

The Lion Had Wings: The Invention of British Cinema, 1895-1939

Paul Moody

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Declaration

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Abstract

Studies of the relationship between British cinema and national identity have tended to focus on the subjects and themes of a select number of films, part of a canon generally agreed to represent the qualities of the British 'character'. Yet several authors have identified limitations to this approach, and presented a range of theoretical and empirical obstacles to the concept of 'British cinema'. This problem of provenance has been the mainstay of critical debate about the British film industry since its inception, but in prioritising textual analysis, this interpretation often ignores the additional factors involved in the development of notions of 'Britishness'.

In contrast, this thesis focuses on how the concept of what became known as 'British cinema', was created during the early twentieth century, addressing the contextual elements of the cinema experience, and arguing that they were extremely important in determining what 'British cinema' would come to represent. Using a range of private papers, government records and marketing materials, I chart the development of the link between 'British' cinema and national identity, and the various ways that this concept was presented to the public both in Britain and across the globe. Rather than conceive of this as a definitive form *ab initio*, I argue that it was a complex process of invention, a myth augmented over time and which was so potent it could accommodate a divergent range of films and filmmakers. Thus, this thesis is not a critique of *what* British cinema represented, but *how* it came to represent it.

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To write a piece of work of this length over several years also requires more than just academic input, and the support of my friends, work colleagues and family have been equally important. Their willingness to listen to me discuss the intricacies of British cinema has been a constant delight (for me, if not always them). Most importantly, my partner Helen has helped at every stage of the process, offering advice, correcting typos, and encouraging me to persevere when encountering difficulty. As with most other aspects of my life, this thesis would not have been possible without her love and kindness.

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Preface: Images of Communion

In 2006 the UK Film Council produced *Stories We Tell Ourselves*, a study of the cultural impact of UK film which sought to identify how films addressed issues of national identity and, therefore, how they spoke to the public about the values and interests of the United Kingdom. The framework for assessing cultural impact included marking each film 'according to whether it predominantly reinforced, challenged, modernised or satirised UK identities, traditions and values.'¹ These 'British values', based on speeches by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and the Minister of State for Culture, Creative Industries and Tourism, Margaret Hodge, comprised:

tolerance, fair play, decency, honesty, reticence (e.g. about contentious issues such as politics, religion, sexuality) to which might be added understated patriotism, and gallantry or self-sacrifice (in war and *in extremis*).²

In so doing, the UK Film Council was developing a debate about the nature of what constitutes a 'British' film, a discussion that has a lineage stretching back at least as far as the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, the first official attempt at defining 'Britishness' with regard to the cinema. By creating two samples, the first consisting of 200 'intuitive' films (i.e. those most often regarded as part of the British cinema 'canon') and the second comprising 200 selected at random, the report's authors

¹ UK Film Council (2009), *Stories We Tell Ourselves: The Cultural Impact of UK Film 1946-2006*, London: UK Film Council, p. 5.

² UK Film Council (2009), p. 22.

were able to measure to what extent these British films either challenged or reinforced these 'British values', and by extension, whether there was a disparity between the commonly held assumptions of what British cinema represents, and what British films actually portrayed. It concluded that the 'intuitive' sample tended to challenge 'British values', while the random sample favoured reinforcing them. As *Stories We Tell Ourselves* argued:

This suggests that the UK films which have been most highly regarded by critics are those which have challenged and satirised traditional British values, while films that espouse more conventional values have found less critical favour.³

What is most interesting about this finding is that, aside from highlighting the vast range of British filmmaking and its capacity to encompass a number of diverse viewpoints, it also suggests that there were other factors at work in the construction of this national cinema, that operated outside of the content of the films themselves and had led to a number of misconceptions about its nature. While this research was focused on British filmmaking since 1946, it has many implications for the study of pre-Second World War British cinema as well, not least the implication that many of the critical assumptions that were in play after this conflict may have in fact been developed decades earlier. My thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how British cinema became entwined with these notions of British 'values' and 'character', by analysing its development from the mid-1890s to just before the start of the Second

³ UK Film Council (2009), p. 23.

World War, when it had become the 'essential social habit of the age'.⁴ In so doing, I seek to re-evaluate the cultural contribution of British film in its fledgling decades, examining how the concept of 'Britishness' was developed and refined by this most pervasive of early twentieth century entertainment media. It is a story that encompasses major technological and structural changes, a World War, and industrial and economic crises. But it begins with the reasons for its critical neglect, which have clouded most of the debate about British cinema since its inception.

The Problem with the 'Britishness' of British Cinema

The course of British film production and distribution was one of alternating boom and bust, yet throughout its history there has been one constant – critical disapproval. In the early 1950s, Paul Rotha would write that 'The years from 1932 to 1939 in the British cinema were mainly distinguished by the fact that few films produced then were in any way characteristically British except that they were made on British soil'. Rotha deliberately eschewed any attempt in this critique to identify what these British characteristics he was searching for actually were, but his 1930 publication, *The Film Till Now*, goes some way to explaining why:

I am unable to discern a realistic, expressionistic, naturalistic, decorative, or any other phase in the development of the British cinema. Added to which, there are no tendencies to be traced, for British films do not have tendencies, unless allusion is made to the prevalence of cabaret scenes and war themes.⁵

⁴ Taylor, AJP (1975), *English History 1914-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 313.

⁵ Rotha, Paul (1930), *The Film Till Now: A Survey of the Cinema*, New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith Inc., p. 230.

Rotha's critique set the tone for much of the critical response to British film in the 1930s, which became increasingly dismissive of the cultural and artistic qualities of British cinema, expecting it to achieve unrealistic and often contradictory standards. Lawrence Napper's analysis of this hostility highlights the difficulties faced by a producer trying to position a film in the British market during this decade:

It was criticised for being too parochial and too internationalist; for its primitive style and its 'slavish imitation' of Hollywood; for being too reliant on stage and literary adaptation, and for its inability to draw on the richness of British literature and history; for being too slow and picturesque, and for failing to use the setting provided by the British landscape; for being too reliant on foreign stars and technicians, and for the poverty of its native talent.⁶

This approach informed most critical discourse until the 1970s, when several revisionist historians began to publish work that reclaimed aspects of British cinema from this critical malaise and started to identify some of the 'tendencies' that Rotha had claimed did not exist.⁷ Most recently, the UK Film Council's *Stories We Tell Ourselves* identified eight key 'themes' that are characteristic of British cinema, namely, 'small-time criminals'; 'dreamers and eccentrics'; 'victory - perhaps'; 'shaken, stirred and undead'; 'youthful ambition'; 'backlight on the present'; 'sex please we're British!'; and 'history from beneath'.⁸ Once again, while these categories refer to the

⁶ Napper, Lawrence (1999), 'A Despicable Tradition? Quota Quickies in the 1930s', in Murphy, Robert (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p. 39.

⁷ For an introduction to this work, see Smith, Justin, 'Film History', *Making History*, http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/film_history.html (Accessed 24 November 2012).

⁸ For a full description of these 'themes', see UK Film Council (2009), p. 18.

post-Second World War period, they are indicative of the range of British cinema and an acknowledgment of how far scholarship in this field has developed since Rotha. Perhaps Sarah Street summarises this best when she argues that

Although there have been discernible trends, it would appear that there is no such thing as a typical British film. The range of representations has been diverse, particularly as far as 'Britishness' is concerned, although in particular periods certain representations have been more striking than others.⁹

Nonetheless, most writers during cinema's formative years were unsure of what British cinema was and what it could, or *should*, be, and this approach extended to the concept of 'Britishness' as a whole. In a world that was rapidly changing, many traditional concepts of British values and beliefs were being challenged, and with the cinema beginning to provide an insight into life beyond Britain, these certainties were eroded even further. Despite these difficulties, the years from 1895 to 1939 saw an increase in the idea of one all-encompassing 'nation' becoming part of popular discourse, which transcended the individual nations of England, Scotland and Wales and sought to present a more homogenous entity – namely, 'Britain'. Concepts like *national* insurance and a *national* government, amongst others, all contributed to the representation of a Britain that was more connected than ever before. That this was also presented on cinema screens ensured that governments and campaign groups would soon link film with the promotion and often, the erosion of, the 'national character', and that this concept would be situated in opposition to a foreign 'other',

⁹ Street, Sarah (1997), *British National Cinema*, London: Routledge, p. 189.

which changed over time depending on prevailing economic and social concerns. The first three chapters of this thesis address these early decades of British cinema, analysing the key factors that led to its development as an industry closely entwined with notions of British national identity.

Benedict Anderson provides a good starting point for an understanding of how these concepts of the 'nation' are constructed, and by extension, how British cinema contributed to the development of these ideas:

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.¹⁰

While Anderson's theory has been extremely influential, his belief in the inherent limitability and sovereignty of this imagination is problematic when analysing British national identity. The fact that Britain is an amalgam of three distinctive nationalities, each with a strong concept of their idiosyncratic national traits, complicates the identity of its inhabitants in a way that few other nations experience. As Anderson concludes, 'No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind',¹¹ but in Britain's case, many people within the Union do not even imagine themselves coterminous

¹⁰ Anderson, Benedict (2002), *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, pp. 5-6.

¹¹ Anderson, Benedict, p. 7.

with Britain as a whole, preferring to regard themselves as either English, Scottish or Welsh. A study of audience surveys from the Thirties provides ample evidence that the 'images of communion', as represented by pictures of other Britons on the cinema screen (be they fictional or real), imparted a powerful sense of connection for cinema patrons, while paradoxically, helping to create even more diverse 'identities', by highlighting nations and regions of Britain that many cinema audiences had never visited and thus had not experienced before. However, as *Stories We Tell Ourselves* outlines, while film was instrumental in popularising these depictions of Britain beyond the confines of London, these portrayals were still made predominantly by an industry located within or on the outskirts of the capital.¹² As such, while offering an ostensibly diverse portrait of Britain, the 'studio system held the regional representation agenda firmly within its own particular canon of taste and cultural vision',¹³ reinforcing a number of stereotypes - although as the report acknowledges, these productions still performed well in the nations and regions that were being fictionalised in this manner.¹⁴

To complicate matters further, there was a notable absence of any significant fiction films made in both Wales and Scotland before the Second World War. William Haggart, generally accepted as the most important early filmmaker to work in Wales, is a notable exception, but only four of his films are known to survive today, and those that are extant, while noteworthy, are not normally discussed in terms of their 'Welshness'. Unlike Cecil Hepworth, Birt Acres, Robert Paul and other filmmakers of

¹² UK Film Council (2009), pp.29-49.

¹³ UK Film Council (2009), p. 31.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the Victorian and Edwardian periods, Haggard did not make explicit references to national elements in his work or the promotion of it, either to British or Welsh nationalities. Instead, one has to look to *Y Chwarelwr/The Quarryman* (John Ellis Williams, 1935), for the first Welsh-language fiction film. Focusing on the lives of men working in a quarry in North Wales, it conveyed the sort of honest, realistic insight into British life the likes of Rotha was longing for. Yet, its status as a Welsh-language film, and a serious, harsh look at real working-class life, meant that it was never really a commercial proposition, and its impact on British cinema and its audiences was negligible. *Men Against Death* (CH Dand, 1933), which is believed to be the first sound film made in Wales, preceded *The Quarryman* by two years, and featured a fictional account of a fatal rockfall in a quarry – a moment which is now lost from the surviving film material. Interestingly, the film was granted an E rating by the BBFC, thus making it ineligible for quota consideration and once again limiting its commercial appeal. Finally, what is now regarded as the most artistically significant film made in Wales before 1939, the biopic *The Life Story of David Lloyd George* (Maurice Elvey, 1919), is also problematic. While the skill and scale of this production is without doubt, it was not actually seen by the public, repressed before its release under mysterious circumstances, and thus its effect on the course of British cinema was non-existent. Therefore, while each of the productions listed above had artistic significance, they did not constitute a 'Welsh' cinema.

Scottish film production was even more sparse in this period. John Grierson, Production Advisor for the 1938 Films of Scotland Committee, argued that 'This year Scottish pictures are being made under proper Scottish auspices and for the first

time.’¹⁵ While there had in fact been many actualities and other non-fiction works made in Scotland before this date, there were no commercial fiction feature films produced, and as such, representations of Scotland on cinema screens were restricted to depictions by Hollywood or as locations in studio films made in London. In fact, a special feature in *The Bioscope* from 1918 entitled ‘British Films in Scotland: Are They Sufficiently Encouraged?’ recorded an antipathy towards ‘British’ films in Scottish cinemas, and encouraged ‘British’ filmmakers to produce more films with a ‘Scottish flavour’:

The question arises, is it worth while for the small number of exhibitors there are in Scotland to produce photo-plays with a Scottish flavour? Decidedly so, for it is a fact that such plays make an appeal everywhere, and are as popular in England and other territories, as they are in Scotland...films with the Scottish touch are more successful everywhere than films which are wholly English.¹⁶

‘Scottish’ fiction films, made in Scotland by Scottish filmmakers, is a phenomenon of the post-Second World War period. And even if there were more examples of Scottish and Welsh cinema before 1939, their status as examples of ‘national’ cinema may also be questioned. Nick Redfern, for example, has posited modern Scottish cinema as a ‘regional’ cinema of Britain, arguing that this enables it to represent “a distinct and meaningful identity’ without the confusion of the label

¹⁵ Butt, Richard, ‘Scottish Film Culture Before 1938’, *The Films of Scotland Documentaries*, http://sites.scran.ac.uk/films_of_scotland/History/index.htm (Accessed 12 January 2013).

¹⁶ Anon (24 October 1918), ‘British Films in Scotland: Are They Sufficiently Encouraged?’, *The Bioscope*, 40: 628, p. 118.

“national””,¹⁷ and this is but one of a series of ideological shifts in recent discussion of the ‘Britishness’ of British cinema.

Despite this concentration of pre-Second World War filmmaking in Southern England, this thesis will demonstrate that the term ‘British’ cinema still had more resonance with the general public than ‘English’. Linda Colley offers a possible reason for this, by emphasising the ability of the label, ‘Great Britain’ to represent a complex mixture of identities.¹⁸ Explicit in her analysis is an assertion that the 1707 Act of Union was not enough to connect the three British nations – there had to be something else, an ideology that transcended state boundaries and that made people believe that they were part of a cohesive whole, each carrying the qualities connoted by the term, ‘British’. This cohesion was tenuous, but nonetheless existed, and more importantly existed *in addition to* people’s narrower identity as either English, Scottish or Welsh. This sense of dual or even multiple nationalities, while not unique to Britain, was certainly an integral part of ‘Britishness’, and was cemented via various political actions throughout the nineteenth century, such as the teaching of the Welsh language throughout Welsh schools from 1888.¹⁹ However, while Colley’s work supports the idea of the relative youth of nationalism, another group of researchers have highlighted the longevity of national traits. Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) and Anthony Smith’s *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1987) claimed that despite the nineteenth century formation of nation

¹⁷ Redfern, Nick, *Scottish Cinema: National Cinema or Regional Cinema?*, <http://nickredfern.wordpress.com/2009/03/19/scottish-cinema-national-cinema-or-regional-cinema/> (Accessed 12 December 2012).

¹⁸ Colley, Linda (1996), *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, London: Vintage Books, p. 13.

¹⁹ Matthew, HGC (2001), ‘The Liberal Age’, in Morgan, Kenneth O (ed.), *The Oxford History of Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 535.

states, nationalism existed long before this formalising process, with Smith using the term 'ethnies' to define common conventions that bound communities together culturally. This approach has proved influential, and revisionist historians such as JCD Clark have used aspects of it to form their own arguments about the nature of nationalism. Clark's book, *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Post-Modernism and History* (2004) is a critique of the modernist and post-modernist approach exemplified by Anderson, and is an attempt to locate the development of national ideology within England's pre-nineteenth century past. For example, Clark takes issue with Colley's assertion that 'men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not'²⁰, arguing that without already possessing a substantial knowledge of their own characteristics, augmented and developed over a substantial period of time, they would not perceive an 'other' as different to them at all.²¹ Bhiku Parekh offers a similar critique of Colley's view, arguing that:

Since the need to define my identity arises partly because I wish to distinguish myself from others, every statement of identity is also a statement of difference. However, it is wrong to suggest that my identity consists in my difference from others. I differ from them because I am already constituted in a certain way, not the other way round.²²

²⁰ Colley, Linda, pp. 5-6.

²¹ Clark, JCD (2004), *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism and History*, London: Atlantic Books, p.70.

²² Parekh, Bhiku (January 2000), 'Defining British National Identity', *The Political Quarterly*, 71: 1, p. 5.

The second part of this thesis, covering chapters four to ten, examines the many attempts to address these issues during the interwar period, especially with regard to Britain's relationship to the various 'others' it encountered during the 1920s - which ultimately led to the establishment of a British film quota enshrined within the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act.

Recent research into British cinema has started to move away from rigid approaches to national identity, and adopt a more *transnational* perspective. As Christine Gledhill argues:

Given the early internationalism of the film industry, the overwhelming presence of American films on British and Irish screens, and more recently the intensification of cross-national co-production consequent on globalization (sic) and increasing transnational circulation through digital technologies, the question arises whether the organization (sic) of film histories in national boxes impedes research and is any longer intellectually viable.²³

A greater recognition of the role of non-British artists and technicians in the British cinema industry is one aspect of this new approach, with Cheryl Buckley and Tobias Hochscherf noting the wide range of cultural influences that these émigrés brought with them:

²³ Gledhill, Christine (2010), *Transnationalizing Women's Film History* (Unpublished Paper).

It was not unusual for émigrés from political persecution in Europe in the 1930s to have already moved several times in Europe prior to crossing the Channel or the Atlantic and, as a consequence, their engagement and understanding of visual culture was multiple, nuanced and interconnected.²⁴

Andrew Higson has outlined the ‘transnational’ approach to British cinema as a ‘subtler means of describing cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries’.²⁵ He regards this as a better way of addressing the issue than Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ concept, which when applied to cinema often produces a ‘tendency to focus only on those films that narrate the nation as just this finite, limited space, inhabited by a tightly coherent and unified community, closed off to other identities besides national identity.’²⁶ Instead, Higson argues, ‘film-making and film exhibition have been transnational since the first public film shows in the 1890s...as film entrepreneurs like the Lumières shot films around the world and arranged for them to shown equally widely.’ These types of associations ran throughout the first four decades of British cinema, and were exemplified by instances such as Alexander Korda’s polyglot Denham studios, despite often being subject to intense criticism from British critics keen to promote a ‘pure’ British identity. The final part of this thesis, encompassing chapters eleven to

²⁴ Buckley, Cheryl and Hochscherf, Tobias (2012), ‘From German “Invasion” to Transnationalism: Continental European Emigres and Visual Culture in Britain, 1933-56’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 13: 2, p. 161.

²⁵ Higson, Andrew (2000), ‘The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema’, in Mackenzie, John and Hjort, Mette (eds.), *Cinema and Nation*, London: Routledge, p. 64.

²⁶ Higson, Andrew (2000), p. 66.

fifteen, examines British cinema's international exchanges in the 1930s, as well as the opposition to this internationalism both within and without the British film industry.

As this preface has demonstrated, there are a number of conflicting approaches to the identity of British cinema, and all historians of British filmmaking are faced with its problem of provenance - A difficulty in determining its origins and parameters in a satisfactory manner. Transnationalism offers a robust theoretical approach to understanding the complex nature of the economic and industrial aspects of British filmmaking before 1939, but it is limited in its explanation of the cultural aspects of British cinema, especially in how British films were perceived by the public. As Higson himself argues, it 'would be foolish...to attempt to do away altogether with the concept of national cinema',²⁷ and Mette Hjort makes a similarly cautious observation, describing transnationalism as the 'new virtue term of film studies'²⁸ and warning of the danger of negating existing notions of how audiences respond to cultural constructions of the 'nation'.²⁹ Of all the audience studies, memory reclamation work and interviews of people visiting the cinema before 1939, only a handful discuss the identity of films in terms of Welsh, Scottish or even English identity. It was the term 'British' that resonated with the public, and this was how they preferred to conceive of the films produced in this period.

My study therefore, is an attempt to determine how the concept of what constituted 'British' cinema emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, and how and why it

²⁷ Higson, Andrew (2000), p. 70.

²⁸ Hjort, Mette (2010), 'On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism', in Durovicova, Natasa and Newman, Kathleen (eds.), *World Cinema: Transnational Perspectives*, London: Routledge, p. 14.

²⁹ Ibid.

evolved in the years up to the start of the Second World War. This period covers the development of purpose-built cinema halls, the nascent use of film as a propaganda tool during the First World War and the establishment of legislation designed to protect the British film industry. Each of these events, amongst others, was crucial to the spread of conceptions of British national identity in the early twentieth century, and helped develop the perception of 'Britishness' that was promoted throughout the world. The period covered thus not only featured the emergence of the British film industry, but also the development of a more defined British national identity. Moreover, my thesis will not focus on the ideas and themes portrayed in the films themselves, but instead will investigate how the conception of 'Britishness' was developed by what Helen Richards calls the 'multi-dimensional attractions' of the cinema.³⁰ Thus, my intention is not to attempt to present a critique of the *concept* of national identity or to define, to use Rotha's term at the start of this chapter, the 'tendencies' of British cinema - instead, this thesis is concerned with how and why the notion of 'British' cinema developed in the way that it did, and as such, provide an insight into the nature of British national identity in the fledgling decades of the twentieth century.

³⁰ Richards, Helen (2005), 'Cinema as an Attraction: Representations of Bridgend's Cinema Exhibition History in the Glamorgan Gazette, Wales, 1900-1939', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25: 3, p. 428.

Chapter One: The Beginnings of a 'British' Cinema, 1895-1909

It is appropriate that one of the earliest surviving examples of British filmmaking, an 'actuality' by Birt Acres and RW Paul called *Rough Sea at Dover* (1895), should be of a view of the sea crashing against the country's borders, establishing Britain and its parameters with an iconic location of British national identity. It is a film that marvels at the natural beauty of the English Channel and the British landscape, that in under a minute set the tone for much of the debate that has raged about British cinema ever since. For while this was a production borne of the utmost practicality - a subject that lent itself readily to movement, a location that provided the requisite amount of light and conditions that ensured the drama of a *rough* sea, as opposed to merely *the sea* at Dover - it feels like it represents so much more than that. For this was an early example of what would become a cinema of national myths, that promoted ideals of 'Britishness' to a public eager to experience the primary entertainment medium of the age.

Moving pictures arrived in Victorian Britain as little more than a scientific curiosity, but within a decade the cultural shift into the Edwardian period, and the profound leaps in living standards that came with it, ensured that Britain was a fertile location for the development of the new medium. Expenditure per head on cinema appears to have been highest in Britain and France until at least the 1930s,³¹ which provided exhibitors with one of the most lucrative markets in Europe and access to a public that was already familiar with proto-cinematic precursors such as the mutoscope, zoetrope, phenakistiscope and the stereoscope. Town hall showmen offered daily

³¹ Bakker, Gerben (2005a), 'The Decline and Fall of the European Film Industry: Sunk Costs, Market Size, and Market Structure, 1890-1927', *The Economic History Review*, 58: 2, p. 310.

programmes in the early 1900s, providing a 'cinema-like' experience before the establishment of purpose built cinemas. It was the town hall showmen who became the first cinema exhibitors,³² and as such, early British cinema was able to draw on local elements, most prominently for the 'actualities' which depicted local life. Despite this, competition for audiences on a national level had already been in place since at least 1897, when demand for footage of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations was present well beyond London's borders. *The Optical and Magic Lantern Journal* proclaimed that, "even in the smallest out-of-the-way villages it would be a difficult matter to find many persons who have not seen this interesting event on the screen".³³ Thus, exhibitors were able to tap into themes of 'national importance' that had purchase in a wide range of locations, as well as serving their immediate populace with more parochial offerings.

Birt Acres, whose *Rough Sea at Dover* was shown at the first public film screening in Britain in 1896, was attuned to the commercial importance of highlighting the 'national' aspects of his films, even marketing his supplies of film stock with the tagline, 'It's English!'.³⁴ Acres' parents were English but he was born in Virginia in 1854³⁵ and moved to London as an adult. Despite living in America for most of his early life, the press focused on Acres' parentage, remarking after his first screenings that 'it is now curious to learn...that the kinematograph is not the invention of either

³² Toulmin, Vanessa (2006), 'Marketing of Early Film by Town Hall Showmen', Paper Delivered at *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, University of Reading.

³³ Sargeant, Amy (2005), *British Cinema: A Critical and Interpretative History*, London: BFI Publishing, p. 3.

³⁴ Anon (3 June 1906), Advertisement in *Projection, Lantern and Cinematograph*.

³⁵ Cook, Patricia (2008), 'Albany Ward and the Development of Cinema Exhibition in England', *Film History*, 20, pp. 295-6.

an American or a Frenchman, as everyone supposes, but of an Englishman.'³⁶ Acres' nationality was to remain contentious however, and in 1915, many years after he had stopped making films, he was arrested and charged with being an unregistered alien.³⁷ He subsequently received an apology,³⁸ but his treatment was indicative of the tensions over immigration that would surface in the early twentieth century and would become exacerbated by first, the 1905 Aliens Act,³⁹ and second, the advent of the Great War.

Acres' work as a photographer led to his fortuitous meeting with RW Paul, which in turn led to them creating a cinematograph camera and recording a film of a mutual friend walking outside Acres' home.⁴⁰ Acres subsequently worked in Germany during June 1895, filming scenes that would later form part of the first film screening at the Royal Photographic Society, such as his *The Opening of the Kiel Canal* (1896). This film, along with much of his other work, provided the opportunity for many audience members to experience scenes they had no chance of witnessing in the flesh. Acres would highlight this aspect of his films himself, arguing with regard to his film of the Prince (later King Edward VII) and Princess of Wales:

³⁶ BFI: Birt Acres Collection: 'The Kinematograph's Inventor', *The Daily Mail* (31 July 1896).

³⁷ BFI: Birt Acres Collection: Letter from The Chief Constable of Essex Police, to Birt Acres (3 September 1915).

³⁸ BFI: Birt Acres Collection, Letter from John Pedder, The Home Office, to Birt Acres (2 October 1915).

³⁹ The 1905 Aliens Act initiated the first major restriction to immigration, excluding migrants 'without visible means of support'.

⁴⁰ McKernan, Luke, 'Birt Acres', *Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/449777/index.html> (Accessed 27 May 2011).

...there are millions of British subjects all over the world who will probably never get the chance of seeing the heir to the throne of this empire...but my invention makes it possible for millions in all parts of the world to see His Royal Highness and others exactly as they are, and move and have their being.⁴¹

That there was a public thirst for these types of productions can be seen by their immense popularity – the Secretary of the Cardiff Photographic Society had to write to Acres to ask for another copy of the ‘Royal Procession film’, since due to it being their ‘main attraction’, it was ‘getting very worn’.⁴²

The demand for new product in turn led to the increasing importance of the distribution infrastructure, and by the early 1900s much of this activity was located in Cecil Court, in London’s West End, in what was dubbed by the contemporary press, ‘Flicker Alley’. Many of these businesses were established on the back of the public’s taste for royalty with the aforementioned Diamond Jubilee giving impetus to the fledgling industry’s development. The theme of the celebrations was Empire, and at least six companies were present to film the event, the success of which would stiffen their resolve to continue with the new medium. These endeavours also led to the first signs of interest from the serious press, with *The Times* predicting that films were destined to

⁴¹ BFI: Birt Acres Collection: Letter from Birt Acres to *The Globe* (31 August 1896).

