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**‘Dial 999!’: Public Panic, the State and the  
Press in Interwar Britain**

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## ‘Dial 999!’: Public Panic, the State and the Press in Interwar Britain

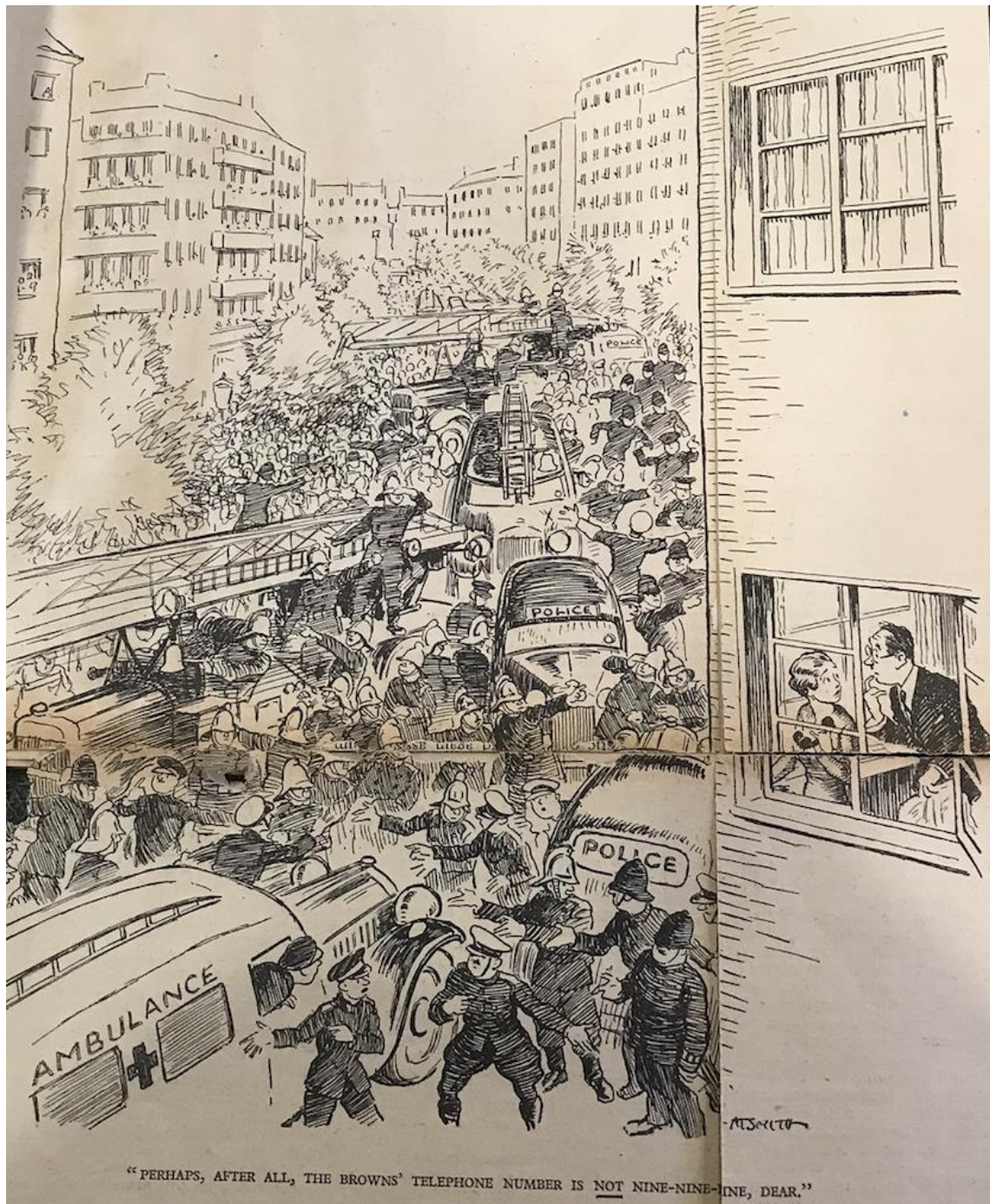


Figure 1: M. Smith, *The Humorist*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1937.

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## Introduction

‘She Just Dialled 999’, read the rather nonchalant headline of the *Daily Herald* on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1937.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the event it described was far from unremarkable. In the early hours of 7<sup>th</sup> July 1937, Mr John Beard was woken by a suspicious noise below his window. Immediately on alert, he shouted, ‘what is going on down there?’ as the burglar fled.<sup>2</sup> Mrs Beard, thinking quickly as her husband gave chase, dialled 999 and ‘as a result...almost instantaneous connexion [*sic*] was made with the police station, and in less than five minutes’ the man was arrested.<sup>3</sup> In court Mr Beard paid tribute to the emergency signal, testifying that ‘it struck me as a... taxpayer that we were getting something for our money, and I was very impressed’.<sup>4</sup> Far from routine, this incident represents the first fruitful instance of a call made to the recently launched 999 emergency service.

The 999-emergency number came into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1937 at automatic exchanges in London. As the first of its kind worldwide, 999 was a truly innovative communication tool which allowed emergency calls to be distinguished from ordinary ones. Today, 999 is an emblem of British society and the first point of call for millions in a crisis, yet few know much about its origins. With a history spanning eighty-two years, this dissertation cannot provide an exhaustive examination of 999, instead electing to consider the introduction of 999, through the lens of a moral panic. The term ‘moral panic’ burst onto the sociological scene with Cohen’s 1972 work, where he defined it as when ‘a condition, episode, person or group... become[s] defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media;... ways of coping are evolved or resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates’.<sup>5</sup> While not without deficiencies, its application is the most useful here because it ties together elements from discordant domains including social movements, collective behaviour, social problems and government intervention. Moral panic theory offers a concentrated framework to begin researching 999, providing the opportunity to track its development and explore the key agents of change. This dissertation argues that 999 was a moral panic triumph driving a public movement for change,

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<sup>1</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/31, ‘She Just Dialled 999’, *Daily Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Success of 999 Signal – Man Arrested Within Five Minutes’, *The Times*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Success of 999 Signal’, *The Times*.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Success of 999 Signal’, *The Times*.

<sup>5</sup> S. Cohen, *Folk Devils & Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 9.

and the presence of the public in every stage of its development thereafter, highlights the significant power they possess in enacting social change. Thus 999 forces a re-examination of traditional understandings of the period as one of state monopolisation, highlighting the disparity between the emergence of this sacred system and the conventional welfare state.

This dissertation fills something of a historical lacuna as almost no research into 999 has taken place. Most histories of the interwar period in Britain are dominated by narratives of early welfare reform and intervention, the 1930s economic depression, and numerous crises building towards the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, the history of 999 may appear dull, and yet as Midwinter argues ‘it is often the mundane which really matters’.<sup>7</sup>

More specifically, this paper sits at the intersection of three distinct fields of inquiry. Bringing this research together, allows for a greater appreciation of the complexities of the historical relationships between the media, governing institutions and society at large. Firstly, this dissertation contributes to histories of social movements, change and state intervention. Utilising sociological theories of action and social movements, historians have grappled with explanations for social change, attributing key roles to certain structures and agents. For example, Sewell has taken a broad theoretical approach tracking the creation of transformative historical events, while Dill and Aminzade have focused on mobilizing structures.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Midwinter’s work on welfare development in Britain highlights common threads in state responses to social fears, including influences on and motivations for state action, thus making it applicable to moral panic studies.<sup>9</sup> More broadly, historians have tended to see the twentieth century as the peak of state intervention, concentrating power in the hands of the state. 999, as a case study, combines these threads providing insight into collective mobilisation, subsequent state reactions and the complexity of state-public relations.

A further contribution relates to the historiography of communications and the media, which has developed substantially in recent decades. Most applicable to this study, are histories of

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<sup>6</sup> P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition; A. Havighurst, *Twentieth Century Britain* (Harper & Row, 1962), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; D. Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century* (Penguin Books, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> E. Midwinter, *The Development of Social Welfare in Britain* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 71.

