal aid for mitigation’ *Modern Law Review*, 40 (1977) pp. 523-32, at p.532 for detail of the Acts. On the debates around criminal legal aid, see, for example, Hansard Commons, 2 May 1930, vol. 238 cc524-83.

demand for *pro bono* services. Government parsimony meant that both the range of situations in which legal aid could be sought, and the amount of aid available were reduced in the course of the 1940s and 1950s, so that only the poorest could access the scheme.⁶ Yet the witnesses who gave evidence to the Rushcliffe Committee were of the professional ‘opinion that the great increase in legislation and the growing complexity of modern life have created a situation in which increasing numbers of people must have recourse to professional legal advice.’⁷ One area in which legal or quasi-legal advice was needed was that of consumer rights. As Hilton and others have shown, the ‘consumer citizen’ emerged in the mid-twentieth century, an individual who was aware of his or her rights, and was aware of the power that came with their ability to spend money – or not. The consumer citizen was a reflection of the greater affluence of the working class, but also their increasing empowerment through such activities as the formation of residents’ associations and other campaigning or advocacy groups, especially from the 1960s.⁸

This leads to the second reason for examining the Bureau. The concept of gaining ‘advice’ or reliable information through newspapers as a first step towards being a responsible citizen emerged during the interwar period in the context of sexual health education, as Bingham demonstrates.⁹ Whilst the working class may have begun to own more consumer goods from the 1950s, it did not follow that consumption was without its problems, or indeed that poverty had been eradicated. In a reflection of how poverty by the mid-twentieth century in Britain was largely relative rather than absolute, advice was a form of welfare, one called upon by the haves as well as the have-nots. The consumer citizen often

⁶ Paterson, *Legal Aid*, pp.21-2

⁷ *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, Cmd. 6641 (London, 1945), p.23

⁸ See M. Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003); Matthew Hilton, ‘The duties of citizens, the rights of consumers’, *Consumer Policy Review* 15 (2005) pp. 6-12; L. Black and N. Robertson, *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock* (Manchester, 2009); N. Robertson, “‘Co-operation: the hope of the consumer’?” The co-operative movement and consumer protection, 1914-60,’ in L. Black and N. Robertson, eds., *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History* (Manchester, 2009) pp.222-39; B. Jones, *The Working Class in Mid-Twentieth Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester, 2012); L. Black, ‘Which? Craft in Post-War Britain: The Consumers’ Association and the Politics of Affluence’, *Albion* 36 (2004), pp.52-82; I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Explaining the Gender Gap: the Conservative Party and the Women’s Vote’, in M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996) pp.194-223

⁹ A. Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford, 2009)

needed help with acquiring goods on hire-purchase and mortgages and managing to repay them, particularly as such items or facilities became more widely available and ideas about what things were essential and desirable in a home changed.¹⁰ It was not always clear what matters needed the advice of a solicitor, or even where one might begin to unpick a problem, and this was the area occupied by a range of civil society organisations as well as the John Hilton Bureau and other newspaper advice services. The largest was the Citizens Advice Bureau, established in 1939 by the National Council for Social Service in order to help people navigate their way through the rules and regulations of the coming war, but which continued to provide (non-legal) advice in peacetime.¹¹ Consumer groups formed and grew in the course of the 1950s, providing advice on how to manage consumer credit and the best products to buy as well as helping consumers assert themselves.¹² At the other end of the need spectrum, advocacy organisations like the Child Poverty Action Group, Shelter and the National Council for Civil Liberties also provided advice as well as support in accessing legal services, in turn responding to and creating a discourse around social justice and empowerment of vulnerable communities.¹³ The Legal Aid Acts were presented as a means of enabling all to be active citizens, aware of their responsibilities and their rights, but by the 1960s and 1970s, securing access to legal or other advice was a key element of ‘social justice’ for the least affluent.¹⁴ The very small proportion of surviving letters sent to the Bureau provide insight into the ways in which people, often from the working class, but not always, expressed and experienced a range of personal matters as individuals, as family members and friends, as employees or employers. In this way, the letters and the Bureau are part of the increasing body of work on emotion that draws upon letters written in to

¹⁰ See M. Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit* (New York, 1983), J. Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1990* (Harlow, 1994)

¹¹ J. Richards, *Inform, Advise and Support: 50 Years of the Citizens Advice Bureau*, (Cambridge, 1989). See also Paterson, *Legal Aid*, pp.23-4, although Paterson here refers to the continuation of these arrangements into the 1970s.

¹² Hilton, *Consumerism*; Jones, *The Working Class in Mid-Twentieth Century England*.

¹³ Paterson, *Legal Aid*, p.25; M. McCarthy, *Campaigning for the Poor: C.P.A.G. and the Politics of Welfare* (Beckenham, 1986); C. Harlow and R. Rawlings, *Pressure Through Law* (London, 1992).

¹⁴ See T. Goriely, ‘Rushcliffe Fifty Years On: The Changing Role of Civil Legal Aid Within the Welfare State’, *Journal of Law and Society* 21 (1994), pp.545–66; C. W. Brooks, *Lawyers, Litigation and English Society Since 1450* (London, 1998); A. Paterson, *Lawyers and the Public Good. Democracy in Action?* (Cambridge, 2012); F. Regan, A. Paterson, T. Goriely and D. Fleming, *The Transformation of Legal Aid* (Oxford, 1999).

newspapers, magazines, campaigns and also reports to the Mass-Observation Survey, as well as private letters between friends and family. As Langhamer and others have shown, such letters reveal the ways in which Britons engaged with public events, how they felt about every day happenings, and sought to be active agents in their lives.¹⁵ The Bureau was a manifestation of this on both personal and public levels until it became unsustainable for the paper.

Third and finally, the Bureau is an example of a welfare agency that existed in a trusted 'fourth space'. The concept 'mixed economy of welfare' refers to the interrelations between private, public (or state) and voluntary sector providers of welfare, but the media exists in a fourth space or sector that does not easily fit into this model.¹⁶ As the umbrella under which the Bureau sat, the *News of the World* was a profit-making or 'private' body but, as with the majority of other newspapers, it ran a number of subsidiary activities in order to differentiate the paper from others, and thus to create an audience, promote reader loyalty, drive their circulation and increase the potential value of advertising space in each issue. Such activities included competitions and promotions, but also such reader services as holiday clubs, 'lonely hearts' and mail order schemes, as well as the advice bureau.¹⁷ The Bureau was not profit-making: it was a popular yet expensive 'public service' that cost up to £100,000 a year, and by the later 1960s and 1970s this had to be justified in terms of the broader operations of the newspaper.¹⁸ Although the Bureau was part of the complex business structure of the *News of the World*, and therefore technically a private sector welfare provider, it occupied a different cultural space. This fourth space, as will be seen, was categorically neither part of the state, a charity, nor one of the types of businesses their

¹⁵ M. Roper, 'The "Spear Head of an Advance": Bion's wartime letters to Rickman,' *Psychoanalysis and History* 14 (2012), pp.95-102; C. Langhamer, 'Sexual Politics in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 62(2006), pp.87-115; C. Langhamer, "'The live dynamic whole of feeling and behavior: Capital punishment and the politics of emotion, 1945-1957', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012) pp.416-41; I. Gazeley and C. Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton', *History Workshop Journal* 75 (2013), pp.159-89.