⁴² BFI: Birt Acres Collection: Letter from TH Faulks, Hon. Sec. of the Cardiff Photographic Society, to Birt Acres (5 August 1896).

produce a veritable historical and biographical revolution...when the cinematograph, free from the slight imperfection of its vibration, can give the living image upon coloured plates, all the celebrities of art, literature, science, eloquence, and war will be depicted just as they were seen by their contemporaries.⁴³

Despite recent scholarship which questions Cecil Court's impact on early British filmmaking,⁴⁴ it was undoubtedly important in encouraging international involvement in the early British film industry. The first company to locate there (in 1897) was the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company – a licensee of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, which supplied one of its founders, Elias Bernard Koopman, to run the London operation (although it relocated to Great Windmill Street by the end of the year),⁴⁵ and it rapidly became home to large foreign concerns such as Nordisk. Gaumont established business premises there in 1897, and while acting as an agent for its parent company, it performed the same role for the Lumière Brothers until they left film production in 1903. Although Gaumont had also left Cecil Court by 1907, these foreign-owned film companies were influential on the development of the indigenous British filmmakers based in Cecil Court, such as Cecil Hepworth, who established his own business there, initially selling cameras before housing his film sales activities from 1902, and James Williamson, who moved into premises from Hove in the latter half of the decade, establishing his business in 1906. By 1908, Williamson's company had become Williamson Dressler and Co. Ltd,

⁴³ Anon (9 June 1900), 'The Paris Exhibition', *The Times*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Brown, Simon (2007), 'Flicker Alley: Cecil Court and the Emergence of the British Film Industry', *Film Studies*, 10.

⁴⁵ Brown, Simon (2007), p. 24.

(acknowledging the relationship he had developed with the American E Dressler Company since opening an office in New York in 1907),⁴⁶ and foreign companies like Vitagraph (which sold American product, sourced from its parent company, in Cecil Court from 1907), continued to move into the area.⁴⁷ These American connections heralded further foreign imports from Nordisk in 1908 and the first British company established to act as a sales agent for American companies, American Film Releases run by Richard Edmonson.⁴⁸ Despite this, Simon Brown asserts that all of the companies based at Cecil Court were 'British to a greater or lesser degree, either British registered or British funded, or run by British businessmen',⁴⁹ but this neglects the influence that often foreign parent companies had on these concerns, not to mention the potential stylistic and visual influences on British filmmakers such as Hepworth and Williamson, who were located amongst these foreign-owned businesses.

Distributors needed venues to sell their product to, and a number of alternatives were available at the turn of the decade. These included a few gimmicks, such as 'Hale's Tours', which consisted of an auditorium resembling the inside of a train carriage, on to which at one end of the wall was presented a 'phantom carriage' film – A recording taken from the front of a train. It was an American phenomenon from the St Louis World's Fair in 1904⁵⁰ that landed in Britain the following year,

⁴⁶ Gray, Frank, 'James Williamson', *Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/519902/index.html> (Accessed 2 August 2011).

⁴⁷ Thompson, Kristin (1985), *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34*, London: BFI Publishing, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Brown, Simon (2007), pp. 27-30.

⁴⁹ Brown, Simon (2007), p. 31.

⁵⁰ Gauthier, Phillipe (2009), 'The Movie Theater as an Institutional Space and Framework of Signification: Hale's Tours and Film Historiography', *Film History*, 21: 4, p. 326.

implanting itself in Oxford Street.⁵¹ Despite its novelty, the intensity of the labour involved (men having to physically shake the carriage to simulate movement, while others produced sound effects) meant that this was not as financially sound an endeavour as the formalised viewing experience that was to supersede it – the cinema. By far the majority of early exhibition activity took place in Britain's music halls, with films featuring as one of the many novelty 'turns' that would comprise an evening's entertainment. The music hall environment had a profound effect on the development of early cinema, and Michael Chanan argues that aside from the numerous aesthetic and ideological similarities that arose from the filming of popular music hall skits, there was also an enormous economic influence, with the business structures of the music hall being appropriated by the burgeoning film trade, forming the distribution and exhibition practices that would grow the British production sector and arguably begin to stifle it after the end of the First World War.⁵² As Sarah Street argues, 'Music Halls were the first real home of the commercial cinema',⁵³ and it was from music hall that many of British cinema's first major commercial acts would come from. Street identifies the comedian Fred Evans as the first music hall star who successfully adapted his act for film, with his 'Pimple' character becoming a staple of British cinema programmes during the First World War. Andy Medhurst has also argued that the influence of the music hall style on early British silent film comedy was especially telling,⁵⁴ and was to resonate long after the 'Pimple' series ended. However, despite the many similarities in content and a shared audience base, the

⁵¹ Hayes, Christian (2009), 'Phantom Carriages: Reconstructing Hale's Tours and the Virtual Travel Experience', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 7: 2, p. 191.

⁵² Chanan, Michael (1996), *The Dream That Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain* (2nd Edition), London: Routledge, pp. 100-101

⁵³ Street, Sarah (1997), p. 13.

⁵⁴ See Medhurst, Andy (1986), 'Music Hall and British Cinema', in Barr, Charles (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, London: BFI.

music hall schedule could not accommodate the steadily increasing length of individual films, and the proprietors that could sense the potential for massive returns in the burgeoning cinema trade realised that these longer and potentially more profitable productions would require a screening venue dedicated solely to them.

By 1906, the first London-based venue was established that is now generally accepted as a cinema, the Daily Bioscope, opposite Liverpool Street station.⁵⁵ Similarly to the activities of filmmakers at Cecil Court, foreign firms, in this case the French Gaumont, held a controlling interest. In the same year, the American Bioscope opened in Aldgate and many more venues purely designed for cinema exhibition followed in their wake.⁵⁶ The rise of these cinemas, each showing a rolling programme of films that lasted on average between five and ten minutes, also helped spark a rise in production, as the rapid proliferation of new exhibition venues demanded a regular supply of content.⁵⁷ Of course, as was the case in the distribution and exhibition sectors, production was also dominated by foreign businesses, most notably from France and America but also increasingly from Denmark and Italy. One of the most influential indigenous production areas was Brighton and Hove, where an entrepreneur who had made his name as a stage hypnotist and was beginning to delve into filmmaking for the first time, made several advances in film form that were to have repercussions throughout the film industry. G. A. Smith's *A Kiss in the Tunnel* (1899), which focused on a couple stealing a kiss in a train compartment as it enters a tunnel, was designed to be inserted between

⁵⁵ Sargeant, Amy (2005), p. 6.

⁵⁶ McKernan, Luke (2007b), p. 129.

⁵⁷ Chanan, Michael, p. 191.

'phantom carriage' scenes filmed by other directors. This put the onus of film editing on the exhibitor, who decided in which order the various shots would be projected,⁵⁸ and ensured it was versatile enough to be exhibited with a Hale's Tour. The version available today uses phantom ride footage recorded by Cecil Hepworth, and would lead Smith into other experimentations with film form. Smith, like Bamforth, based many of his earlier works on popular stories that would appeal to a large audience base who could recognise the truncated limitations of short film. RW Paul and Georges Méliès were influential on his style, and he incorporated elements of formal experimentation that was common in much of their work, innovating in films like *Grandma's Reading Glasses* (1900), which showed the audience the view of various objects magnified via the eponymous heroine's reading glass. Importantly, these tricks were not merely used as gimmicks, but were integrated into the plot via complementary exposition scenes before the close-ups. This technique was also used for his version of *A Kiss in the Tunnel*, cutting from footage filmed by Cecil Hepworth from the front of a train carriage to an interior view of a couple kissing. In so doing, he was among the earliest pioneers of editing, and thus laid the foundations for more complex narratives from later filmmakers.

From the early 'trick' films, which often featured one-shots of actors and actresses displaying progressively more animated facial tics, he moved on to narratives that used the limitations of the medium to cover up amorous undertakings, such as in the master and his maid hiding behind a washing-line to sneak a kiss, before being caught by the master's wife in *Hanging Out the Clothes* (1897), to the darkness of

⁵⁸ Gray, Frank (2004), 'The Kiss in the Tunnel (1899), G. A. Smith and the Emergence of the Edited Film in England', in Grieveson, L. & Kramer, P. (eds.), *The Silent Cinema Reader*, London: Routledge, pp. 57-8.

the train journey in *A Kiss in the Tunnel* or the dissolving fantasies of the frustrated husband in *Let Me Dream Again* (1900). His films were about what we cannot see, and his sheer joy of playing with audience expectations, either revealing hitherto unknowable visions (such as the close up point of view shots in *Grandma's Reading Glasses*) or hiding images from the viewer. This experimental spirit featured in much of his work, and led to his attempts in the latter half of the decade to pioneer colour filmmaking.

Smith's partner in this venture, Charles Urban, began his career in a Kinetoscope parlour in Chicago, for the Edison subsidiary Maguire and Baucus, and was sent to London in 1898 to be the firm's British manager.⁵⁹ Relocating the company to Warwick Court and then renaming it to the appropriately British-sounding Warwick Trading Company, he began to distribute a wide range of films to the public and was the focal point for many British directors working in the industry. By 1904 he had formed the Charles Urban Trading Company after a bitter split with Warwick, the repercussions of which (coupled with demands from his other creditors) led to Urban filing for bankruptcy in 1903. Urban's statement to the court indicated the cutthroat nature of the business and his belief that he had become subject to a coordinated campaign that had little to do with reclaiming debt:

...this petition has not been presented bona fide by the Warwick Trading Company limited but solely with the object of trying to ruin me and with the avowed intention of getting rid of me as a formidable rival in trade...it was the intention of the directors to stop

⁵⁹ The National Archives (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO): B 9/492.

me from carrying on business as a competitor of the petitioners as England is not big enough for the Warwick Company and Charles Urban in the animated picture business.⁶⁰

This setback did not deter Urban from continuing in the business, nor did it compel him to leave England. Instead, he became a naturalised British subject in 1907, and in 1908 moved his company premises to 'Urbanora House' in Wardour Street, announcing his business' new logo with the catchphrase, 'We Put the World Before You'. This philosophy, presented by the image of Mercury holding up a magnifying glass to the globe, would serve as an apposite reminder to the public that while this was a British film company, it was one that not parochial in intention.



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Figure 1: The Logo for the Charles Urban Trading Company.

Despite this, Urban believed that this international scope could only be achieved once film was recognised as a medium of national importance. In 1907 he published

⁶⁰ Ibid.

a booklet entitled *The Cinematograph in Science, Education and Matters of State*, which was his manifesto for the development of the future of filmmaking. In a section called *The Cinematograph Demands National Recognition*, he presented his belief that the

object of this pamphlet is to prove that the Cinematograph must be recognised as a National Instrument by the Boards of Agriculture, Education, and Trade, by the War Council, Admiralty, Medical Associations, and every Institution of Training, Teaching, Demonstration and Research.⁶¹

This vision of cinema as a nation-building tool, which would help spread civilisation throughout the country, was promoted widely by Urban, with *The Cinematograph and Bioscope Magazine* (published by the Charles Urban Trading Company) declaring in March 1907 that ‘the idea of making the Bioscope of national importance is...a subject which should be considered by the governments of all countries’,⁶² and while this was an in-house trade magazine with a vested interest, it was indicative of a wider belief that cinema was not going to be the mere fad that had once been predicted, and that it could have a profound influence on the nation.

In GA Smith, Urban found a filmmaker who had the technical skill and creative ability with which to attempt to fulfil the company’s ambitions, and building on the

⁶¹ Urban, Charles, *The Cinematograph in Science, Education and Matters of State*, <http://www.charlesurban.com/manifesto.htm> (Accessed 16 May 2011).

⁶² Anon (March 1907), ‘The “Bioscope” of National Interest’, *Cinematograph and Bioscope Magazine*, p. 145.

experiments of Edward Raymond Turner (who had died in 1903), Smith was set to work on the production of a two-colour additive process that he called Kinemacolor. The operation Urban established to produce these films, the Natural Colour Kinematograph Company, launched its first commercial screening in 1909 and was for a short period extremely successful, patenting the process across most of Western Europe, South America and the Far East by the end of 1912.⁶³ By 1914 the first three feature-length films recorded in colour had been released by the company, including the hugely popular chronicle of the 1911 Delhi durbar, *With Our King and Queen Through India* (1912).⁶⁴ Interestingly, one of its earliest productions with this process was 1908's *Tartans of Scottish Clans*, which presented a series of Scottish tartans to the viewer, using to great effect the green and red filters that captured the colour information and choosing an explicitly Scottish subject matter. However, its success was to be short-lived. Another pioneer of colour film technology, William Friese-Greene, launched a successful patent suit against it,⁶⁵ and the technical limitations of the process, not to mention the cost of installing the projection equipment in cinemas, meant that Smith was unable to continue with it.

Despite its failures, Kinemacolor was important in that it further entrenched the burgeoning trend in British cinema towards a form of 'realism', that would become increasingly important in critical responses to British filmmaking. Smith's vision for colour cinema was precisely tied to his desire to represent 'reality', and had been since his earliest days as a filmmaker. In fact, he would recall that while filming

⁶³ BFI: Charles Urban Collection: 'Sale Prices of Kinemacolor Patents' (December 1912).

⁶⁴ BFI: Charles Urban Collection: 'Letter from JF Madan to Charles Urban' (5 October 1914).

⁶⁵ McKernan, Luke (2002b), 'Putting the World Before You: The Charles Urban Story', in Higson, Andrew (ed.) *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, p. 73.

Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901, he was dazzled by the rich colours of the royal pageant, regretting that his recordings 'conveyed nothing of all this; and to my mind lost nine-tenths of its interest and truth.'⁶⁶ Simon Brown argues that in addition to these realistic elements, Smith's colour work also 'encompasses the spectacular and the sensual',⁶⁷ although the manner in which Smith and Urban marketed their product suggests that realism was still their main concern. An invitation to an early screening in 1908 was presented as the 'first exhibition in history of animated photography in *natural colours*' (my italics),⁶⁸ and this line was copied verbatim for its US premiere, which promised 'the first exhibition in the United States of America of motion pictures in natural colours'.⁶⁹ This focus on the 'natural' elements of their specific branch of film photography, was of particular importance to Smith's partner, Charles Urban, whose interests lay mainly in the non-fiction work that was in his view, the most valuable contribution that cinema could make to society.

Urban had helped to popularise the 'authentic' qualities of British film by the start of the 1910s, but Gerry Turvey's detailed research on the first six years of British cinema suggests that the 'actualities' produced by filmmakers such as Acres, Smith and others were, despite regularly trumpeting their 'picturesque' qualities, rarely presented as 'realistic'.⁷⁰ However, Acres' own pronouncements and the way his work was viewed by the press, suggests that the 'authenticity' of the images were of

⁶⁶ Brown, Simon (2009), 'Colouring the Nation: Spectacle, Reality and British Natural Colour in the Silent and Early Sound Era', *Film History*, 21, p. 140.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ BFI: Charles Urban Collection: 'Kinemacolor Screening Invitation' (1 May 1908).

⁶⁹ BFI: Charles Urban Collection: 'Kinemacolor Promotional Booklet' (11 December 1907).

⁷⁰ Turvey, Gerry (2004), 'Panoramas, Parades and the Picturesque: The Aesthetics of British Actuality Films, 1895-1901', *Film History*, 16: 1, p. 15.

importance. A revealing article in *The Amateur Photographer* suggested that 'it is just because [Acres] dreads his "kineopticon" becoming accepted by the unappreciative public as a "show", instead of as a really remarkable scientific spectacle and entertainment, that has kept Mr Acres from blowing the trumpet a little more loudly.'⁷¹ However, despite Acres' reticence, some critics viewed these productions as rapidly becoming an essential part of the national taste:

The yearning for instruction of a popular order which characterises the British race is extraordinary...Mr Douglas Cox, the experienced general manager of the Alhambra, understands this public, and he is filling that hall nightly by an appeal to this national trait...during this "turn" the bars are deserted, the promenaders are all facing one way and every eye in the house is diverted on the screen - it is a sight that would alone repay any student of national character for a visit to the Alhambra.⁷²

By 1906, this position had developed so that the trade press and company promotional material began to subtly highlight a film's 'authenticity', positioning this as essential to the integrity of actuality footage. For example, the *Cinematograph and Bioscope Magazine*, would report that:

[T]he way in which some venues have recently endeavoured to foist upon the public *faked* films of incidents that have profoundly affected

⁷¹ BFI: Birt Acres Collection: *The Amateur Photographer* (31 July 1896).

⁷² Anon (29 August 1903), 'Popular Science at the Alhambra', *Court Circular*, Reprinted in the *Urban-Duncan Micro-Bioscope*, Scott Herbert and Co (London, 1903).

the sympathetic imagination of the world, is not only a scandal to human intelligence, but it is a policy which is hateful to every true British heart.⁷³

This issue was mentioned again in the September edition of the magazine,⁷⁴ and in the May 1907 edition of *Projection, Lantern and Cinematograph*.⁷⁵ *The Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal* had also addressed the subject in 1905, as part of a series of articles exploring filmmaking techniques, stating:

[W]hen we note the various illusions to which the art is subject, it becomes a problem taxing the greatest genius, how best to avoid giving false effect upon the screen.⁷⁶

The same year, the journal claimed, 'perhaps the highest use to which the cinematograph could be put would be the reproduction of natural phenomena',⁷⁷ and by 1906 ran an article on 'How Films are Faked'.⁷⁸ There was clearly a strong link between 'authenticity' and British filmmaking technique promoted via the trade press in this period, which would only heighten as marketing techniques developed after 1910.

⁷³ Anon (June 1906), 'Fake and 'Frisco – Ominous Facts', *Cinematograph and Bioscope Magazine*, 3, p.37.

⁷⁴ Anon (September 1906), *Cinematograph and Bioscope Magazine*, 5, p.86.

⁷⁵ Anon (May 1907), *Projection, Lantern and Cinematograph*, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Anon (1905), 'Hints on Cinematograph Work', *The Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal: Collected Issues 1*, London: ET Hekon and Co, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Anon (1905), 'The Caricaturist and the Cinematograph', *The Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal: Collected Issues 1*, London: ET Hekon and Co, p. 106.

⁷⁸ Anon (June 1906), 'How Films are Faked', *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal: Collected Issues 3*, London: ET Hekon and Co, p. 100.

However, by the start of the First World War, the fiction film had been established as the dominant cinematic form, and crucially, the one that the majority of the public was willing to pay to see. Few filmmakers made the transition from the early 'actualities' and educational material that was Urban's forte, to the fictional entertainments that were rapidly becoming the norm, but of those that attempted to traverse this gap, RW Paul and Cecil Hepworth were the most successful. Paul was a filmmaker with international connections and ambitions, and his influence spread to filmmakers that would become world renowned, such as George Méliès, who adapted a Theatrograph projector sold to him by Paul into his first camera.⁷⁹ The money Paul made from his jubilee procession actualities enabled him to branch into fiction filmmaking using newly built studio facilities. His studio was an arena for experimentation, and it was here that he produced, *Come Along, Do!* (1898), the first two-shot filmed linked by a cut, before branching into extravagantly produced 'trick' films, which initially used simple cuts or dissolves to create fantastic scenarios. In 1901, Paul produced his longest and most ambitious 'trick' film to date, *The Magic Sword*. It was presented as a response for people 'weary of foreign pictures of this kind' (which was a barbed comment on the work of Méliès and Pathé), and in a two-page illustrated catalogue spread, stated that 'the facts of the actors and costumes being Old English, together with the original nature of the plot, cannot fail to please English-speaking audiences'.⁸⁰ Ian Christie has located the film's 'distinctively English traditions' as drawing on several diverse sources, each of which had purchase with a contemporary audience and ranged from John Maskelyne's magic theatre, to the 'Fairy extravaganzas' of James Robinson Planché and other

⁷⁹ Abel, Richard (2005), *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, Oxford: Routledge, p. 137.

⁸⁰ Christie, Ian (2004), "'The Magic Sword': Genealogy of an English Trick Film', *Film History* 16: 2, p. 164.

‘despised or little-known genres within Victorian entertainment’.⁸¹ Regardless of what allusion was drawn by each audience member, Christie asserts that the film was a prime example of the pleasure for audiences of ‘early film’s “remedial” fascination with a culture that was already slipping into the past.’⁸² As such, it helped to establish one of the key tenets of discussion about British nationality in relation to the cinema – that of the evocation of a past age in which supposedly untarnished ‘British’ or ‘English’ values were seen to be located.

Cecil Hepworth was a filmmaker for whom ‘national’ values were also of great importance. He had begun his career as a Charles Urban employee, but after being fired moved to Walton on Thames in 1900 to start his own business. Hepworth’s earlier productions had followed the pattern of most of his contemporaries, by focusing on ‘local’ films which could be incorporated into travelling shows throughout the country. The importance of this to his output can be seen by the front page advertisement he placed in the trade magazine *The Showman*, in June 1901:

The most popular Cinematograph film in a Travelling Show is ALWAYS a LOCAL PICTURE containing Portraits which can be recognised. A film showing workers leaving a Factory will gain far greater popularity in the town where it was taken than the most exciting picture ever produced. The workers come in hundreds, with all their friends and relations, and the film more than pays for itself the first night. In other words this is THE GREATEST DRAW YOU

⁸¹ Christie, Ian, p. 166.

⁸² Christie, Ian, p. 170.

CAN HAVE, AND IT IS OUR BUSINESS to provide it for you in advance, for each town you visit.⁸³

Hepworth's business model was based on these local 'actualities', but his career is instructive in that it demonstrates how this approach was broadened to encompass topics that would have a 'national' appeal, and how these subjects would be ingrained within fictional products. Hepworth's biggest success with fiction film was with 1905's *Rescued by Rover* (Lewin Fitzhamon), which had to be re-recorded a total of three times in order to keep up with demand for prints.⁸⁴ It presented a complex narrative based on the safe return of a child, located by the family dog (the eponymous Rover), after being abducted by a gypsy woman. The story was told without intertitles, and while much has been written about the lucid sequential editing technique employed by the director Fitzhamon and the editor Mabel Clark,⁸⁵ the film was also important in popularising the notion of 'otherness' represented by the gypsy woman (something that would become a recurring theme in Hepworth's career). This topic was perhaps most explicitly evoked in a Hepworth Company film also released in 1905, *The Aliens' Invasion* (Lewin Fitzhamon). Produced in the same year as the government's Aliens Act was made statute, this was an attempt by Hepworth to capitalise on the fears encompassed by that legislation, and tap into the widely-held anti-Semitic attitudes implicit in the Act. The film focused on a Jewish immigrant arriving at the London Docks, before meeting with his already resident immigrant

⁸³ Toulmin, Vanessa (2010), 'Cuckoo in the Nest: Edwardian Itinerant Exhibition Practices and the Transition to Cinema in the United Kingdom From 1901 to 1906', *The Moving Image*, 10: 1, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 122.

⁸⁴ Dixon, Bryony (25 February 2008), *Total Recall: Cecil Hepworth*, Presentation at the British Film Institute.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Perkins, Roy and Stollery, Martin (2004), *British Film Editors: The Heart of the Movie*, London: BFI Publishing, p. 61.

family, who number at least twenty and all share a single room. While now lost, the Hepworth Company catalogue provides an insight into the nature of the production, noting with horror this family's destitution. However, this was not a plea for better living conditions for immigrant workers, but developed into 'a tragic story of an English workman in great need who fails to obtain work owing to the influx of cheap foreign labour.' The catalogue described it as:

the first of a series of Political Pictures, intended to present in a graphic and convincing form the political questions of the hour which are of the highest national importance. The Alien question is shown in a manner which is both highly convincing and at the same time intensely interesting.⁸⁶

Many commentators believe that instead of films like *Rover* representing the moment where British filmmakers were able to develop and expand their craft, it led to their eventual decline. For example, Charles Barr argues that 'This is the point at which the British input falters: The stage when cinema begins to acquire genuinely national dimensions.'⁸⁷ Hepworth's work was a key factor in this development, with his company's distinctive style, itself a deliberate attempt to construct a 'British' cinema aesthetic, conforming to much of the critical commentary about British film from this period. While Barr refers specifically to the content of films made in the wake of *Rover*, in my view, the examples outlined in this chapter of how national dimensions

⁸⁶ Low, Rachael, and Manvell, Roger (1997), *The History of the British Film Volume One: 1896-1906* (2nd Edition), London: Routledge, p. 58.

⁸⁷ Barr, Charles (1999), 'Before Blackmail: Silent British Cinema', in Murphy, Robert (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p. 9.

were promoted in film catalogues and throughout the press, suggest that the roots of British cinema's identity run deep, that these notions were already a part of British cinema culture, and were about to be exposed by the actions of international competitors. For 1905 marks a turning point in British cinema history, a year in which a confluence of factors led to a dramatic upheaval in the industry and in the fortunes of British filmmakers. At the end of 1905, only a year after it had established its first permanent office in London,⁸⁸ Pathé began to sell its films for fivepence per foot, undercutting British companies who had a gentlemen's agreement not to sell for anything less than sixpence.⁸⁹ Within a year, the major British players (including Urban, Mitchell and Kenyon, Hepworth, Williamson and Paul) formed the Kinematograph Manufacturers' Association (KMA), in order to stand united against Pathé and prohibit film sales to renters who also bought from the French company.⁹⁰ Edison had attempted a similarly tough stance with Pathé in 1904, stopping the purchase of Pathé films from its London office in October that year,⁹¹ and this was indicative of Pathé's position in the industry at the turn of the century. *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* published a cartoon in January 1906, that depicted Britain's leading filmmakers crestfallen and aghast next to a triumphant Pathé cockerel, and being advised by a wraithlike Joe Chamberlain that 'Your only remedy gentlemen, is protection.'⁹² The clamour for support of the industry at a national level had begun.

⁸⁸ Thompson, Kristin, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Burrows, Jon (2006a), 'When Britain Tried to Join Europe: The Significance of the 1909 Paris Congress for the British Film Industry', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 4: 1, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Burrows, Jon (2006a), p. 6.

⁹¹ Thompson, Kristin, p. 6.

⁹² Anon (January 1906), 'The Monthly Cartoon, No. 2: The Film Crises', *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal: Collected Issues* 2, p. 12.

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REASONS

Figure 2: Cartoon Depicting the Crisis Engulfing the Industry.

Despite this, Pathé's sales were not adversely affected, and by December 1906, they had cut their prices to fourpence per foot, prompting Urban to withdraw from the KMA and follow suit – something that other KMA members did in 1908 when Pathé cut prices to threepence.⁹³ However, Pathé was merely responding to the dominant trends of the industry, which was about to move from direct sale from producers to exhibitors towards a film rental system, in which the distributor became increasingly important. In 1904, Walturdaw, a distribution company run by JD Walker, EG Turner and GH Dawson, was the only film renter operating in Britain. However, by 1905, five new rental businesses opened in Britain, followed by a further seven in 1907, including the major non-British firms Pathé, Vitagraph, Nordisk, Gaumont and

⁹³ Burrows, Jon (2006a), p. 6.

Edison.⁹⁴ This was prompted by two factors; first, the move to purpose-built, fixed-site cinema venues from 1906 onwards meant that audiences quickly grew tired with the same films shown from the exhibitors' stock of purchased work, and second, the economics of renting films made more financial sense to the exhibitors, who were able to purchase more content at a far cheaper price than by buying the material outright from the producer. Thus, in 1907, the rental firm Butchers could offer a programme of 6000 feet of film for just over £6, whereas Hepworth had sold copies of the 400 foot-long *Rescued by Rover* direct to exhibitors for £10/12s/6d.⁹⁵ At these prices, the financial risks were transferred to the manufacturers, who were now increasingly reliant on a renter to get their product into cinemas.