<sup>8</sup> W. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); B. Dill and Aminzade, ‘Historians and the Study of Protest’, in Roggeband and Klandermans (eds.), *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines* (Springer, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Midwinter, *Development of Social Welfare*.

the press. Bingham has charted this avenue of research arguing that for some time historians oversimplified the role of the press, assuming it to be invariably either ‘conservative or reactionary’, resulting in misinterpretations of broader developments in British politics, society and culture.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to highlight more recent research which highlights the role of the press in identifying social threats and improving accessibility to political issues.<sup>11</sup> Emerging from this thread are discussions of historical moral panics. While a well-established sociological concept, historians have been hesitant to apply it. Williams argues this is because many view moral panics as ‘a product of modern society’, an assumption which he strongly refutes.<sup>12</sup> The few forays into moral panic analysis have proved fruitful. The early research of Davis on the London Garrotting Panic of 1862 and more recently Nicholas and O’Malley’s collective volume *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media* situate moral panic theory within the realm of media history by awarding a central role to the mass media as the vehicle through which ideas penetrate society and politics, often facilitating state responses.<sup>13</sup>

This dissertation also contributes to the historiography of policing and crime. This has tended to focus on the development of the police and changing reactions to crime.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Wood has highlighted the prevalence of sensationalised media coverage in crime histories arguing for further consideration of ‘everyday’ crime reporting.<sup>15</sup> Press coverage of 999 is one avenue through which to approach this gap, as it does not possess the same startling effect as gruesome crimes. Furthermore, historians including Johansen have produced work on police-community relations highlighting public contributions to effective policing and changing perceptions of the police.<sup>16</sup> 999 adds another dimension to these relationships as the public reprised their early role in stopping crime.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Bingham, ‘Ignoring the First Draft of History?’, *Media History*, 18:3-4 (2012), 311.

<sup>11</sup> A. Bingham, ‘An Organ of Uplift? The Popular Press and Political Culture in Interwar Britain’, *Journalism Studies*, 14:5 (2013), 651.

<sup>12</sup> K. Williams, ‘Moral Panics, Emotion and Newspaper History’, in Nicholas and O’Malley (eds.), *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 28.

<sup>13</sup> J. Davis, ‘The London Garrotting Panic of 1862’, in Gatrell and Lenman (eds.), *Crime and Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London: Europe, 1980); Nicholas and O’Malley, *Moral Panics*.

<sup>14</sup> D. Taylor, *The New Police in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control* (Manchester University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> J. Wood, ‘Crime News and the Press’, in Knepper and Johansen (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice* (Oxford University Press, May 2016), 311.

<sup>16</sup> P. Knepper and Johansen (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*.

Both the National and BT Archives contain a wealth of material on the 999-emergency number. These collections, which include government records, correspondence and newspaper cuttings, form the source base of this dissertation. These eclectic archives are invaluable as they contain material gathered and created by a wide range of actors. While the logic of selection is unclear, meaning some material could be missing, the assurance of archivists, who work to locate all surviving documents helps to negate this issue. In addition, wherever possible evidence has been corroborated by other sources to ensure the greatest degree of reliability. From these collections, two prominent source types emerge which will inform the crux of this dissertation; newspaper reports and government records.

It is first necessary to consider the merits and weaknesses of using newspapers as sources. At a meeting of Traffic District Superintendents and representatives of the Service and Equipment Divisions held on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1937, Mr Dive (Chairman) organised for the collation of all 999 relevant press cuttings.<sup>17</sup> The resulting file has been consulted at the BT Archives. While useful in showing the spread of coverage, it is important to recognise that these contain only snippets of the newspapers. As a result, the picture created is relatively limited given that the surrounding context is removed. More generally, newspapers occupied a central position in twentieth century British society acting as a platform for the expression of a wide range of views to large audiences. Bingham shows that in the twenty years after 1918, circulation of daily newspapers doubled, regularly reaching two thirds of the population by 1939.<sup>18</sup> Thus they can be taken as an indicator of public opinion during this period. Nevertheless, it is important to remain critical as newspapers often only display a limited perspective as a result of particular agendas and the nature of instant reporting. Through the consideration of a number of newspapers which vary in their audiences, both politically and socially, this threat has been addressed.

Government records possess their own values and deficiencies. An important consideration is whether disclosure was ever intended. If publication was anticipated, it is possible that they could have been manipulated for political reasons. In the case of 999, it does not appear that the reports and departmental correspondence were intended for public consumption. Instead, public statements were made containing information deemed crucial to the success of the

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<sup>17</sup> London, BT Archives: TCB211/31., 'Extracts from Newspapers', 1937-8.

<sup>18</sup> A. Bingham, *Journalism Studies*, 651.

scheme. Therefore, these records provide a candid glimpse into the inner workings and deliberations of the government and related institutions, i.e. the General Post Office (GPO). Unfortunately, there is some uncertainty regarding the authors of certain documents, however in most cases the department concerned has been decipherable as compensation.

Taking Cohen's sequential model of moral panics as its framework, this dissertation adopts a tripartite structure.<sup>19</sup> Critcher contends that applying Cohen's model can reduce analysis to a 'rather mechanical model of progression'.<sup>20</sup> Yet, when employed as a loose framework, it effectively highlights the central processes and overall trajectory of moral panics without prescribing an exact formula. Chapter One tracks the emergence of the moral panic through the first four stages, highlighting the crucial build-up of grassroots concern and the facilitating role of the media. Chapter Two addresses the *rescue* and *remedy* processes, challenging traditional narratives by illustrating the integral role of the public in state activity. Chapter Three illustrates 999's success in quelling the moral panic, and the central place that 999 and the panic it emerged from enshrined for the public in societal change. Together these discussions redress the power imbalance intrinsic in views of the twentieth century, placing agency back in the hands of the public.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Cohen, *Folk Devils & Moral Panics*.

<sup>20</sup> C. Critcher, *Moral Panics and the Media* (Open University Press, 2003), 18.

## Chapter One: Generating Panic

To begin, this section explores the foundational processes in Cohen's model – *Warning, Threat, Impact* and *Inventory* – through an analysis of newspaper content. The function of this chapter is two-fold – it establishes the explosion of concern as a moral panic, and outlines the processes and actors involved. In terming something a moral panic influential theorists, Goode and Ben-Yehuda, identify several essential elements – discernible elevated concern, hostility towards a designated enemy, widespread consensus, disproportionate anxiety and volatility – which are particularised in the ensuing analysis.<sup>21</sup> However, as a sociological concept, 'moral panic' was developed in relation to current events and as such historical archetypes do not conform exactly. Nonetheless, by utilising the paradigm to inform analysis, rather than stringently applying all elements it is possible to identify the spiralling processes of the interaction between the media and the public which manifest into heightened fear and moral panic.

'Shouts of Fire! Fire!', 'a scream... and then there was silence'.<sup>22</sup> These were the sounds heard on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1935, as a well-known doctor's Wimpole Street home went up in flames, killing five women. What followed was a period of intense public concern, best described as a moral panic, which led to the introduction of the emergency-999 number. This event encapsulates the critical *impact* stage when 'disaster strikes, and an immediate unorganised response takes place'.<sup>23</sup> The escalation to panic was contingent upon three key factors. Firstly, the press reaction to the incident was immediate and intense. Newspapers nationwide deployed emotionally charged headlines, provoking angst amongst the population. The front page of the *Daily Herald* was emblematic, reading 'Five Women Die as Fire Sweeps Doctor's Home', followed by the caption 'house of death'.<sup>24</sup> Numerous articles shared graphic details of the fruitless efforts of the girls to save themselves. *The Daily Telegraph*, for example, detailed the 'girls' terror in trying to save their sleeping mistress'.<sup>25</sup> In presenting the victims as defenceless females the press provoked outrage and fear that more could suffer a similar fate. This depiction is particularly important in the context of the 1930s, as society resisted post-war feminism, preferring, as Pugh argues, to put everything 'back in its proper place', with women dependent

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<sup>21</sup>E. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 33-9.

<sup>22</sup> 'Ten Dead in Two Fires', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> 'Five Women Die as Fire Sweeps Doctor's Home', *Daily Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>25</sup> 'How Five Women Died in Wimpole-Street Fire', *Daily Telegraph*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1935.

and fragile.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, by specifying the cause of the fire as the persistent leakage of gas and electric current and highlighting the coroner's remarks that 'anyone might be trapped in a similar way in a similar house in London', the press triggered further anxiety.<sup>27</sup> Together this widespread coverage provoked an emotional response across society, facilitating the expansion of this otherwise minor issue into a collective rupture.