¹⁶ For the 'mixed economy of welfare', see J. Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain: the Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association Since 1869*. (London, 1995)

¹⁷ See W.B. Reddaway, 'The Economics of Newspapers,' *Economic Journal* 73 (1963) pp.201-18; M. Conboy and J. Steel, 'The Future of Newspapers: Historical Perspectives', *Journalism Studies* 9 (2008) pp.650-661; C. Bainbridge and R. Stockdill, *The News of the World Story: 150 Years of the World's Bestselling Newspaper* (London, 1993), pp.308-12.

¹⁸ Bainbridge and Stockdill, *The News of the World Story*, pp.133-4.

readers were encountering problems with, such as department stores, door-to-door sales and the like. As I will demonstrate in this article, the Bureau was successful on account of its location in this fourth space, but it was ultimately vulnerable when it came to fitting into the conception of the *News of the World*'s affluent working class audience towards the end of the 1960s.

The legal profession and charities' work on making legal advice more accessible coincided with newspapers taking on a more interactive role with their readers in the first half of the twentieth century. A problem page or an advice bureau was part of the construction of the paper as being on the side of its reader. The *Daily Mail* positioned itself as the paper of the soldier during the First World War, and had a letters page specifically for the problems of soldiers and their families.¹⁹ Letters pages, problem pages and the related 'human interest' story grew in popularity during the interwar period, and new war-focussed problem pages and the like gained popularity on the back of them.²⁰ Although there was the precedent of the soldiers' 'Answers' page in the *Daily Mail* in the First World War, the newspaper advice bureau was a product of the Second, with services offered by the *News of the World*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *People*. They remained massively popular long after the war, despite the new legal aid system, because they offered something that the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Poor Man's Lawyer centres and even lawyers participating in the legal aid scheme after 1950 could not: legal advice and action without geographical boundaries or obstacles, and on a much larger scale. For example, in London in 1965-6 up to 23,000 people were helped by private law firms. The legal advice centres at three settlements alone – Toynbee Hall, Mary Ward and Cambridge House – interviewed 14,000 people. In contrast, the John Hilton Bureau and the bureau at the *People* handled around 150,000 cases each per year.²¹ A 1968 report by the Society of Labour Lawyers explained this through many lawyers with

¹⁹ J. Lee Thompson, *Politicians, the Press and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Kent, OH, 2000), p.183.

²⁰ K. Williams, *Read All About It! A History of the British Newspaper* (London, 2010), p. 160; C. Horrie, *Tabloid Nation: The Birth of the Daily Mirror to the Death of the Tabloid* (London, 2003), pp. 67-68.

²¹ M. Zander, *Lawyers and the Public Interest: A Study in Restrictive Practices* (London, 1968), pp. 243.

appropriate specialism in housing, consumer law and the like simply not having offices in working class areas.²² Simply knowing where to start could be a problem, as the John Hilton Bureau rapidly found to be the case for many people – and trouble in finding the starting point was not the exclusive province of the less affluent.²³ In contrast, newspapers could be bought on the streets, delivered or bought at a local shop; and all that was needed to seek advice from the newspaper bureau was paper, pens, envelopes and stamps. Personalised advice could be obtained with minimal personal cost, be that in terms of finance and time, or with the fear of the social embarrassment that might ensue when trying your luck with a solicitor's office or taking a hand-out from a charity. A letter was a means of starting the process of articulating and thus converting personal concerns and everyday experience into public action, through confiding in a trusted reader: the Bureau expert.

The impetus for what would become the John Hilton Bureau lay in the broader network of middle and upper class people interested in the welfare of working class communities by the interwar period. Hilton was born into a working-class family in Bolton in 1880, and worked in cotton mills before a bout of ill health, during which as he became interested in economics and international relations. He first became a lecturer for the Free Trade Union, then joined the Norman Angell Movement and the Garton Foundation.²⁴ These appointments brought Hilton into the network of reform-minded people who were involved in the Labour Party, the Fabian Society, the settlement movement and the Romney Street Group, and helped him gain traction in his career.²⁵ After the First World War, he joined the Ministry of Labour as an assistant secretary and director of statistics, with a remit to examine unemployment.²⁶ In 1931, Hilton left the Civil Service to take up a chair in industrial relations at the University of Cambridge. He placed great emphasis on the need to have a 'hands-on' rather than a theoretical understanding of unemployment and labour issues.²⁷

²² M. Finer et al, *Justice for All: Society of Labour Lawyers Report* (London, 1968), pp. 22–3.

²³ D. Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-57* (London, 2010), p.331.

²⁴ M. Hilton, 'Hilton, John (1880-1943)', in L. Goldman, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2006).

²⁵ J. M. Lee, 'The Romney Street Group: Its Origins and Influence - 1916-1922', *Twentieth Century British History* 18 (2007), pp.106–128; E. Nixon, *John Hilton. The Story of His Life* (London, 1946), pp. 61–2.

²⁶ Hilton, 'Hilton, John'

²⁷ Nixon, *John Hilton*, pp. 116–7, 125, 127.

From 1933, Hilton developed a parallel career in the media, when he began two series of BBC radio programmes called ‘Talks for the Unemployed’ and the ‘National Stocktaking’.²⁸ The following year, he began a further series, ‘This and That’, which was intended to be broadcast to entertain people whiling away their time at clubs for the unemployed.²⁹

People began to write to Hilton, asking for advice on a range of personal matters, and Hilton responded both by letter and visiting the people who wrote to him. He also went out on to the streets to get a sense of what worried ordinary people. Hilton was sufficiently concerned that so many people were confused about the law that he went in 1934 to the BBC with a proposal for the ‘This Way Out’ series, which was broadcast in the evenings and aimed to provide people with guidance on how to tackle a range of issues. Between 1936 and 1939 he also wrote a weekly column on similar issues in the *News Chronicle*, along with a readers’ questions forum, which further widened his reach.³⁰

By the start of the Second World War, Hilton had built a strong public reputation as an expert on unemployment, and one with an approachable, friendly radio style. It is through a surviving broadcast of ‘This Way Out’ from 1936 that we can gain a sense of Hilton’s democratic and egalitarian approach to helping people and drawing out their individual stories, as also reflected in his later style in the Bureau’s columns. In this recording, he spoke of how he:

believe[d] in the common people. Why we should be called the common people, I don’t know. Whenever I talk to common people, I find they are most uncommon people... And that’s why I prefer to say I believe in Tom, Dick and Harry, and in Peggy, Joan and Kate.

Hilton’s radio voice was not overtly regional, if clearly not a south-eastern, ‘BBC’ accent. He spoke slowly and clearly, and with a warm, friendly tone.³¹ Hilton was an approachable and trustworthy expert.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 161; Hilton, ‘Hilton, John’.

²⁹ Nixon, *John Hilton*, p. 161.