The major players in British fiction filmmaking convened in Paris in 1909, to undertake a series of congresses with other major international filmmaking concerns, in order to address the commercial issues that were affecting their businesses. Unbeknownst to them, the implications of these meetings would extend far beyond a simple trading dispute, and instead open up

a bitter rift between domestic filmmakers and renters and exhibitors, and [allow] American film companies to take the first significant step towards their future domination of the British film trade.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Brown, Simon (2013), 'From Inventor to Renter: The Middleman, The Production Crisis and the Formation of the British Film Industry', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 11: 2, pp. 105-07.

⁹⁵ Brown, Simon (2013), p. 106.

⁹⁶ Burrows, Jon (2006a), p. 1.

The initial impetus for the convention was the formation of the Motion Picture Patent Company (MPPC) in America, which used the existing and wide-ranging patents held by its members to help impose restrictions on imports to this fruitful market from European filmmakers.⁹⁷ Kristin Thompson regards this move as ‘the main factor in the struggle for the American domestic market before World War One’, arguing that without it, ‘foreign companies would presumably have continued to enter the market after 1907 as the demand for films increased.’⁹⁸ Charles Urban, Percy Stow (from Clarendon), James Williamson, AC Bromhead (Gaumont), RW Paul, Will Barker (Warwick) and Cecil Hepworth all attended, with the intention to secure their position in an industry that was beginning to seem precarious. Many of these pressures came from the domestic market, which only a year previously had been suffering an erosion of demand for new product, as a result of exhibitors re-screening old film reels they had already purchased. In order to halt this trend, the Kinematograph Manufacturers Association (KMA) had proposed an end to film sales, with renters in future being required to lease films from the manufacturer,⁹⁹ return them to the manufacturer within four months, and follow a scale of set rates for renting.¹⁰⁰

Despite these pressures, many industry observers believed British cinema to be in rude health. In 1909, *The Bioscope* would write, ‘the time is rapidly nearing when British films will be reckoned amongst the best...on the photographic side, British artists are not surpassed by those of any other nationality.’¹⁰¹ There was a belief in

⁹⁷ Thompson, Kristin, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Thompson, Kristin, p. 19.

⁹⁹ Burrows, Jon (2006a), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, Simon (2013), p. 110.

¹⁰¹ Anon (29 July 1909), ‘Where England Leads’, *The Bioscope*, p. 3.

British cinema and of the importance of British filmmakers on an international stage, and the Paris Congress was viewed by the KMA as an opportunity to gain wide European support for its proposals. All this achieved was to prompt the formation of a similar industrial organisation, the Cinematograph Trade Protection Society (CTPS), which was a collection of renters and exhibitors who succeeded in blocking the KMA's proposals. Yet to secure its credentials as the key supporter of free trade in the British distribution and exhibition industry, the CTPS did not stop there, and arranged to buy 90,000 feet of film a week from the MPPC. By 1909, American Biograph and Essanay had set up operations in London for the first time,¹⁰² and in so doing, the CTPS had in one fell swoop enabled American interests to gain a foothold in the British market. To compound matters further, several major British film producers, including Hepworth, Paul, Williamson and Warwick, signed up with a newly formed American distributor, the International Projecting and Producing Company (IPPC), but this failed to establish a foothold in the market and quickly folded.¹⁰³ This failure was indicative of the composition of manufacturers, who, having mostly come from scientific or technical backgrounds, had never really fully grappled with the financial aspects of their businesses, and lacked the 'imaginative and economic leap' that would have seen them expand in to distribution and 'could have secured their future'.¹⁰⁴

The European film market had remained remarkably strong at the start of the decade; in 1904 the world market share was 55 per cent in favour of European films

¹⁰² Burrows, Jon (2006a), p. 14.

¹⁰³ Thompson, Kristin, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, Simon (2013), p. 111.

in American cinemas,¹⁰⁵ and in the UK the percentage of European films in domestic theatres was as high as 82 per cent in 1910. But by the end of the Paris Congress, British filmmakers had opened the door to American companies, and thus had secured their eventual decline in importance throughout the international industry. They had also ensured that by the end of the 1900s, British audiences were already accustomed to viewing non-British films as the dominant form of their visual entertainment, and thus with formalised cinema exhibition came increasing foreign influence. The quality of films from Italy and established European companies like Pathé and Nordisk, coupled with the novelty of being able to see entertainment from across the world, had led to the swift decline in interest in what was by then already perceived to be inferior quality British product.¹⁰⁶ By the end of the decade, RW Paul believed that the expense 'necessary for the production of any saleable film' was so great that he 'found the cinematograph side of the business too speculative to be run as a side-line to instrument making.'¹⁰⁷ It was a damning indictment on how far British filmmaking had fallen, and an indication of the problems yet to come.

¹⁰⁵ Bakker, Gerben (2006), 'Sunk Costs, Market Structure and Productivity Growth in Services: The Emergence of the Film Industry, 1890-1940', Paper Delivered at *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, University of Reading.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, Kristin, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Anon (July 1936), 'Paul, RW', in Harris, Sylvan (ed.), *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, 27: 1, p. 512.

Chapter Two: Exhibiting 'Britishness', 1909-1918

If the 1900s was a decade exemplified by the rapid growth of the film production and distribution industries, then the 1910s represented the moment when exhibitors ensured that film would become the dominant national pastime. Increases in public income precipitated a rise in leisure spending throughout the decade, which led to exhibitors marketing their products more actively and, in turn, further entrenched cinematic images in the public consciousness. The inauguration of the state pension scheme on 1 August 1908 (which came into effect on 1 January 1909) was one such example of legislation that indirectly benefitted cinema exhibitors as, despite only being available to the over-seventies on a means tested basis, for those eligible few it added one to seven shillings to the family purse – the equivalent of up to 20 per cent of average earnings. Limited National Insurance followed in 1911, which provided sickness and unemployment benefit for the first time, enabling some form of security for 16-70 year olds earning less than £160 per year.¹⁰⁸ This was provided only to people who had lived in the country since 1878 and were full British nationals, and as such, was part of a wider entrenchment of the concept of the state as a *national* influence.

These changes were as much the result of attempts to engineer national 'character' as they were ideological acts by Herbert Asquith's Liberal government, predicated as they were on the repercussions from the 'recruitment shock' of the Second Anglo-Boer war almost ten years prior to the first pension payment, and framed as an attempt to improve the racial stock of the nation. Yet they arrived at a fortuitous

¹⁰⁸ Butler, David, and Butler, Gareth (2000), *Twentieth Century British Political Facts*, Hampshire: Palgrave, p. 377.

moment for cinema exhibition, dovetailing the 1909 Cinematograph Films Act and providing an unwaged mass audience with financial means at precisely the moment that fledgling purpose-built cinema venues needed patrons to survive. Therefore, the recession that developed during the final years of cinema's second decade did not halt the endeavours of the various showmen and exhibitors who relied on waged clientele, but instead presented young men, who were previously working an average 60-hour week, with the opportunity to visit the cinema during the day, many with their wives (over 90 per cent of married women had no occupation before the First World War¹⁰⁹). The first purpose-built cinema in Lancashire was finished in 1907, the year unemployment reached its peak, with the fledgling medium becoming increasingly popular in the industrial North and other areas similarly affected by the recession.¹¹⁰ Advances in social security, coupled with the regulation of pub opening hours (itself a response to the perceived decline in national 'stock') ensured that not only did the public have more money for leisure, but also its favoured source of recreation was now closed for half of each day. More importantly, while there was concern over its influence, it was viewed as the lesser of two evils when compared with drunkenness. As Dallas Bower identified:

A totally different kind of dope had arrived. And upon examination it was found to be of rather better value for money than the previous one and the only kind available. It also had the considerable advantage of not inconveniencing the body. Thus is the intense popularity of cinema (and decline of drunkenness) with the masses

¹⁰⁹ Hobsbawm, Eric, p. 199.

¹¹⁰ Matthew, HGC, p. 573.

accounted for. It is really the substitution of one sort of dope for another; and, on the whole, the new dope is very much better than the old.¹¹¹

Cinema exhibitors were keen to capitalise on the government's restrictions with appropriately scheduled matinee performances, which bridged the 2.30-6.30pm embargo on pub opening times and helped introduce even more patrons to the cinema experience. Of course, these times were ideal for the young as well, and some estimates predict that almost 50 per cent of the audience were youths,¹¹² approximations that compare favourably with data collected from British cinemas after the Second World War.¹¹³ The professionalisation of the exhibition industry also coincided with an increase in foreign workers, predominantly Jewish, in the East End of London and other dock areas, who found the cinema hall to be a convivial meeting place for many non-British communities. Much anecdotal evidence exists of Jewish children translating intertitles into Yiddish, Polish, Russian or German for their parents, and forming a major part of the new cinema audience in the early 1910s.¹¹⁴

What this new audience began to experience was more formal than the film screenings attended by their predecessors, and was subject to the recent legislative tenets of the 1909 Cinematograph Films Act. This Act, for the first time, required cinemas to be licensed under local authority control, and was designed to protect the

¹¹¹ Bower, Dallas (1936), *Plan For Cinema*, London: JM Dent, p. 120.

¹¹² McKernan, Luke (2007a), "'Only the Screen was Silent...': Memories of Children's Cinema-going in London Before the First World War', *Film Studies*, 10, p. 1.

¹¹³ For further information, refer to UK Film Council (2011), *Film Council Statistical Yearbook 2010*, London: UK Film Council.

¹¹⁴ McKernan, Luke (2007a), p. 9.

public from the fire hazards of improperly handled nitrate film stock. The legislation marked the death knell for the travelling showman – something encouraged by distributors who now had a national network of venues in which to sell their product. By legislating for all film exhibitors, the government created national standards, formalising exhibition practices. While this took a few years to permeate all venues, by the start of the First World War these newly licensed cinemas were a ubiquitous element of the urban landscape and did not significantly change until the advent of synchronised sound in the late 1920s.

Electric Theatres was the company leading the way in rapid cinema expansion. Established in 1908, by 1910 it had sixteen cinemas in Greater London.¹¹⁵ It was founded by Joseph Jay Bamberger, a New York stockbroker with experience of building nickelodeons in New York. Other large-scale outfits followed in quick succession, the most notable of which was the sixteen-cinema circuit of Montagu Pyke, followed by another sixteen-cinema circuit in Scotland owned by JJ Bennell. Proprietors like Bennell visited the US to see how their businesses were run, and this became a key avenue for exhibitors to source equipment and distribution contacts. While exhibitors had used foreign products from the start, *Kinematograph Weekly* identified that this process of standardisation in building and equipment often meant accepting even more of these goods – A report in its first Year Book in 1914 acknowledged the ‘old showmen’s prejudice against projectors of American

¹¹⁵ McKernan, Luke (30 June 2006), ‘Unequal Pleasures: Electric Theatres (1908) Ltd and the Early Film Exhibition Business in London’, Paper delivered at *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, University of Reading.

manufacture' when recommending the new *Simplex* projector, and clearly American equipment was becoming increasingly important to the British cinema trade.¹¹⁶

The cinema-building boom saw an increase in the number of new cinema registrations from 231 in 1910 to 544 by 1914,¹¹⁷ and by 1911 Britain was second only to America in the number of established theatres, numbering at least 2000 in total.¹¹⁸ By 1913 it was estimated that in London alone there was accommodation for up to 55,000 people in cinema halls.¹¹⁹ More importantly, these seats were being filled, with 28,000,000 people attending across the country on a weekly basis.¹²⁰ By 1914, the efforts of Montagu Pyke and JJ Bennell had been eclipsed by Albany Ward, whose cinema circuit comprised 29 cinemas and had a reach that extended to Devon, Cornwall and South Wales.¹²¹ Ward was acutely aware of the importance of marketing in his venues, and upon opening his 'New Palace of Varieties' in Yeovil, a souvenir programme was produced that extolled the virtues of Ward's 'extensive, forward looking enterprise, with offices in London and Weymouth'.¹²² This marked a significant shift in cinema exhibition, from venues appealing to local traditions, to one where the national nature of the business was highlighted and, importantly, was also a sign of quality. This 'nation-building' element of cultural practice was the defining characteristic of this period of cinema development.

¹¹⁶ Anon (1914), *Kinematograph Weekly Year Book*, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Burrows, Jon (2006b), 'Folly, Fraud and Failure?: Evaluating the Hostility of the Financial Press Towards the Early British Film Exhibition Industry, 1910-1914', Paper delivered at *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, University of Reading.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, Kristin, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Sutcliffe, JB (5 April 1913), 'British Notes', *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 38.

¹²⁰ Sutcliffe, JB (12 April 1913), 'British Notes', *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 170.

¹²¹ Cook, Patricia, p. 294.

¹²² Cook, Patricia, p. 305.

However, this approach had its drawbacks, and with the rapid expansion of the exhibition and distribution market, many producers realised that more money could be made in these areas, rejecting film production as too costly and fraught with risk. Likewise, the increase in the density of cinemas was matched by audience demand, and the only way this could be fulfilled was by importing more and more foreign films. As Kristin Thompson argues, 'By downplaying production in favour of distribution and exhibition, the British firms left the field open for foreign films; with so little screen time being devoted to native production, it became increasingly difficult to interest investors in making British films.'¹²³ This was exacerbated by Britain becoming America's European distribution base, and the constant flow through the country of US films on their way to continental Europe, meant that the opportunities for entrepreneurial British distributors were manifold. What this led to was a steep decline in the percentage of British productions projected in British cinemas:

Within the space of a year - from 9 January 1911 to 14 January 1912 – the percentage of British films shown in British cinemas dropped only marginally from 19.5 to 16.5 per cent. But during the same period, the percentage of American films increased from 26 to 43.4 per cent.¹²⁴

Thus, despite calls from some sections of the industry for 'All-British' theatres that showed purely British product, the 1915 Kinematograph Year Book argued that 'the supply of British films was not nearly sufficient to meet the demand for films on the

¹²³ Thompson, Kristin, p. 30.

¹²⁴ Thompson, Kristin, p. 215.

part of the kinematograph theatres in the country.’¹²⁵ Because of this, some of the earliest books about cinema produced in Britain, including Harry Furniss’ *Our Lady Cinema* (1914) and Frederick Talbot’s *Moving Pictures: How They are Made and Worked* (1912) would discuss British film in terms of decline,¹²⁶ and the one positive publication, Alex J Phillip’s *Cinematograph Films: Their National Value and Preservation* (1912), was a plea to create a national repository for film, and as such, highlighted the danger (which would of course transpire) that the neglect of British cinema would lead to many of its treasures being lost for future generations. Despite this, it shows how already by the teens the idea of film as something of national importance, to be either encouraged or disparaged, was current.

It is this sense of a wide confluence of factors converging at or around 1911, that has led some critics to argue the case for the ‘second birth’ of cinema,¹²⁷ the point at which the prototype technology of making films became a recognised ‘medium’, with narrative and stylistic conventions and an established industrial infrastructure with which to support it. Andrew Shail calls this year a ‘crescendo of reinvention’ in Britain, in which

licenses held by ‘picture theatres’ first outnumbered those held by older venues...*Punch* printed its first cartoons about film venues, national newspaper columns devoted solely to film first appeared, production companies releasing films in the UK launched their first

¹²⁵ Montgomery, HB (1915), ‘Kinematograph Finance in 1914’, *Kinematograph Year Book 1915*, London: The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly, p. 29.

¹²⁶ Sargeant, Amy (2005), p. 29.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Gaudreault, Andre and Marion, Phillipe (2005), ‘A Medium is Always Born Twice...’, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 3:1.

publicity campaigns about picture personalities targeted at the general public, the feature film made its first appearance, and the first film fan magazine was released...'¹²⁸

However, as Simon Brown argues, British cinema 'does not fit this model'.¹²⁹ While the industrial aspects of the business had developed in line with most other countries up until 1911, Brown argues that stylistically, British cinema did not adopt 'modern storytelling techniques', such as those that would become associated with DW Griffith, but instead turned to 'patriotic British subjects and spectacle to woo middle-class audiences and gain a new respectability for British cinema',¹³⁰ resulting in the adaptations of British literary classics such as *Henry VIII* (Will Barker, 1911), *Oliver Twist* (Thomas Bentley, 1912) and *Hamlet* (Hay Plumb, 1913). Brown sees this trend as having its roots in the economic slump of the previous decade, with the failure of the British manufacturers to adapt to the new methods of distribution and the eventual debacle of the Paris Congress leading to an attempt by later British filmmakers to seek to distinguish British films from foreign competition. To do so, producers like Will Barker and Cecil Hepworth appropriated elements of the more respectable British arts of theatre and literature, while a similar gentrification process took place in the newer purpose-built cinemas.¹³¹ As I will show in the following chapter, in addition, the marketing of these productions, which was directly linked to the cinema-building boom, also exploited these supposedly respectable British qualities, and coupled with these changes in the content of British films and the

¹²⁸ Shail, Andrew (2013a), 'Cinema's Second Birth', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 11: 2, p. 97.

¹²⁹ Brown, Simon (2013), p. 111.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Brown, Simon (2009), p. 141.

standard of exhibitions venues, had a major impact on the way that British cinema was presented to the public and its development as an art form.

This process began with the recognition of the cinema by the British press, if often only grudgingly so. 'Now, it is an undoubted fact that the "Cinema" is by far the most popular entertainment of the present day', wrote one such contributor to *Academy and Literature*. 'All the afternoon and evening the picture palace and its humbler brethren draw humanity through their gaudy doors. You can scarcely find a town in which none of these places exist. And it is to the "cinema" that we have to look for the future.'¹³² Aside from the public house, the cinema was also drawing its congregation from the churches, and there was much debate about Sunday opening times for picture theatres, which were heavily restricted – although this was also due to pressure from various entertainment unions, concerned that the ubiquity of cinema would lead to the decline of music halls and other traditional venues.¹³³ WT Stead, writing in the *Review of Reviews*, believed that the cinema could be used as a force for good, and found it absurd that 'of 4,000 Cinema halls 3,500 remain empty and useless on the one day in the week when the masses have leisure to attend them.'¹³⁴ And while his views were tempered by a disdainful view of the cinema's status as an art, he clearly recognised its increasing importance in the country's cultural landscape:

¹³² Stables, JH (September 1913), 'National Drama in England', *Academy and Literature*, p. 381.

¹³³ See Anon (8 January 1910), 'Cinematograph Shows on Sundays', *The Times*, p.5.

¹³⁴ Stead, WT (November 1912), 'The Church's Picture Galleries', *Review of Reviews*, 46: 275, p. 533.

The magic-lantern slide often produces far more artistic effects than can be obtained from the cinema film. But it is not Art that draws the multitude. It is life. The Cinema show represents Life as it is lived to-day - Life caught in the act of living, and made to reproduce itself before the cinema crowd.¹³⁵

Even the aforementioned cinema proprietor Montagu Pyke would refer to these edifying effects in the promotional literature for his cinema chain, imploring

What would we not now give for reliable representations, veritable re-productions of epoch-making events in the history of our own country...if they could be brought before our eyes to-day precisely and actually as they happened, how easy and interesting it would be at once to teach and to learn history...¹³⁶

Because the audiences were so vast, and cinemas so numerous, the government sought to legislate for venue licenses, especially in light of an increasing number of fires that had happened during film screenings. Despite the ostensible intentions of the 1909 Cinematograph Films Act, some of its critics noted that there was scope within it for local authorities to exert influence on more than just public safety issues. Jon Burrows has suggested that control over gatherings of immigrant communities in the East End of London was at least partly responsible for the new regulations,¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Stead, WT, p. 534.

¹³⁶ Shail, Andrew (2013b), 'Focussing the Universe', Montagu A Pyke, c. 1911', *Film History*, 11: 2, p. 179.

¹³⁷ Sargeant, Amy (2005), p. 19.

and this would certainly conform with the prevailing concerns of the period, and preempt the blame that would be levelled at foreigners throughout the 1910s for many of the perceived dangers of the cinema halls.

Watson Rutherford, MP for Liverpool West Derby, described the Act in Parliament as 'increasing those grandmotherly, and in many cases, entirely unnecessary, precautions which are supposed to be in the interests of the public, but which really inflict very considerable hardship upon individuals',¹³⁸ and yet while the law established safer methods of operating, these early picture houses were far from models of sobriety. Despite some cinema managers changing admission prices in order to force the working-classes (whom they perceived to be the root of the problems) into the upper balcony of the auditorium,¹³⁹ reports regarding alleged debauchery in these venues prevailed.¹⁴⁰ These concerns led many local authorities to take a more active role in controlling the content of what was shown to cinema patrons. To stave off what appeared to be an inevitable government intervention into the content of films, the industry struck on the idea of self-regulation. The British Board of Film Censorship opened its doors on 1 January 1913 under the Presidency of GA Redford, and, while the BBFC was not a statutory body, after the advent of the First World War there was pressure from some MPs that censorship of films should be coordinated centrally via the Home Office. However, with the fall of Asquith's Liberal administration, a new BBFC director, TP O'Connor, was appointed and Sir George Cave, to whom the idea of censoring films held no interest, replaced the previous

¹³⁸ House of Commons Debates (HC Deb);, Vol. 3 cc1595-9 (21 April 1909).

¹³⁹ Gledhill, Christine (2003), *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928: Between Restraint and Passion*, London: BFI Publishing, p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ For a description of many of these complaints, see Dewe Mathews, Tom (1994), *Censored: The Story of Film Censorship in Britain*, London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, p. 9.

Home Secretary.¹⁴¹ Regardless of the motivations behind its formation, concerns about the content of moving images had existed since the birth of the new medium, and were not likely to abate any time soon. In 1889 Samuel Smith wrote to *The Times*, referring to 'the vicious, demoralising pictures shown in penny-in-the-slot machines...It is hardly possible to exaggerate the corruption of the young that comes from exhibiting, under a strong light, nude female figures represented as living and moving, going in and out of baths, sitting as artists' models etc...'¹⁴² But by the 1910s, much of this content had subsided in the wake of the far more popular (and hence, profitable) narrative films discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, attention turned rapidly to the cinema halls themselves, and their growing prominence only served to further heighten official concerns.

Initial worries about exhibition practices generally revolved around problems of inadequate lighting. The 1 March 1917 issue of *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* presented a one-page editorial on the subject, insisting that 'it was not uncommon to hear of children having headaches after visiting the picture theatres, and it was also not uncommon that visits to such places resulted in attacks of vomiting.'¹⁴³ By 1909, several firms were already attempting to introduce daylight projection, mainly to discourage pickpockets and 'improper behaviour', and in 1913, *The Lancet* described the pictures halls as 'disease dens', which hinted also at the scourge of VD.¹⁴⁴ That the darkness of the cinema hall encouraged sexual activity was widely

¹⁴¹ Dewe Mathews, Tom, p. 25.

¹⁴² Sanders, Lise Shapiro (2002), 'Indecent Incentives to Vice': Regulating Films and Audience Behaviour from the 1890s to the 1910s', in Higson, Andrew (ed.) *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, p. 101.

¹⁴³ Anon (1 March 1917), *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, p.3.

¹⁴⁴ Sutcliffe, JB (3 May 1913), 'British Notes', *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 478.

acknowledged from its inception, although most saw this as harmless courting by the young:

This dark recess at the back of the hall, though innocent enough, is looked on askance by the occupants of the respectable tip-up chairs, for it harbours the wild spirits of both sexes – the freelances – the untamed...Yet the authorities of the cinema smile patiently. They can afford to wait. They are far-seeing, for although nominally the space behind the railing is provided for anyone unable to find an unoccupied chair, its real use is as a sort of mating-ground. It is for the unattached. It is a respectable agency, under whose roof any lonely young man may, without the necessity of a formal introduction, make the acquaintance of any lonely young lady.¹⁴⁵

By the middle of the First World War, pressure began to come from some quarters of the press, who started to treat films as endemic of a wider national crisis. A leader in the August 1916 edition of *The Church Times* was entitled 'The Child and the Cinema – A Parent's View of the Growing Danger', and purported to say that the chief methods of drawing a full house were '1. The dangerous, and 2. The undesirable.' It continued:

...if we just pause and consider the cinema in its relation to the child, we shall be forced to the conclusion that it is time to check what is

¹⁴⁵ Thomson, C Gordon (March 1914), 'Life in Little: Love in the Cinema', *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 53: 251, p. 390.

undoubtedly a great and growing danger to the children of the nation.¹⁴⁶

In the same year, on 4 May, the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, declared in Parliament that there had been 'a considerable increase in juvenile offences during the past year, and...one of the causes is to be found in the character of some of the films shown at cinematograph theatres.'¹⁴⁷ Samuel had already contacted the London Commissioner of Police, Sir Edward Henry, on 6 April, to ascertain how best to manage the perceived danger, and to discuss whether the state needed to intervene with some form of official film censorship system.¹⁴⁸ By 18 July, Henry produced a report which again commented on the darkness of most cinemas, particularly the proliferation of darkened theatre style boxes, which provided an 'easy opportunity for improper practices.'¹⁴⁹ In addition, it was revealed that the London County Council had detailed eleven cases of child molestation that had taken place at cinemas in 1915 alone.¹⁵⁰

The LCC was keen to stamp out this behaviour, and took matters into its own hands. In December 1915, it introduced as a licensing requirement that a Special Children's Attendant should be present at cinemas to 'take care of and safeguard' the children attending the hall.¹⁵¹ In addition, a new condition to the licensing agreement, 'That no

¹⁴⁶ Anon (25 August 1916), 'The Child and the Cinema – A Parent's View of the Growing Danger', *The Church Times*.

¹⁴⁷ HC Deb: Vol. 82 c132 (4 May 1916).

¹⁴⁸ TNA: PRO: MEPO 2/1696.

¹⁴⁹ TNA: PRO: HO 45/24570.

¹⁵⁰ TNA: PRO: HO 45/24570.

¹⁵¹ TNA: PRO: MEPO 2/1691.

films be displayed which are likely to be subversive of public morality', was added in May 1916, as a direct result of Samuel's Parliamentary speech.¹⁵² Interestingly, this further entrenched the link perceived between the activity in the cinema hall and the behaviour on screen, and furthermore, the supposed effect of cinema experiences on the nation's morals. However, the LCC stipulations were not always strictly adhered to, and on 10 May 1916 the police received a further report on 'improper practices', the fruits of research conducted over the previous month. Not only did the reporter discover the same 'gross immorality' being carried out by both sexes, as well as men entering toilets with young boys, he witnessed a much more disturbing trend; apparent instances of child prostitution taking place inside the cinema venue.¹⁵³ Organised prostitution in music halls (which often showed films in the early 1900s) was common, leading some to comment that the music hall audience consisted of 'ragged boys, each one with his pipe, potato and (we must add it) his prostitute.'¹⁵⁴ That this trend should have continued is therefore unsurprising, but the key difference was the ubiquity and increasing classlessness of the cinema. It was not something that could be hidden away as a working-class problem, as in the case of the music hall, and the nation's 'moral guardians' felt a responsibility to deal with these issues before even more people became exposed to them. The National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland was the chosen custodian to take up the baton, and agreed with Henry to conduct a trial cinema patrol scheme he had suggested. However, their patrols discovered little new evidence of impropriety, and they were eventually halted.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ TNA: PRO: HO 45/24570.

¹⁵⁴ Summerfield, Penny (1986), 'Patriotism and Empire: Music Hall Entertainment, 1870-1914', in Mackenzie, John (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 22.