The second determinant was the expression of a specific concern which represented a serious threat to public safety. In a letter published in the *Times*, Dr Norman Macdonald detailed his attempts to notify the Fire Brigade of the fire in his neighbours' house through the advised dialling code, '0'. He expressed unease at the lack of response from the telephone exchange.<sup>28</sup> Macdonald then broadened the issue posing the question of 'how any given operator is able to deduce the urgency' of a call and thus 'decide which call to leave unanswered?'.<sup>29</sup> This articulation of concern was key in provoking a wider reaction and the moral panic. Further letters published in *The Times* added weight to Macdonald's experience. For example, Mr Watson shared his experience:

'I am constantly complaining of the delay of the night staff in responding to a call. A delay of two to three minutes is by no means infrequent... In emergencies dialling "0" is little more than a farce'.<sup>30</sup>

These private complaints invaded the public sphere, provoking anxiety and undermining confidence in the telephone service by highlighting the potentially fatal flaws in the system. Unlike in other panics, notably the Garrotting Panic of 1862, it emerges that the hysteria stemmed from the grassroots not the press.<sup>31</sup> A consideration of the justifiability of the concern is required here. Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue that often the problem 'as measured by concrete indicators, turns out not to be especially damaging'.<sup>32</sup> For them, this element of disproportionality is essential in terming something a moral panic. The report of the Emergency Telephone Calls Committee, set up following the Wimpole Street fire, sheds significant light

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<sup>26</sup> M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 72.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Dr N. Macdonald, 'Fire in Wimpole Street', *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>29</sup> Dr Macdonald, 'Wimpole Street Fire – Reply to PO Statement', *The Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>30</sup> J. Watson, 'Telephone Calls in Emergency', *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>31</sup> J. Davis, in *Crime and Law*, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 4.

on the proportionality of the anxiety. The report detailed the results of inquiries into complaints made about the telephone system in nine representative districts. On average approximately 0.11% of emergency calls resulted in complaint.<sup>33</sup> This data shows that the majority of emergency calls were dealt with satisfactorily, thus displaying an element of disproportionality in the panic. Furthermore, in an official statement, regarding the Wimpole Street Fire, the Post Office concluded that the alarm had been raised prior to Macdonald's call:

‘The first notification of the fire reached the fire station... at 6.33am... engines arrived at 6.35am. These times are confirmed by the fire brigade... [Dr Macdonald] said that he had dialled 0... between 6.35 and 6.40am but having received no reply by the time he heard the engines arriving he abandoned the call.’<sup>34</sup>

This convincingly shows that the delay experienced by Dr Macdonald had no bearing on the outcome of the event. As such, a level of irrationality exists in the subsequent public agitation. This threat inflation was only possible due to the third key determinant – the platform created by the press. The Times provided the initial rupture site of the panic, and with an approximate daily readership of 200,000, the anxieties expressed in its columns reached many.<sup>35</sup> Complainants also found a voice in newspapers like *The Scotsman* and the intensely popular *Daily Mail*.<sup>36</sup> Widespread coverage provided a channel through which concerns could be expressed as pandemic, thus acting as the site for the micro-to-macro problem transformation.<sup>37</sup> In providing a platform for societal anxieties, the press compounded the shock of the impact event focusing public attention on a concrete example of the potential for disaster, creating a situation conducive to panic. As such the press simultaneously fuelled and were fuelled by grassroots concerns. Thus, the *impact* process sheds light on the complementary interplay between press and public during the interwar period, aptly exhibiting Hageman's assertion that ‘there is power in the pen and in the press’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kew, The National Archives, (hereafter TNA): HO341/13, ‘Emergency Calls Committee Report’, April 1936.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Wimpole Street Fire – New Post Office Statement’, *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>35</sup> J. Curran, Smith and Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences: Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 1987), 29.

<sup>36</sup> *The Scotsman*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1935; *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1935; Circulation of *Daily Mail* in 1930 was 1,845,000; J. Curran, Smith and Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Sociological concept applied to the process of an issue becoming a collective concern; J. Coleman, ‘Social Theory, Social Research and a Theory of Action’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 91:6 (1986).

<sup>38</sup> M. Hageman, *Police-Community Relations* (Sage Publications, 1985), 137.

The *warning* and *threat* stages are preconditions for the intense outbreak of underlying concerns evident in the *impact* event. *Warning*, as defined by Cohen involves ‘apprehensions based on conditions out of which danger may arise’ which are powerful enough to instil a belief that ‘current tranquillity can be upset’.<sup>39</sup> The *threat* process is one in which ‘people are exposed to communication... or signs... indicating specific imminent danger’.<sup>40</sup> *Warning* of this particular moral panic is difficult to decipher in contemporary evidence. However, in retrospect, conditions which held the potential for danger are apparent. Rising wages and new employment opportunities were accompanied by the increasing prevalence of late 19<sup>th</sup> century technologies, including the telephone.<sup>41</sup> This endowed significant swathes of society with the power inherent in the possession and possibility of the usage of technology, as outlined by Colin Cherry, affording a sense of security and a level of expectation.<sup>42</sup> Inherent in the term ‘moral panic’ is the idea that the threat relates to something which is ‘held sacred by or is fundamental to the society’.<sup>43</sup> In British society, personal security, safety and protection are indispensable, and emergency assistance expected. The explosive expansion of the telephone provided the public with a more efficient method of mobilizing emergency services, increasing their reliance on a quick reaction. Any infringement upon this emergency protection would pose a significant threat to the established structure of society. Sewell argues that such a ‘dislocation of structures’ would produce ‘a deep sense of insecurity, a real uncertainty about how to get on with life’, conducive to the emergence of a moral panic.<sup>44</sup> The danger here arose as demand for exchange operators grew alongside telephone ownership, and the GPO struggled to acquire staff. For example, in December 1932, *The Daily Telegraph* reported on difficulties in finding women willing to work the exchanges during the night.<sup>45</sup> This increased the probability of delays, with potentially fatal consequences. Such an event would, and did, severely undermine the existing structures which provided security for the masses. Thus, it is clear that the conditions from which *danger* could arise were present.

The *threat* had been identified prior to the ignition of moral panic. This is apparent from letters written to *The Times* in the aftermath of the event in November 1935. Dr Orchard wrote that in

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<sup>39</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> D. Gladstone, *The Twentieth Century Welfare State* (MacMillan, 1999), 23.

<sup>42</sup> W. Edmondson (ed.), *The Age of Access: Information Technology and Social Revolution*, posthumous papers of Colin Cherry (Kent: Croom Helm, 1985), 72.

<sup>43</sup> K. Thompson, *Moral Panics* (Routledge, 2005), 23.

<sup>44</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 250.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Night Phone Calls, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1931.

October his patient had received no response for ten minutes, while he had endured a wait of five minutes when organising urgent care.<sup>46</sup> He then detailed his interaction with the exchange supervisor where he identified the potential danger had it been a case of fire. An additional letter from Mr Latta, highlights an awareness of operator neglect in treating every call as if it was urgent, arguing that ‘what is normally no more than a slight inconvenience may in other circumstances have fatal consequences’.<sup>47</sup> All six available letters featured in *The Times* emphasise frequent delays in reaching an operator and the potential for a serious incident to occur, with additional complaints certainly made to the controlling institution, the GPO.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the imminent threat had been felt and concerns conveyed to those operating the service. These foreshadowing events had little influence without press coverage, as their reach was limited to personal acquaintances and GPO officials. Their impact was contingent on the disastrous event, which facilitated the publication of preceding concerns and increased their scope.

Finally, unfolding in the aftermath of the *impact* event is the *inventory* process, defined by Cohen as when ‘those exposed to the disaster begin to form a preliminary picture of what has happened and of their own condition’.<sup>49</sup> This realisation process is apparent in the evidence discussed already. The enemy in this instance was not any one group but identifiable as the threat posed to life by significant delays in answering emergency calls. This possibility challenged confidence in the telephone service, generating uncertainty about the best means of sourcing help, resulting in the consensus that greater measures were needed. Sewell posits that ‘this uncertainty is a necessary condition for the kind of collective creativity that characterizes so many great historical events’.<sup>50</sup> Thus the public began to develop methods of alleviating the threat. Initially these ideas lacked clarity, but as the panic developed more nuanced conceptions emerge. This is seen in letters sent to the press from interested parties. Mr Watson, writing on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1935, suggests a need for greater operator efficiency and more staff, while Mr Sachs recommended that subscribers should have the respective numbers for the services written above their telephones.<sup>51</sup> These initial proposals failed to address the key issue of the current impossibility of distinguishing between ordinary and emergency calls. More pertinent

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<sup>46</sup> HP Orchard, ‘To the Editor of the Times’, *The Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>47</sup> G. Latta Letter to the Editor of the Times, ‘Telephone Calls in Emergency’, *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>49</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 250.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Emergency Calls by Telephone – More Experiences’, *The Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

suggestions appear in a later article, which pinpoints the recommendation in three of four letters of the 'institution of some distinctive signal, to be confined to such emergencies as fire or sudden illness'.<sup>52</sup> Thus it is clear that the public began to take stock and formulate their own solutions to the conundrum.

Overall, this chapter established the intense public concern which emerged in the aftermath of the Wimpole-Street Fire as a moral panic. Goode and Ben-Yehuda's criteria are fulfilled to a varying extent, for example the rapid build-up of concern is undeniable, while the hostility towards a specific enemy is more abstract. In tracking the progression of the panic through Cohen's preliminary stages, significant light has been shed on the correlative roles played by the public and the press in movements for social change in interwar Britain. The pressure originated from below with the outpouring of concern, highlighting the agency of the public in professing their grievances and pushing for change. As in many moral panics, the press played a key facilitating role: widely publicising the event and subsequent criticisms; distorting its severity which fuelled the mounting anxiety; and contextualising the situation in a way which provoked fear that a similar tragedy could occur. Thus, it is clear that the public and the press worked off each other fuelling anxiety and generating a significant moral panic. The particular impact of this panic, in terms of effecting change and influencing government policy will be explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>52</sup> 'The Telephone in An Emergency – The Post Office and Recent Suggestions', *The Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1935.