³⁰ Hilton, ‘Hilton, John’.

³¹ National Sound Archive, British Library. ‘This Way Out’, 1936.12.03; from 3m.23s.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 Hilton joined the Department of Home Publicity and abandoned much of his media work, but returned to the BBC after leaving the Civil Service to broadcast 'John Hilton Talking', a series on aspects of wartime experience. As with his earlier broadcasts, the programme elicited a flood of letters from the public, as did a March 1942 leading article on the problems of the war for the *News of the World*, then the Sunday national newspaper with the highest circulation. 1,000 letters were sent to the paper following the article, and an advice bureau was set up in Cambridge in order to send personal replies to each respondent, and the others that continued to be sent in.³² The opening of the Bureau brought the *News of the World* into line with its competitors, Sunday or otherwise. For example, the *Daily Mirror* already had two popular reader letter columns on the outbreak of war, and built on this by introducing an equally popular column on soldiers' grievances, which received letters both from troops and their loved ones.³³

The Bureau was essentially Hilton's until his death in 1943. Hilton's death left the still relatively new Bureau in an odd place, and T.K.P. (Kenneth) Barrett took over as Director as terms with the *News of the World* and BBC were negotiated. The BBC wrapped up their involvement with the Bureau, setting up a phased transfer of all letters that came into them.³⁴ Hilton's way of working also came under scrutiny, as he had tended to bring in personal contacts to work as letter-answerers. The *News of the World* disapproved of the part-time working arrangements, and requested that the Bureau phase out part-time staff in favour of full-time appointments.³⁵ The paper's management were keen that the Bureau be efficient, causing some anxiety for Bureau staff that the personal touch so strongly associated with Hilton would soon be lost. Barrett, on the other hand, saw the new arrangements as offering fresh opportunities for the Bureau to remain adaptable and flexible with regard to the changing world their readers lived in.³⁶ The personal, helpful and somewhat improvised world of the Bureau contrasted strongly with the newspaper's desire for an efficient service.

³² Nixon, *John Hilton*, pp. 280, 284 and 305.

³³ Horrie, *Tabloid Nation*, pp.67-8.

³⁴ NI/JH Box 2 Interregnum 1943-45, 48 Letter 1 September 1943.

³⁵ NI/JHB Box 2 Interregnum 1943-1945, Letter to Beaumont from T.K.P. Barrett, 3 March 1945.

³⁶ NI/JH Box 2 Interregnum T.K.P. Barrett Memo on Position of John Hilton Bureau, 3 June 1944.

The moment remained a precarious one for the Bureau. Hilton's death meant that the newspaper had a space in which to request a different way of working, after a time; whether this would have happened if Hilton had lived longer is impossible to say. The changeover was a period of anxiety for those whose working lives were being altered on top of personal loss.

How did the Bureau operate on a daily basis, and how was its work received by the public? Letters were posted to the *News of the World* offices on Bouverie Street, just off Fleet Street in Central London. The postbag was then delivered in batches to the Bureau in Cambridge. Those who wrote into the John Hilton Bureau would receive a prompt reply from one of the team of experts. As the post-Hilton way of working became established and to promote greater efficiency letters were opened and assessed by a team of allocators, who passed them on to the post appropriate specialist team. Some cases could be dealt with in one informative reply, whilst others would effectively be taken on by the Bureau, who would then tackle governmental departments and other official bodies on behalf of the respondents, often getting voluntary organisations involved. The team evolved to include a range of full-time experts who provided specialist advice on finance, legal, property, medical matters and welfare issues, amongst others. Women inevitably made up the administrative staff, but they were also represented on the expert panel, such as the example of Mrs Kathleen Caris, who worked as an expert for the Bureau from its foundation until 1967, dealing with general enquiries.³⁷

A sense of the popularity of these services and the scale of the Bureau comes from a 1945 article by one of the Bureau experts in *Leader* magazine:

The modern newspaper advice bureau is a full-blooded affair employing a staff - in one case at least - greater numbers than the editorial department proper, and costing something over £10,000 a year in salaries alone.

³⁷ NI/JBH Box 2 Staff files and Who's Who of main founding members of Bureau team staff files; Interregnum 1943-5, 1948 'John Hilton Bureau staff, at death of John Hilton' ; Box 13, Experts' annual returns, 1958-1963; Box 14, Experts' annual returns 1964-5 and Experts' working statistics 1965-8

The author also stated that one paper received over 4,000 letters a week, and that the newspaper advice bureaux were ‘serious competitors’ to the Citizens Advice Bureaux.³⁸ We might ask what the newspapers got from this, as the Bureau could only ever engage with a fraction of the 8 million readers of the *News of the World* at its peak.³⁹ It was a form of personal connection that offered the potential to know more about what was happening in their lives, and in this way the paper could live up to its strapline of ‘all human life is there’.

Only a few examples of letters received by the Bureau and those sent out to readers have survived in the archive. The extant letters show that the style of the replies was clear, and detailed guidance on what needed to be done was given. For example, one letter writer of 1959 asked about tracing a relative who had moved to Australia, but had fallen out of touch. The Bureau response was that the immigration services in both countries would be unable to help, but if the respondent was to go to their local library, they could use a copy of Willing’s Press Guide in order to find a list of Australian newspapers and their London advertising agents. The next step would be to draft an advertisement to catch the attention of the relative, and the agents would be able to provide a rough guide to how much that could cost. An alternative plan was suggested: the Salvation Army would be able to open a case, for a charge of 5/-. As seen here, the Bureau response was very carefully researched and prepared. Another respondent, writing over a declined visa for a relative, was given an explanation of the law, an outline of the possible reasons why the visa was declined, along with some next steps that could be taken. Someone else was advised as how to get a valuation on a painting that they owned.⁴⁰ All cases were taken seriously and given a clear way forward with their situation, no matter how trivial or serious.

The letters dispatched from the Bureau were could meet with intense gratitude by their respondents. Some valued the way in which the team were able not only to answer the

³⁸ NI/JHB Box 2 Staff files and Who’s Who of founding members of the Bureau team. Interregnum 1943-5. Clipping *Leader*, 14 July 1945, p.15, C.E. Griffin, ‘Please can you tell me?’

³⁹ *Guardian*, Friday 8 July 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/jul/08/news-of-the-world-circulation-data>, correct at 6 February 2013, Simon Rogers, ‘News of the World circulation data: who read it and how many bought it?’

⁴⁰ NI/JBH Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys Memo to Barrett, 1959/1960, attached letters: n.d., 12 December 1959 and 29 December 1959.

questions asked, but also to anticipate future problems, for their problems to be listened to and taken seriously. A 1948 respondent wrote:

I think that your letter is most excellent and, undoubtedly, great pains were taken to study the problem and to give advice on points not actually raised by me but which were foreseen by your department.