Certainly, organised prostitution was still rife throughout cinemas after these efforts – as a letter from the Cinematograph Exhibitor’s Association to the Home Secretary in January 1917 attested. The CEA claimed that there were 50,000 prostitutes in London, of which 40,000 were of ‘alien birth’. Desperate to maintain its associates’ reputations, it claimed that the reports of indecent conduct ‘were entirely without foundation’, and that instead it was foreign prostitutes, predominately refugees from France and Belgium resulting from the Great War, that were the source of these events. Its proposed solution was to mark the National Registration Cards held by prostitutes, to identify them from the rest of society, and then to deport all of those so marked who were not British citizens.¹⁵⁵ However, the police disputed such claims, arguing that the 50,000 figure was greatly exaggerated and that the majority of prostitutes they dealt with were of British origin. Considering the CEA’s delicate position in the light of reported indecencies recorded throughout its cinemas, it was natural that it would seek to smooth over some of the more challenging facts and attempt to conceal the reality of what happened in its theatres. Nonetheless, by the end of the First World War the police were also attempting to disregard recorded events, declaring in a memo of 1917 that ‘No complaint had been made [to them] that indecent or immoral conduct had taken place in the Cinemas (sic).’¹⁵⁶ The conclusions of a report by the National Council of Public Morals’ Cinema Commission in 1917,¹⁵⁷ established in the wake of allegations made against cinemas, accepted this view.

¹⁵⁵ TNA: PRO: MEPO 2/1691.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Cinema Commission of Enquiry (1917), *The Cinema: Its Present Position and Future Possibilities*, London: Williams and Norgate.

This sentiment was adopted wholesale in government documentation from that point forward, and no official records of investigations into First World War cinema behaviour exist after this memo. There are a number of possible reasons for this, and it seems natural to assume that the end of the Great War itself was the key factor. The deflection of official resources and purpose to other areas over the following year suggests that the problems of London's metropolitan cinemas would have failed to register as one of the main government priorities. Perhaps also the intense interest in child welfare that the war had exacerbated began to recede once the end of the conflict was in sight, and the promise of the return home of Britain's young males was on the horizon. The end of the war may have lifted the sense of urgency over the protection of children that the conflict had engendered. Undoubtedly, the conclusions of the National Council of Public Morals' Cinema Commission also helped to dissuade moral campaigners from further investigation. As Dean Rapp argues, these campaigners could not 'ignore the eminence of the members of the Commission, its convincing evidence, and its sponsorship by a social purity group.'¹⁵⁸

However, what is more likely is suggested by the CEA's letter of 1917, which attempted to place the majority of the blame onto a fictitious minority, 'foreign prostitutes'. It appears that the issue was skilfully deflected by the CEA and the exhibitors they represented, to become a problem not of the cinema halls, but of either their spectators or the films that they exhibited – particularly if the spectators or films were not British. The call for the deportation of foreign prostitutes was primarily a convenient smokescreen for the reality of life in the halls, fanned by the

¹⁵⁸ Rapp, Dean (2002), 'Sex in the Cinema: War, Moral Panic, and the British Film Industry, 1906-1918', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 34: 3 (Autumn 2002), p. 450.

chauvinism instilled by the First World War itself and entwined with the prevailing narrative of the 'decline' in national character that had been promoted by the press. Ironically, the LCC's constant referral to the evils of individual films provided another aspect to this argument, and along with the President of the BBFC, T. P. O'Connor (with his 43 rules for excluding films that were also introduced in 1917), the films shown after this period were perceived as more damaging than the cinemas in which they were exhibited. Yet, 'O'Connor's rules' strengthened the BBFC against further attack from the government and critics, and were the logical conclusion of the industry's drive towards 'national' standards, a process that had begun with the proliferation of purpose-built cinema venues in the wake of the 1909 Cinematograph Films Act. For the lack of national consistency was what the government really feared, as Herbert Samuel attested to in Cabinet in 1916:

...this local censorship is not satisfactory. Different local authorities have different standards...where a film is banned as objectionable in one area, the very fact gives it considerable advertisement in some neighbouring place where it has not been prohibited. The control of cinematograph films is clearly not a matter which should be left to local boards of censorship.¹⁵⁹

A national cinema network required a national censorship body in order to alleviate these fears, and T.P. O'Connor was able to provide it, at just enough distance from the government for the Home Secretary to maintain a critical detachment. However, by the beginning of the First World War, one thing was absolutely clear to the public

¹⁵⁹ TNA: PRO: CAB 37/157/2.

– Britain, by virtue of its legislative measures, building developments and commercial endeavours, had a geographically, if not quite yet culturally, ‘national’ cinema.

Chapter Three: Marketing 'Britishness', 1909-1918

Perhaps the most profound, although often overlooked, change in cinema culture during the 1910s was the rapid increase of what is now a treasure trove to the film historian – cinema ephemera. Pressbooks, posters and advertising boards, amongst other marketing material, were printed and distributed at a phenomenal rate, and they provide a direct insight into the themes and representations the industry was keen to promote to audiences. The novelty of cinema exhibition meant that it was regarded as a 'laboratory for an advertising man',¹⁶⁰ and while the very nature of this material was that it was ephemeral, it has come to have lasting value to cinema historians. Likewise, with the relative novelty of increased immigration, and the legislative measures taken to reduce it, it is unsurprising that much marketing material from this decade focused on establishing national characteristics and differences in relation to other countries. This approach had its foundations in the portrayal of foreigners in much of contemporary British culture, and the notion that 'foreign' equated to 'exotic' and even dangerous. And as most immigration was concentrated in large towns and cities, portrayals of urban locales were more often than not of a similarly seedy, suspicious character. Hence, the popular series of spy films that always featured a double-crossing foreign agent, and the *Lieutenant Rose* (Various, 1910-1915) serials, which saw the eponymous hero battle all manner of deadly urban crooks. Alternatively, urban locations featured in many lower-budgeted comedies, such as Fred and Joe Evan's *Pimple* (Various, 1912-1917) series, although these often also featured Pimple in a variety of well-known scenes from British history.

¹⁶⁰ Groskopf, Jeremy (2012), 'Profit Margins: Silent Era Precursors of Online Advertising Tactics, *Film History*, 24, p. 84.

In contrast, a romanticised view of rural locations was widely established in British culture by the twentieth century, and was used by politicians and community leaders as shorthand for the essence and heritage of the British national character. As early as 1903, the *British Journal of Photography* would declare:

[W]hat would not the rural councils in our now almost depopulated agricultural districts give, if they could show in the neighbouring overcrowded towns animated photographs of English rural life and industries! Actual scenes from farm life would do more to reawaken the love of country life than the most eloquent and impassioned speeches.¹⁶¹

Many British filmmakers from the 1910s were eager to incorporate the British landscape, and their production companies were as enthusiastic in their promotion of its intrinsically ‘national’ qualities. George Pearson’s *Ultus, The Man From the Dead* (1915), had its rural surroundings presented as emblematic of its ‘Britishness’, and integral to its commercial appeal:

Ultus has many claims to close consideration of the discerning exhibitor. “British” is stamped all over it. One part of the country has provided the desert scenes; another the wonderful scenery among the hills.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Anon (10 July 1903), ‘The Application of Animated Photography to Science and Education’, *The British Journal of Photography*, Reprinted in the *Urban-Duncan Micro-Bioscope*, London: Scott Herbert and Co. (1903).

¹⁶² BFI: James Anderson Collection: Pressbook for *Ultus, The Man From the Dead*.

And this was maintained in the promotion for the film's sequel, *Ultus and the Grey Lady* (George Pearson, 1917), which highlighted the 'Delightful settings on the tranquil upper reaches of the Thames and on drowsy Cornish hills and dales, [which] furnish agreeable backgrounds to many of the incidents.'¹⁶³ In the same year, *The Cinema* would describe *The Gay Lord Quex* (Maurice Elvey, 1917) as 'notable for some quite exceptional outdoor scenes', arguing that its 'glorious old English gardens, and some fine river scenes, will still more heighten its thoroughly English atmosphere.'¹⁶⁴

This portrayal of a peaceful, serene environment was often conflated with the notion of an intrinsic 'character' embodied by the landscape, which could imbue its inhabitants with qualities of 'Britishness'. This notion would even extend to the promotional material for The London Film Company's *The Manxman* (George Loane Tucker, 1916) which, despite being set in the Crown dependency of the Isle of Man, would also seek to highlight the production's 'British' traits:

For nearly a year little actual production was done. The time being spent in studying not only the different parts of England, Scotland and Ireland, but in becoming steeped in the atmosphere, environment and psychology of the different races, that warring in the past have united their blood, and whose descendants are the product of invasion and conquest of the Briton, by Angle, Saxon, Dane and Norman French. The modern Briton in different parts of

¹⁶³ BFI: James Anderson Collection: Pressbook for *Ultus and the Grey Lady*.

¹⁶⁴ TNA: PRO: HO 45/10955/312971.

the United Kingdom clings extraordinarily to racial characteristics of the original stock.¹⁶⁵

In addition, there was a clear distinction presented between this identity and that of the film's American director, George Loane Tucker. The first example of this was in one of the headlines suggested by the pressbook, where it was stated that:

The government of the Isle of Man with special permission of the English Home Office and British Board of Admiralty co-operates with an American producer in the production of a photo-drama.¹⁶⁶

Later, this developed into a light-hearted play on the theme of invasion presented as:

The capture of the Isle of Man by an American film producer. Taking over the railroad transportation of the island.¹⁶⁷

The establishing of first, an organic national heritage, and second, a foreign 'other' with which to contrast these traditions, was integral to the pressbook's portrayal of the Island's landscape.

By late 1913, regular features about film productions had begun to appear in publications other than the film trade papers, initially via magazines directed at the

¹⁶⁵ BFI: James Anderson Collection: Pressbook for *The Manxman* (1916).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

theatregoing public. *Playgoer and Society Illustrated* began its regular series 'The Picture Playgoer', and these articles helped to disseminate similar ideas to those seen in pressbooks from the decade. For example, in October 1913, *Playgoer* greeted the release of the London Film Company's adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The House of Temperley* (Harold Shaw, 1910) with great praise:

A remarkable advance has been made of late in the development of English cinematography, and though I have no desire whatever to decry the output of foreign firms, it is good to know that British enterprise stands in a fair way of holding its own.¹⁶⁸

In the case of this picture ('perfect as possible in every detail'), the review effusively identified its English qualities:

The story of "The House of Temperley," as is well-known, is British from every point of view, and as it was enacted amid English surroundings, with every national characteristic, its realism was complete.¹⁶⁹

Likewise, a review of the artist Sir Hubert Herkomer's forays into filmmaking (he produced and directed *The Old Wood Carver* in 1913) highlighted the scenery of his home where his films were set, which provided 'some perfect rural pictures.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ 'Ariel' (October 1913), 'The Picture Playgoer', *Playgoer and Society Illustrated*, 9: 49, p. 32.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Playgoer continued this trend when commenting in late 1913 on the tendency towards film adaptations, stating that 'It is gratifying to note that British producers are in no way behind their foreign confrères in this matter, for among the newest adaptations can be announced one which is essentially English.' The adaptation in question, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Frank Wilson, 1913), as rendered by the Hepworth Manufacturing Company from Oliver Goldsmith's 1766 original, was praised for its 'high-class style of photography...combined with the beautiful scenery of Surrey and Kent'.¹⁷¹

By 1914, this approach was adapted further, with *Nash's and Pall Mall* magazine running a series of feature articles on stage actresses who had started working in filmed entertainment. Mary Manners, in a piece titled 'The Drama of Reality', was quoted as saying

[T]he photo-drama is nearer to nature than any spoken play, placed in ever so real a setting. The reality of the scenes in which the cinema players move and have their being, the enormous variety of places in which the action can be worked, and the knowledge on the part of the spectator that he is looking upon actualities, all contribute to the cinema's fascination.¹⁷²

Even Sarah Bernhardt, describing her new role in *Jeanne Doré* (Louis Merchanton & René Hervil, 1915), said

¹⁷¹ 'Ariel' (November 1913), 'The Picture Playgoer', *Playgoer and Society Illustrated*, 9: 50, p. 71.

¹⁷² Manners, Mary (December 1914), 'The Drama of Reality', *Nash's Pall Mall Magazine*, 54: 260, pp. 342-343.

*I like it better even than the stage...*In the first place I have always had a great aversion to shams – on the stage, as elsewhere. I have always wanted things to bear close inspection. I prefer always the real. Tinsel or any tawdry glitter always offended my taste. In moving picture work it is possible to employ real scenery. It is superb. In all moving picture art the scenery can be actual.¹⁷³

Chrissie White's feature piece in the magazine also had her extol the virtues of 'Britishness', claiming that 'people are at last realising that sincere all-British pictures, carefully and honestly done, are bound to be better than most of the foreign things.'¹⁷⁴ And the by now obligatory reference to authenticity – 'I believe in taking every play that I am in as a real happening – we all try to do that at our studio, because it makes our plays so much truer and more satisfying.'¹⁷⁵ While this link between reality and the 'new style' of film acting was not unique to Britain – a similar process took place in Germany and France during the 1910s between their film critics and actors¹⁷⁶ – what was different about the British experience was how this was linked specifically in some cases to the British landscape, and how producers and directors were also presented in this way. For example, a piece on GB Samuelson highlighted the merits of his studios at Worton Hall, Isleworth, which,

¹⁷³ Bernhardt, Sarah (January 1915), 'The Divine Sarah on Cinema', *Nash's and Pall Mall Magazine*, 55: 261, p. 572.

¹⁷⁴ White, Chrissie (January 1915), 'Fame Through the Camera's Eye', *Nash's and Pall Mall Magazine*, 55: 261, p. 181.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Silberman, Marc, 'Soundless Speech, Wordless Writing: Language and German Silent Cinema', *Imaginations*, <http://www.csj.ualberta.ca/imaginations/?p=181> (Accessed 16 May 2011).

seemed] to naturally suggest wigs and patches, silk stockings, elegant figures, courtly manners, and minuets.’¹⁷⁷

‘Realism’ in these instances, also related to the portrayal of women during the teens. Women had been gradually gaining positions of prominence throughout the film industry, most obviously as high profile actresses, but also behind the camera. Being a scriptwriter (or scenarist, as they were often described), was the most available route into the industry for women after acting, and some, like Enid Lorimer, who was a regular letter writer to *The Bioscope*, were an integral part of the British film industry of the period. Of course, many women took the roles vacated by men serving in the First World War, although it is still unclear how many of these positions remained after 1918 and particularly during the bleak economic conditions of the 1920s. An American actress, scenarist and director, Florence Turner, was the most high-profile woman working in Britain during the 1910s. Aside from her direction of *Daisy Doodad’s Dial* (1914), she was a producer with her own company, Turner Films, and her influence on its productions (and British film culture during the First World War) was profound. Florence Turner’s company produced the film *Sally in Our Alley* (Larry Trimble, 1916), which was one of several productions from this period to fantasise about lovers transcending their poor urban background and moving to an idyllic life in the country. Yet, as in all of these films, the characters soon realise that their hearts are still with their home town, and they return happy with their fate.

The same dichotomy was played out in another Turner vehicle, 1915’s *A Welsh Singer* (Henry Edwards, 1915). One of the earliest films to be set in Wales, it was

¹⁷⁷ Anon (January 1918), ‘A Leading Film Producer’, *The Era Almanack*, p. 205.

emblematic of the way that Britain's rural 'character' was presented to the public. The film is now lost, and all that remains is the pressbook to provide an indication of the plot and the way it was marketed. Focusing on Mifanwy, the eponymous Welsh singer, who finds fame and fortune as a performer in London, the pressbook was intended to highlight the links between her character and the ethereal qualities of the Welsh landscape, especially 'majestic Snowdon'.¹⁷⁸ As in *Sally in Our Alley*, despite her successes, Myfanwy can only find happiness back home in Wales, and the cover of the pressbook, depicting her on stage in London looking up to an inset image of herself on Snowdon, reinforces the moral point of a longing for a simpler, yet richer life, epitomised by the British landscape which is depicted as the antithesis of the superficiality of urban living.

Turner was not the only non-British woman with a prominent role in British cinema. Ivy Martinek was a French actress who featured as the eponymous heroine of *The Exploits of Three Fingred Kate* (HO Martinek, 1912), the first of a series of films about the three-fingered leader of a gang of criminals,¹⁷⁹ of which only *Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents* (HO Martinek, 1912) survives.¹⁸⁰ Produced by the British and Colonial Kinematograph Company these films were unusual in featuring a lead anti-heroine. Yet, while this series did not moralise to its audience, it continued the subtext of the city as a dangerous place, awash with criminal activity. This role of an authentically anarchic criminal, as opposed to the harmless anarchy depicted in the

¹⁷⁸ BFI: Pressbook for *A Welsh Singer*.

¹⁷⁹ A full description of the series can be found in Turvey, Gerry (2010), 'Three-Fingered Kate: Celebrating Womanly Cunning and Successful Female Criminal Enterprise', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 7: 2, pp. 200-212.

¹⁸⁰ Marlow-Mann, Alex, 'The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate (1912)', *Screenonline*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/727128/index.html> (Accessed 26 April 2011).

Tilly (Various, 1910-1913) series of films (Which usually featured the British actresses Chrissie White and Alma Taylor as anarchic sisters), could have only been portrayed by a foreign actress. As Christine Gledhill has observed:

...involvement in film production had its own “heroic” aura, soon crystallized in the aspirational images offered by Hollywood of transnational class and ethnic mobility, along with an aura of feminine modernity...the female film worker – and especially the actress abroad – contends with the cultural stereotypes expected of her nationality and gender, including ethnic body types, fashions in beauty, and differences between national acting styles. In this respect, “nationality” itself both travels with the migrant and is “in place” at the migrant’s destination. The experience of transnationalism, then, rather than defining a unitary identity or product, initiates cross or inter-cultural clashes, encounters, and negotiations.¹⁸¹

These depictions continued after the First World War. Lisa Stead has calculated the most popular female actresses from the pages of *Picturegoer* magazine, from 1918-1928, covering not just features and interviews, but adverts, posters, letters from the public, and any other instance of these stars being mentioned. Unsurprisingly, two Americans, Mary Pickford and Norma Talmadge, topped the list of most featured stars, with 114 and 78 instances each. But the British actress Betty Balfour came third with 48 mentions, and Alma Taylor and Violet Hopson also made

¹⁸¹ Gledhill, Christine (2010).

the top twenty with 21 and fifteen instances respectively. Most interestingly, Stead's data shows how much of this coverage was formalised, editorial content, such as features and interviews, and how much was generated by fan contributions, thus providing an insight into what audiences felt about these actresses, rather than just what the editors wished to present their readership. It is this data that suggests fans were less concerned about Hollywood than the magazine editors, which prominently featured American actresses (although of course, these editors would have had easier access to published information about American stars). Instead, actresses like the Polish Pola Negri, feature in the top twenty solely because of fan contributions – 23 instances, more than Hopson and Taylor, despite having had no editorial coverage. Alma Taylor and Betty Balfour also benefited from wider fan interest than they were afforded by the magazine, as did all other non-American stars in the top twenty with the exception of Violet Hopson. Of course, not all of this fan coverage was positive, but it shows that audiences were interested in a wider range of stars than had been previously thought.¹⁸² And when the magazine covered British stars, the treatment was surprisingly different from that of its portrayal of American actresses:

British stars were not generally presented as glamorous individuals in their off-screen lives, and the way in which they were domestically marketed often emphasized (sic) this as a point of pride, underscoring the importance of actresses like Alma Taylor who refrained from using makeup and had a preference for simple

¹⁸² Stead, Lisa, 'Audiences from the Film Archive: Women's Writing and Silent Cinema', in Bose, Nandana & Grieveson, Lee (eds.), *Using Moving Image Archives: A Scope eBook*, <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/archives/indexcov.php> (Accessed 9 December 2010), pp. 40-41.

costumes. Many fan letters show frustration with this perceived failure of British stars to mimic the American style.¹⁸³

Throughout the first half of the decade, the ideals represented by rural locations and British actresses were conflated. Rural locations were predominately marketed in opposition to cityscapes, representing peace and tranquillity in place of the urban hubbub. In this conception, rural landscapes consisted of people who lived simply and naturally and to whom material pleasures were inconsequential. While the city was presented as the place to make one's fortune, it was only back in the country where emotional life could be seen to blossom. This representation allowed studios to promote these landscapes as part of an unchanging heritage, with traditional values. The consistent theme permeating the marketing of landscapes in the period was the permanence of tradition and heritage, roots embedded in the characters portrayed on screen. Similarly, British actresses were seen to embody these notions of enduring 'Britishness', with their foreign counterparts representing the perceived danger and anarchy of the city. This fitted neatly with the ideologies presented by the main advertisers during the decade, who could draw on the 'natural beauty' of the female film stars to help sell beauty products, and thus the public was presented with a consistent message that conflated 'female' with 'natural'. Clearly, this was part of a wider attempt to attract ordinary working people to the films and this commercial imperative was the defining characteristic of all the marketing strategies discussed in this chapter. In addition, the industry was responding to immense pressure from moral campaigners, whose aforementioned crusades against what they perceived to be the evils of the cinema halls threatened the entire industry. That these

¹⁸³ Stead, Lisa, p. 42.

campaigners preferred pastoral scenes certainly had a major impact on the films of the early half of the decade, but even as late as 1917 Protestant magazines like *The Quiver*, part of the group of conservative publications founded by John Cassell in the nineteenth century, would declare that ‘Only now and then is there any beautiful scenery or incident illustrating natural history, such as the development of the chick from the egg, or the unfolding of a flower’, when discussing the ‘failings’ of British cinema.¹⁸⁴

These comments were indicative of an underlying sense that the trade and government had woken up to the potential of cinema too late, and that British filmmaking was already in decline. British films fared well in Germany,¹⁸⁵ but American renters were already predisposed to dismiss them as inferior:

When English manufacturers are ready to loosen their purse strings, and pay less attention to arithmetic when considering the production of a film; when they are willing to pay the price to first-class actors and actresses to appear in their productions, they will have a market in America and we shall be delighted to see their product.¹⁸⁶

It has been commonly held that American superiority in the film industry was principally as a result of the First World War, which took European countries out of the contention while Hollywood expanded. However, in the case of Britain,

¹⁸⁴ Barnard, Amy B (May 1917), ‘The Child at the Cinema: A Serious Indictment’, *The Quiver*, 52: 7, p. 605.

¹⁸⁵ Sutcliffe, JB (19 April 1913), p. 286.

¹⁸⁶ McQuade, Jas S (12 April 1913), ‘Chicago Letter’, *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 38.

comments like the one above demonstrate that American product was already perceived to be superior long before the conflict, and the sheer volume of American product that was shipped to the UK – over three quarters of the 60,000,000 feet exported from the US in 1912¹⁸⁷ – suggests that the battle was already won in the minds of the British audience. Even the British trade press damned the industry with faint praise, with *Kinematograph Weekly* arguing that ‘English film production is rapidly advancing both in quality and quantity as compared with that of America and the Continent’.¹⁸⁸ In 1913, the American trade magazine, *Moving Picture World*, published an account by W Stephen Bush of one of the main reasons for Britain’s failings, ‘Yankee Films Abroad: An Interesting Budget of Information on Picture Conditions in Great Britain’, proclaiming that ‘if you want to realize (sic) what can be done with American made films, do not fail to come to London.’¹⁸⁹ This article is revealing in that even at this early stage in the history of British film, it identified a chronic lack of investment, and that despite London being ‘dotted with modern superb moving picture theaters (sic)’, British filmmakers ‘languish like an exotic plant on unfriendly soil’.¹⁹⁰ In fact, the soil was fertile for British filmmakers – only in America was the exhibition infrastructure more advanced and audiences more willing to patronise cinemas – but these resources were not used to their fullest and instead American producers were able to fill cinemas with their product. Bush emphasised this point when he described his meeting with Sam Warner, newly arrived in Cecil Court and of the belief that this was an ‘ideal market for an enterprising American

¹⁸⁷ Anon (17 January 1913), ‘Moving Pictures by the Mile’, *Hawaiian Gazette*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Anon (1914), p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ Bush, W Stephen (10 May 1913), ‘Yankee Films Abroad: An Interesting Budget of Information on Picture Conditions in Great Britain’, *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 573.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Picture man...He is the latest American invader.'¹⁹¹ Bush would comment in a subsequent article that

What the British manufacturer needs just now is the plain, blunt truth about his work. It is bad. With golden opportunities all about him he keeps turning out poor stuff...Good British films, dealing with big British subjects of either history or literature and made on British soil, whether by Englishmen or Americans, will be among the best possible film investments of the immediate future.¹⁹²

Up to this point, one of the British filmmakers to most consistently depict 'big British subjects' was Alfred West. His film catalogue, *Life in Our Navy and Our Army* is a good example of this. Published in 1912, it represented the complete collection of West's output so far, from early accounts of naval exploits at Portsmouth, through to his later official film engagements with the navy and armed forces. He had developed a patriotic touring show that mixed these productions with music and live entertainment, and as such his work traversed forms of theatre, music hall and cinema. Yet *Life in Our Navy and Army*, illustrated throughout and running to over 80 pages, shows just how extensive his film work had become, and also provides a good example of the type of marketing that was employed by filmmakers throughout the 1910s. Beginning with a call to the values of the British Empire and the exploits of Horatio Nelson, the tone of benign imperialism is plain throughout, with the

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Bush, W Stephen (24 May 1913), 'Americans Win on Quality: The "Projection Room", a Characteristic British Institution – The Work of "Viewers" – Value of Frank Criticism', *The Moving Picture World*, 16, p. 788.

introduction imploring that (in capital letters) 'BRITAIN RULES AS A MOTHER DOES', explaining that this rule is by 'weight of authority, by force of example, by encouragement and sympathy'.¹⁹³ West does not hide the fact that this is an exercise in propaganda – in fact, his next section explains that his intention was to make the cinematograph 'a factor of importance in the domain of PATRIOTISM.'¹⁹⁴ The remainder of the catalogue outlined the hundreds of films available to the renter, under titles such as 'Our Future Nelsons', and featured a range of activity from manoeuvres at sea through to the leisure activities of the crew. An extended pictorial story, consisting of three individual episodes, depicted the 'true story' of a boy who joins the navy, encompassing his training regimen and personal tragedy when his mother dies while he is away at sea. This was supplemented by *Our Colonies*, which featured cruise films of the West Indies, and *Our Homeland*, which covered 'beauty spots of England'.¹⁹⁵

This increasing integration of film into semi-official government propaganda reached a natural peak with the advent of the Great War. By 1915, official war reporters were allowed on the battlefield, although distribution of the material produced was restricted and was not shown by the newsreel producers. This changed in May 1917, when under the aegis of the War Office Cinematograph Committee (under Lord Beaverbrook at the Ministry of Information), the Topical Film Company started producing the *War Office Official Topical Budget* – which used (approved) footage from the front. John Buchan had proposed to the War Cabinet in February 1917 that

¹⁹³ West, Alfred (1912), *Life in Our Navy and Our Army*, Portsmouth: Wessex Press, p. iii.

¹⁹⁴ West, Alfred, p. iv.