## Chapter Two: State to the Rescue?

‘While the connection between press coverage and policy change is sometimes clear... other panics come and go without leaving much of a trace’.<sup>53</sup>

As such, it is not the moral panic itself which is most noteworthy, but the outcomes and wider reaction to its emergence. These are typified in the *rescue* and *remedy* stages of Cohen’s model. Cohen defines *rescue* as the ‘activities geared to immediate help’, and *remedy* as ‘more deliberate and formal activities undertaken towards relieving the affected’ during which the ‘supra-system takes over’.<sup>54</sup> Eminently useful in understanding this phase is Sahlins theory regarding the ‘constitution of historical events by cultural structures’.<sup>55</sup> Championed by Sewell as a ‘necessary starting point for any theorization of events’, the theory declares that ‘what consequences events will have depends on how they are interpreted, and that interpretation can only be made within the terms of the cultural structures in place’.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the *rescue* and *remedy* processes it is necessary to get to grips with both the interpretations of events and the structures within which they took place. To accomplish this, this chapter adopts a tripartite structure. An examination of the contextual tendencies and interests of the relevant authorities, primarily the Government and the General Post Office (GPO), followed by an exploration of the chosen measures, and ultimately the methods used to implement them.

Critcher highlights that typically, having exploited the resources available to them, the public and media find them insufficient and are forced to appeal to a greater authority with the power to implement change.<sup>57</sup> Due to the inextricable link between the problem and the telephone service, the public lacked the ability to enact direct change as the GPO controlled the system. As a Department of State, the GPO was an integral feature of the government apparatus. Thus, the success of the moral panic rested on its ability to permeate government consciousness and gain political support. The key to this and the resulting solutions, according to Midwinter is

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<sup>53</sup> J. Davis, in *Crime and the Law*, 311.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 17.

<sup>55</sup> M. Sahlins, ‘The Return of the Event, Again: With Reflections on the Beginnings of the Great Fijian War of 1843 to 1855’, in A. Biersack (ed.), *Clio in Ocean: Toward a Historical Anthropology* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>56</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 198-9.

<sup>57</sup> Critcher, *Moral Panics and the Media*, 18.

‘the amount of... danger, that might be caused to the generality of people’.<sup>58</sup> This danger was primarily conveyed through the medium of the press who used the incident at Wimpole Street to present an ongoing active threat to the safety of the public, as demonstrated previously. In so doing, the press aided the public endeavour, infiltrating political circles, disseminating their concerns and gaining support. This is unmistakable, as on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1935 the moral panic commanded the attention of British Parliament when Captain Cunningham-Reid, Conservative MP, questioned the Postmaster-General (Major Tryon) on the trouble experienced by Macdonald in contacting the exchange during the fire at Wimpole Street.<sup>59</sup> The subsequent debate contained several follow-up questions from MPs suggesting means of alleviating the risk.<sup>60</sup> In settling the debate, Major Tryon launched ‘a departmental inquiry that w[ould] cover the whole question of urgency calls’.<sup>61</sup> This shows that the danger was sufficiently profound to compel meaningful action. Undoubtedly the combined force of the publicity and mounting societal concern was crucial in attracting the attention of the supra-system.

However, media attention and public concern alone are not sufficient to account for government intervention. A certain level of congruence is essential in the relationship between political structures and popular anxieties. Klingemann and Fuchs argue that this harmony ‘at the level of political processes exists where the specialized actors... can give citizens what they want’ thereby securing a degree of support.<sup>62</sup> Gaining popular support was particularly important in the interwar years, as voting became a ‘habit for the adult majority’ following universal suffrage in 1918, and the Labour Party went from strength-to-strength.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, political considerations undoubtedly influenced the decision to intervene. As such, we can appreciate Bingham’s assertion that ‘the relationship between government intervention, the role of the media and social fears [is] not always straightforward’.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, prevailing trends in government action in the interwar period were conducive to further intervention. Midwinter argues that in this period ‘the state intervened more forcefully and was much more

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<sup>58</sup> Midwinter, *Development of Social Welfare*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Commons Sitting 9<sup>th</sup> December 1935, 20<sup>th</sup> Century House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers, 5th series, vol. 307 (1935-6), 531-702.

<sup>60</sup> Commons Sitting 9<sup>th</sup> December 1935, House of Commons Sessional Papers.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Emergency Telephone Calls – Postmaster-General Promises an Inquiry’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1935.

<sup>62</sup> H. Klingemann and Fuchs (eds.), *Citizens and the State* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>63</sup> S. Glynn and Booth, *Modern Britain: An Economic and Social History* (Routledge, 1996), 48-50.

<sup>64</sup> A. Bingham, ‘The British Popular Press and Venereal Disease during the Second World War’, *Historical Journal*, 48:4 (2005).

proactive', tackling social problems including housing and unemployment.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it seems that the governments of this period were more willing to alleviate social issues than previous administrations. While these aspects of the political structure are worth considering, it is important not to administer too much credit to the state and overlook the importance of public activity. Overall it is apparent that the moral panic ultimately succeeded in attracting the attention and assistance of the supra-structure due to the widely publicised panic which made passivity both untenable and politically unfavourable.

Troubled by events playing out in the public sphere, the GPO in conjunction with the government established a committee to: 'consider the best means of securing the rapid setting up of emergency telephone calls including the question of a special indication to the exchange operating staff that such a call is of an urgent nature'.<sup>66</sup> In April 1936 the Committee adopted the public's suggestion, recommending 999 as the 'special code [to] be made available for all emergency calls which would... enable the call to receive priority'.<sup>67</sup> A number of elements influenced their decision. Firstly, the public occupied a prominent place in the discussion as the government strived to dispel the panic. One of the first points raised was that they should be careful to remember that 'the telephone subscriber, faced with an emergency... regards his telephone as ever-ready help', and as such should do all in their power to 'provide the most efficient and reliable service'.<sup>68</sup> Attention was also given to ensuring ease of use. To maximise this, three essential criteria for the code were set-forth: easily remembered; easy to dial in the dark or thick smoke; and unlikely to be misdialled.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, technical advice from members of the engineering and traffic departments influenced the outcome. The initial suggestion of a lever was abandoned following the surfacing of a number of insurmountable technical difficulties.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the choice of 999 was the result of surmounting numerous obstacles inherent in other codes, including SOS and 111.<sup>71</sup> While the technicalities were important in deciding specifics, ultimately it was public needs which exerted the largest influence over the creation of the solution. The effects of the initial moral panic and the power of public opinion are very distinctive in this report.

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<sup>65</sup> Midwinter, *Development of Social Welfare*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

<sup>67</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

<sup>68</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

<sup>70</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

<sup>71</sup> TNA: HO341/13, 'Emergency Calls Committee Report'.

Finally, a consideration of the 999-implementation strategy is needed. Having chosen the emergency dialling code, the government and GPO were faced with the complex task of successfully administering the strategy. Firstly, they had to coordinate the work of the engineering and telecommunications departments. Unfortunately, the minutes of all Emergency Calls Committee meetings could not be located, however a significant number were accessed, and an abundance of inter-departmental correspondence provides assurance that the crucial information is available. In order to effectively coordinate the technical changes required to segregate calls, a Technical Sub-Committee was created with representatives from the Telecommunications Department, Engineering Department and the London Telephone Service.<sup>72</sup> A sense of urgency is conveyed in the correspondence. Numerous requests for the provision of a 'firm date' at which 'the new emergency service will be ready' appear in private correspondence and during meetings.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, in a letter on behalf of the Engineer-in-Chief, it was stated that 'in view of the urgency... the 999 service so far as exchange equipment is concerned can be provided in 6 months'.<sup>74</sup> Clearly, the relevant departments were acutely aware of the schedule outlined at the fifth technical sub-committee meeting, and were working hard to meet it.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the scheme was plagued by delays. Having been scheduled for introduction on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the number was not operational until 1<sup>st</sup> July 1937.<sup>76</sup> Through the above noted inter-departmental correspondence it becomes clear that the technical implementation was primarily governed by conditions impacting the arms of the state apparatus, including the GPO. It is at this point that the role of the state in the introduction of 999 is most authoritative.

However, the crucial condition for successful implementation is effective advertisement. Mayron et al argue that if a media campaign is well-organized, a measure 'can become widely accepted and appropriately used by the public' in a short time, which is the ultimate goal of any reform.<sup>77</sup> Therefore the government and GPO endeavoured to publicise the 999-scheme to raise awareness and stimulate usage. An official announcement in the House of Commons on

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<sup>72</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, 'Technical Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes', 27/01/1938.