Another wrote: 'It is with lighter hearts we wish to tender our very best wishes to both you and the News of the World'.⁴¹ A respondent of 1959 stated:

Your wonderful letter of the 22 of December, the letter that took a load of worry off our minds and helped to make our Christmas much happier than it would have been as my wife has been worried so much about this affair.⁴²

The bureau had a powerful impact on those who had been worried, either setting their minds at rest or empowering them with a next step. A common feature in the earlier letters was the affection for the work of the then recently deceased Hilton:

Your kindly human touch impressed me deeply and if only there was more of it in the world it would be a much better place. I am so glad the spirit of John Hilton is still in the work he loved so well.⁴³

Another wrote:

As colleagues of Prof. J. Hilton, and chosen by him to carry on the great work he so ably pursued, is in my humble opinion the greatest honour and recommendation that could be desired, and without a doubt must be a great incentive to those in need of advice, hence my appeal to you...⁴⁴

John Hilton's trusted radio presence and approachable manner encouraged the public to see him as a friend. The powerful personal touch was maintained through the avoidance of stock replies, although the letter-writers had access to a series of in-house specialist leaflets, which

⁴¹ NI/JBH Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, sample of thank-you letters, 6 August 1948 and 'Reader from Salford', n.d.

⁴² NI/JBH Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Memo to Barrett, 1959/1960, attached letters: 27 December 1959.

⁴³ NI/JBH Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, sample of thank-you letters, 'Reader from Palmers Green', n.d.

⁴⁴ NI/JBH Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, sample of thank-you letters, 1 August 1944.

enabled them to write informative, accurate yet individualised replies.⁴⁵ Letters from the bureau were kept by respondents, sometimes for future reference by a trade union or society.⁴⁶ Sometimes the letters had a long term impact. In 2003, the *News of the World* presented the case of Mary, a 55 year old woman who was being threatened with deportation as an illegal immigrant by the Home Office. Mary's mother married a US serviceman and moved to the US with him after the Second World War, where she gave birth to Mary. When the marriage broke up, Mary's mother wanted to return to the UK. Mary's grandmother wrote to the bureau for help, and received a letter from Barrett containing legal advice on the situation, which in due course allowed Mary and her mother to return to the UK. More than advice was given: the Bureau and newspaper also paid for the family's tickets back from the US. The letter was carefully saved by Mary and her family, and its advice was to help them again in 2003, when Mary was able to use the letter in evidence to successfully fight her deportation.⁴⁷ Doubtless there were others who were dissatisfied with the responses they had received, as well as those who were not sufficiently compelled by the advice or too busy to write back with thanks, and it is due to a selection bias that these highly positive and exceptional testimonies remain. Nonetheless, we can gain a sense of just how powerful the Bureau's work *could* be to those involved. The value of the Bureau was in the way in which it could be trusted by those writing in to take their personal issues seriously.

In addition to the personal replies, the articles in the newspaper served as a means of conveying information and helping the public. The articles published in the newspaper followed a distinctive format. Whilst he was alive, articles were published under Hilton's by-line. The tone of these articles was friendly and familiar, almost paternalistic. Hilton would typically open with an anonymised case, which he presented as being typical of a much wider group, for example:

⁴⁵ NI/JBH Box 2 Bureau Journal, 1948, 1951-3, *Journal of the John Hilton Bureau*, 1 (1) 8 October 1948, 11. Leaflets included: *Change of name; How to make a simple will; Correspondence courses; The property of husband and wife; Points to watch on buying a house; and Unmarried wives in the new social security schemes.*

⁴⁶ For example, Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies, D-SO-26/3/2/33 National Union of Sheet Workers, Coppersmiths, Heating and Domestic Engineers: Wolverhampton Branch. Letter from Kenneth Barrett for the John Hilton Bureau, to Mr V. Tuckley, of Wolverhampton, re: Unemployment Benefit, 1953.

⁴⁷ *News of the World* (hereafter *NOTW*) 16 February 2003, Vanessa Altin, 'Paper Tigers'.

Every post brings its quota of letters asking me for the “proper” wage for the kind of work the writer is doing.⁴⁸

Here is a letter from a girl in the WAAF. It is only one of many – asking the same question – which come to me week by week from similarly-placed girls in one or other of the three Women’s services.⁴⁹

Many a letter comes to me from readers who want to enquire locally about their liability for fire guard duties but do not know where to apply.⁵⁰

Hilton would provide a pen sketch of a specific case as a means of drawing out a common experience: much like his approach on the radio. This stood in contrast with the other news articles typically run in the newspaper, which identified the outstanding and deviant stories as a matter of course. Here, the emphasis was on empathetic engagement and encouraging people either to take the advice and guidance on board as being potentially applicable to them or people they knew, or to feel that Hilton (and his team) were trustworthy enough to warrant a letter. These articles, which featured a further two or three case studies, were accompanied by a small text box which gave the address of the *News of the World*, and instructed readers to include a stamped addressed envelope for their reply. The text box often included testimonials from people who used the service to their satisfaction. The cumulative effect of the tone, style and use of testimonials was to create a sense of the people writing in as being part of the same community as those who read the paper, of Hilton as being a friend to all – despite the reality of the volumes of letters which came in and demands for efficiency.

After Hilton’s death, the role of Bureau figurehead passed to Kenneth Barrett. Barrett, however, was rarely mentioned by name in the by-line, but rather was referred to as ‘Director of Our John Hilton Bureau’, later the ‘Director of Our Hilton Bureau’.⁵¹ Although the Bureau still operated as the John Hilton Bureau, the dropping of the ‘John’ and the

⁴⁸ *NOTW*, 17 Jan 1943, p.5, Prof John Hilton, ‘Are you getting the right wage for your job?’

⁴⁹ *NOTW*, 24 Jan 1943, p.7, ‘Marriage does not entitle girl in Forces to release’

⁵⁰ *NOTW*, 31 Jan 1943, p.5, ‘Meaning of “scheduled”’: its advantages and obligations’.

⁵¹ See, for example, *NOTW*, 6 Jan 1963, p.2, ‘Now a wife can sue her husband. The Director of Our John Hilton Bureau spotlights an important change in the law’; *NOTW*, 13 Jan 1963, p.6, ‘Why should this woman’s house be sold? Our Hilton Bureau’.

capitalisation of the 'Our' clearly associated the Bureau's work as an integral part of the newspaper rather than a largely independent group at a physical remove in Cambridge, whilst also playing on the memory of Hilton for older readers. Hilton's legacy was too powerful for a complete break with the past, acting as it did as a powerful brand signifying individual attention, diligence and a passionate advocacy of the needs of what Hilton called the 'common people'. The articles that appeared under the Director by-line evolved a different approach from Hilton, notably a more editorial tone. These kept the same principle of using a supposedly individual case to highlight a much wider concern, but were more polemical than Hilton's. If Hilton's style had been to present a situation, to explain it and then offer a solution, the post-Hilton articles took a situation and presented an opinion on it. In January 1953, the Bureau offered opinions on the need for people to realise that spending money on consulting a solicitor was cheaper in the long run than getting things wrong, on how biting your tongue could help to create a happier home life, and how the public had not 'degenerated already into a nation of spineless loungers, all grabbing every coin from the public purse' with the new welfare state, but rather the needy required encouragement to claim what was rightfully theirs.⁵² The following month Barrett railed against a county council whose staff chased a family nursing a disabled son at home for the unpaid hire fees of a bed pan, and what he saw as a growing readiness to claim compensation after any injury.⁵³ Barrett continued to produce these strident articles into the 1960s, if he also presented less rhetorical pieces on the new pension scheme and the new right of spouses to sue their partners for civil damages.⁵⁴

The personalisation of the letters was vital in creating a sense of the Bureau as being something that belonged to the individual reader – it also developed a powerful sense of trust, of respect. This was further conveyed through Hilton's intimate and friendly form of address,

⁵² *NOTW*, 3 Jan 1953, p.2, Director of Our John Hilton Bureau, 'Trying to Save Those Pennies might cost you pounds'; *NOTW*, 11 Jan 1953, p.2, 'Silence can be the golden key to happiness'; *NOTW*, 17 Jan 1953, p.2, 'Pride can prejudice your right to assistance'.