¹⁹⁵ West, Alfred, p. 78.

there should be a centralised publicity and propaganda department, with responsibility for cinema films managed by a 'small expert Committee (sic) under the Director, for no branch of propaganda has greater possibilities before it'.¹⁹⁶ Beaverbrook had made specific appeals to cabinet to gain control of all activities relating to film propaganda, writing to clarify his duties and suggesting that 'money would be saved and efficiently increased if these [propaganda bureaux] were brought under the Ministry of Information'.¹⁹⁷ By May 1918 the suggestion that the 'Ministry of Information should undertake home propaganda by means of cinema films and pictorial methods' had been agreed by cabinet.¹⁹⁸ Some successful home propaganda had been applied, including a blanket distribution to 222 cinemas of the film *Repairing War's Ravages* (Imperial, 1918), which covered help available to disabled soldiers for retraining,¹⁹⁹ or the previous recruitment films, records of which suggest that these were seen at over 2000 cinema shows.²⁰⁰ However, by far the most popular war film was *The Battle of the Somme* (British Topical Committee for War Films, 1916), which used footage recorded by official war cameramen, Geoffrey H Malins and JB McDowell and was edited by Charles Urban. Over 20,000,000 tickets were sold for the production (although it is likely that many of these purchases were by individuals on repeat viewings), and in London, owners were reporting that they could not keep up with the audience demand to see the film.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/6.

¹⁹⁹ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/40.

²⁰⁰ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/6.

²⁰¹ Reeves, Nicholas (1997), 'Cinema, Spectatorship and Propaganda: "Battle of the Somme" (1916) and its Contemporary Audience, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 17:1, p. 14.

Somme opened the government's eyes to the commercial possibilities of official propaganda, and as the war drew to a close, the Ministry of Information and the Colonial Office discussed their hopes of promoting films that depicted the 'commercial possibilities of the British Empire when peace is restored.'²⁰² However, by then, the moment had passed, and it appeared that public interest in this type of direct propaganda was on the wane. *The Battle of the Somme* and *The Battle of the Ancre* earned £65,000 in their first three months of exhibition, yet from January 1917 until the end of the war, all official films together only managed a gross of just over £70,000.²⁰³ This commercial failing led to the derailing of the National War Aims Committee's most ambitious project yet, a feature-length drama centring on a German invasion of Chester, provisionally entitled *The National Film*. The decline in interest, coupled with a fire at the production company that destroyed much of the film, led to it being shelved at the end of the war.²⁰⁴ However, Nicholas Reeves argues that it was the context of exhibition that was most crucial to the success of *Somme*, rather than the intrinsic qualities of the film itself (powerful though they were):

Battle of the Somme was incorporated into the audience's own existing ideology. Images which at another time or in another place might have served to convince audiences of the inhumanity and

²⁰² TNA: PRO: FO 228/2922.

²⁰³ Reeves, Nicholas (1999), *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?*, London: Continuum, p. 29.

²⁰⁴ Reeves, Nicholas (1999), p. 30.

barbarity of war, served in Britain in the summer and autumn of 1916
to reconfirm existing convictions that Britain's cause was just.²⁰⁵

The success of *Somme* ensured that the Government would take a far greater interest in film from 1916 onwards, beginning with a report presented to cabinet asserting that 'Films and photographs...are playing a strong part in bringing before the American public our side of this momentous struggle'.²⁰⁶ Cabinet minutes would also record that 'Moving pictures are of great importance in any propaganda work, and this fact should never be lost sight of, and every care should be taken to see that full value is obtained for films shown in the States'.²⁰⁷ This focus on America was understandable as part of a wider appeal to the USA to join the war, but it also reflected the cultural dominance afforded to film, particularly to American audiences, in such a short space of time and recognised the successful propaganda work that had been produced by Germany. In fact, the success of the German propaganda machine was noted up until the very end of the conflict, with the War Cabinet receiving a report in June 1918 that commented on Germany being 'independent of other countries for all cinematographic materials' and that its industry 'will be extensively applied to the purposes of propaganda in foreign countries'.²⁰⁸

Similar reports had provided evidence of the effectiveness of American propaganda, particularly in France, where films depicting the American Navy and other armed

²⁰⁵ Reeves, Nicholas (1997), p. 21.

²⁰⁶ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/3.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/148.

forces were shown 'at all cinemas in Paris and the provinces.'²⁰⁹ The success of these short, fifteen minute films was to make the 'French Nation (sic) think that American ships of war alone take the sea and that the American army is the only military power of any consequence besides themselves.'²¹⁰ The result of this was that that 'British soldiers are inclined to become jealous', and the memo's author, Acting British Military Representative to the Supreme War Council, Major-General Sackville West, insisted that 'we take a leaf out of the book of our American cousins and run a propaganda of our own similar "boosting" films'.²¹¹

Enemy propaganda had already been restricted, as first suggested by an Interdepartmental Committee report on the restriction of imports distributed in February 1917. The committee had been convened in December 1916 with the Deputy Governor of the British Trade Corporation, Sir Henry Babington Smith as chair, to produce two alternative programmes, of restrictions of 500,000 tonnes and 250,000 tonnes per month respectively.²¹² The report recommended the higher restriction, and the prohibition of imports on cinematograph films (predominantly from the United States and France).²¹³ The report placed the value of film imports in 1915 at £1,212,000, with £1,115,000 of that figure coming from America.²¹⁴ While there was a clear economic imperative to restrict foreign films, the cultural implications were also profound. Despite this, it was agreed by the War Cabinet on 16 February

²⁰⁹ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/60.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² TNA: PRO CAB 24/3.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

1917 not to restrict foreign imports of films, presumably for reasons of public morale on the home front, and the loss of import duties that cinematograph films were subject to.²¹⁵ However, import of films was eventually prohibited for April-September 1917, compared to 600 tons imported during the same period the previous year.²¹⁶

Of course, much anti-foreign sentiment was also incited by the press:

Ever since the war began people have written to *The Times* complaining that there are films to be seen which are not even honest woodbine, but some deleterious stuff that ought not to be sold. That is an evil which probably will die a natural death through the prohibition of foreign films.²¹⁷

Three letters to *The Times* published on 15 February 1916 confirmed the concerns from a section of the public regarding foreign films. W H P Gibson wrote that ‘The British Board of Film Censors, an organization (sic) maintained by persons engaged in the cinematograph industry, are unsuited to deal with the difficulties which present themselves...the suggestions contained in your leading article go to the root of the whole business – namely, to check the importation of vapid, vacuous, and vulgar portrayals of stupid incidents...’ And interestingly, ‘A widow’ added

²¹⁵ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/1.

²¹⁶ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/13.

²¹⁷ Anon (6 April 1916), ‘Our Duty towards the Cinema: Woodbine or Havana?’, *The Times*.

I am selling my few American shares to our Government because the Treasury ask those of us who have dollar securities to do so...Is it any use for me to add my mite to the Government funds, while they, as I understand, are allowing £2,000,000 a year to go from this country to America to pay for cinema films, many of which are of an undesirable nature, when as good or better could be provided at home?²¹⁸

This last note of anti-American feeling was to slowly pervade Britain's cinema culture over the subsequent decade.

By the end of the Great War, cinema in Britain had matured. In the space of ten years it had gone from being a fledgling industry to one that now had a national infrastructure, powerful marketing campaigns, a recognised censorship body and, with the Industries and Manufactures Department of the Board of Trade assuming responsibility for film, government acknowledgement. But what it lacked, namely an indigenous industry that could be self-sustaining and hold its own against the might of Hollywood, would soon become the trade's most pressing concern.

²¹⁸ Anon (15 February 1916), 'Films Good and Evil', *The Times*.

Chapter Four: The Post-First World War British Film Industry

A year after the end of the Great War, a film of Sir Ernest Shackleton's attempt to cross the Antarctic was released in Britain, embodying all of the defining qualities that the public were led to believe had won the conflict. From the outset, *South* (Dir. Frank Hurley, 1919) presented the expedition as inextricably linked to the British 'character'. The second intertitle described it as 'Presenting a wonderful and true story of British pluck, self-sacrifice and indomitable courage', and the film's penultimate line reinforced the 'story of British heroism, valour and self-sacrifice in the name and cause of a country's honour'. The belief that this message would resonate with audiences provides an indication of how much had changed since the Great War started, both in British filmmaking and more generally, in British culture.

In the same year that *South* was exhibited, Maurice Elvey released his *Nelson: The Story of England's Immortal Naval Hero*, which with the cooperation of the Navy was partly filmed on location at Portsmouth and in *HMS Victory*. The film's souvenir programme highlighted that the audience should

never forget him, for he is the most shining example of patriotism in our history, as well as the most perfect embodiment of duty that the chronicles have given us. Patriotism cannot be dismissed as purely a sentiment, it is equally with duty a virtue and also a commercial

asset; it is the spirit which binds the Empire together and makes it strong enough to keep its place in the world.’²¹⁹

Of course, audiences had to manage several challenging practical concerns in 1919, and the parables between *South*, *Nelson* and the exertions of the First World War are irresistible. Shackleton’s efforts could be read by the audience as a noble, courageous endeavour, following in the tradition of Nelson, and while ultimately he was thwarted, he had returned alive – along with all of his crew.

In contrast, Britain had suffered colossal losses during the First World War – 9 per cent of all British males under 45 were killed and 1,600,000 permanently weakened by wounds. The pre-war decline of the staple industries of coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding accelerated after 1918, precipitated by an increase in the national debt from £650,000,000 in 1914 to £7,435,000,000 in 1919. From being the leading creditor nation at the turn of the decade, it had been superseded by the USA and was now a major debtor. More importantly, the founding principles of British political thought had been challenged, and the philosophy of economic liberalism was under attack. While domestically, this heralded the end of Lloyd George’s coalition government, the effects were most obvious in Britain’s relations with its Empire. Despite this, during the 1920s the government would embark on a wide range of cultural interventions in its imperial interests, with film taking a prominent role.

Film had by now firmly established itself in the public consciousness, proving doubters wrong who had expected it to collapse during the First World War, which

²¹⁹ Sargeant, Amy (2002), ‘Do we Need Another Hero? Ecce Homo and Nelson (1919), in Monk, Claire and Sargeant, Amy (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*, London: Routledge, p. 19.

had in fact exerted precisely the opposite effect on the cinema's fortunes. A special 'British Supplement' in an October 1918 edition of *The Bioscope* identified the unexpectedly positive effect of the conflict on the industry, which it argued was entwined with the surge in patriotic spirit prompted by war:

[This] increased sense of nationality, originating on the battleground, is reverberating throughout every circle of our social life, whilst its influence upon industry and commerce is equally strong. Upon art - and especially upon the art of the motion picture - its effect has already been very clearly marked.²²⁰

This effect, coupled with an increased audience demand, precipitated a shift towards more lavish exhibition arrangements – The first edition of the trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* in 1920 noted that 'the solitary pianist is not so frequently encountered as was the case 12 months ago; he is now aided by strings, woodwind or brass'.²²¹ However, by the end of the First World War Hollywood had become the dominant force in world cinema, and British filmmaking was poorly represented in British cinemas. For many years, the generally accepted explanation for this reversal was the advent of the conflict, which, being a predominantly European war, directed resources and attention away from the film industries of Europe, providing the opportunity for Hollywood product to dominate European cinemas. However, all extant evidence suggests that to the contrary, European production companies made

²²⁰ Anon (24 October 1918), 'Foreword to The British Film Supplement', *The Bioscope*, 40: 628, p. 91.

²²¹ Pearson, Roberta E (2002), 'Shakespeare's Country: The National Poet, English Identity and British Silent Cinema', in Higson, Andrew (ed.) *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, p. 211.

far larger profits during the war years than in the immediate years prior to battle. In fact, the total length of European film released in America was approximately 1,000,000 feet before 1914, and was still at this level by 1920.

Despite this, the American industry in 1920 had grown significantly, and as such, the amount of European film exhibited in America had actually suffered a relative decline despite European productions remaining at a healthy level. In other words, while from 1914-1924 the UK and French industry released a stable amount of approximately 100 films per year, during the same period the American industry rocketed to at least twice this level. The sheer number of new American films, coupled with a policy of 'block-booking' initiated by American distributors from 1915 (which compelled exhibitors to take films many months in advance of release, often sight unseen), strangled the opportunities for other European distributors to get their product into venues.²²² In addition, while Hollywood was expanding during the 1910s, the British government, needing to raise finance due to the crippling nature of the war effort, imposed several new taxes. One of these was an Entertainment Tax, which increased seat prices and had a temporarily damaging effect on attendance,²²³ negatively affecting the growth of Britain's exhibition sector and, by extension, its home-grown product. To combat this decline, the content of many of the British productions from the early 1920s focused on literary adaptations, building on the strategy established by many British companies before the war and with the intention of accessing the pre-existing market for many of these works.

²²² Thompson, Kristin, p. 83.

²²³ McKernan, Luke (2007b), p. 136.

Cecil Hepworth, the only filmmaker from the dawn of British cinema who was still producing films in the 1920s, had been one of the earliest adopters of this trend towards adaptations, and continued to lead the way with his versions of rural-set novels such as *Tansy* (filmed in 1921) and *Comin' Thro' the Rye* (filmed for the second time in 1923).²²⁴ His work was still viewed as emblematically 'national', and as Hepworth would argue himself, his intention was to make 'English pictures, with all the English countryside for background and with English atmosphere and English idiom throughout'.²²⁵ Interestingly, despite this proclamation, his company's marketing would generally refer to 'Britishness', rather than 'Englishness', such as in this full page advertisement in the 1917 edition of the *Kinematograph Year Book* for 'Hepworth Picture Plays':

Hepworth Picture Plays are usually adapted from the novels or plays of the leading British authors. They are produced by Cecil Hepworth and played by a band of players whom the public have learned to love...truly British in conception, execution and sentiment, they are an essential part of every successful programme.²²⁶

Hepworth's company went into liquidation in 1923, before *Comin' Thro' the Rye* was released,²²⁷ and his final hurrah was to stage a 'prologue' – a live, staged short presented at the film's premiere – featuring all of the original cast and entitled *A Film*

²²⁴ Hepworth had filmed a version of this story previously in 1916.

²²⁵ Gruner, Olly (2012), 'Good Business, Good Policy, Good Patriotism': The British Film Weeks of 1924', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32: 1, p. 44.

²²⁶ Anon (1918), 'Hepworth Picture Plays', *Kinematograph Year Book 1918*, London: Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly, p. 176.

²²⁷ Sweet, Mathew (2005), *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 27.

of 1860. That he would end his filmmaking career with a reprise of the theatrical tropes that were of such importance to his work, was at once both poignant and indicative of what many critics argued was wrong with the British film industry.

Nonetheless, there was an audience for this type of work if marketed effectively, and The Ideal Film Company, while drawing on national heritage in much the same way as Hepworth did, was able to create a profitable business where Hepworth had floundered. It was established in 1911 by Harry Rowson, who had just returned to Manchester after spending the best part of a decade dealing in 'films for scrap' in America.²²⁸ Initially operating as a renter, Ideal was instrumental in the development of higher rates for what were then known as 'exclusives', multi-reel 'feature' films that marked a break from the existing open market of uniformly priced one or two-reelers.²²⁹ Within a few years, the company had moved into film production, working from Elstree and Twickenham Studios under the leadership of Rowson's brother, Simon (who would eventually work for the Board of Trade as a statistician and write a detailed analysis of the economics of the British film industry in the 1930s).²³⁰ Its productions followed the same philosophy as their rental business, focusing on the 'quality' end of the market by deliberately targeting adaptations of British literary classics. Of the 22 feature films it produced within its first two years of production, including *Lady Windermere's Fan* (Fred Paul, 1916), *Bleak House* (Maurice Elvey, 1920), and *Wuthering Heights* (AV Bramble, 1920), only three were based on original

²²⁸ Street, Sarah (1987), 'The Memoir of Harry Rowson: David Lloyd George, MP - "The Man Who Saved the Empire"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 7: 1, p. 55.

²²⁹ Burrows, Jon (2003), *Legitimate Cinema: Theatre Stars in Silent British Films, 1908-1918*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, p. 180.

²³⁰ Ibid.

scenarios.²³¹ Its focus on these literary tropes ensured that it would quickly become associated with explicitly 'British' productions, and after the war would even organise a 'grand day of British pictures', a showcase of British films that prefigured the film weeks of 1923.²³² It was also responsible for the aforementioned *The Life Story of David Lloyd George*, a biopic of the then Prime Minister that from the outset was prepared as a prestige production. However, as the film was nearing completion, Ideal came under intense pressure to stop its release, and accepted a reimbursement of all of its costs in return for handing over the negative. This epic film, running over 150 minutes and which had been expected to be a critical and commercial success, was not shown to the public, yet its fate had been sealed long before the production had halted. The Rowson's had to endure intense criticism from the right-wing John Bull magazine, which lambasted the notion of 'Germans' (the Rowson family was originally the 'Rosenbaum' family, but both Harry and Simon were born in Britain) producing a film about Lloyd George.²³³ While the reason for the film's suppression is unclear, it is likely that it was due in part to concerns being raised about the potentially negative critical reaction in some quarters of the press that this incident had highlighted.

It is unsurprising that after having seen their efforts over the previous year squandered in such a fashion, that the films produced by the Rowsons after *Lloyd George* returned to the established formula of adaptations of well-regarded 'British' classics. However, where Ideal differed from Hepworth was in its openness to

²³¹ Burrows, Jon (2003), p. 182.

²³² Bamford, Kenton (1999), *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s*, London: IB Tauris, p. 8.

²³³ Street, Sarah (1987), p. 62.

American influences, and the way that it was able to package its productions to suit both the British and American markets. For example, Christine Gledhill argues that its adaptations of the British play *Out to Win* (Denison Clift, 1923) and novel *Through Fire and Water* (Thomas Bentley, 1923) were well-received because they combined ‘the pleasures of American and British filmmaking’,²³⁴ with contemporary reviewers noting their literary heritage but drawing parallels between these films and the rapid pacing and snappy dialogue of Hollywood. While in the first instance this might have been due to the film’s director being American (Denison Clift had come to Ideal from Fox and would return to work for the American company again the following year), Rowson did make a concerted effort to appeal to American audiences. In the US, the company’s connections to British literature operated as a signifier of ‘quality’, and this was what would make its productions stand out in a market already suffused with the ‘pleasures of American filmmaking’. As Rowson would recall in his memoirs, Ideal ‘sold more films to foreign countries than any other [British] company, because, being so thoroughly British, they could not be compared with others’.²³⁵ The American trade paper *Motography* would remark on Rowson’s tour of America in 1916 that Ideal was the ‘first European film manufacturer to see the value in adapting well-known plays and well-known fiction to the screen’, describing one of the films he brought with him, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (Fred Paul, 1916) as ‘especially interesting as it was made under the personal supervision of its author’.²³⁶ *Moving Picture World* was similarly effusive, arguing that it was ‘one of the few instances of a screen version of a famous stage work that gives more than a pale, or a distorted

²³⁴ Gledhill, Christine (2003), p. 134.

²³⁵ Burrows, Jon (2003), p. 191.

²³⁶ Anon (3 June 1916), *Motography*, 15: 2, p. 1275.

reflection of the original',²³⁷ and in general the films produced by Ideal were distinguished by their quality and favourable critical reception. Nonetheless, as American movies became more and more dominant after the end of the First World War, the Ideal style became more and more out of touch with the demands of the general public. Thus, on the preview screening of *God and the Man* (Edwin J Collins, 1918), *Moving Picture World* would once again compliment the acting, remarking that 'even the least conspicuous player is excellent', but it concluded that 'with or without reason exhibitors are opposed to anything that is not clothed in modernity as to dress' and that the film's religious 'preachments' did not 'invite profitable possibilities'.²³⁸ Likewise, the American *The Film Daily* published an ebullient review of *A Bill of Divorcement* (Denison Clift, 1922), declaring it to be 'the best thing England has ever sent over' and that all associated with it, including the American exhibitors, 'gain prestige'.²³⁹ Yet despite this, the paper questioned 'whether it will make a great deal of money'.²⁴⁰ Rowson's increasingly frequent visits to the USA also generated suspicion, and he was forced to release a statement in 1923 denying that he was attempting to establish a distribution venture in America.²⁴¹ Nonetheless, Ideal remained one of the most important British distributors, and as late as January 1926 Rowson secured the sole British rights to Pathé's 1926 and 1927 output, at a cost reported to be in excess of \$500,000.²⁴² Yet only a year later, Rowson had resigned, citing problems with booking films into British cinemas as the main reason

²³⁷ Denig, Lynde (20 May 1916), 'Two English Productions', *Moving Picture World*, 28, p. 1350.

²³⁸ Hill, Walter K (17 May 1919), 'Four English Pictures', *Moving Picture World*, 40, p. 1074.

²³⁹ Anon (23 October 1922), 'Thank You, Harry', *The Film Daily*, 21, p. 4.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Anon (19 June 1923), 'Rowson Denies Reports', *The Film Daily*, 23, p. 1.

²⁴² Anon (18 January 1926), 'Buys Two Outputs', *The Film Daily*, 35, p. 1.

for his departure.²⁴³ Ironically, the same year Ideal would be purchased by Gaumont-British, which controlled the majority of British cinemas.

The other major player in literary adaptations from this decade, Stoll, had also established its reputation with 'pictorialist' dramas such as *The Lure of Crooning Water* (Arthur Rooke, 1920), but would adopt the 'pleasures of American filmmaking' more fully than Ideal had - and importantly, survive until the 1930s. *Crooning Water* was cast in a similar vein to Hepworth's work and told the story of a London actress who, while taking a restorative break in the countryside, elicits the amorous attentions of a married man. Of course, in keeping with the traditions established in the previous decade, and in order to not fall foul of the censor, the film concluded with the actress returning to London and the husband and wife reconciled. Stoll's in-house publication, *Stoll's Editorial News*, trumpeted one American review that called it 'The finest example of British workmanship yet seen',²⁴⁴ and *Crooning Water* was of a high enough standard for even the normally reserved *Kinematograph Weekly* to comment that it was

as near perfection as anything which has yet emanated from a British studio, and all concerned deserve the thanks of the British industry for the effort...It disposes once and for all of the ridiculous argument that good films cannot be made in this country.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Anon (10 March, 1929), 'Rowson Cites Reasons For Leaving Ideal Film', *The Film Daily*, 47, p. 12.

²⁴⁴ Anon (29 January 1920), *The Sunday Evening Telegram*, Quoted in *Stoll's Editorial News*, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Anon (29 January 1920), *Kinematograph Weekly*, Quoted in *Stoll's Editorial News*, p. 5.

Yet, despite *Crooning Water*'s success, when Stoll proclaimed an 'All-British' programme in 1921, the main attraction was an adaptation of the Walter Hackett play *The Barton Mystery* (Dir. Harry T Roberts, 1920), followed by the fifteen-episode serial *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Maurice Elvey, 1921). The quaint pleasures of *Crooning Water* and *Comin' Thro' the Rye* did not elicit the same excitement as the dynamic, *modern* stories that Stoll would popularise, following the high-tempo style developed by the American studios. Despite this, *The Times* review of *The Barton Mystery* neatly summarised another appeal to 'Britishness' that was creeping into the plots of all of Stoll's work:

In the [stage production] after everybody has been suspected in turn, the murder is eventually laid at the door of a young woman...In the film, the psychic also accuses her – but, hey, presto! At the right moment he produces, as it were from up his sleeve, a Japanese servant, who confesses to having committed the crime to avenge a wronged sister...Perhaps it was felt that the audience would appreciate this as the easiest way out of a difficult situation.²⁴⁶

This tacking on of a foreign culprit was indicative of the 'anti-alien' movement during the decade, although, crucially, this was not a European 'alien' – most anti-foreign sentiment in the early 1920s was still directed towards the cultural might of Hollywood, and Stoll's productions were in general careful to locate their villains in non-European settings. It's next major literary adaptation after *Holmes* was indicative of this, embarking on a series of Sax Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* stories from 1923-1924,

²⁴⁶ Anon (12 February 1920), *The Times*, Quoted in *Stoll's Editorial News*, p. 7.

which were also in part inspired by the success of its feature-length *The Yellow Claw* (Rene Plaisetty, 1920), an adaptation of Rohmer's novel described by Stoll's Editorial News as 'a picture of Chinese cunning'.²⁴⁷ Each of these adaptations were popular and daring compared to the more restrained product produced by other British film companies in the early 1920s. Stoll was not afraid to push moral boundaries, and a film from 1921, *The Gentle Doctor* (Fred Paul), attests to this. The plot hinged on the story of a cuckolded doctor who, while tending to poor patients in East London, encounters a woman who has been stabbed by her lover. It transpires that the woman is the doctor's former wife, and rather than help her, he stabs her himself and lays the blame on her lover. At the film's conclusion, the lover is hanged and the doctor returns to his work. This remarkable moral stance for a British film of the 1920s is perhaps tempered only by one consideration - the doctor was Russian, and this was released only four years after the revolution that saw tens of thousands of Russian exiles arrive in Britain.

The tensions revealed by the crude villainy of Stoll's non-British characters were potent in a society witnessing greater exposure to foreigners. In the first half of 1919, Britain witnessed several race riots in many of its main ports (including Liverpool and Cardiff),²⁴⁸ and this had a direct relationship to the introduction of the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of the same year. The Act was further strengthened in 1920 (when it banned immigrants from being admitted without the permission of a customs officer, and even then only if the applicant was fit and could support their families) and extended in 1925 with the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen)

²⁴⁷ Anon (15 December 1921), 'The Yellow Claw', *Stoll's Editorial News*, p.13.

²⁴⁸ Bland, Lucy (2005), 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender and History* 17:1, p. 34.

Order.²⁴⁹ In addition, in 1924 the Foreign Office added 'Chinese' to the list of nationalities on a warning statement handed out to women by British marriage registrars:

The warning statement, already operating in relation to 'Hindus, Moslems, African Negroes etc', advised women that their marriages were unlikely to be recognised in their husband's country of origin, that their husband would be able to have other wives, indeed may already have other wives, and that they would lose British 'protection' once married to an alien.'²⁵⁰

The new Conservative government led by Bonar Law, and succeeded by Stanley Baldwin in 1923, mirrored these social restrictions with economic controls on foreign involvement with Britain, adopting protectionist measures as an antidote to the country's debt problem. In addition, there was no leeway on tax relief, as the Cabinet was resolved that while 'it was still necessary to retain the taxes on such articles as sugar and tea,' there could be no removal of the Entertainment Duty.²⁵¹ By the time Ramsay MacDonald brought the Labour Party to form a minority government in 1924, the issues faced by the film industry could not have been more acute. In November 1924, not a single British film was in production, a period that was to become known as 'Black November.' The number of British films shown in the UK had been steadily declining since 1920, with 136 trade-shown in 1921 becoming only

²⁴⁹ Bland, Lucy, p. 39.

²⁵⁰ This required British seaman to provide evidence they were British or British Empire born before they could work in the country. It took several years before the India Office successfully revoked the order amid concerns regarding its racist implications.

²⁵¹ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/46.

56 in 1924,²⁵² and in December that year, *The Times* stated that 'the British film trade has never been in a worse condition'.²⁵³

This disaster, the result of the stranglehold that American distributors had on British exhibition, came despite efforts the previous year to boost the chances of British films with the public. On 14 November 1923 an event was held in London to promote the 'British Film Weeks' initiative, a programme of British films scheduled for nationwide release during February to March 1924.²⁵⁴ This activity was the idea of the British National Film League, a trade body established in 1921 that represented a number of British film companies and was chaired by AC Bromhead of Gaumont. His address to the assorted guests argued for the importance of maintaining a significant British presence in cinemas, arguing that the 'nation which today has no films of its own...[has] to an extent become inarticulate'.²⁵⁵ The BNFL's aim was to place 'British films on an equal footing with American films both in the domestic market and internationally'.²⁵⁶ Its method was to promote British films as an alternative to Hollywood, a strategy that had both economic and cultural dimensions. For while the BNFL's ostensible interests lay in the support of the commercial concerns of the companies that it comprised, its public pronouncements were often of a moralistic nature, equating film with wider concerns about cultural dominance by America and the impact that this had on the British public.