<sup>73</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, 'A. Belgrave to The Engineering Department', 04/02/1937; BT Archives: TCB654, 'Memorandum' February 1937.

<sup>74</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, 'Sgd EB to Mr Gomersall', 13/07/1936.

<sup>75</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, 'Controller LTS to the Engineering Department', 30/07/1936.

<sup>76</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, 'E1, Sgt. WGT to S2, "Subscribers Emergency Service Code 999"', 04/02/1937.

<sup>77</sup> R. Mayron, Long and Ruiz, 'The 911 Emergency Telephone Number: Impact on Emergency Medical Systems across a Metropolitan Area', *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 2:6 (1984), 493.

30<sup>th</sup> June 1937, declared 999 operational in the London area.<sup>78</sup> Correspondingly, the government and GPO launched a public education campaign comprised of two main components: targeted and comprehensive. Firstly, the GPO specifically targeted the subscribers who would be covered by the new scheme, i.e. those on automatic exchanges in London. They sent 350,000 letters to subscribers of the relevant exchanges detailing the new arrangements, and organised the replacement of centre dial labels with ones reading ‘Fire, Police, Ambulance – Dial 999’.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the establishing committee was very concerned with ensuring that ‘in all relevant publicity matter and permanent instructions, subscribers should be advised of an effective method of dialling 999’.<sup>80</sup> This resulted in the amendment of the emergency notice at the front of the telephone directory, to include written and visual instructions for users.<sup>81</sup> These tools worked to provide information to those on whom the initial success of 999 rested.

However, in order to address the moral panic itself, the state needed to publicise the solution more broadly, so employed the press as the vehicle to spread awareness. In the first week of operation, 999 appeared in almost every newspaper in the UK.<sup>82</sup> Analysis of 37 newspaper articles dating from 30<sup>th</sup> June 1937 to 5<sup>th</sup> July 1937, collated in the BT Archives and other newspaper archives reveals a remarkably similar format.<sup>83</sup> Unsurprisingly, all 37 contain a brief overview of the number and how it works. More interestingly, 81% of the articles contain an emphasis on limiting usage to real emergencies so as not to undermine its purpose. The phrasing is such that it reads like a specific request from the government and GPO. For example, the *Daily Sketch* states that ‘Sir Womersley yesterday asked the Daily Sketch to urge the public to confine the use of 999 to real emergencies’.<sup>84</sup> It is primarily the provincial newspapers, like the *Irish Times* that don’t mention this, probably believing it irrelevant given that the service was only operational in London.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, 78% of articles noted that the service was only available in London, while the provincial newspapers and some national

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<sup>78</sup> Commons Sitting 30<sup>th</sup> June 1937, *House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, Vol.325 (1936-7).

<sup>79</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/31, ‘When you should dial that 999’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1937; TNA: HO341/13, ‘Emergency Calls Committee Second Report’, 1936.

<sup>80</sup> TNA: HO341/13, ‘Emergency Calls Committee Second Report’.

<sup>81</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, ‘Letter from your Telephone Manager’.

<sup>82</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>83</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>84</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/31, ‘999 – Landsman’s SOS’, *Daily Sketch*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1937.

<sup>85</sup> Appendix 1.

papers noted that further extension was expected. The existence of the same information framed in a curiously similar way in early press coverage, begs explanation. The government and GPO might have issued a press release containing information to be included in the newspapers, although such a document has not been located. Therefore, it is probable that this information was obtained from calculated parliamentary discussion. The debate and announcement in Parliament on 30<sup>th</sup> June was unquestionably geared towards ensuring the desired information fell into the hands of the press. A letter to the GFO from Mr Innes of the Telecommunications Department reveals an appreciation that when the Postmaster-General tells ‘the House what is being done. The press will do the rest’, therefore implying an element of manipulation.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the arm of the state is clearly visible in much of the press coverage and the implementation process more generally. Altogether, the implementation strategy sheds light on the priorities of state structures. While exerting significant control, they gave antecedence to resolving the moral panic as efficiently as possible, pursuing anyone who diverged from the planned schedule and launching a widespread advertising campaign. This highlights the more delicate influence of the public, as they quietly shaped the direction taken.

Overall, through the exploration of a number of elements implicit in the *rescue* and *remedy* processes this chapter has established the inseparability of the public from state activity. Concerns about the moral panic unfolding in the public sphere extended into the political sphere, leading to the establishment of the Emergency Calls Committee. The public were an ever-present guiding force in the Committee’s discussions and decisions. Furthermore, while government monopolisation is most marked in the implementation stage, the general public remain implicit in formulations of the best methods of administration, and ultimately possessed the prerogative to approve the new scheme. Thus, it is too simplistic to attribute the introduction of new social measures solely to the government as the cruciality of the intangible influence of citizens is shown. Together this chapter proves that the measure was not simply made for the public but was also made by them.

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<sup>86</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, ‘Innes to O’Dell’, August 1936.

### Chapter Three: A Success Story?

We have seen how the moral panic developed and the measures enacted by the state to resolve the problem. Modelled on Cohen's final stage, *recovery*, defined as when 'a community either recovers to former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaptation to the changes which the disaster may have brought about', this chapter illustrates the success of 999 in re-instilling public confidence in the telephone system.<sup>87</sup> The chapter then outlines how 999's introduction impacted social dynamics more broadly, shifting emphasis from the state to enshrine a political place for the public in social change. Through this analysis, 999 takes its rightful place as a historical event which transformed previous structures and practices.<sup>88</sup>

An understanding of the short-term impacts is central in surveying 999 as a moral panic. Initially the public was somewhat ignorant of the existence of 999. Newspapers, like the *Evening Standard*, highlighted that in the first week 1,336 calls were made to 999, compared to 1,896 emergency calls to '0', demonstrating that 999 was not yet ingrained in public consciousness.<sup>89</sup> A definite advancement in the use of the 999 is shown in the results of a GPO investigation of the first five months of operation.<sup>90</sup> The first week saw just 36.2% of all genuine emergency calls received on 999.<sup>91</sup> The first month witnessed 50% of emergency calls routed through 999, rising to 57.3% in the second month and 69.7% by the end of the fifth month.<sup>92</sup> This increase can be attributed to the lower level of awareness in the first week, and the subsequent publicity which facilitated the expansion of knowledge and confidence in the new scheme. According to Schwartz and Paul, for an education campaign to be effective, it cannot only contain narrative coverage, but also requires 'feature stories, editorials and press endorsements'.<sup>93</sup> In this vein we can understand the success of the campaign, as along with general instructions newspapers contained numerous success stories and editorial-style commentary. For example, at least seven articles detailed the Beards' positive experience of

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<sup>87</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 17.

<sup>88</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 227.

<sup>89</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/30, '1336 People Dialed 999', *Evening Standard*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

<sup>90</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, 'Notes on Telegraph and Telephone Traffic Developments', HQ53/38 no.34, January 1938.

<sup>91</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, HQ53/38 no.34.

<sup>92</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, HQ53/38 no.34.

<sup>93</sup> M. Schwartz and Paul, 'Resource Mobilization versus the Mobilization of People', in Morris and Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (Yale University Press, 1992), 209.

999 while numerous other triumphant stories littered national newspaper throughout 1937.<sup>94</sup> As a credible and trusted source in twentieth century British society, this press endorsement instilled confidence in the new system, playing what Happer and Philo call a ‘legitimising role’.<sup>95</sup> Due to this press-led public encouragement campaign, 999 quickly became a familiar feature in the everyday lives of London’s inhabitants.

The success in London was so great that attention swiftly turned to its extension. In October 1937, it was settled that there was no reason ‘for delaying further steps for the extension of the scheme... and it is, therefore proposed to proceed’, and in 1938, 999 was introduced in Glasgow.<sup>96</sup> Due to constraints on expenditure imposed by the outbreak of war in 1938 further extension was halted in October.<sup>97</sup> Discussions resumed in September 1943, and in a meeting designed to ‘expedite the introduction’ of 999 in February 1945, the GPO stated its commitment ‘to the provision of the Emergency dialling code 999 as a standard facility’, and work resumed in October.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the demand for 999 in the provinces is evidenced by the warm welcome potential extension received from controllers in Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Manchester in 1948.<sup>99</sup> This clearly shows the extent of 999’s success, as the government considered it an indispensable institution and one which should be universal. As such, by 1948 all large towns had access, and in 1976 999 became nationwide.<sup>100</sup>

Success is further demonstrated by the way 999 captured the imagination of the general public. Fascination with the scheme is indicated in the countless letters received by Scotland Yard, containing suggestions, questions and complaints. The National Archives hold 57 letters, dated 1945-66, to Scotland Yard from curious members of the public.<sup>101</sup> It is reasonable to assume that many more were sent to the GPO and other institutions. All 57 letters expressed discontent with the choice of 999 based on dialling speed, consistently suggesting 111 as a better

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<sup>94</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/30 and TCB211/31.

