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Resilience

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<https://wp.me/P1Bfg0-4Wa>.

In my previous articles for the SERRC, (particularly [‘Behavioural Insights’](#)), I’ve discussed and critically analysed the UK’s approach to handling of the pandemic; in particular, the way it’s framed its messages to the public—quoting the [Behavioural Insights Team](#) (BIT) guidance/critique of governments’ approach to messaging to the public, along with the World Health Association (WHO), who present a similar critique. (It’s all too late, by the way.) I’ve argued that the State has made a considerable mess of its messaging to the public.

In my last article, [‘Behavioural Insights’](#), I argued that the State was caught between incompetence and cock-up, and the understandable desire to kick start the economy; however, the signs from many parts of the country demonstrated that we were witnessing a spectre similar to that of Dickens’s Christmas Carol’s [Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come](#) across significant parts of the country. The virus was getting out of control again: this seems to be exactly what has happened across many parts of the country now, although of course I hate to boast (or god forbid, indulge in an obtuse episode of [Schadenfreude](#)), about how I was correct in this assertion; the World Health Organisation (WHO), said that irresponsibility and, specifically, pubs and alcohol were COVID-19’s playground, and this has proved to be exactly the case. How exactly is alcohol supposed to make any of us act responsibly?

### The [Great British Mistake](#) and Loss of Insight

I argued the restrictions on the lifting of the lockdown were far too previous; it was bound to end in disaster, and the signs were all around, and now the chickens have come home to roost. Now we find ourselves on the verge of a second wave of COVID-19. This article, however, focuses on ‘Resilience’. The 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain has just passed and the [Queen’s direct comparison with the spirit of the nation at war](#) (again suggesting nationalism, patriotism and sacrifice plays a central role in defeating the virus, just like a world war) made me think of that spirit that sent millions of men ‘over the top’ in 1914-18 to their deaths in the Great War. We were resilient yet again between 1939 and 1945 (unless you read the Mass Observation Reports and watch the documentary which tell a very different story,<sup>1</sup> MOO<sup>2</sup>) during that second time around during a global conflict; despite the spivs and black marketeers who preyed upon the needy during that time, mirroring the hoarding of medicines by foreign powers now.

Can we overcome this unprecedented pandemic then, which we still don’t understand, and still have no vaccine yet to combat it with? Moreover, this country’s appalling failure to develop an effective track and trace system (just in time now though—allegedly—like other nations, for example South Korea who were there at the start in every sense), instead of leaving it to local authorities to sort out for themselves in many cases. So now that the government’s strategy of making sickness and death as widespread and accepted as it was in medieval times—as I argued in [‘Behavioural Insights’](#); now the State seemingly panics while

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<sup>1</sup> <https://talkinghumanities.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2016/08/09/memories-of-the-second-world-war-from-the-mass-observation-archive/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/19/myth-blitz-spirit-model-coronavirus>.

introducing the ‘rule of six’—or should we call it six degrees of separation (given the many contradictions and continuing its tendency toward an irrational strategy of suicidal like policies), bars and restaurants will close at 10 pm, and we’ll take off our facemasks whilst eating and drinking; great plan.

### **‘Resilience’ and its Meanings**

But what does resilience actually mean? I actually loath essays that resort to dictionary definitions but in this case it is relevant. This definition is particularly apt: The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness e.g. "*the often remarkable resilience of so many British institutions*." [straight from the Queen’s lips, perhaps] (We’ll see about that, or at least the ministers involved).

No doubt the government will soon be presenting this second attribute as its central marketing tool.

Now consider seven skills of resilience, taken from *Psychology Today*. Do read the entire article—I assure you, it’s not meant to be ironic; we will need to develop survivors’ skills!<sup>3</sup>

Principle 1: Cultivate a Belief in Your Ability to Cope.

Principle 2: Stay Connected With Sources of Support.

Principle 3: Talk About What You’re Going Through.

Principle 4: Be Helpful to Others.

Principle 5: Activate Positive Emotion.

Principle 6: Cultivate an Attitude of Survivorship [you’ll definitely need that one]

Principle 7: Seek Meaning.