⁵³ *NOTW*, 1 Feb 1953, p.2, Director of Our John Hilton Bureau, 'The family that is "fined" for not going to hospital'; *NOTW*, 15 Feb 1953, p.2, 'Life doesn't always have its compensations'.

⁵⁴ *NOTW*, 6 Jan 1963, p.2, 'Now a wife can sue her husband. The Director of Our John Hilton Bureau spotlights an important change in the law'; *NOTW*, 13 Jan 1963, p.6, Our Hilton Bureau, 'Why should this woman's house be sold?'; *NOTW* 27 Jan 1963 p.6, 'The New Pensions and You. Are the changes as fair as they could be? Asks Kenneth Barrett, Director of Our Hilton Bureau'.

and the scaling-down of masses of post into individualised, generalised yet familiar case studies. Certainly for older readers, Hilton remained a powerful brand after his death, whilst the newspaper carefully used text to anchor the Bureau within the world of the paper to emphasize its literal ownership, as well as the more metaphorical ownership of those who bought and read the paper. This sense of being a trusted ‘friend’ was maintained in the post-war period, but there was a distinct evolution away from John Hilton’s radio persona to a more assertive, crusading voice somewhere between an investigative reporter and an editorial writer – the Bureau’s persona was remade for a post-war generation. Both before and after the war, the Bureau had no whiff of charity about it, as it was squarely placed as part of the service provided by the newspaper for those who bought or read it. The experience of reading the newspaper itself enhanced this sense of ownership – the direct, personal address to the reader creating a sense of individual engagement and the close physical nature of reading a newspaper, both running counter to the realities of a mass-produced newspaper and its readership. This was a form of information and advice that the individual could be in control of, without having to try and find a time to get to a free legal advice centre or try to navigate the application for legal aid – if that was indeed what one was sure was needed. In this way the Bureau was more than appropriately placed within the private sector, with a newspaper that had no direct connection with the agencies that their readers ran up against. It was a ‘friend’ as much as it provided an alternative, non-geographic community for the reader.

I will now turn to the kinds of problems the public wrote in with. From the beginning, the Bureau assiduously monitored the post in order to see what external factors drove people to write in, as well as the shifting nature of the topics they sought advice on. A 1942 analysis of the letters revealed a series of factors which could stimulate post, namely (and unsurprisingly) the content of the Bureau column and article in preceding weeks, but also the release of government publications, new legislation and parliamentary debates, as well as the hours of light – whether people were in or out, and if in during the blackout, looking for

something to do. Media commentary also played a role. The Bureau had a ‘weekly offer’, asking for letters on a particular subject, whilst some letters were prompted after the writer had seen a similar problem or query published. The stimulus could be random: ‘They see an article which reminds them of the Bureau. The problem may have nothing to do with the article’; others wrote in because they had had previous issues solved by the team.⁵⁵

Whilst the profile of types of cases was assiduously monitored, the Bureau found it harder to gain a sense of who the people sending it were, beyond them generally being a listener to one of Hilton’s radio programmes or, later, a reader of the *News of the World*. During the war, most of the letters that came in were from those who were not serving overseas, but based in the UK, either taking part in war work on the Home Front or a relative of someone in the forces. For example, battles in the Mediterranean prompted terrified relatives to write to the Bureau, desperately seeking further avenues of information about their loved ones when the forces were not providing this.⁵⁶ An analysis of the subjects that came in from summer 1943 to the following summer revealed that the most common letter related to allowances and war service grant, which elicited 9118 letters in that period. ‘Other Forces matters’, which covered a wide range of experiences within service, accounted for 8731 letters. ‘Other civilian matters’ accounted for 5393. War and civilian pensions were a further matter of concern, with 3673 and 4924 letters respectively. Service on the Home Front drew 1461 letters in relation to civil defence, and a further 3450 in relation to industry. Income tax and pay also figured highly, with 1163 enquiries in relation to industrial wages, and 2749 for civilian income tax matters. War decorations accounted for 1177 letters, and ‘Forces postal’ – the ability of family members to communicate with loved ones or to discover their fate, 1154. Family and matrimonial matters accounted for 376 in relation to adoption, marriage to Allied Forces soldiers 160, divorce and separation 152 (albeit in the course of one week in the period), and child registration/birth certificates 52.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys Letter to Barrett, 19 November 1942

⁵⁶ NI/JH?B Box 13 Analysis of Forces Letters 1942-44 (News of the World and BBC), Analysis of letters received from soldiers and their relatives over the two weeks, April 16th – 30th.

⁵⁷ NI/JHB Box 14 Subject Returns 4/7/1943-21/2/1944

The sheer number of letters coming in with regard to allowances, tax and wages speaks clearly to the financial impact of the war on many families, and the difficulties some people had in trying to address this imbalance. There was no attempt to monitor class or income, and given the abrupt changes in fortune that could befall families and individuals during wartime, we should be cautious of seeing these letters as primarily coming from the working classes. The radio and newspaper coverage both reflected and stimulated this preoccupation. The BBC broadcasts in April 1943 featured such cases as ‘ATS widows with dependent children’ and ‘the allowance book folded in four by the Pay Office’, whilst *News of the World* articles included ‘the forgiven wife can reclaim her allowance’ alongside the ‘ten extra clothing coupons’, and ‘wife can claim husband’s insurance when he is overseas through Army Welfare’.⁵⁸ The considerable number of letters relating to conscription into war work or into the Forces demonstrated how conscripted people came into contact with a complex array of rules and regulations, some of which seemed to run counter to the practices of civilian life.