<sup>95</sup> C. Happer and Philo, ‘The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change’, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1:1 (2013), 328.

<sup>96</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, ‘Sd. To Engineering Department’, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1937; BT Archives: TCB654, ‘Technical Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes’, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1938.

<sup>97</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, S. Saffery, ‘Memorandum’, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1943.

<sup>98</sup> BT Archives: TCB654, ‘Emergency Dialling Code 999 – Minutes of Meeting’, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1945; BT Archives: TCB654, ‘Works Specification TE6240’, October 1945.

<sup>99</sup> BT Archives: POST33/5618, ‘Sgd. Ray to All Telecomms Controllers’, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1948.

<sup>100</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, I. Blackhouse, ‘999 – The Number One Life Saver’, BT Press Information, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1987.

<sup>101</sup> Appendix 2.

alternative.<sup>102</sup> Similar concerns were also voiced in the newspaper articles of various observers including MPs, journalists and members of the public in letters.<sup>103</sup> For example, the *Star* noted that it is the ‘slowest signal it is possible to make’ taking double the time of 111.<sup>104</sup> Taken alone, evidence of this type suggests that the public were not wholly content with the new system, but this would be a glaring misinterpretation. Closer examination reveals that the letters display an appreciation of the system and a strong desire to ensure that it works as efficiently as possible, evidenced by many noting that the extra few seconds ‘might be the difference between a murder or help in time’.<sup>105</sup> Whether they constitute complaints or suggestions is debatable, but the interest and engagement is glaringly apparent. The letters are authored, by a wide range of people – from as young as 13 and as far afield as Canada and China.<sup>106</sup> The active interest in the system demonstrates the extent to which 999 permeated society, captivating the population at large. Together the existence of these letters, increased usage, and gradual extension indicate that 999 was considered vital in emergency situations becoming a hallmark British institution. Edmondson’s assertion that ‘technology itself, in the metal has no power; the power lies in the hands of those who possess and use it’, holds most true in this instance as it was the very existence and possibility of 999’s usage which endowed it with importance.<sup>107</sup> This instilled a security in the consciousness of the public, which allowed them to overcome the moral panic.

Having established the success of 999 in dispelling the moral panic, we turn to more ambiguous considerations: the long-term structural impact of 999 and the moral panic. Firstly, the advent of 999 enshrined a political place for the public. In the aftermath of WWII, the state became increasingly attentive to public expectations of the 999 service, simultaneously responsive and pre-emptive in order to prevent a further moral panic. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the reaction to ‘five separate occasions’ of criticism on the radio programme ‘Listening Post’ in 1967.<sup>108</sup> Paradoxically, this time the government panicked. In July 1967, Mr Crawford shared his experience of twice having to wait for ‘over 10 minutes’ for the police to answer.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>103</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>104</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/30, ‘999’, *Star*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1937.

<sup>105</sup> Appendix 2; TNA: MEPO2/9695, ‘Correspondence from Mr Foster’, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1958.

<sup>106</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>107</sup> Edmondson (ed.), *The Age of Access*, 15.

<sup>108</sup> TNA: HO287/241, ‘999 Calls DRAFT’.

<sup>109</sup> TNA: HO287/241, Listening Post, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1967.

In a scathing report he suggests that delays ‘make the whole thing ridiculous’.<sup>110</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> August Mr Butler outlined his own encounter with 999.<sup>111</sup> He claimed to have been instructed to dial another number which was impossible as he had no coins, and dismissed by the police so the crime he witnessed went ‘unchecked’.<sup>112</sup> The allegations expressed by these men were thrown into question by numerous officials charged with investigating the situation. For example, the GPO stated that they had no record of Mr Crawford’s complaint, contending that had he really experienced multiple ten-minute delays he would have lodged a complaint.<sup>113</sup> Despite doubts over the complainants’ authenticity, the criticism set in motion an extensive inquiry into the effectiveness of 999. In July, a representative for the Home Secretary asked the Assistant Commissioner for ‘urgent comments’ on the Listening Post transcript and ‘in particular on the efficiency of the 999 system’.<sup>114</sup> According to Glaysh (GPO Communications Branch), the GPO took on average just seven seconds to answer a 999 call, while analysis in Kent revealed that the total average response time was 6.4 minutes.<sup>115</sup> While a general consensus emerged that most were ‘satisfied that the 999 system is efficient’ and that having ‘stood the test of time’ 999 should not be altered, the crucial feature of this example is the extent of concern and the efforts made to mitigate risks and prevent another moral panic.<sup>116</sup> As the state became increasingly alert and responsive to the needs of the public, they endowed the public with a powerful political voice.

999 and the preceding moral panic also enshrined a place for the public in social change. This period witnessed a major expansion of government activity in the supply of welfare, paving the way for the establishment of the post-1945 welfare state. As such history readily views this period as one in which the state increasingly monopolised societal change. For example, Midwinter argues that ‘the entire gamut of public services... were in the hands of the same authorities’, producing, according to Glynn and Booth, a situation in which ‘the legitimacy of British institutions... [were] accepted with unquestioning enthusiasm by the vast majority’.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> TNA: HO287/241, Listening Post, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1967.

<sup>111</sup> TNA: HO287/241, Listening Post, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1967.

<sup>112</sup> TNA: HO287/241, Listening Post, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1967.

<sup>113</sup> TNA: HO287/241, ‘Correspondence from R. Fowler’, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1967.

<sup>114</sup> TNA: HO287/241, ‘Mr Angel to Mr Mark’, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1967.

<sup>115</sup> TNA: HO287/241, ‘Correspondence from Glaysh’, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1967; TNA: HO287/241, P. McMorgan, ‘Response Times to Emergency Calls’, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1967.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: HO287/241, ‘Correspondence from Fowler’; TNA: HO287/241, ‘Met Police to Commissioners Office’, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1967.

<sup>117</sup> Midwinter, *Development of Social Welfare*, 71; Glynn and Booth, *Modern Britain*, 42.

Subsequently many might argue that 999 was a precursor to the welfare state, including it in that realm. By concentrating disproportionately on the actions of the state, such interpretations obscure the efficacy of human action. The moral panic which produced 999 shows that far from being reliant and unquestioning, the public actively challenged the status-quo, creating social change. Additionally, the existence of a widespread moral panic allowed the public to occupy an enlarged role in the state apparatus, directly and indirectly influencing government action. The reality of the public as critical agents in the introduction of 999, poses a serious challenge to established judgements of the period. Therefore, while an undisputed hallmark institution, I contend that 999 does not conform to traditional ideas of the welfare state due to the nature of its inception as the product of a triumphant public-led moral panic.

Finally, 999 transformed public-police relations. As another arm of the state, the police are integral to the state monopolisation thesis, which sees the response to crime as the sole responsibility of the police, depriving the public of agency in criminal justice history.<sup>118</sup> Gaining ground due to histories of the hostile reception the police received on their inception, this theory accentuates the isolation of the public from the police.<sup>119</sup> While historians have queried the theory, they have done little to directly dispute its assertions. The telephone and 999 challenge this theory, endowing the public with a power and importance in police operations. Countless historians, including Reiss and Melville Lee agree that public communication is crucial in ensuring effective policing.<sup>120</sup> Melville Lee highlights that ‘only on the rarest occasions [is] a policeman actually the eye-witness of a crime’ and must therefore ‘rely on information’ from the public.<sup>121</sup> The telephone is the primary means through which the public communicate with the police as Reiss argues it is ‘readily available to most citizens and is the fastest way of exchanging information’.<sup>122</sup> It follows that 999 would improve this process by providing a specific avenue for emergency transfers. Manning argues that the significance of citizen calls has been exaggerated, implying that the transformation of the call throughout the transmission process places the power of response in the hands of state

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<sup>118</sup> D. Churchill, ‘Rethinking the state monopolisation thesis: the historiography of policing and criminal justice’, *Crime, History and Societies*, 18:1 (2014), 132.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor, *The New Police*, 9.

<sup>120</sup> A. Reiss Jr., *The Police and the Public*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1971), 105; W. Melville Lee, *A History of Police in England* (New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1971), 329.

<sup>121</sup> Melville Lee, *History of Police in England*, 329.