But of course, the Queen meant something quintessentially British, like the laudable ‘resilience’ of Sir [Captain Tom](#) throughout his long and distinguished military career, (and now he’s written a book)—a war (career) which he survived—my relatives weren’t so lucky and were never seen again after the invasion of Singapore by the Japanese, despite our family’s resilience. Like so many who remained stoical during the two world wars resilience wasn’t enough: British, German, French, Russian and the historically the most resilient of all, the Jews—even the Resilience word wasn’t enough for them, and just in case we’ve lost the narrative again, this isn’t a war but an invisible virus, mutating all the time, and using the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s many modes of travel to find new hosts, and of course, governments’ incompetence.

### **Resilience Wasted: A Campus Crisis**

Once, UK Health Secretary Matthew Hancock’s suggested that university students might have to stay in residence halls during the Christmas break. Head of the BBC Children in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifespan-perspectives/202003/seven-skills-resilience>.

Need charity, journalist [Rosie Millard](#) (herself ill with COVID, as it turns out), was interviewed to defend her child's right after three years to come home—this is the resilience the WHO and BIT suggested we would all need to show—perhaps the Queen was correct—a bit of that resilience shown during WWII would serve us all well now: I repeat again: ***Simply put, our behaviour today, will set the course for the pandemic.***

However, because of the failure of the State to follow this advice, backed by Millard's lack of resilience ([snowflake](#)-like mum on behalf of her daughter), it lifted restrictions, rendering the people the main actors. It is an individual as well as a collective responsibility. Follow the recommendations of your national authorities, limit social interactions, keep washing your hands, maintain physical distancing and reduce risk to the most vulnerable in our society, the elderly and those with chronic underlying health conditions. They rely on the choices you make.

So, my three messages as restrictions are regularly lifted (after temporarily being imposed):

One—Communities: Remain vigilant and protect the gains. Our complacency is COVID-19's playground. [e.g. the pub and restaurants without masks].

Two—Policy-makers: Keep attuned to what people are doing—listen, learn and adjust measures accordingly.

Three—To us all: we all have a role to play to keep COVID-19 at bay. Our behaviour determines COVID-19 behaviour. It's up to us now. Thank you. [Resilience maybe].

So resilience isn't just keeping on, it's the power of positive thinking; something our government might have done well to instil in us before, instead of the Prime Minister's message in June, as he eased lockdown against all the evidence: [go out and enjoy the summer](#).

### **The Same but Different**

To those who are interested, a new work by the BIT will be coming out soon: we all might find something valuable in its pages. Let's try the resilience which saw my late uncle—called up during WWII despite being in reserved occupation—firstly repairing one flying fortress for months, only to see the pilot crash on the runway in Norfolk at his first attempted take-off; and then found himself posted to India with the RAF to help finish the Japanese off by bombing them in Burma: his new wife waited at tables in an Italian cafe and literally waited for months for him to be demobbed. Meanwhile my other late aunt (my late father's sister) as one of the first women put herself through a Classics degree at University College London, then a teaching diploma between 1933 and 1936. She lived and worked in a cold, damp, rat-infested room for those three years.

One Christmas away from home, a disaster—seriously? Yes, I think what I am attempting to articulate is that despite the new revelations the media foist upon on us every day, as new

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and revelatory, is that we all have histories of resilience. Try reading Jeremy Seabrook's *The High Price of Textiles from Bangladesh to Blackburn: The Song of the Shirt* which shows how we were all interconnected in subordination to global capitalism from the moment the Dutch/English East Indies company took hold of our rightful resources. White or Black, we have all been slaves of the system. My late paternal grandfather, whom I never met, fought in the third Afghanistan war—he was part of the British Raj, marrying a French Anglo-Indian. We all have histories. I for one was, and still am, very proud of my father's resilience: that's why my mum has a comfortable existence at the age of 89.

### **Conclusion**

We are all well aware of the trials and tribulations of the Royal Family, not least recently with regard to Prince Harry and Meghan (of course his Harry and William's late mother, her life and that of the royals constantly re-hashed in the media, and of course the now persona non grata Prince Andrew: perhaps her resilience through the abdication, her father's early death, the concept of 'duty' is the resilience we need now). I am by no stretch of the imagination a royalist and in fact am ambivalent about republicanism. But we are all human beings with experience we need to learn from—more recently insights from below might prove more useful as I suggest.