²⁵² Gruner, Olly, p. 41.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Gruner, Olly, p. 42.

²⁵⁶ Gruner, Olly, p. 44.

This work by Bromhead was complemented by tub-thumping from the press, with *Picturegoer* dedicating an entire issue to British film in its 'Special British Number' from February 1924, stating that, 'This all-British number of THE PICTUREGOER, like the British Film week, has one aim – the advancement of British pictures. The object seems to me to be a very worthy one. What do *you* think?'²⁵⁷ This special issue is interesting from a number of perspectives. First, it was indicative of the growing clamour of support for British cinema, primarily for its perceived cultural qualities and beneficial effects on the populace. But secondly, it also highlighted as virtues many of the elements that British cinema's critics felt put it behind its competitors, such as an over-reliance on slow-moving, historical sources and pastoral scenes. For example, Penryhn Blade's article, 'This Homeland of Ours', described the opportunities afforded to filmmakers by the British landscape, recounting a conversation with DW Griffith, in which, in reference to the countryside he exclaimed, 'What exteriors! What lovely scenic shots! It must be great to make pictures in locations that are so rich in tradition and history.'²⁵⁸ But of course, Griffith was portrayed as the American interloper; the master filmmaker displaying his ignorance of a tradition that already was being mined successfully by British filmmakers:

And what of our own films, Mr Griffith? We are proud of our country, you know. We think it beautiful as you do. We see it photographically as you do. We revel in its tradition, its age, its legends, as you would like to do. And, to be quite honest, you have arrived rather late in the

²⁵⁷ Anon (February 1924), 'The Thinker', *Picturegoer*, 7: 38, p. 66.

²⁵⁸ Blayde, Penrhyn (February 1924), 'This Homeland of Ours', *Picturegoer*, 7: 38, p. 8.

day, you and your American colleagues. For there is hardly a corner of the British Isles which we have not already screened, and screened – though we say it as shouldn't – remarkably well.

And if there was any doubt about whether an American could do a better job than a 'Britisher', a later article argued that 'The truth of the matter is that every department of American screenland is rich in artists over whose birthplace floated, not the Stars and Stripes, but the Union Jack...you will find a little of Old England in every branch of the industry.'²⁵⁹

However, the legacy of the BNFL is one of failure. The shock of Black November, barely six months after the film weeks initiative had ended, and the continued decline in the number of British films trade-shown (only 36 by 1926, fewer than a third of the 1921 number), ensured that the BNFL could not continue, and it was quietly wound down by the middle of the decade. But the core reason for its failure was closely intertwined with its remit, for as Olly Gruner argues, in promoting 'national' culture it marginalised its appeal to the mass audience, who rejected its essentially middle-class conception of what 'national' culture was.²⁶⁰

And yet, this was not the full story, for the BNFL movement had achieved something of note, if not exactly what it had hoped to do. For it highlighted the problems that British cinema faced in an open market – or, more precisely, the difficulty of operating within a market that, because of the practice of block-booking, was

²⁵⁹ 'RT' (February 1924), 'The Britisher Abroad', *Picturegoer*, 7: 38, p. 12.

²⁶⁰ Gruner, Olly, p. 51.

anything *but* open, and in fact, was heavily weighted in favour of American distributors. The British government did not turn a blind eye to this revelation, and by the end of 1924 it was clear that if the industry was not to repeat the tragedy of Black November then intervention was essential. It was with this recognition that Britain attempted to restrict foreign involvement in its cinema and establish its first formal conception of what constituted a 'British' film.

Chapter Five: Anti-Americanism in the Interwar British Film Industry

The general decline in the number of British productions, their lack of opportunity for exposure to the indigenous market, and the increasing dominance of American cinema, led many British filmmakers in the Twenties to start to tailor their productions to the US market. Kristin Thompson quotes a British producer as saying in 1920 that

England can supply stories and themes to the American people which will come to them with a fascinating freshness, but we are fully alive to the fact that such stories have got to be presented in the best possible way and must follow to a large extent American ideas and customs.²⁶¹

However, by the mid-1920s, critics had become increasingly perturbed about the number of American films the British public was being exposed to:

If our masses at home, and our masses overseas, are so constantly steeped in the American atmosphere, may they not lose a little of their Britannic consciousness?²⁶²

This concern was heightened even further by the news that American production company Famous Lasky was going to start producing films in the UK, and the worry that in these hands, the propaganda power of the cinema might become a 'national

²⁶¹ Thompson, Kristin, p. 127.

²⁶² Low, Sir Sidney (1919), 'Behind the Screen', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 128: 3331, p. 195.

danger.’²⁶³ While these comments were from the pen of Sir Sidney Low, scriptwriter of *The Life Story of David Lloyd George* and thus someone with a vested interest in British filmmaking, these fears had currency across a wide range of cultural commentators, keen to uphold the British values they perceived to be eroded by American cinema. For example, *The Quiver* questioned the appropriateness of American films for a British audience, arguing that ‘every nation has its own psychology, and the fact remains that films devised primarily to appeal to Americans have not the same lure on this side of the Atlantic.’²⁶⁴ Yet this was not an entirely negative article, and the author provided a telling insight into the attitude of many British film producers who would like to see British films portray the best of what British literature had to offer:

It is useless, for instance, to take a witty stage comedy whose success depends upon clever dialogue, and expect it to shine in a theatre where no words are spoken. We shall never get its full artistic possibilities into the cinema until we acknowledge that it is a *new* art, which imperatively demands new methods, and is only disfigured by borrowed plumes.²⁶⁵

The fact that approximately 90 per cent of the films shown in mid-1920s British cinemas were from America,²⁶⁶ made these fears about outsider influence

²⁶³ Low, Sir Sidney, p. 196.

²⁶⁴ Miall, Agnes M (September 1921), ‘What’s Wrong With the Cinema?’, *Quiver*, p. 982.

²⁶⁵ Miall, Agnes M, p. 984.

²⁶⁶ Glancy, Mark (February 2005), ‘The “Special Relationship” and the Cinema: Anglo-American Audiences and Film Preferences’, Paper Given at the Joint Neale and Commonwealth Fund Conference on Anglo-American Relations from the Pilgrim Fathers to the Present Day.

understandable, but the decisions based on such concerns were often influenced by a more deep-rooted distrust of foreigners. Ironically, it was precisely those companies that adopted foreign filmmaking techniques that managed to survive, although creative dialogue with a wider range of countries was difficult, due to increasingly restrictive legislation regarding the movement of workers into Britain. Despite this, as late as March 1925 the President of the Board of Trade, Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, was able to scoff at suggestions of a compulsory quota for British film exhibition and talk of 'a great opportunity for cooperation, not only [within Britain] but also – what I am convinced is very desirable - with America.'²⁶⁷ According to Cunliffe-Lister, American cultural products did not diminish 'Britishness', and American involvement (meaning American financial support) would in fact enhance the British film industry. This belief was so strong that he said unequivocally, 'The national aspiration in this country does not in the least exclude cooperation; on the contrary, it welcomes it.'²⁶⁸ Instead of placing barriers to American involvement, he hoped for agreement between British distributors and exhibitors on a 'voluntary quota', for a year's trial before a compulsory system would come back under discussion.

Even some critics, traditionally opposed to what they saw as the Americanisation of British culture, were broadly in support of American film. Pearkes Withers provided an account of 'Why British Films Fail', but opened with a qualifying statement – 'I am far from convinced that those of us who patronize (sic) the cinema are to any great extent influenced by the pictures we see on the screen.'²⁶⁹ Withers' contention was

²⁶⁷ Anon (15 March 1926), 'British Films: Attitude of the Government', *The Times*, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Withers, Pearkes (November 1925), 'Why British Films Fail', *Quiver*, 61, p. 79.

that if American films were what their detractors claimed – degenerate, immoral and opposed to ‘British’ values – then their proliferation would suggest that ‘it would seem that no one in all the world has any taste, any judgement, in the matter of films – except the people who make these British films that all the world neglects!’²⁷⁰ However, in less than a year, the government and industry had changed their view – the effects of ‘Black November’ had struck too deeply and America became perceived as the arbiter of the British film industry’s demise. Two potential solutions to this apparent problem were discussed, one related to increased taxation on American product and the other to the use of the British Empire as a distribution platform for ‘British’ films. Both options fed the debate about what constituted a ‘British’ film, which led directly to the creation of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act – legislation that, when first proposed in 1925, had been described by a *Times* editorial as

[W]rong in principle...[and] may now be regarded as dead, subject to an improbable resurrection at some future time.²⁷¹

The first discussions regarding a fiscal solution took place on 31 December 1926. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, received a letter from Lord Riddell, who sought to pursue a previously unexplored avenue for supporting the British film industry – taxation of Hollywood films.²⁷² Enclosed was a memorandum drafted on 18 February, which requested Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue

²⁷⁰ Withers, Pearkes, p. 80.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² TNA: PRO: IR 40/4110.

and the Board of Trade to 'frame joint proposals to help the British film industry and to secure the utmost possible revenue from the Americans',²⁷³ and by 26 February, Cabinet had accepted the President of the Board of Trade's proposal that he keep

in close touch with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order not to close the door to taxation of the American film industry, if it is found possible and desirable and the moment appropriate.²⁷⁴

The concern was that the total amount of money leaving Britain was £2,500,000 per annum (of total gross cinema receipts of £30,000,000 per annum), predominantly finding its way to American interests. In 1926, film productions were regarded as comparable to the manufacture abroad and sale in Britain of goods. This was problematic, as it was necessary to prove that a non-British resident was trading *within* Britain and not merely *with* Britain before they could be liable for income tax. As a British distributor was arguably purchasing a foreign product for re-sale (i.e. distribution and exhibition), the foreign manufacturer could not legally be accused of trading in the United Kingdom and therefore was not liable for income tax. Even if the distributor operated via a British based subsidiary owned by foreign interests, it would be liable only for the taxation attributable to the marketing of the film in this country, as the manufacturing took place on foreign soil.²⁷⁵ The memorandum suggested that this situation could be avoided, proposing a charge similar to that levied on foreign writers whose plays were performed in Britain; in those cases, the

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

authors' royalties were regarded as representing income from property within Britain, and hence were liable for income tax. However, the most 'equitable' solution appeared to be some form of *ad valorem* tax based on rental income for each individual product - but how to operate that on a differential basis and charge foreign film producers a higher rate was not clear, and more importantly was regarded as 'infringing the spirit, if not the letter, of the Commercial Treaties.'²⁷⁶

It was felt that the only solution at all workable was one that simply increased the existing rate of taxation based on the length of footage imported, as well as ensuring that the cost to import a negative was equal to the importation of a positive print. The drawback to this method was that as all films would be treated alike, a duty at the rate of two shillings per foot would generate tax of £600 for the average 6000 feet of film – acceptable for the small proportion of American films that earned an exceptional £5,000-10,000 gross in Britain, but too prohibitive for the majority of foreign films earning £1,500-2000 per film. In essence, the films that were drawing the largest audiences and therefore arguably having the most adverse effect on the success of British cinema, were precisely those who would easily be able to survive the taxation – resulting in a situation whereby the films penalised were those least likely to tempt audiences away from British films.

Churchill forwarded Riddell's memo to the Chairman of the Board of the Inland Revenue, Sir Richard Hopkins, and Sir Horace Hamilton, asking for

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

[Dramatic] proposals which will be effective for extracting money from the American film industry and for securing a fair field for British films...[Please] have ready for me when I come home a choice of good plans for terminating this detestable position.²⁷⁷

By 17 February 1927 details had been forwarded to Churchill regarding the amount of taxation levied on the profits of renting concerns 'which are subsidiaries of American producers or closely associated with American interests'²⁷⁸ in the preceding financial year, based on tax from their renting, distributing and marketing, but not manufacture (which was ineligible for income tax). The total yearly profits amounted to £160,000, which resulted in a tax yield of approximately £32,000. These figures followed an upward trend, and were predicted to rise to £50,000 of tax revenue in the following year. A similar figure is found in a letter from the Federation of British Industries (FBI) to the Treasury on 14 March 1927. The FBI complained that although it appeared £5-6,000,000 was remitted annually to America, the return for the McKenna duty²⁷⁹ on imported films was only £103,174 during the 1925-26 financial year.²⁸⁰

The recently reinstated McKenna duties on film²⁸¹ were considered to be too little, too late by the liberal-Conservative London weekly *The Saturday Review*, which

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Liberal MP Reginald McKenna established the McKenna duties in 1915, as a taxation on 'luxury goods' intended to help fund the war effort. By 1927, these duties were one third of a penny per foot for raw film stock, one penny for positives (developed or undeveloped) and five pence for negatives (developed or undeveloped).

²⁸⁰ TNA: PRO: IR 40/4110.

²⁸¹ The McKenna duties were repealed on 2 August 1924 and then reimposed on 1 July 1925.

highlighted the fact that there were more pressing issues with the distribution of British films in UK cinemas:

The moment the British producer individually or collectively makes a serious endeavour to push his wares, the American competitor lowers prices temporarily, sometimes going so far as to offer not only his own film for next to nothing but a contribution towards losses resulting from the exclusion of the British film which is thus squeezed out.²⁸²

But of course, the key concern was not only the industrial or economic effect, but also the denigration of British cultural values. The McKenna duties were criticised for not being able to 'really check developments which are making us mentally a dependency of America.'²⁸³ And further, that 'It cannot possibly be desired by the normal citizen that the younger generation should grow up denationalized (sic) in its social ideas and talking the jargon of the captions on American films.'²⁸⁴ But perhaps most interesting here was one of the earliest acknowledgements of why the author felt this was so important:

²⁸² Anon (May 1925), 'The "Pictures" and the People', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 139: 3628, p. 480.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

We are no longer the people who feel kinship in our common relation to Shakespeare; our spiritual home is now the cinema; and at all costs we must see to it that the home is at least in part British.²⁸⁵

On 19 February 1927, the British Association of Film Directors contacted the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a joint letter,²⁸⁶ calling his attention to the ‘immunity from British taxation at present enjoyed by the American film industry’. Once more, an *ad valorem* tax was suggested as the only option, with the existing taxation (5d per foot of film) described as ‘inadequate either to protect the British film industry or replenish the British Exchequer’.²⁸⁷ It is telling that the proposal was suggested not because of a concern for equitable taxation, but rather as *protection* for the British film industry from the perceived American threat.

The taxation issue abated until January 1931, when the Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade, Percy Ashley, contacted the Principal Private Secretary to the Chancellor, Sir James Grigg, to inform him of a meeting he had had with the film producer John Maxwell, where once again the issue of an *ad valorem* tax was raised.²⁸⁸ The Chief Inspector of Taxes produced a report comparing the situation to that of 1926, when the initial inquiry was raised. His assessment was broken down into each respective company, and tabulated to show the cinema receipts, percentage paid to American parent companies and the profits retained by their

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Along with signatories from the British Empire Film Institute, Women’s Guild of Empire, British Women’s Patriotic League, British Empire Union, National Citizen’s Union, Industrial Peace Union and National Constitution Defence Movement.

²⁸⁷ Anon (19 February 1927), ‘Foreign Film Profits in this Country: A Taxation Suggestion’, *The Times*, p. 10.

²⁸⁸ TNA: PRO: IR 40/3914A.

British subsidiaries. Of the eight companies listed (Universal, Warner Brothers, United Artists, Fox, First National Pathé, Paramount, Producers Distributing Co. and Jury-Metro-Goldwyn), Universal provided the most generous arrangement, with the British company retaining 45 per cent of the profits. The remaining seven companies offered between 20 to 35 per cent of the profits,²⁸⁹ a handsome sum considering that the British subsidiaries did not (at this stage) take on any production burden, the key area of financial risk. In fact, Jury-Metro-Goldwyn had increased its remittance from 25 per cent in 1927 to 35 per cent in 1928, suggesting its willingness to finance a lucrative market. In addition, the report noted that First National Pathé had a controlling British interest, predicted as 51 per cent,²⁹⁰ and showed that the figure the Federation of British Industries believed to be remitted to America was grossly inflated. Instead of the £5-6,000,000 predicted, in 1927 (one year after the financial year quoted by the FBI), the total amount of money paid to American film companies was approximately £2-2,500,000.²⁹¹ Even by 1929, the total figure was approximately only £3,586,697. According to the Chief Inspector of Taxes, in 'aggregate' the figures were 'not unsatisfactory and would probably be so regarded if the companies traded through agents or branches and not by means of subsidiary companies'.²⁹² However, he argued that individually the position might not be as beneficial to British interests. Using First National Pathé as an exemplar (with 51 per cent British controlling interest and an estimated 35 per cent remitted to Britain), he

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Figures for First National Pathé Ltd are unavailable for 1927 and estimated for 1928-29. However, even the approximate figure for 1928 (£427,253) brings the 1927 total to only £2,502,739.

²⁹² TNA: PRO: IR 40/3914A.

concluded that 'only one, or at most two of the other companies reach the standard indicated.'²⁹³

However, First National Pathé was unique in that the British interest was already making 'large profits', and therefore was able to secure a better deal with the Americans.²⁹⁴ In addition, the Chief Inspector qualified United Artists' low remittance to Britain (20 per cent) by arguing in their case there was no 'complete identity of interest in the American producing and distributing companies'.²⁹⁵ This was due to United Artists' insistence on independent producers retaining their independence and their refusal to exert any influence over the production of films they distributed. For these reasons, the Chief Inspector accepted it 'may be necessary to be satisfied with a rather lower standard.'²⁹⁶ With First National considered in this light, the assessment of American financial involvement in British filmmaking appeared more positive. Considering that the British subsidiaries were involved mainly in distribution and incurred none of the financial risks associated with production, the report could conclude that profits reaped by British companies were 'considerable'. Moreover, in the two instances where they were not, the British companies were in their infancy, and the percentage was expected to rise as had happened with Jury-Metro-Goldwyn over the previous three years.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ TNA: PRO: IR 40/3914A.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Based on this report, Grigg was able to reply to Ashley on 12 March 1931 that the data (although not disclosed to Ashley), proved the proportion retained by distributing concerns in Britain was not as low as 20 per cent (the amount at which the companies would have paid no tax).²⁹⁸ Although the estimated figure for United Artists was 20 per cent, its role as distributor, not producer, took it out of Britain's tax assessment criteria, and while the company's accounts indicated that United Artists was in fact solely American-owned, it was not (as was suggested) illegally escaping tax payments.

These ambiguities in the assessment system ensured that the issue did not fade away. By February 1932, John Rummy Remer MP wrote to the new Chancellor, Neville Chamberlain, that he was aware that 'ten American film producing companies' remitted between 'seven and eight million pounds' to the United States each year, none of which, allegedly, was liable for taxation.²⁹⁹ A further letter from Lt.-Col. JTC Moore-Brabazon MP to Chamberlain in December 1931 sought to explain how this situation had arisen, arguing that producers initially invoiced a moderate figure for producing costs, then revised the figure up to match its equivalent earnings and took the product out of tax liability.³⁰⁰ Once again, an *ad valorem* tax was suggested as the most profitable solution.³⁰¹ Remer followed his Commons question with a letter to Chamberlain in February 1932. This correspondence also proposed an *ad valorem* tax but for the first time proffered a second solution to the issue,

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ TNA: PRO: IR 40/4110.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Moore-Brabazon also names Edward Foxen Cooper at the War Office as someone who 'knows all about the business', and suggests that it would be 'undesirable' for the proposal to be known as inspired by Kodak as he was one of their directors.

namely a tax based on 10 per cent of the American production costs, allegedly offset by the 'huge profits' already made in the United States before the film arrived in Britain.³⁰²

The Inland Revenue response was consistent with its previous rebuttals of tax collection amendments, and to cement this position, the recently-appointed Chairman of the Board of the Inland Revenue, Sir James Grigg, saw Moore-Brabazon on 29 February to confirm his department's stance. He noted that Moore-Brabazon's original 'informant' was once again John Maxwell, although he believed Maxwell's 'hostility to the US producers has recently been very effectively lessened (presumably to Maxwell's advantage).'³⁰³ Moore-Brabazon's view of the meeting prompted a letter to Chamberlain in which he claimed Grigg 'confess[ed] to the fact that the English subsidiary companies of the great American interests had already had their assessments raised by the Inland Revenue no less than five times without complaint. This, to me, seems pretty good evidence of what has been going on.'³⁰⁴ Grigg called the account 'grotesque', and asserted that 'there is no ground for suspecting any widespread evasion.'³⁰⁵ Further, he criticised an analogy drawn by Conservative MP Sir Alfred Butt, which linked royalties on books and plays (taxed at source) to film rentals, arguing that one was allied to income while the latter was related to gross turnover. This would amount, he argued, 'to treating American film companies on a basis far harsher than any other foreigners trading in this country. This was all carefully considered in 1927 [a reference to Churchill's earlier

³⁰² TNA: PRO: IR 40/4110.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

investigation] but Mr Churchill, although anxious to do all he could to sting the Americans, finally decided to take no action.³⁰⁶ The matter was laid to rest when Moore-Brabazon finally received his correspondence from Chamberlain, who while offering assurance that the matter was 'constantly under review', stated that no extra tax would result from the proposed changes.³⁰⁷

In February 1933, a letter from G Mitcheson MP to the Secretary of Parliament's Tariff Advisory Committee suggested that the tax issue persisted. However, when Mitcheson visited SE Minnis of the Inland Revenue on 22 March 1933, the identity of his 'expert guest', John Maxwell, revealed that this discussion was merely a continuation of Maxwell's previous anti-American endeavours. According to the Revenue's minutes 'It became evident at once that Mr Mitcheson's activities in the foreign film question are (sic) inspired by Mr Maxwell, and the former took little part in the discussion.'³⁰⁸ After an apparently fruitless discussion centred on Maxwell's suggestion that American companies were adapting their accounts to minimise their tax burden, Maxwell admitted that his actual objective was to impose an *ad valorem* import duty on films, and that he had 'put in the income tax matter merely as an additional attraction or "bait"'.³⁰⁹ Minnis' detailed reply highlighted the flaw in Maxwell's argument, that an *ad valorem* tax would force a foreign film company to declare a figure before the production had reaped any profit, and in addition that the company would be held to that assumption 'whatever the actual results may be'.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ TNA: PRO: IR 40/4323.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

Minnis contended that this would be 'a step in the direction of purely arbitrary taxation' and that this proposal was 'a form of penal taxation directed against a particular foreign trade'.³¹¹ Nonetheless, by 15 May, Dedman wrote to Minnis to ask for his 'final word on the subject',³¹² arguing that Customs might be willing to give the scheme a trial. Minnis was equally decisive in his response, again rejecting the proposals and arguing further that they 'would be bound to lead to an outcry in America.'³¹³

In essence, Maxwell's (or officially, Mitcheson's) proposal would have punished the British distributors more profoundly than the American producers importing films into the country. This may have still produced the desired effect, as British distributors would surely have balked at paying inordinate amounts on foreign films when they could withhold more of the profit on British productions. However, it is unlikely Maxwell would have considered this to be a suitable option and instead did not realise the potential damage to British interests his scheme might have caused. Interestingly, Maxwell was not alone in this view, as the Empire Economic Union had made a 'precisely similar proposal',³¹⁴ but nonetheless his suggestions were deemed 'unworkable' and the matter was officially closed.³¹⁵ Regardless, yet again a measure instigated by Britain had resulted in exactly the opposite of its original intention, and instead of abating American influence in the industry, it had served to entrench it further.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Six: 'Trade Follows the Film' – Cinema and Empire, 1924-1928

While the Inland Revenue and the Treasury debated ways to tax the foreign film industry and distribution network, the Colonial Office sought to embrace it, and for the first time began to seriously address the question of the international promotion of British cinema. This process had started in November 1923, with the address by the Chairman of Gaumont-British, Colonel A.C. Bromhead, to the British National Film League luncheon in which the upcoming British film weeks were announced. Only a year earlier, Isidore Ostrer had bought out Gaumont's remaining French interests and established it as a solely British-owned company,³¹⁶ and now that it had gained this independence it sought to exploit the established trade links with Britain's colonies and Dominions. Bromhead argued that 'the British Empire cannot afford to be absent from the world's screens',³¹⁷ a sentiment echoed by the following year's British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium. One of the stated intentions of the latter event was to 'foster inter-Imperial trade and open fresh world markets for Dominion and home products'.³¹⁸ As the Prince of Wales asserted, 'there were those businessmen and others who believed that films are a real aid to the development of Imperial trade; we all know the catch phrase "Trade follows the film"'.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Spicer, Andrew (2012), 'A British Empire of Their Own? Jewish Entrepreneurs in the British Film Industry', *Journal of European Popular Culture*, 3: 2, p. 124.

³¹⁷ Glancy, Mark, p. 4.

³¹⁸ Ferguson, Niall (2004), *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, London: Penguin Books, p. 318.

³¹⁹ Higson, Andrew (1997) *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 20.

Developing trade was at the core of the report of the Economic Sub-Committee of the 1926 Imperial Conference, which stated the case for increased Imperial film production, and began its appeal with the bald statistic that the proportion of British films (defined here as ‘films produced within the Empire by British Companies employing British artists’) shown in British cinemas amounted to scarcely 5 per cent, a fact repeated throughout the Empire where the situation was frequently even worse.³²⁰ To take the most extreme example, but one indicative of the lack of attention Britain had paid to this potential market throughout the 1910s, imports of British films to New Zealand had deteriorated to just 3.9 per cent of the market by the end of the First World War, whereas before its outbreak British imports had stood at 43.6 per cent. Conversely, the percentage of the market comprising American imports had risen over the same period to 92.1 per cent.³²¹

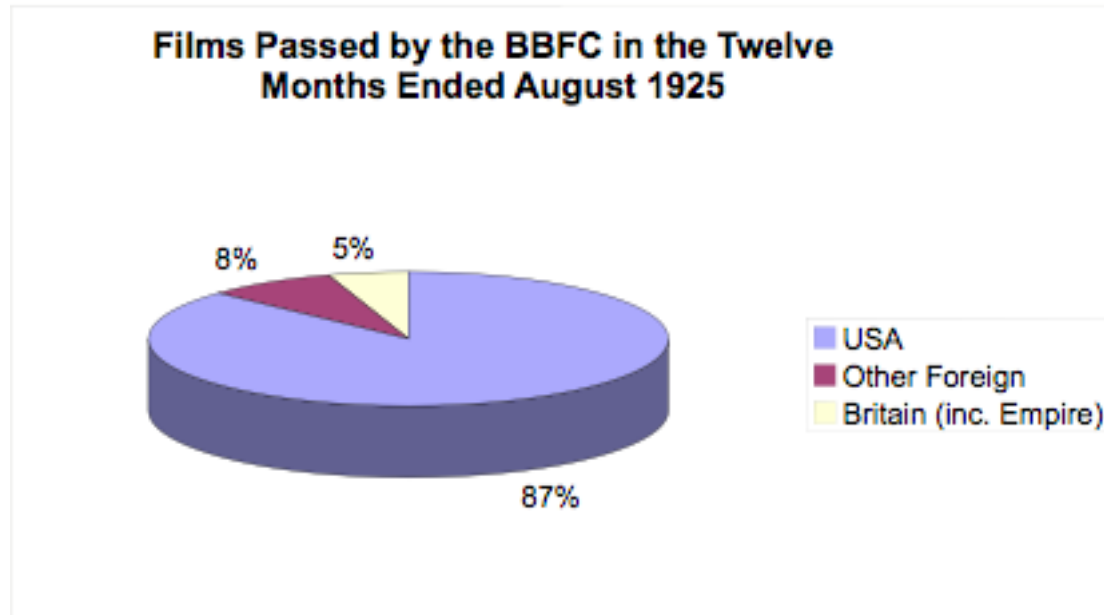


Figure 3: Source: TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

³²⁰ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

³²¹ Thompson, Kristin, p. 82.