<sup>122</sup> Reiss, *Police and the Public*, 11.

agencies.<sup>123</sup> Yet the importance of 999 for the police, evident in police appeals for citizen calls in several newspapers, serves to discredit this argument. In October 1937, a *Daily Mail* caption read ‘The Man in the Street can JOIN IN THE HUNT’, accompanied by an invitation from the Police Commissioner for the public ‘to make free use of the telephone when they wish to communicate with or consult police’.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, *The Times* in May 1939 detailed the importance of emergency calls to the police citing two particular cases in which they had been able to detain criminals as a direct result of a citizen’s call.<sup>125</sup> This is followed by an assertion of ‘Scotland Yards’ hopes that the public will realize the importance and effectiveness of a call to the police through the medium of 999’.<sup>126</sup> These police appeals indicate the value of 999 calls to the police, allowing them to mobilize effectively and catch criminals. It also highlights the reliance of the police on the public for information, giving power back to the public, as it was their prerogative to use 999. Thus 999 redefined the relationship between the police and the public, balancing the dynamics of power to reveal a mutual dependence and giving new meaning to Page’s suggestion that ‘the police are the public’ and ‘the public are the police’.<sup>127</sup>

In short, this chapter demonstrates the immediate success of 999 from the acceptance and increasing usage of the new system by the public which led to further expansion to the provinces and the formation of 999 as a sacred institution to the British public. Furthermore, the pivotal implications for existing social dynamics are proven, as the public were endowed with a powerful voice in politics, change and policing. In describing societal relations, historians have often drawn a false dichotomy of power-wielding state versus power-bending public. 999 challenges this, revealing the complex dimensions of these relationships and highlighting the essential determining force of the public in the emergence of 999. Thus, traditional power frameworks are challenged as the pre-eminent position of the public in inter-war British political society is uncovered.

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<sup>123</sup> P. Manning, ‘Organisation and Environment – influences on police work’, in Clarke and Hough, *The Effectiveness of Policing* (England: Gower Publishing, 1980), 109-12.

<sup>124</sup> BT Archives: TCB211/31, ‘Bandits Beaten by 999’, *Daily Mail* (22<sup>nd</sup> October 1937).

<sup>125</sup> ‘Emergency Calls to the Police’, *The Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1939.

<sup>126</sup> ‘Emergency Calls to the Police’, *The Times*.

<sup>127</sup> R. Page, *Revisiting the Welfare State* (New York: Open University Press, 2007).

## Conclusion

To modern eyes, immediate help in emergency situations is a right and the existence of 999 a given. Yet it did not exist until 1937. This dissertation has tracked the development of 999 through the lens of a moral panic. Chapter One established the events and context that allowed for the build-up of concern, which constituted a moral panic surrounding security and aid in urgent circumstances. It highlighted the indispensable role of the public in generating the level of apprehension required to induce government intervention, which was underscored by the role of the press who provided a vehicle for the dissemination citizens' concerns and portrayed it in a way which was conducive to the eruption of panic. Chapter Two showed how this moral panic led to government intervention and the continued agency and influence of the public in shaping the 999 system which emerged. Challenging traditional narratives which emphasise state ownership of such hallmark institutions, this chapter established the hold of the public over social change. Chapter Three demonstrated the ways in which 999 provoked significant changes in public-state dynamics, highlighting the increasingly balanced nature of these, with the public as key actors, possessing influential power and agency. Most importantly it presents serious opposition to established narratives of this period as one in which the state alone held power.

This dissertation provides an inroad into 999 histories, which would undoubtedly benefit from additional exploration. Such research could be orientated towards an exploration of later developments in the 999 system, particularly as it is continually evolving, with a new awareness campaign for the 'Silent System' launched in April 2019.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, former telephonist Mrs Hartley spoke of how 999 had been invaluable in conveying air raid warnings, so further inquiry into the role of 999 in WWII would also be worthwhile.<sup>129</sup>

Given 999s' success, the delay in the introduction of similar systems worldwide is somewhat surprising. The USA did not enjoy a designated emergency number until 1968.<sup>130</sup> This is attributable to the lack of a similar moral panic driving reform in these arenas, meaning that

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<sup>128</sup> BBC News, 'Silent 999 Calls: Press 55 to confirm emergency, campaign warns' (8<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

<sup>129</sup> BT Archives: 999 Information Box, 'Telephonist Recalls the Birth of the 999 Service' (1987), ITV Press Release.

<sup>130</sup> NENA, '911 Origin & History', <https://www.nena.org/page/911overviewfacts>.

the issue did not demand immediate attention in the same way as it did in Britain. Therefore, the value of considering this case study through the lens of a moral panic is evident as it reveals much about the specific conditions and crucial actors required for social change to occur – namely the existence of a profound social concern which permeates society and is propelled forward by the public to such an extent that political attention is inevitable.

The interwar period laid the foundations for the emergence of the ‘welfare state’, which carries the assumption that the creation of structures was the sole realm of the government. Today’s society associate the ambulance, police and fire services, as well as 999 with welfare, yet it is clear that 999 was not the result of state dynamism but rather the product of active citizen involvement. As such, this case study of 999 should be regarded as symptomatic of developments of wider historical significance, as it demonstrates the discrepancies between the emergence of hallmark institutions and the creation of the welfare state.

## Appendix

**Appendix 1: Table outlining the key details of press coverage announcing 999 from 30<sup>th</sup> June to 5<sup>th</sup> July.** BT Archives: TCB211/30 & TCB211/31, ‘Extracts from Newspapers’ (1937-8); ProQuest Historical Newspapers; The Telegraph Historical Archive Online; and The Times Digital Archive.

Article Title	Newspaper	Date of Publication	Overview of number and how it works?	Only for Emergency Use	London Only	Explanation of choice of 999 code
‘Dial 999 Now – When you want to make an emergency phone call’	Evening News	30 <sup>th</sup> June 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
‘Dial 999 if your call is urgent’	Evening Standard	30 <sup>th</sup> June 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘999 to be Phone SOS Call’	The Daily Telegraph	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘999 – Emergency Calls on Telephone’	The Manchester Guardian	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	No	No
‘Nine Double Nine’	The Times	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘Say 999’	The Times	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Not Available	The Bystander	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	No	Yes
‘In case of real emergency’	Daily Express	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘Dial 999 for SOS’	Daily Herald	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘When in Danger – July Dial 999’, Percy Cater	Daily Mail	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

‘999 – Landsman’s SOS’	Daily Sketch	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No – extension expected
‘Why they chose 999 for hurry calls’	Evening News	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – extension expected
‘999 Means SOS’	Daily Mirror	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	No	No
‘Why not 111?’	Manchester Evening News	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Vaguely	Yes	No	No
‘Dial 999’	Morning Post	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Not noted	News Chronicle	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
‘Today’s London Letter – Emergency Telephone Calls’	Oxford Mail	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
‘Dial 999 – New Emergency Phone Call System’	Yorkshire Post	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – extension expected
Not noted	Punch	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	No	No
‘999’	Star	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	No	No
‘Dial 999’	Yorkshire Telegraph & Star, Sheffield	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	Yes	Yes – extension expected
‘Emergency Telephone Calls’	Birmingham Post	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
‘999’	Evening Standard, Late Night Final Edition	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
‘New Telephone SOS’	Glasgow Herald	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	Yes	Yes – extension expected
‘Call 999’	Manchester Guardian Commercial	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	Yes	No

'999 Trouble – Call in Operation'	News Chronicle	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'New Emergency Number'	Northern Whig, Belfast	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – extension expected
'Emergency Telephone Calls'	The Scotsman	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No – extension expected
'Why you Dial 999'	Star	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
'999 in Operation'	The Times	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'999 on Dial – Police on Doorstep'	Daily Mail (Scotch Edition)	3 <sup>rd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Nine Ninety-Nine – New System of Emergency Telephone Calls'	Richmond and Twickenham Times	3 <sup>rd</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'New Phone SOS – Dial 999 in Cases of Emergency'	News of the World	4 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
'New SOS Call?'	The Observer	4 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'When you should dial that 999'	Sunday Pictorial	4 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
'New SOS Call – Post Office and the Burglar'	The Observer	4 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Post Office and Burglars'	Irish Times	5 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Yes	No	Yes	Yes – extension expected
Total: 37	/	/	37 (100%)	30 (81%)	29 (78%)	22 (59%)

**Appendix 2: Table containing details of complaints made by members of the public about the 999 system to New Scotland Yard and Others.** Contained in the National Archives docket MEPO2/9695 ‘999 Emergency Calls: Suggestion that a Different Number be Used for Ease and Speed’ (1945-66), closed until 1997.