The detailed fortnightly analysis of letters for the period 16-30 April 1943 mentioned that many miners who had been conscripted into the Forces wanted to be returned to the mines as the ‘Bevin Boys’ to meet the demand for coal, whilst there was also a great deal of snobbery and status-chasing at large. The Bureau estimated that a third of the letters they got from men in the Army related to men wanting to transfer out of the Pioneer Corps, a light engineering group that did not come with quite the same cachet as other assignments. Some men found it demeaning to do jobs that might be associated either with women or men from lower social classes: ‘the greater part of the remainder of the transfer letters are from men engaged in cooking, batmen’s duties, cleaning, washing-up, etc.’⁵⁹ It was therefore not just the ‘big’ issues of family finance and survival that animated readers to write in, but also everyday slights and perceived injustices. Whilst total war was a universal experience, the

⁵⁸ NI/JHB Box 13 Analysis of Forces Letters, 1942-43 (News of the World and BBC) Subject matter of broadcasts covering period of analysis April 6th to May 4th : 6 April 1943, 13 April 1943; Subject matter of articles covering period April 4th to May 2nd: 18 April 1943, 25 April 1943

⁵⁹ Box 13, Analysis of Forces Letters, Analysis of Letters received from soldiers and their relatives over the two weeks April 16th-30th, 1943

letters demonstrate that it was very much experienced in classed ways, with people trying to hold on to their pre-war status.

Not being able to get in contact with loved ones, particularly when relatives on the Home Front knew that they had been in the area of intense battles, was another cause of intense strain for families, and one in which external intervention could be reassuring or helpful in getting through to the right people. Proportionately fewer letters came in that related exclusively to matrimonial or other family matters. Rather than suggesting that Britons were less interested in such matters, the manner of categorisation of letters is more likely to disguise family problems with a more financial cause. Divorce had purposely been expedited as a means of keeping up troop and civilian morale during the war: the Services Divorce Department and a Poor Persons Civilian Department were set up in 1942 in order to address this.⁶⁰

The demand for information about the war and its impact on everyday life diminished with demobilisation and the gradual relaxation and withdrawal of rationing and civilian restrictions – if war pensions and support for those disabled, widowed or orphaned by the conflict were persistent topics into the post-war period. On the whole, the public wrote in with tales of the ‘little man’ up against a bigger system, if some were more dramatic and others sought advice on hearsay and urban myths.⁶¹ Some demonstrated how simple, everyday transactions could go wrong: one letter received on 25 January 1960 was from a house-holder who bought coal that had subsequently exploded, due to a torch battery caught up with the consignment, which the coal merchants denied responsibility for. Another, on the 28 January that year, came from an elderly man who had gone bankrupt in 1921 and desperately wanted not to ‘die with this stigma on his name’. Others wrote of stray cows causing motor accidents, of pensioners being hassled into taking up TV rentals by door-to-door salespeople, and freak £1 notes.⁶²

An analysis of the post in 1964/5 explicitly compared its composition with statistics from 1947. Legal enquiries relating to property had risen from 19 percent in 1947 to 37

⁶⁰ Paterson, *Legal Aid*, 12.

⁶¹ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Memo to TKP Barrett, 1959/1960

⁶² NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Memo to T.K.P. Barrett, 29 January 1960, attached letters.

percent in 1964; matrimonial enquiries remained somewhat static at 10 percent and 7 percent respectively. Landlord and tenant had dropped to 6 percent in 1964 having been higher at 13 percent eighteen years earlier, whilst social services questions dropped from 24 percent in 1947 to 19 percent in 1964. These shifts were seen by the Bureau as reflecting the transition to a peacetime economy and the bedding in of the welfare state. They acknowledged that any suggested or actual change to the system prompted a surge in their postbag from those who feared that they would be affected. The author of the survey commented that:

The middle 50s saw a change from the problems of rationing, shortages and poverty to those tied up with the acquisition of possessions: the buying of houses, furniture, washing machines etc: The car, its insurance and accidents; and, with the wider spread of ownership of all kinds of property, with inheritance. [...] There is considerable demand for effective action against “get rich quick” firms who exploit the public.⁶³

These were, to a point, the problems of affluence – or rather the problems of a shifting wider sense of what the basic equipment and resources a ‘modern’ family needed to have in order to function, and how those goods should be maintained and eventually passed on. Yet there were two layers of the working class and the ‘consumer citizen’ engaging with the Bureau. The first was the more affluent, who wanted help in negotiating a new world of ownership and contracts. The second was a more diffuse group, whose common feature was having little in the way of financial resources or social capital. The fact that changes in welfare could energise people to write in suggested that many still remained vulnerable and afraid of what changes might mean for them. The postbag of the 1940s reflected a highly regulated yet terrifyingly chaotic world, one in which the smallest of administrative hiccups could have serious consequences, where homes and businesses could be lost through bombings, and family members might not return home. The letters of the 1960s shone a light on a world in which some people negotiated their way around acquiring property of various kinds, whilst others needed help with asserting their rights within the welfare state: very different risks and

⁶³ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Memo, ‘The Composition of the post is as follows’, ca. 1964-5

uncertainties to those faced during wartime. The Bureau could certainly help the consumer citizen to assert their rights or accept their responsibilities, but it also helped those who were disempowered at least in part through a lack of financial resources.

The Bureau was also keen to find out *who* was writing in. In 1942, one of the team, K.D. Johnston, undertook an appraisal of the letters which wished to demonstrate their potential for a Mass-Observation style study of the public, but concluded in a somewhat crestfallen fashion that the letters were ultimately too random to form a suitable sample.⁶⁴ Like Mass-Observation, the public wrote in with their concerns and thus the Bureau had the potential to offer an anthropological study of the domestic, to act as a privileged, knowing interpreter of ordinary people's lives. Unlike Mass-Observation, the letters were not written as deliberate reflections for consumption in that way. Mass-Observation and the Bureau had a connection through Hilton's work with Tom Harrison in the later 1930s. Hilton helped to get the 'Worktown' study in Bolton running, worked on Mass-Observation's 'Happiness' survey, and also worked with the Home Publicity Committee during the war.⁶⁵ The Bureau's letters did not offer themselves up to the same analyses as Mass-Observation, but the statistical information gained from the letters had its uses in terms of assessing the morale of the nation.

The desire to know more about those who wrote in continued after Hilton's death, if it moved closer to justifying the role of the Bureau within the complex economic landscape of the newspaper. It was ostensibly part of managing the panel of experts, but there was the possibility of using the Bureau's to generate interesting content for the paper, as well as providing some profit-making insight into the readership of the *News of the World*. In the early 1960s, Peter Chapman-Walker, the paper's managing director, suggested to the Bureau that the letters written in 'might throw some light on what makes "News of the World" readers tick' and thereby contribute to the editorial process.⁶⁶ Monitoring the letter content

⁶⁴ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys Letter to T.K.P. Barrett, 19 November 1942

⁶⁵ J. Heimann, *The Most Offending Soul: Tom Harrison and His Remarkable Life* (Honolulu, HI, 1998), pp.125, 155; Gazeley and Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Happiness'

⁶⁶ NI/JHB Box 15, Graphs and Specific Surveys Memo to T.K.P. Barrett, 15 February 1960.

and those writing in did not yield much usable insight into the readership of the paper at the time, but the surveys undertaken remain important for an understanding of who was prepared to use the service.