Figure 3 shows that even more surprisingly, 8 per cent of the films submitted to the British Board of Film Censors were of non-American foreign origin, 3 per cent more than indigenous British product, suggesting that not only was British film distribution problematic, but British film production as well. More instructive is the data presented in *Figure 4*, showing the prevalence of British films in three of the key Dominions, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.³²²

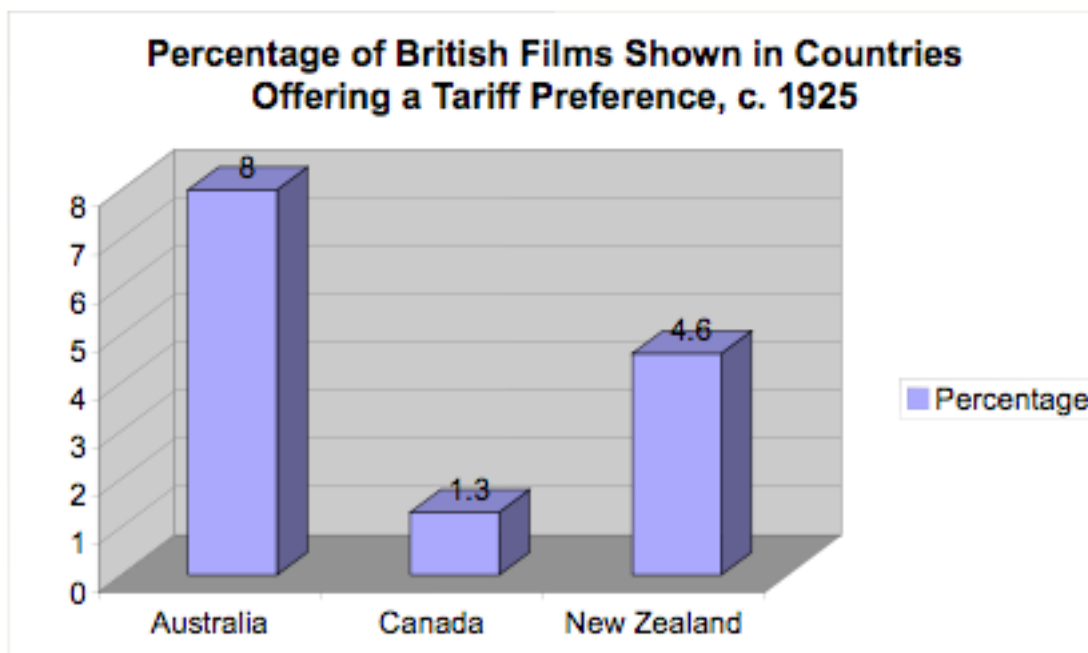


Figure 4: Source: TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

All three offered tariff preferences to British product, and of course, all three were English speaking (which despite being before the advent of dialogue driven films removed the expense of translating subtitles). Nonetheless, British films were still shown only marginally, and American dominance of these markets prevailed.

In India and South Africa, where British films received no tariff relief, the situation was similarly desperate - In India for example, despite 36.1 per cent of the total

³²² Ibid.

length of films imported by the year ending March 1925 originating from Britain (3,410,851 feet of a total 9,444,760), much of this came from re-exports of foreign films, leaving the actual amount of British imports much lower.³²³ The cumulative effect of these issues had resulted in the British share of the Indian film market declining from 25 per cent in 1914 to only 5 per cent by 1927.³²⁴ Naturally, the sub-committee concluded that preferential tariffs operated by some Dominions had produced little benefit to the British film industry.³²⁵

One of the reasons the tariff relief system failed to work was that the financial might of Hollywood ensured that even with tariff preferences in place, the American industry was still able to undercut British film distributors. The example provided by Australia was indicative of what was happening across the Empire. Australia levied a charge of 1.5d per foot of film imported, reduced for Britain via tariff relief to 1d. However, the average sale price per foot of film that American distributors offered to Australian exhibitors was only 1.6d, compared to the British average of 1.9d.³²⁶ The advantage offered by the tariff relief was therefore greatly reduced, leaving exhibitors with only a small financial gain if they went with a British production. American producers could do this because they had already made their profits in America, whereas British producers had not, and could not do this from Britain alone. In addition, the American film companies had agencies in Australia, which the British

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Indian Cinematograph Committee (1928), *Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee, 1927-1928*, Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, p. 193.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

did not, and were forcing exhibitors into 'block booking',³²⁷ further restricting the opportunities for British product to gain a screening.

The Australian situation was of such concern to the government that the following year, the minister for the Colonies and Dominions Office, LS Amery, met the Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia, to discuss how to resolve the problem. The Commission's Chairman, WM Marks MP, cited 'inadequate censorship' of British films at home as another factor in their lack of Australian exhibition, as the Australian censor had on occasion been forced to ban objectionable content that it felt could have been dealt with before export.³²⁸ Amery rejected further censorship as proving too difficult to put into operation, due to differing cultural attitudes across the Empire and the varieties in prints this would require. Instead, he argued that the 'trouble experienced in the Colonies was with American films.'³²⁹ The Commission proposed a quota in Australia of roughly 5 per cent Australian and 5 per cent British films (slightly lower than the 8 per cent showing there that year) but Amery felt a quota on Empire films would be more flexible, and would not debar exhibitors from showing only Australian or British films - in fact, he suggested a British exhibitor could meet the quota with a programme of only Australian films. However, nearly £1,000,000 per year went from Australia to America for the purchase and hire of films.³³⁰

³²⁷ The practice whereby distributors rented a major film to an exhibitor on the condition they also exhibited a number of lower quality films as well, many sight unseen.

³²⁸ TNA: PRO: CO 323/1001/2.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Similar patterns were repeated throughout Britain's dealings with its Empire. In Canada, once again Britain had no sales agents permanently based there, and exhibitors were forced to import British productions from agents based in the USA. This made the tariff preference redundant, as these films were classed as American imports. In the West Indies, the prohibitive cost of British as opposed to American product was also problematic, with the leading distributor in the area, Colonial Film Exchange Limited, purchasing the majority of its product as old American prints.³³¹ In fact, a letter to the Colonial Office from the distributors Henry K Davson asserted that prints of American productions such as *Beau Geste* (Herbert Brenon, 1926) could be purchased for £50 each, whereas the lowest price Gaumont offered for a film (*Mademoiselle Parley Voo* (Maurice Elvey, 1928)) was £200 (reduced after negotiation to £100).³³² As the distributor pointed out, 'There is a market in the West Indies for British films provided that they are up to the standard of the American films and that they do not cost any more.'³³³

The committee therefore suggested a series of solutions; firstly, that a tax should be levied on the revenue generated by the exhibition of foreign films in this country, although there were issues regarding the definition of a foreign as opposed to British film, and concern for the possible effect on American studios. Secondly, exhibitors could be offered remission on their Entertainments Tax payments, although the primary concern here was destabilising the uniformity of taxation across the industry. An *ad valorem* tax, based on the estimated value of individual films was suggested

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

as a third option, arrived at independently of the discussions happening in the Inland Revenue. Here, its potential flaw was also identified as the difficulty of judging the eventual earnings of films, coupled with the administrative implications of analysing films individually. Similarly, the fourth proposal based the tax on custom duty per foot of film, again weighed against potential earnings, with the subsequent problems of refund applications if these estimates were to prove inaccurate. Finally, the suggestion of an increase in the present duties was discounted, as it would result only in the costs being transferred to the average cinema-goer, via the distributor and exhibitor.³³⁴

The conclusion drawn from the various proposals was that the government should adopt a quota system, which formally set a figure for British films each exhibitor should show per year and which would be an integral part of their cinema license.³³⁵ This was not a novel idea, as several European nations had instigated their own quota systems during the 1920s; Germany (1921), Italy and Hungary (1925) and Austria (1926) all had some form of restriction on foreign film imports, with France following the trend in 1928.³³⁶ All told, eleven European governments introduced similar measures between 1925-28,³³⁷ all in order to support their products against the onslaught from Hollywood. The committee wished to follow the model adopted in Germany, enabling renters as well to be constrained by quotas on the amount of British films they would have to distribute each year. Once again, the committee was

³³⁴ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Jäckel, Anne (2003), *European Film Industries*, London: BFI Publishing, p. 5.

³³⁷ For a full discussion of these measures see, Bakker, Gerben (2005b), 'America's Master: The European Film Industry in the United States, 1907-1920', in Sedgwick, John and Pokorny, Michael (eds.), *An Economic History of Film*, London: Routledge.

careful not to mention countries or companies by name that it felt to be responsible for this legislative need, but in a further discussion of 'block booking' it was clear that the Americans were implicitly intended as the key target.³³⁸

Two further conclusions were drawn which suggested the type of films that had the potential to revive the British film industry throughout the Empire. First, more cooperation with Empire governments over the production and exhibition of 'instructional films' was suggested and, secondly, it was recommended to prevent the exhibition of films that gave 'the native races very unfavourable impressions as to the characteristics and habits of the white races.'³³⁹ In particular, it was advised to restrict films 'calculated to bring His Majesty's Uniform and the Army into contempt' – so crucial that it was provided with its own annex in the document.³⁴⁰ The perception of Britain as displayed in its films was by now key to government propaganda efforts. For example, in January 1928, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Austen Chamberlain, discussed with the BBFC a proposed film about Edith Cavell, the British nurse who was executed for helping Allied soldiers escape Belgium during the First World War. This intervention came after receiving enquiries from Belgium and Germany as to its nature,³⁴¹ and in light of this meeting and further discussions about the film at Cabinet level,³⁴² a move to a stricter, state-controlled film censorship was considered. However, the Home Office minister, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, suggested that 'unless it can be shown – as it has not yet been shown - that the

³³⁸ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/57.

³⁴² Ibid.

present system [of censorship] is unsatisfactory, it is sound policy *quieta non movere*'.³⁴³ The Cabinet agreed and the existing British film censorship system remained intact. There are no similar instances of direct intervention over the content of an American film in this decade, and this example demonstrates the importance placed by the British government on European relations throughout the 1920s.

However, the Board of Trade was aware that the area in which it could make the most profound intervention was throughout the Empire. Its President, Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, described the resolution of the 1926 Imperial Conference, that imperial film production should be increased, as 'a realization (sic) that the cinema is today the most universal means through which national ideas and national atmosphere can be spread...and most unconsciously influence the ideas and outlook of British people of all races.'³⁴⁴ Cunliffe-Lister and Churchill agreed on 4 May 1927, that a joint conference between their departments, the Customs Office and the Dominions and Colonial Offices could discuss the feasibility of a 100 per cent duty tariff preference for films qualifying as part of the soon to be enforced British quota. At its outset, the subsequent Colonial Office Conference attracted wide interest from film producers, including the Embassy Film Company, self-proclaimed 'Producers of British Dominion Films'. It contacted the Colonial Office, announcing that it was planning an all-British film unit that would launch a 50 per cent British film programme in all of the large colonies and Dominions by the end of 1927.³⁴⁵ Greville Brothers also made contact, expressing its interest in any resulting film projects and

³⁴³ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/193.

³⁴⁴ Richards, Jeffrey (1986), 'Boy's Own Empire: Feature Films and Imperialism in the 1930s', in Mackenzie, John (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 152.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

highlighting its previous government contracts producing Empire films in the Gold Coast and Nigeria.³⁴⁶ But British Instructional Films was the largest and most credible concern to make an approach, asking on 7 June 1927 whether the Colonial Office could consider it as 'official cinematographers to the colonial governments'.³⁴⁷

British Instructional Films was founded in 1919 and established its reputation with a series of science and nature documentaries that began to be shown at schools within the London County Council from 1925. Parallel to this operation were historical subjects produced for cinema exhibition, such as *Armageddon* (H Bruce Woolfe, 1923), *Zeebrugge* (AV Bramble & H Bruce Wolfe, 1924), *Ypres* (Walter Summers, 1925) and *Mons* (Walter Summers, 1926). Its confidence in this field led to the claim in 1927 that its forthcoming production, *The Battles of Coronel and the Falkland Islands* (Walter Summers, 1928) 'will prove the biggest financial success ever achieved in the English film industry.'³⁴⁸ A film version of the Gallipoli campaign was also in development with alleged support from the British Army and Navy, although this project never came to fruition. The company's success in the colonies was also in evidence, with Nigeria providing the location and cooperation necessary for *Palaver* (Geoffrey Barkas, 1926) and an industrial film for the Keffi Consolidated Tin Company. Taking its title from the term ascribed to European explorers entering into discussions with Africans, *Palaver* was an excellent example of British cinema's approach to its colonies during the 1920s. While the film was clearly the product of the prevailing condescension towards Africans that was a feature of Britain's

³⁴⁶ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

relationship with the Empire, its portrayal of identity was instructive of how British filmmakers wished to portray the 'civilising' effects of colonialism. The director and his cinematographer, Stanley Rodwell, had experience of this topic, having worked the year previously as official photographers for the Prince of Wales' tour of Africa and South America, and they imbued the film with this sense of British right and duty. For example, the protagonist, District Officer Peter Allison, is described as being 'sent from the comfort and security of home to uphold, in a wild country, the justice and traditions of the British Empire', and as Tom Rice argues, 'The ideal of turning chaos into order shapes the narrative in *Palaver*',³⁴⁹ a theme clear from the way the film was promoted. The front cover of *Palaver*'s pressbook depicted Allison in a dramatic stand-off, his pistol firing at four Africans brandishing spears, while the bodies of two of their group lie dead on the floor from earlier shots. Inside, the reader is told that

Here, as elsewhere, men of our race have plunged into the Unknown and set themselves to transform chaos into order and security. Battling against slavery, human sacrifice and cannibalism, against torture and devil worship, against famine and disease, they have worked steadily on, winning the land for the natives under the Imperial Crown.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Rice, Tom, 'Palaver', *Colonial Film*, <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1342> (Accessed 12 January 2013).

³⁵⁰ BFI: Pressbook for *Palaver*.

In a letter to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, W Ormsby-Gore, on 23 June 1927, British Instructional Films established 'three definite circles for film distribution among the Crown colonies.'

1. West Indies, Bermuda, British Guiana, (serving the Irish Free State en route).
2. British West Africa.
3. Malaya and East Africa, serving the Mediterraneans (sic) possessions en route. India might cooperate with this service.³⁵¹

British Instructional Films presented itself as best able to meet the needs of these groups, but only if appointed official cinematographer to the Colonial Office and thus centralising all of Britain's activities in Empire filmmaking. However, it was a subsidiary of what was still one of the biggest British film producers, Stoll Pictures Production Ltd, one of only sixteen companies allied to the Federation of British Industries Film Manufacturers Group (also including Gaumont and Ideal Films Ltd), and concerns about the reaction from this group to one company gaining a monopoly on official film production stalled the idea.³⁵²

Nonetheless, Stoll were very persistent, and a memorandum prepared in the Colonial Office suggests the influence they were beginning to have on the issue of educational films. This contained an annex written by the secretary of the Advisory

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, Hans Vischer, in which he discussed the use of educational film throughout African schools. He commended the assistance of a Mr de Valda, the director of a company called Visual Education Ltd, which was also revealed to be a subsidiary of Stoll Pictures productions.³⁵³ It is no surprise therefore that the report emphasised the danger of American educational films filtering into British schools, arguing that 'What is happening in our theatre will happen in our schools, unless encouragement is given to British educational films.'³⁵⁴ A further memorandum prepared by the Federation of British Industries supported the argument and concluded that the government had to work with Colonial authorities to produce a 'series of fine pictures illustrative of the life and story of different parts of the British Empire.'³⁵⁵ These films, delivered to African children in their schools and local cinemas, were discussed as not 'purely propaganda pictures' but it is clear that the intention to promote British views and interests was paramount in the minds of the Federation of British Industries, in addition to the obvious financial benefits of such an endeavour.

The film-related elements of the conference itself were presided over by Cunliffe-Lister. He emphasised the need for the British film industry to improve its distribution throughout the colonies and explained the relevance of school screenings to help achieve this aim. Despite this, the Colonial Office was still unclear about the demand for film throughout the Empire, and delivered a circular to all colonies and protectorates³⁵⁶ on 1 October 1927, to ascertain what film activity was being

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Excluding Malta, but including Palestine and Tanganyika.

undertaken, and what additional work could be done.³⁵⁷ The circular requested each authority to confirm a series of questions relating to film production and exhibition within their boundaries. First, whether they would in principle be prepared to provide financial assistance towards the production and distribution of either fiction or non-fiction films in their country; second, how many films were exhibited in the territory annually (including what proportion of these were purely fictional and how many places of exhibition existed for these productions); third, whether instructional films would benefit the territory; fourth, to what extent had films been produced in their territories and how much official assistance had been provided to producers; and finally the existing arrangements for censoring film and marketing materials.³⁵⁸

Of the 46 colonies questioned, 43 per cent responded that they would be willing to offer financial assistance to film projects in their area, and 78 per cent felt there would be a benefit to showing instructional films in their colonies. Clearly, there was an interest throughout the colonies to have British product shown, and to a lesser extent, to help in the support of this. More importantly, the comments received confirmed there were still major flaws in Britain's exploitation of its territories' exhibition facilities. For example, in Bermuda, despite foreign films paying a 5d duty while British films were tax free, only 18,000 feet of British film was imported in 1927, compared to 2,149,600 feet imported from America.³⁵⁹ In Barbados, British films paid only 5d duty but yet the product shown was almost entirely American, even though American renters were liable to a 10d tax rate.³⁶⁰ Other territories expressed support

³⁵⁷ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/1.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

for British product, but each time added a caveat that exposed the reality of attempting to exhibit a British film instead of an American one. Dominica assured the Colonial Office that theatre owners would 'be glad to see English films', primarily to break free of the domination of American companies that block-booked films into cinemas, but also because the films were felt to 'Americanize (sic) the masses and... give them false impressions of life generally.'³⁶¹ The Bahamas also wished to reduce the amount of 'silly and sensational rubbish ' generated by the American studios, but conceded that the distribution cost implications of Britain's geographical position in relation to the much closer America rendered the idea fanciful.³⁶² However, Jamaica, while acknowledging the geographical constraints, identified the more pressing problem – 'British producers will not rent their films.'³⁶³ While American distributors were offering productions to colonies on a short-term basis, British companies would only sell films outright. While this was probably due to shipping costs, it is understandable why the territories opted for the American offer. In fact, it was only St Helena that had any regular influx of British product, instigated by the importation of a projector in 1916. Technical difficulties halted screenings after a year, only for them to be reinstated in 1926 after the building of new equipment. Soon after, a contract with an 'English distributor' was established to ship over an average of four items per month.³⁶⁴ In terms of cooperation with filming, the most significant involvement came from Nigeria, which provided official assistance to the production of the Nigerian film for the 1927 British Empire exhibition and for the aforementioned feature length

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

fiction film *Palaver*.³⁶⁵ Zanzibar purchased films from distribution company Ogden and Madeley in Manchester and assisted on a section referred to as the 'slave market scene' in *Livingstone* (MA Wetherall, 1925), as well as on the now lost *Zanzibar*. The only other notable contribution came from the Gold Coast, which had produced three films, including the Gold Coast official film for the 1927 British Empire exhibition,³⁶⁶ and North Borneo which had one production on native customs made by the pioneering British wildlife filmmaker Cherry Kearton and his American counterpart Martin Johnson.³⁶⁷

The replies also highlighted a persistent use of censorship across the Empire, which in many cases was undertaken directly by the controlling authorities and was often politically motivated. In Jamaica, one film had been banned because officials felt it might have 'offended the coloured population',³⁶⁸ and in Ceylon, one of the censorship criteria included 'films calculated to incite racial feeling'.³⁶⁹ Northern Rhodesia restricted admittance to 'European cinema displays' and provided an alternative weekly screening exclusively for the indigenous population.³⁷⁰ However, the key issue was not protection of the native population, but instead protection of a particular portrayal of white Europeans, and by extension, a conception of 'Britishness'. For example, in both Borneo and Sarawak, films were banned or altered when considered likely to be 'detrimental to the prestige of Europeans or

³⁶⁵ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/2.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/1.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/2.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

good behaviour of the local inhabitants'.³⁷¹ Some territories went even further, such as Tanganyika, which between June and November 1927 banned three films on the grounds of unsuitability to the natives, adding that 'owing to the native problem the government do not go out of their (sic) way to encourage "cinema halls".³⁷² The Federated Malay States banned over 65 per cent of the films shown in the territory, including those likely to 'outrage the racial or religious susceptibilities of any section of the community.'³⁷³ The 'susceptibility' most feared was sexual attraction between races, and British territorial officials were at pains to ensure activity of this nature was not portrayed to the indigenous population. In the Gambia, films that showed 'European and African people in conflict to the detriment of the former e.g. films of boxing contests [and] Europeans in the uniform of any branch of the Service or of the Police...in any condition except those which are creditable' were banned.³⁷⁴

However, the strictest censorship was reserved for films depicting 'European women under conditions likely to be misunderstood by natives'.³⁷⁵ In fact, in Antigua,³⁷⁶ 'in one or two instances, the censor [had] caused to be deleted scenes depicting white female artists actually engaged in vulgar street brawls',³⁷⁷ and the Uganda protectorate had as a censorship criterion films 'which in the eyes of non-Europeans [were] likely to bring white women into disrepute.'³⁷⁸ Miscegenation fears had much

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/2.

³⁷⁶ Listed as part of the Leeward Islands.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/1.

purchase amongst the British establishment, and actions of this nature were in keeping with a wave of divisive legislation instigated throughout the Empire colonies at the start of the twentieth century. In 1903, Southern Rhodesia's Immorality Suppression Ordinance criminalised extra-marital sex between indigenous males and white females, and at the same time, it introduced the death penalty for rape or attempted rape, directed primarily at the black population. In 1916, the legislation was revised 'to make solicitation or any kind of enticement of black men by white women a crime, with a penalty of two years imprisonment for the woman.'³⁷⁹ Papua New Guinea followed in 1926 with the 'White Women's Protection Ordinance', and as late as 1927, South Africa passed an Immorality Act that criminalised all extra-marital interracial sex, with a penalty of five years imprisonment.³⁸⁰ *Kithnou* (Henry Étiévant & Robert Péguy, 1924) was produced in Mauritius but deemed unsuitable for local exhibition owing to the fact that the central theme was the illicit love of a European man for an Indian girl in a Mauritian setting.³⁸¹ The grounds for banning Mauritian films also included '[Europeans] illustrated in degrading conditions with regard to coloured people', and when 'racial antagonism between whites and blacks is illustrated as the basis of a film story.'³⁸²

Some responses to the Colonial Office request clearly highlighted the prejudicial attitudes that film exhibition in the Empire was designed to support. In British Guiana four films were banned because of the effect they would have had in

³⁷⁹ Bland, Lucy, p. 31.

³⁸⁰ Bland, Lucy, p. 32.

³⁸¹ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/1.

³⁸² Ibid.

lowering the prestige of the white race in the eyes of the illiterate Negro and East Indian population, who form a very large part of the audiences here. These pictures depicted scenes of debauchery, where white men and women behaved in a loose and sometimes immoral manner, which, seen by the average audience in this Colony, would have seriously affected the mental attitude of the coloured population who are only too ready to raise the colour question, or bring disrepute or ridicule to the white races... [Occasional] deletions were considered necessary for the same reasons as in the cases of banning, and because of the liability of people of such low intellect being tempted to do as they see others do.'³⁸³

Kenya's reply went even further:

The problem in Kenya is complicated by factors common to all countries where the inhabitants consist of members of races in different stages of development...it seems fundamentally illogical to regard the African as on a par with European children...Bearing in mind then the duty...to exercise control over extraneous influences which may affect the welfare of the African population in Kenya, the Committee recommends that a clear division should be instituted between the presentation of films to Africans and to members of other races...Africans should have separate picture halls set aside

³⁸³ TNA: PRO: CO 323/990/1.

for their use, halls to which members of other races would not be allowed admittance except on special occasions...and that the films to be shown in these halls should be subject to a special form of censorship...The kind of film to be shown in an African picture hall should be selected as to avoid risk of misrepresentation...³⁸⁴

The replies led to the drafting of a circular memorandum on 8 January 1927, to be sent to each of the colonies and addressed from 'Downing Street'. It began

I have the honour to inform you that prominence has been given recently in various quarters to the undesirable effects produced by the exhibition of certain types of cinematograph films in Colonies.³⁸⁵

These effects were clearly defined:

[Each administration shall prevent] the exhibition of any film or section of film which is open to objection whether on general grounds or in view of the special character and susceptibilities of the native people before whom the film would be exhibited, or which is calculated to arouse undesirable racial feeling by portraying aspects of the life of any section of his majesty's subjects which, however

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ TNA: PRO CO 323/990/2.

innocent in themselves, are liable to be misunderstood by communities with other customs and traditions.³⁸⁶

Despite these concerns, CS Jeffries of the Colonial Office wrote on 13 November 1928, that he believed it possible for a scheme providing a 'supply of good British films will be made available for...those colonies which can conveniently be placed in geographical groups.' However, this was yet another false dawn for the British film industry and the proposed committee never convened. It is debatable how great the influence of Empire markets was on the British film industry, and to what extent the strict censorship of depictions of white Europeans had on the attitudes towards British cinema in this decade. What is certain, is that there was much enthusiasm in government for the possibilities of distribution throughout the colonies and Dominions, and a belief in the interest of local people in British product. For example, in November 1928 Cunliffe-Lister presented a report to cabinet in which he stated that in India, 'A steadily increasing demand for British films may be anticipated as they are preferred by a considerable section of the cinema public.'³⁸⁷ Yet, this opinion was optimism verging on denial, and as Cunliffe-Lister was aware, British cultural influence in India had already suffered a severe decline.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/199.

Chapter Seven: 'Films That Lower Our Prestige in India'

The Indian Cinematograph Act 1918 ensured that no film could be exhibited unless it had received a certificate from one of India's boards of censorship. By 1920, boards had been established in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rangoon,³⁸⁸ each of which could grant a certificate that would be valid across the whole of India.³⁸⁹ These boards had been established along similar lines as the British Board of Film Censorship, and so while they had a degree of autonomy from the Indian authorities, they were still tasked to omit scenes that were perceived to be damaging to public order, including those that would portray the British Empire in a negative light. In fact, the BBFC's report of 1919 noted the 'courteous cooperation of the Home Office, the Foreign Office, [and] the India office...in dealing with special subjects which are of national and international importance.'³⁹⁰ There were also reports surfacing in the trade press that a degree of unofficial censorship was applied by many of the cinema venues that were booking films as well. For example, *The Cinema* would report that:

Now the Metro Films Corporation have filmed [IAR Wylie's] book, "The Temple of Dawn"...When the owners of the theatre learnt that this film had scenes calculated to bring British rule in India into contempt, they at once informed the Metro authorities, cancelling their contract for it.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Rangoon had become part of the British Indian Empire after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852.

³⁸⁹ British Library (BL): L/PJ/6/1747.

³⁹⁰ BFI: BBFC Annual Report (1919), pp. 8-9.