<b>Item Name</b>	<b>Mode of Complaint</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Complaint/ Suggestion</b>	<b>Response</b>
‘When in Danger – Just Dial 999’*	Daily Mail	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Sir Herbert MP, noted in the Commons - it takes three seconds to dial 999, why not have some sort of button to press.	None noted
‘Dial 999’*	Yorkshire Telegraph & Star, Sheffield	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	Split second likely to be important if there is a burglar. Could on dial 999? 111 is quicker.	Womersley assured the experts had been into everything
‘999’*	Star	1 <sup>st</sup> July 1937	What an idea that a woman in distress must dial 999 if she wants help. Slowest signal it is possible to make. Takes double the time that 111 takes.	None noted
‘999’ Letter from HS Robertson, Royal Air Force Club*	Daily Mail	6 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	Would it not be better to dial ‘111’ which can be recorded a second faster and could make all the difference in an emergency?	None noted
‘999’ To Editor of the Spectator from John Hayward*	Spectator	9 <sup>th</sup> July 1937	I feel that I should be done for anyhow before the three 999 has returned slowly and audibly to their starting	None noted

			point. In a first-class crisis I should feel happier if the requisite numbers added up to 3 or even 6, rather than 27.	
‘999 – out of order’*	Star, Late Night Final	12 <sup>th</sup> August 1937	Solicitor at Highgate – client had been assaulted, his wife went to a nearby telephone kiosk and rang 999, but nothing happened.	None noted
‘999s First Failure’**	The Times	10 <sup>th</sup> April 1939	First reported case of failure to function of the 999-emergency call in a burglary of a jewellery shop.	Scotland Yard and PO officials making inquiries
Correspondence re. P. Robinson complaint to Sir Longden MP	Collection of Letters	October-November 1972	Witnessed a serious accident, dialled 999 but got an engaged signal. 5-minute delay in ambulance reaching the man. Wants an investigation into the effectiveness of 999 system in general.	Passed from Home Office, to Metropolitan Police, to Under-Secretary of State. Inquiries made. Established that the ‘public is reasonable well satisfied with the emergency system’. General response is good and public opinion contented.
Correspondence from Harrison (Joint Credit Card Company) to Commander Matthews (New Scotland Yard)	Collection of Letters	November 1974	If a card is found to be stolen, fraud department gets involved and wait for arrival of police. Not able to use 999 as outside the operable area, so sometimes face delays. Want their calls to be expedited.	Given special facilities – ACCESS SOUTHEND
Correspondence from Mr Bailey	Letter	25 <sup>th</sup> January 1963	8 years thinking about writing the	Response from Assistant

			letter. Very old people and invalids cannot dial 999. Could easily dial 1, 2 or 3. Think you should introduce 222 as well.	Commissioner – PO give special consideration to problems associated with handicapped persons. Response from Chief Telecommunication Superintendent, February 1963 – special arrangements are available for those with disabilities on request.
Correspondence from Mr Duncan	Letter	8 <sup>th</sup> December 1964	Time contacting police is about 15 seconds, why not dial 0 for police and 999 for fire and ambulance service. Precious seconds saved may get you men quick on the crime.	Response from Assistant Commissioner – 0 can be dialled in slightly less time, 999 selected for technical reasons.
Anonymous Letter	Letter	9 <sup>th</sup> April 1964	Days are over for dialling 999, the extra seconds allow many things to happen which you don't want. Why not 111 in place of 999.	None noted
Correspondence from Mr Pizey	Letter	5 <sup>th</sup> September 1963	Convenient to dial 111 instead of 999. Could save valuable seconds.	Response from Assistant Commissioner – standard response*****
Correspondence from S Phillips, Esq	Letter	20 <sup>th</sup> November 1962	Idea – would it not be very easy for all 999 calls to be connected to the local police station at the same time as it is put through to the information room.	In modern policing the fullest possible use is made of patrolling manpower which are in direct communication with central control, so need for local police stations is reduced. No need for duplication.

Correspondence from TG Davies, Esq	Letter	7 <sup>th</sup> February 1961	Change to 111 because 999 takes 6 seconds to dial while 111 takes only 2. Also, a chance that 8 or 0 could be dialled by mistake.	None noted****
Correspondence from Mrs Flit-Croft	Letter from Canada	10 <sup>th</sup> May 1961	Husband wondered if time could be saved if they could dial 111 instead of 999.	None noted
Correspondence from Master John Gee	Letter 15 ½ years old boy.	25 <sup>th</sup> May 1960	Timed this for an experiment. From picking up the receiver to a few seconds after the last number had been dialled it took 13.25 seconds, while 111 took only 4 and 1/8 seconds.	None noted
Correspondence from A George	Letter	8 <sup>th</sup> November 1945	Interesting to know just why dial 999 should have been selected instead of 111. Difference in my own timing of 9 seconds.	None noted
Correspondence from Miss Grainger	Letter	6 <sup>th</sup> November 1945	Listening to 'nine nine nine' tonight, discussion of wasting time. Then why is your phone number 999 as 111 would save more time.	None noted
Correspondence from Mr JF Flavin	Letter	6 <sup>th</sup> November 1945	Could you dash into a telephone box and dial 999 with your eyes closed, or more sensibly after dark? Reasoned 9 was the last digit,	Response from Chief Constable – inclusion of instructions for how to dial 999 in darkness or in smoke.

			but it's actually the second last.	
Correspondence from Mrs East	Letter	13 <sup>th</sup> December 1945	Radio appeals to dial 999 to report crime or suspects seem to me to conflict with the speed essential. Injured person might collapse before being able to complete the dialling of so long a number. To dial 1 would save 5/6 of the time.	None noted.
Correspondence from Mrs Bryan	Letter	31 <sup>st</sup> December 1945	In view of present crime wave, I offer a suggestion. Substitute 111 for 999 when ringing the police. Every second counts in these matters.	None noted.
Correspondence from Lt. Cdr. Wilson	Letter, from soldier stationed in China	19 <sup>th</sup> June 1946	Noticed from English papers that a strenuous effort is being made to make the British citizens crime-conscious and report suspicious happenings. In view of emphasis on speed why have you chosen 999 instead of 111? Suggests slogans.	Standard Response from Deputy Commander.
Correspondence from Mrs Bennetton	Letter	6 <sup>th</sup> November 1946	I suggest that 111 would be preferable.	Standard Response.
Correspondence from Mr Randall	Letter	3 <sup>rd</sup> January 1948	I would like to suggest that if 111 was used instead, the call could be received in 1/6 of the time. May result in a still	None noted.

			better percentage of arrests.	
Correspondence from Miss Lunt	Letter	15 <sup>th</sup> April 1948	Alter it to 111 as I should imagine, you would 'have had it' before finishing the dialling of the first 9.	None noted.
Correspondence from Rev. John Lisle	Letter	15 <sup>th</sup> June 1948	In time of emergency, to dial 999 takes far too long. 111 should be substituted	None noted.
Correspondence from Miss Pocknell	Letter	18 <sup>th</sup> January 1949	Time could be saved when contacting the police if 111 was used.	Standard Response.
Correspondence from Mr Lampen	Letter	13 <sup>th</sup> October 1949	Could cut the time of calling 999 down by over 2/3 by making it a single A. In a small modern house, a burglar could not miss hearing the whir of the dial revolving.	Standard Response.
Correspondence from Mr Addenbrooke	Letter	13 <sup>th</sup> October 1949	Suggests a silent modification of the domestic telephone receiver. There is almost invariably a tell-tale tinkle within the machine itself or in another machine on the same circuit. This sound must give the intruder ample warning.	Forwarded to the Regional Director of London Telecommunications. No simple solution to the problem but will be considered further.
Correspondence from Mr Crown	Letter	22 <sup>nd</sup> December 1949	To dial 999 takes from 10-12 seconds. To dial AAA or 111 takes 3-4 seconds. Can	None noted.

			you afford to give away 7 or 8 vital seconds.	
Correspondence from Mr Williams	Letter	25 <sup>th</sup> January 1957	Newsreel at local cinema showed how time is saved in your department. I suggest that time could also be saved in an emergency if 111 was dialled instead of 999.	None noted.
Correspondence from Mr Fleming-William	Letter	16 <sup>th</sup> April 1958	If 111 instead of 999 were used it would save a great deal of time and bother. Age-old case of the hysterical housewife with the murderer coming up the stairs; would she not have been less worried if it only took 3 seconds.	None noted.
Correspondence from Mr Foster	Letter	11 <sup>th</sup> December 1958	Takes longer to dial 999 than any other three figure number. The extra time might be the difference between a murder or help in time. Asks for an explanation.	None noted.
Correspondence from Miss Harding	Letter	11 <sup>th</sup> December 1958	Witnessed an accident and wondered if time could be saved. Potential for misdialling 999 when anxious. I would suggest 111 should be adopted instead. Much easier to find in the dark.	None noted.

Correspondence from Miss Davies (13 years old)	Letter	17 <sup>th</sup> March 1959	Much easier and quicker to dial 111. Grateful for an explanation, as this has always puzzled me.	None noted.
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Notes:

57 total letters to Scotland Yard suggesting a different number.

\*‘Extracts from Newspapers’ (1937-8), TCB211/30 & TCB211/31, BT Archives.

\*\* The Times Digital Archive.

\*\*\*MEPO2/10707 ‘999 Emergency Calls: Complaints about the System and Suggestions for Improvement’ 1966-81.

\*\*\*\* Standard response established from a number of replies and a circulated memorandum from the GPO of ‘reasons for selecting 999 instead of any other combination of numbers’ to be used in response to such questions. It is expected that where the replies to correspondence are not retained, they took the form of the standard response.

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