If Johnston had been attempting an anthropological study of Britons through the letters, the surveys of the 1960s owed more to dominant trends in sociology, in terms of method and conclusions. A survey undertaken at the turn of 1959 and 1960 revealed much about the demographics of those who wrote in. Younger people, aged 16-24 and 25-34, were the least likely to write in, with less than 1 percent of the letters coming from the first group and 5 percent from the second. Those aged 35-44 wrote 20 percent of the letters, with a further 24 percent coming from the over-65s, whilst the largest group were those aged 45-64, who contributed 50 percent. That the bulk of letters came from those in the older age groups was unsurprising – as age and responsibility increased, it would appear that the likelihood of seeking advice from the Bureau also grew, and there was very possibly remembrance of John Hilton as a factor. Ascertaining the socio-economic grouping of the letter-writer was harder, given that discussion of income and job did not necessarily feature in the letter. This fact notwithstanding, the team used the British National Readership Survey classes used by newspapers to classify their readers for advertising purposes to estimate that 2 percent of their letter-writers came from the AB professional/managerial groups, the C1 category (supervisors, clerical and junior professions), to make up 16 percent, C2 (skilled manual workers) 14 percent and DE (semi and unskilled workers, and pensioners and the unemployed) 68 percent. Over four-fifths of the people writing in were defined in this way as broadly working class. The Bureau was also interested in the general literacy of their respondents. A team-member wrote: ‘I would put 90% in the literate class; about 5% in the sub-normal and about 5% in the very “advanced” class.’⁶⁷ On the whole, the people who wrote in were more likely to be those in early to late middle age, employed in less-skilled work or precariously employed, with reasonable literacy skills. Whilst there were some middle class and ‘affluent’ working class letter-writers, the Bureau predominantly received

⁶⁷ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Memo to T.K.P. Barrett, 29 January 1960.

post from those on less-skilled jobs, which were often lower paid and less likely to be unionised, as well as those excluded from society in other ways.

One desired demographic was missing from this: the younger, affluent workers who all the daily and Sunday tabloids were trying to chase.⁶⁸ In a memo to Barrett analysing the data, Munro wrote:

My guess is that a lot of young wives, particularly if they feel posh in their new Council house and think they are a step up on the social ladder, not only no longer vote Labour, but do not take or do not allow their husband's [sic] to take, *The News of the World*, which their parents took.

Munro also asked if there were regular letters from some of the new towns created by the 1946 Act, 'Harlow, Hemel Hempstead, Basildon, Stevenage, Crawley or Peterlee?'⁶⁹ This interest in the changing leisure pursuits was contemporaneous with the work being undertaken by John Goldthorpe on the 'affluent worker' in Luton, a town to the north of London, and also had some resonance with the concerns about shifts in working class culture raised by Richard Hoggart in the *Uses of Literacy* a year or two earlier, which were also being explored in books such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.⁷⁰ Munro's speculation here was that the young women who had moved out of the slums were looking for a newspaper that better suited their interests and aspirations – and which was not associated with ageing parents and less 'modern' tastes. Goldthorpe and his team found that working class people living in these new towns were no more likely to drop their support of the Labour Party once they moved house, and that rather than adopting middle class tastes and behaviours, their home lives were privatised and the media played an ever more important role. Whether young working class women in these new towns were shunning this specific paper remains unclear, but what this incident reveals is the extent to which the Bureau and the editors were consumed by wanting to understand more about the readership of the paper,

⁶⁸ Williams, *Read All About It!*, p.199.

⁶⁹ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys, Comments, n.d. Attached to 29 January 1960 memo

⁷⁰ J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969); J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968); R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life*, Orig. publication 1957 (Harmondsworth, 2009).

as far as this could be understood through the Bureau. The younger working classes appeared to have very different tastes and attitudes to their parents, seemingly overnight and challenging long-established understandings of what the working class wanted. Insight into these groups was needed if the papers were to maintain their appeal. In particular, their concern was with the connections between shifts in consumption patterns, working lives and life away from close family members impacted on class allegiances and behaviours, something of key interest to newspapers that had traditionally appealed to particular social classes. As the newspaper witnessed a drop in its readership from 8 million to 6 million in the early 1960s, anything which could potentially shed light on this process was seized.⁷¹

Despite this pressure to be chasing the affluent worker or coming up with stories of interest to this group, the Bureau increasingly saw their purpose as acting as a mediator between the neediest individuals and the welfare state, which created tension between it and the paper. David Kynaston has described Barrett as a ‘well-meaning paternalist’, who was concerned about the commitment of the new Conservative government of 1951 to the new welfare state.⁷² By 1953, Barrett was writing in the Bureau’s in-house journal of how it was an innovative and powerful form of social service itself:

It may not be too much to claim for the Bureau that it is something of a pioneer in its interpretation of “social service”. It is not merely that social service by post is a new technique but that its range is so extensive: it can do far more than help the materially poor. It can dispense with the assumption that affliction in mind, body or estate is confined to a particular race, class or income group [...] We can conduct as lively a duel to keep a senior officer’s son at a public school as to help a lorry driver’s daughter to go to university.⁷³

Central to Barrett’s concept of social welfare was the sense of a need across all classes to essentially access expert information, packaged in such a way to enable action or to get specialist help – if their own surveys suggested that it was largely the less affluent who

⁷¹ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/jul/08/news-of-the-world-circulation-data>; also commentary in Bainbridge and Stockdill, *The News of the World Story*, pp.175-84.

⁷² Kynaston, *Family Britain*, pp. 70–1.

⁷³ NI/JH Box 2 Journal of the John Hilton Bureau Special Coronation Issue Vol. V., no.6, 1 June 1954, p.5

sought them out. It was also a form of social service that was wholly driven by technology - in this case, an efficient modern postal service supplemented by the circulation of a mass weekly newspaper. In this analysis, the way to solve the self-identified problems of the public was to provide them with information that could help them to overcome everyday or systemic problems in the short term, with the Bureau, through its association with the newspaper, having the potential to tackle the structural issues.

One example of the latter was the coverage of the Rachman slum housing scandal in the paper in the 1960s. Barrett expressed puzzlement in 1963 that the two articles written in the newspaper on 21 and 28 July by Peter Earle and David Roxan, exposing the Rachman property scandal in West London, in turn part of the bigger John Profumo affair, had brought such a 'thin' response from the public, fewer than 50 letters. Of those letters, 35 percent were what Barrett deemed to be the normal business around housing law that the Bureau dealt with, whilst 20 percent were concerned with race and housing; 20 per cent needed help with obnoxious landlords, including one who kept threatening elderly residents with assault charges; whilst the final 20 percent were letters of support to the paper, or confirmed elements of the articles. Barrett interpreted this lack of post as evidence of 'a helpless underlayer, which hardly dare turn anywhere, of people suffering from the evils attached to the housing problem. Many of them are frightened', and encouraged the paper to continue its crusading role.⁷⁴ There was not necessarily any evidence to support this view, but the sense of this need for the Bureau to act as a champion remained.

The Bureau did not always position itself as a truculent outsider: it also attempted to influence the policy process through giving evidence to Royal Commissions. Barrett drew upon the Bureau's expertise in his evidence to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce,⁷⁵ whilst the Bureau also provided a written memorandum to the Commission on Funds in Court (1959), the Latey Commission on the age of majority (1967), the Law Commission's report on blood tests and paternity (1968), the Payne Report on the

⁷⁴ NI/JHB Box 15 Graphs and Specific Surveys Memo by TKP Barrett, 'Response to articles on the Rachman property rackets and on the communications in reply thereto investigated by the News of the World, 6 Aug 1963'

⁷⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 23 July 1952, p.6 'Misunderstanding over divorce evidence'; *Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, Report 1951-55*, (Cmd. 9678), (London, 1956) p.345

enforcement of judgement debts (1969), the Crowther Report on Consumer Credit (1971), and the Law Reform Committee's report on the interpretation of wills.⁷⁶ In the case of the Law Commission's working paper on family property, the Bureau supported its work by running a questionnaire in the *Sun*, the daily sister paper of the *News of the World*, which elicited 300 responses from the public in 1972.⁷⁷ The Bureau had some success, therefore, in entering into the policy process, by being a trusted organisation that was seen as having a rigorous evidence base.

The Bureau remained popular with the public and maintained a wider position in terms of the policy process, but its inability to attract the desired demographic or be a regular source of 'juicy' stories meant that its place within the *News of the World* was vulnerable. It was not enough for it to be a service that readers found useful. The Bureau's work was cut back in the later 1960s in order to save costs, before being closed down altogether in 1974 by the newspaper's new owner, Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch made a number of cutbacks on arrival in order to stop the losses the paper was making despite its high circulation.⁷⁸ By the 1970s, the Bureau cost £100,000 to run each year, and it was closed following a 1973 review by Henry Douglas, the paper's legal manager. Douglas concluded that the same sort of advice could be provided to readers through articles in the paper, rather than running a full scale, free advice operation.⁷⁹ Advice continued to be provided in a more editorial fashion through Unity Hall's column and more salacious photo diary problem pages, whilst more personalised advice came through premium-charge advice phone lines.⁸⁰ Advice columns lost none of

⁷⁶Finer et al., *Justice for All*, pp.27–30. *Report of the Committee on Funds in Court*, (Cmnd. 818) (London, 1959), p.1; *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority*, (Cmnd. 3342) (London, 1967), p. 48 and p. 160; Law Commission, *Report of the Committee on Blood Tests and Proof of Paternity in Civil Proceedings*, (London, 1968), p. 39; Lord Chancellor's Office, *Report of the Committee on the Enforcement of Judgement Debts*, (Cmnd. 3909), (London, 1969), p. 320 and p. 406; Department of Trade and Industry, *Consumer Credit. Report of the Committee*, (Cmnd. 4596) (London, 1971), p. 405; Law Reform Committee, *Nineteenth Report (interpretation of wills)*, (Cmnd. 5301), (London, 1973), p.25.

⁷⁷ Law Commission, *Family Law: First Report on Family Property: A New Approach*. (London, 1973), p.2.

⁷⁸ Horrie, *Tabloid Nation*, p.131.

⁷⁹ Bainbridge and Stockdill, *The News of the World Story*, pp.133-4.

⁸⁰ *New Society*, 24 October 1968, p.592, 'Memo to Maxwell'; A. Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978*, (Oxford, 2009), p.94.

their popularity in the 1970s: as Bingham demonstrates, Marjorie Proops at the *Daily Mirror* received 40,000 letters a year, whilst Claire Rayner at the *Sun* received 13,000, if both were dwarfed by the 100,000 sent to the Bureau.⁸¹ The gap left by the closure of the Bureau as a free service was filled, to a point, by other newspaper columns. However, it closed off a national and non-geographical avenue to seeking legal or other advice at a time during the 1970s as legal aid continued to be cut back, after years of more and more groups of people becoming ineligible for it. At the same time, the legal profession and voluntary sector responded through setting up community law centres in the most disadvantaged areas to try to combat this. Such community law centres were set up in response to perceived community needs, and funded by local authorities and charities rather than through the legal aid scheme. This allowed them to take on a wider range of work than they might otherwise have done through the legal aid scheme, as not all of their clients necessarily saw themselves as having ‘legal’ problems. Groups like the Newham Rights Centre were primarily involved in advice, but also in advocacy work for a large proportion of their local community, which included supporting ethnic minority groups, Ford car factory workers who found their wages did not stretch as far as they had previously and council house tenants, among others.⁸² Existing free legal advice centres (as the Poor Man’s Lawyer had become by the 1960s) and CAB services continued to provide services, albeit under pressure. The withdrawal of the John Hilton Bureau therefore coincided with a point of crisis in the provision of advice and legal aid within the wider community. However the Bureau staff and its users may have conceived of it as being a social service, it was first and foremost a service run by a newspaper that, whilst doing well in terms of its circulation, was struggling with its finances. The imperative at this time was to service the needs and interests of readers who had disposable income, and not so much those without.

⁸¹ Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p.76.

⁸² See Newham Rights Centre, *Newham Rights Centre: Two Years Work 1975-77* (London, 1977); also P. Kandler, ‘North Kensington Law Centre: “You thought that a really great society was going to come out of all of this”’, in H. Curtis and M. Sanderson, eds., *The Unsung Sixties: Memoirs of Social Innovation*, (London, 2004), pp. 155-67

On its founding in 1942, the personality and reputation of John Hilton had counted for much in a world in which supporting citizens to undertake their role effectively was paramount. Hilton's personality was central to his ability to act as a conduit for the public to ask for advice about the things that were troubling them, and his standing meant that the BBC and the national press were more than willing to support this. This needs to be understood in the context of the idea of the citizen needing information and support in fulfilling their duties, and the role of the newspaper in this, as Bingham has noted. The newspaper was an appropriate vehicle for this, by being easily affordable, trustworthy and aimed at a wide demographic. During the war, it was a cheap and accessible means of reaching a mass public. After the war, it was associated neither with charity, nor the state, nor with untrustworthy vendors, but rather occupied a trusted fourth space, particularly as access to statutory legal aid and advice became harder for more people to obtain. It was part of the empowerment of the so-called consumer citizen. As the *News of the World* and its competitors positioned themselves as the papers of the 'people', advice columns and bureaux fitted nicely into their world view. The private sector was, in this situation, the best place for an organisation that required the trust of ordinary people and independence from some of the structures that gave them trouble. The Bureau staff came in time to see themselves as the purveyors of a 'private social service', open to all. However, their own surveys strongly suggested that the group who used them were the more vulnerable members of the working class rather than the younger, more affluent generations with increasing disposable income. . . . As the newspaper fought to capture this audience, this connection with the older section of the readership and their relatively un-newsworthy problems made the Bureau vulnerable. The demand for the service had not gone away, but the Bureau just did not make money from it. It was rather one of a number of drains on the *News of the World*, which could not be justified to its new owner on the grounds of yielding sufficient news stories to cover its way. It was part of the complex environment of a newspaper in which non-news services could be offered if they brought in a particular segment of readers, or helped with the marketing and the positioning of the paper against its competitors. For the Bureau, however, there was no ready home for it within the public or voluntary sectors once the *News of the World* could no

longer sustain it, as those sectors were struggling to meet demand. The consumer citizen could find the support they needed in alternative ways; the abiding social need was supporting those who were disempowered through their lack of purchasing power.