³⁹¹ Banerjea, SB (20 April 1922), 'Films in India: Anti-British Pictures Banned', *Cinema*.

Despite this, concerns began to be raised about the perceived laxity of a system that was disjointed and seemingly dependant on the whims of various cinema owners. It was in this context that the *Evans Report on Cinema Publicity in India* was published in 1921, which suggested greater control of the censorship, production and distribution of films in India. By the end of the year, fears over the condition of Indian film censorship had permeated Parliament, with Conservative MP Colonel Sir Charles Yate raising questions about the result of the new censorship regulations following the 1918 Indian Cinematograph Act. No details were provided,³⁹² as information had by that point not filtered back to the India Office, and the complexity of the Indian censorship system ensured that it was difficult for firm evidence to be collated. This lack of information was increasingly seen as a problem, as it meant that government officials had no data with which to respond positively to criticism of film exhibition in India, which was becoming increasingly potent. The most significant example of this growing trend was an article written by Constance Bromley for *The Times Cinema Supplement*, in which she argued the

Asiatic matures early, and the development of his mentality does not keep pace with his physical growth....At maturity he is still a child, and childlike he remains...[The plays and stories] he delights in would bore to death an English child of tender years by their simplicity.³⁹³

³⁹² HC Deb (9 November 1921) Vol. 148 c420W.

³⁹³ Bromley, Constance (21 February 1922), 'India; Censorship and Propaganda; Influence of Foreign Films', *The Times Cinema Supplement*.

This analysis was in keeping with the prevailing attitude towards the non-white Empire subjects held by much of the government, and its inclusion in *The Times* shows that it was a view that had some purchase with the British public too. Bromley's solution to this perceived problem was a stricter form of censorship in India, so that, as in other British colonies during this period, 'improper' representations of the British would not persist. Her article ended with a call to arms, which featured a strain of anti-Americanism that had become commonplace in British film criticism during the Twenties:

Why do we allow foreigners to flood India with travesties of English domestic life, sordid sex films, and serials based on crime? Sown in such fertile soil there can be but one harvest!³⁹⁴

Another example of this criticism, from the *Westminster Gazette*, highlighted a further potential problem that a loose system of censorship presented to Colonial authorities:

One of the great reasons for the hardly-veiled contempt of the native Indian for us may be found in the introduction and development of "moving pictures" in India...Like us, the Indian goes to see the "movies", but is not only impressed by the story of the film, but by the difference in dress, in customs, and in morals. He sees our women on the films in scanty garb, he marvels at our heavy, infantile humour – his own is on a higher and more intellectual level. He forms his

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

own opinions of our morals during the nightly unrolled dramas of unfaithful wives and immoral husbands, our lightly-broken promises, our dishonoured laws.³⁹⁵

While Bromley's approach was more akin to much of the wider debate regarding cinema throughout the Empire, the *Gazette's* stance was closer to that taken by Evans, and suggested that in fact, it was the Briton who appeared the intellectual and moral inferior. According to this view, films were not, as other critics asserted, presenting a false view of British life that was misunderstood by bemused natives, but instead, these films presented all the flaws of British culture and were understood as such by an astute Indian audience. Of course, this concept was particularly worrying for the British government, and the *Gazette* article was sent to the Governor General of India by the India Office, to put weight behind his request for information about the Indian film censorship system.³⁹⁶

Meanwhile, India's Advisory Publicity Committee in Delhi had discussed Evans' report, and noted that:

There is at this present moment both in India and elsewhere a small but highly profitable market for films of an indecent or otherwise undesirable type...Considerations of common sense would seem therefore to point to the desirability of controlling not merely the exhibition but also the production of films. If this is true of England

³⁹⁵ EB (17 November 1921), 'The Cinema in India', *Westminster Gazette*.

³⁹⁶ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

and America, there are prima facie reasons for supposing that it would be still more true of India.³⁹⁷

The censorious mood continued to build, with Colonel Yate again asking in Parliament whether the Under-Secretary of State for India, Earl Winterton, was aware that 'some of these cinemas are of a most pernicious kind and are doing an infinite amount of harm in India'.³⁹⁸ However, when detailed information was finally furnished to the British government, it was observed that very few films were mentioned as having been rejected or amended, and the Indian government decided that no further action needed to be taken on censorship.³⁹⁹ In addition, suggestions to establish a central Indian censorship board, located in Bombay, were deemed to be impractical by most observers,⁴⁰⁰ and Bengal was praised for exercising 'strictness in the certification of the propaganda type of films produced chiefly in America, in which scenes of an exaggerated nature [were] introduced'.⁴⁰¹

Yet, this would not satisfy the growing clamour of discontent expounded by some critics. An article in *The Times*, on 23 August 1923, argued that 'It seems that the time has come to regulate more strictly the importation of films from abroad into [the East] and to examine more carefully those that are imported'.⁴⁰² This article

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ HC Deb 28 March 1922 Vol. 152 c1108.

³⁹⁹ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, Letter from L Stephenson, Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, to The Secretary of the Government of India, (4 March 1922), BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Anon (23 August 1923), 'Films in the East: Bad Effect on the Natives', *The Times*.

reiterated most of the accusations levelled by Bromley in her earlier opinion piece,⁴⁰³ especially those related to the 'racial inferiority' of the Indians, and presented similarly anti-American arguments:

Everyone has seen those films made in the United States which set out to give an idea of English life and manners...To the native, who probably believes that they give a fair idea of English life, they may be very harmful indeed.⁴⁰⁴

And in response to this account, a letter to the editor from H Rowan Walker, General Secretary of the British National Film League, argued:

Perhaps in time we shall come to realize, as America has realized all along, what the screen can do towards promoting a nation's ideals and habits of thought, apart from promoting its trade.⁴⁰⁵

It was estimated that by 1922, 90 per cent of the films shown in India were American,⁴⁰⁶ and this realisation, coupled with the sustained criticism of the press, led to pressure groups and charities to start to lobby the government on the issue, with the Manchester Diocesan Association for Preventive and Rescue Work writing to the Colonial Office on 9 December 1924. It argued that

⁴⁰³ The article was credited to 'A Special Correspondent', and so may have even been written by Bromley herself.

⁴⁰⁴ Anon (23 August 1923).

⁴⁰⁵ Walker, H Rowan (4 September 1923), 'Unsuitable Films in the East', Letter to *The Times*.

⁴⁰⁶ Thompson, Kristin, p. 122.

From workers in India and Burma of all denominations comes the request that more care shall be exercised with films, posters and magazines that are imported. It is obvious that the posters are almost more dangerous to white prestige than the actual films.⁴⁰⁷

These concerns reached their apogee when, in 1926, a delegation from the British Social Hygiene Council reported that Indian cinemas increased the 'dissemination of disease'.⁴⁰⁸ However, after further enquiries from the India Office, it was discovered that there was no concrete evidence as to the unsuitability of films shown in India.⁴⁰⁹

Similarly, Parliament began to press the government on the issue of unsuitable films throughout 1925, with questions from Liberal MP Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy regarding the 'very small proportion of British produced cinematograph films shown in the cinematograph theatres in India as compared to films of foreign origin' - which also received a holding reply that the government was looking into the issue.⁴¹⁰ The perceived lack of action ensured that the press would continue to raise these concerns, and by 1926 Sir Hesketh Bell would write in *The Times* that

[T]here is reason to believe that much of [the concern over the portrayal of white people in India] is equally applicable to some of

⁴⁰⁷ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

⁴⁰⁸ Dass, Manishita (Summer 2009), 'The Crowd Outside the Lettered City: Imagining the Mass Audience in 1920s India', *Cinema Journal* 4, p. 82.

⁴⁰⁹ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

⁴¹⁰ HC Deb (22 June 1925) Vol. 185 c1058.

our great African colonies and protectorates, and that the marked decrease of respect towards Europeans, which is constantly being observed, is largely due to the representations of the disreputable conduct of white men and women that are too often depicted by the cinema.⁴¹¹

Bell, a former Governor of Mauritius, would continue to develop this idea in his writing, arguing in his book *Foreign Colonial Administration in the Far East* that 'to the vast mass of black, brown, and yellow people the inner life of the European, and especially that side of it which flourishes in centres of crime and infamy, was unknown until the American films showed them the travesty of it.'⁴¹² And in the same year as Bell's article to *The Times*, Constance Bromley would write what would become the 'battle cry for pressure groups which sought to regulate cinema in the colonies',⁴¹³ an article for the *Leeds Mercury* entitled 'Films that Lower Our Prestige in India: Imperilling the Safety of the White Woman'.⁴¹⁴ This article, as its title suggests, argued that white women were endangered by negative representations of white Europeans in film, and thus a stricter censorship system in India was needed.

By 1927 these broader concerns, of the perception of white Europeans across the Empire, had even reached the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. In an after-dinner speech for retiring directors of the BBC, he said:

⁴¹¹ Bell, Hesketh (4 October 1926), 'Cinema in Africa: Perverted Views of European Life', *The Times*.

⁴¹² Larkin, Emma (2003), 'The Self-Conscious Censor: Censorship in Burma Under the British, 1900-1939', *Journal of Burma Studies*, 8, p. 73.

⁴¹³ Arora, Poonam (Fall 1995), "'Imperilling the Prestige of the White Woman": Colonial Anxiety and Film Censorship in British India', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 11: 2, p. 38.

⁴¹⁴ Bromley, Constance (26 August 1926), 'Films That Lower our Prestige in India: Imperilling the Safety of the White Woman', *Leeds Mercury*, pp. 5-6.

[I]t is too early yet to say what the influence on civilization of the moving picture may be, but I confess that there is one aspect of it upon which I look with the gravest apprehension, and that is the effect of the commoner type of film, as representing the white races, when presented to the coloured races...the whole progress of civilization in this world is bound up with the capacity that the white races have, and will have, to help the races of the world to advance, and if their power to do that be impeded by false ideas of what the white races stand for, it may well be that their efforts will not only fail, but that the conception of the white races generated in the hearts of the coloured races throughout the world may be the initial step in the downfall of those white races.⁴¹⁵

The result of this pressure led to the first series of debates on film censorship in the Indian legislature and media. The first instance of this, at India's Council of State Debates, was a motion by Haroon Jaffer to replace the various Indian censorship boards with a single board, but this was not approved.⁴¹⁶ The India Office supported the decision, as it felt that the proposal to unite the censorship boards and staff them with a range of paid subordinate inspectors would fail, mainly because it believed that the pay was too low in order to attract inspectors of sufficient calibre and

⁴¹⁵ Anon (26 January 1927), 'New Broadcasting Era; Mr Baldwin on the Changes; Tribute to BBC', *The Times*.

⁴¹⁶ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

experience.⁴¹⁷ Likewise, the Indian press began to support calls for stricter censorship of foreign imports, opining

We wish the Board [of film censors in Bombay] would exercise similar discrimination [as it did to specific Indian films] by prohibiting a certain type of foreign-manufactured cinema film in this city in which women, wine and vice of all sorts seem to be the principal features.⁴¹⁸

As had been the case in the British media, the foreigner in question was American, and the sense that public and critical opinion was turning in favour of what the British government was trying to achieve, did not go unnoticed by the British authorities. A private letter to the new Viceroy, The Earl of Reading, in September 1926, expressed the wish that

It is to be hoped that the development of Indian and British film companies may do much to loosen the hold of American companies in India, but at best it must take some years to achieve much progress in that direction.⁴¹⁹

It was believed that an increase in the amount of censorship applied to imported films (and hence a reduction in the many negative images of Europeans presented

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

by Hollywood), coupled with measures to encourage plurality of ownership of cinema venues, would also enact this ulterior goal of reducing American cultural and economic influence in the region. The British government also expected that the Indian authorities would be happily complicit in this arrangement, as a letter from the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy demonstrates:

The small proprietor would, I presume, be more amenable to the stricter control [of cinema ownership] which I consider essential; and, in so far, is, I agree, to be preferred to and supported against the monopolist, who tends to be in close contractual relations with the foreign, particularly American producer, whose films are by common consent most harmful.⁴²⁰

On this account, the British government was proved right, and by 1927, the Indian Council of State had passed the motion to ‘improve the system of censorship and control over cinemas and other public resorts or amusements, and to adopt adequate measures to prohibit the exhibition therein of films and other shows which are calculated to corrupt the morals of the people.’⁴²¹ The success of the campaign led *The Times* to state that ‘Public opinion in India has developed so strongly against American films that the Government of India is contemplating special steps in response to it.’⁴²²

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Anon (6 July 1927), ‘US Films in India; Government and Censorship’, *The Times*.

At about this time, the India Office began to receive notification from the Bombay and Calcutta censorship boards, detailing the reasons for omitting particular scenes or refusing certificates for films altogether. As is to be expected of the decade, there were a large number of excisions for nudity or other sexually suggestible images, however, what is most fascinating about the reports, is the level to which these boards were complicit in upholding the ideological values that the British government wanted to portray of white Europeans, and how the rationale for this censorship was often linked to a perceived threat of American cultural hegemony. For example, in Bombay, films were prohibited for reasons such as 'it transfers to an Indian setting all the worst features of the lowest type of American vulgar study in the marriage question',⁴²³ or 'the rough handling of a white girl by Moors'.⁴²⁴ The American studio First National's *The Sea Hawk* (Frank Lloyd, 1924), had 'the scene showing Sir Oliver's captives from England being sold as slaves in Algiers' shortened,⁴²⁵ and even Indian productions were not immune, such as *Vimala* (Chandulal Shah, 1925), which had the line 'Oh God! Be merciful and relieve us from the foreign yoke' omitted.⁴²⁶ This scrutiny would even extend to the word 'strangers' replacing the word 'foreigners' in the line, 'Foreigners are treacherous',⁴²⁷ and in Rangoon, even a film like *Our Girls and Their Physique* (Geoffrey H Malins, 1920), which had been passed by the other Indian censorship bodies, was deemed only fit for 'a limited audience of artists'.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Ibid..

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Larkin, Emma, p. 76.

Calcutta was similarly censorious, and also had one eye firmly on the representation of British authority, judging the Hollywood film *A Guilty Conscience* (David Smith, 1921) as 'lower[ing] the prestige of the government in the eyes of uneducated cinema-goers'.⁴²⁹ Lines that were omitted for the same reason included 'then our masters will be our masters no longer. The reins will be in our hands and we will drive them as they have driven us', from *The Stranger's Banquet* (Marshall Neilan, 1922),⁴³⁰ and the intertitle 'the sport of kings and other non-essentials' from *Tail Light* (Fred Hibbard, 1923).⁴³¹ Decisions based on race-related concerns appear to have been more prominent in this region however, with *The Man From Brodney's* (David Smith, 1923) having six separate instances of the word 'white' omitted,⁴³² and 'I never hoped to see a white man suffer unmerited torture. In time you will come to understand something of an Indian's feeling towards the white race', removed from *The Mine With the Iron Door* (Sam Wood, 1924).⁴³³ Graham Cutts' *The Rat* (1925) had 'instances where a negro [is] seen with a white girl'⁴³⁴ omitted, and it was this fear of miscegenation that was by far the most censored theme, as was the case in other Empire territories. For example, *The Pell Street Mystery* (Joseph Franz, 1924) had the intertitle 'Chinaman loves white lady' omitted,⁴³⁵ and Stoll's *The Chinese Bungalow* (Sinclair Hill, 1926), which was adjudged to deal with

⁴²⁹ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

an undesirable theme, depicting in a very unpleasant light both from the point of view of their moral and general character, two Englishmen and two Englishwomen as compared with a Chinaman who is generally shown in a favourable light. It also introduces the vexed question of marriages between western women and Orientals.⁴³⁶

By 14 September 1927, James Crerar had tabled a motion at the Indian Legislative Assembly to set up a committee to investigate film censorship in India. Interestingly, the focus of the debate did not so much dwell on censorship, as it did a clause inserted into the resolution by Crerar. This stated that the committee should 'consider whether it is desirable that any steps should be taken to *encourage the exhibition of films produced within the British Empire* generally and the production and exhibition of Indian film in particular (my italics).'⁴³⁷ This was in line with the recommendations of the 1926 Imperial Conference, in which the Federation of British Industries and the Board of Trade had recommended this goal to all territories of the Empire.⁴³⁸ As Lala Lajput Rai put it during the Assembly debates, 'I find that the real object of this resolution is practically to afford a kind of protection to films produced in the British Empire.'⁴³⁹ The Secretary to the Government of India's Home Department, HG Haig, countered this notion, arguing that '[The Indian government's] interest in this matter, so far as they have any interest at all, is simply that the proportion of films showing

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Jaikumar, Priya (Spring 2003), 'More Than Morality: The Indian Cinematograph Committee Interviews (1927)', *The Moving Image*, 3: 1, p. 88.

⁴³⁹ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

empire conditions, empire manners, should be increased',⁴⁴⁰ and the motion was passed.

The result of this was that in October 1927, the Indian Cinematograph Committee was established, chaired by a former High Court Judge in Madras, T Rangachariar, and it set to work on a comprehensive survey of Indian cinema culture over the following year. The committee's final report recommended the establishment of a central body to help train and support Indian filmmakers, with a similar operation controlling film censorship, both located in Bombay.⁴⁴¹ Despite this, the suggestion that special preference should be reserved for films from the empire was rejected, as it argued that it was 'no good to India to substitute artificially one class of non-Indian film for another'.⁴⁴² This was not to say that the committee was opposed to foreign films being shown in India. In fact, the evidence of the American Trade Commissioner in India, Charles B Spofford Jr, was warmly received, particularly his assertion that

Who really imagines that the images of humanity produced in Hollywood are likely to replace or blow everything native out of the soul of India or Europe? American films are meant to entertain, whether in India or any other part of the world.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Anon (8 August 1928), 'Indian Films Report: Promotion of Home Industry', *The Times*.

⁴⁴³ Mazzerela, William (2009), 'Making Sense of the Cinema in Late Colonial India', in Kaur, Raminder, & Mazzerela, William (eds.), *Censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, p.63.

While this was the public face of the inquiry, in private, it was well known that India could ill-afford to antagonise the American film industry – for a start, the US provided 80 per cent of the films shown in its cinemas.⁴⁴⁴ Yet, there was a sense across the responses provided to the ICCs' questions that films should be considered on their own merits, without artificial support from the state. For example, the President of the Bombay Board of Film Censors would argue that 'films produced within the Empire must stand or fall on their own merits. If the Americans do better they must win'.⁴⁴⁵

The Times published a one-page review of the report, which identified that 'The cinema could, indeed, play a valuable part in promoting adult education and the principles of health and other "nation building" qualities'.⁴⁴⁶ It also acknowledged that the committee believed that 'complaint[s] that too much delicacy is shown to communal, racial, political, and even colour considerations is, in the view of the committee, not altogether unfounded'.⁴⁴⁷

From its opening pages, the tone of the report was one of openness to foreign influence, in opposition to much of the pressure that had been brought to bear on both Indian and British authorities in the preceding years:

[W]e desire to place on record our unanimous conviction that the general effect of the Western film in India is not evil, but, on the

⁴⁴⁴ Jaikumar, Priya (Summer 2002), 'An Act of Transition: Empire and the Making of a National British Film Industry, 1927', *Screen*, 43: 2, p. 131.

⁴⁴⁵ Jaikumar, Priya (Spring 2003), p. 88.

⁴⁴⁶ Anon (8 August 1928), 'Indian Films Report: Promotion of Home Industry', *The Times*.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

whole, is good...We are satisfied that Western films, in spite of their defects...tend to open the eyes of the uneducated to other and more advanced conditions of life...[and] they tend to broaden their minds and widen their outlook.⁴⁴⁸

And, in a telling reversal of the concerns held by the British:

positives when they are exported abroad should be subjected to censorship before they are allowed to leave the country, for we have heard complaints , that *Indians are depicted in an objectionable light* in some of the films exhibited abroad (my italics).⁴⁴⁹

This shift in focus to a concern over the indigenous Indian film industry and the perception of Indian culture worldwide, precipitated by the Indian Cinematograph Committee, meant that protectionist prejudices previously held by the British would now also transfer to the Indian authorities. Only a few months after the publication of the Cinematograph Committee's report, Maulvi Abdul Matin Chaudhury asked at the Indian Legislative Assembly, in response to rumours that American film companies had combined to open a distribution base in Bombay, 'In view of the threatened American invasion of the Indian cinema trade, what steps do Government intend to take to check this menace[?]'.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Indian Cinematograph Committee, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Indian Cinematograph Committee, p. 81.

⁴⁵⁰ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

The Cinematograph Committee report was brought to the Legislative Council, and the following motion was tabled:

[That] immediate effect be given to the recommendations for the Indian Cinematograph Committee by the imposition of the “quota system” and the introduction of legislative measures requiring compulsory registration of persons and companies engaged in producing, exhibiting, distributing and importing films, or owning or controlling cinema houses, the predominance of Indian elements being assured in all such concerns.

However, despite the thoroughness and perceived legitimacy of the report, the house was divided 39 for and 39 against, and with the President’s casting vote going against the motion, it failed.⁴⁵¹

The collapse of these measures ensured that the issue of stricter film censorship in India quickly fell out of favour, and as the British government proceeded with its own protectionist measures after the introduction of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, most commentators in Britain became engaged with critiques of their own country’s film industry. Yet this endeavour ensured that the British government had become more aware of the difficulties of reaching and manipulating its empire markets, and went some way to convincing it of the growing importance of supporting its own indigenous film industry. Its efforts in regulating the Indian film industry mirror similar

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

events on British shores, most specifically the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act. Priya Jaikumar argues that

Britain's regulation of its cinema as a national commodity in 1927 was the construct of a state attempting to compensate for its growing vulnerabilities. It was also the product of a state in the habit of authority, asserting the only form of control possible within a transforming powerscape.⁴⁵²

Britain's failure to exert this authority in India speaks volumes about its declining influence both in the cinema industry, and throughout its empire. However, according to data from the mid 1930s, Asia represented only 3.13 per cent of the world film market, with Australia, New Zealand and South Africa responsible for 2.12 per cent.⁴⁵³ This marginal figure attests to the importance, even at this relatively early stage in the cinema's development, of America, and by extension, English language films. If British cinema was to survive in this climate, it required government support, and great hope lay with the newly-proposed quota system.

⁴⁵² Jaikumar, Priya (Summer 2002), p. 121.

⁴⁵³ Bakker, Gerben (2005a), p.30.

Chapter Eight: The Cinematograph Films Act, 1927

The President of the Board of Trade, Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, circulated his memorandum on the British Film Industry to Cabinet in February 1926. This proposal, which was the first serious consideration of quotas for British film and was to become the Cinematograph Films Bill, was leaked to the *Daily Express* for publication on 22 February, prompting concern,⁴⁵⁴ but on 26 February Cabinet met as agreed to discuss the proposals. It was decided that Cunliffe-Lister should make a pronouncement regarding the agreed points, and while these eventually became legislation, the tone of two of these areas is particularly interesting. The opening point was that 'We recognise the national importance of British Films',⁴⁵⁵ the first such official acknowledgement of the influence of the cinema and the government explicitly linking this to a national concern. The Leader of the Opposition, Ramsey MacDonald, had previously presented a speech in which he implored British filmmakers 'to use our own natural scenery; to use our own history, which is more magnificent for film production than the history of any other nation in the world; to use the romance, the folklore, the tradition that has never been exploited for the film industry',⁴⁵⁶ but Cunliffe-Lister's pronouncement was the earliest official recognition from a government source.

It is clear that the genesis of the Cinematograph Films Bill was not a purely economic decision, but one that considered issues of cultural importance, in marked

⁴⁵⁴ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/52.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-39* (3rd Edition), London: IB Tauris. p. 63.

contrast to how the eventual bill was presented in the following year's King's Speech, where it was explicitly linked with measures to combat unemployment.⁴⁵⁷ The economy was paramount in these considerations, with Cunliffe-Lister confirming that he 'would welcome American cooperation, but [The Board of Trade] should keep in close touch with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order not to close the door to taxation of the American film industry if it is found that it is feasible and desirable and the moment appropriate.'⁴⁵⁸ It is likely that this insertion was made in response to an intervention by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), which had offered a deal that would see Hollywood subsidising 40 per cent of one British film, with guaranteed American distribution, for every 30 American films distributed in the UK (equivalent to supporting about twenty British films per year).⁴⁵⁹ However, while this offer was 'welcomed', there is no evidence of any serious consideration of this deal, and the political implications of going ahead with this type of arrangement would have most likely proven disastrous for Baldwin's government.

Cunliffe-Lister presented a further memorandum to Cabinet in January 1927, regarding his readiness to produce a draft bill on cinema legislation. In this document he asserted that

The trade has had full opportunity of securing an increased exhibition of British films by a voluntary effort. It is admitted that this effort has failed.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/184.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Thompson, Kristin, p. 118.

⁴⁶⁰ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/184.

And further:

The Americans will not help unless there is legislation. They were nervous of legislation, but as legislation was delayed, they are hoping that nothing will be done; and if they can have the market for nothing, why should they incur the expense of collaborating with producers here?⁴⁶¹

And then the first official definition of a 'British' film:

[A] film made by British nationals or by companies registered in the British Empire and British controlled, and the scenario at least should be the work of a British author. The film should be produced in the British Empire by a personnel predominantly British.⁴⁶²

Cunliffe-Lister, in his earlier appeal to Cabinet in February 1926, had declared 'I can hardly emphasize (sic) too strongly the importance of establishing a British film industry.'⁴⁶³ But his reason for this was revealing:

In Great Britain and throughout the Empire, nearly every film shown represents American ideas, set out in an American atmosphere (and in American language). The accessories are American houses,

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/178.

American motor cars, American manufactures, and so forth. I have no wish to attack or malign the American industry, but cinematograph audiences everywhere are made up of the most impressionable sections of our community, and it seems to me of the utmost importance that they should see at least some proportion of British films – of importance for our prestige, for our trade, and – I am assured – for our morals. I am therefore convinced that a British film industry would be a national asset.⁴⁶⁴

Discussing the concerns of exhibitors regarding his proposal for a quota of British productions, he said, 'If that fear were realised, it might kill the movement for British films in the same way that the voluntary "British film week" of 1923, by giving a chance to the worst films, did so much harm.'⁴⁶⁵ Lord Ashfield, Chairman of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd, wrote a letter to Cunliffe-Lister on 22 January 1926, which suggested his company was 'prepared to cooperate in assisting the British film industry', which it transpired included the establishment of a 'modern studio'.⁴⁶⁶ In addition, Hollywood wanted to support the idea:

I received encouraging evidence of America's growing anxiety as to the movement, and desire to help so that the movement should not become anti-American...I have reason to believe that if we show a determination to establish the industry here, they will cooperate.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

On 2 February 1927, the Cabinet met to discuss Cunliffe-Lister's proposals. The plans, generally approved by those present, included the prohibition of 'blind booking' and limitations on 'block booking'.⁴⁶⁸ More importantly, he floated the idea of a minimum quota of British product levied at renters, initially set at 7.5 per cent in 1928, but rising by an undetermined number each subsequent year. A quota on exhibitors would follow this about six months later. The criterion of 'Britishness' was defined as any film made by British nationals or by British controlled companies registered in the Empire where the personnel were predominantly British.⁴⁶⁹ On 2 March 1927, the Board of Trade circulated a draft Cinematograph Films Bill to the Home Affairs Committee, which included the provisions requiring quotas and limitations on blind and block booking. Quotas were firmly identified, rising from 7.5 per cent for renters in 1928 to 25 per cent by 1935 (starting in 1929 for exhibitors and rising to 25 per cent by 1936). However, the Board recognised that it was section 26, relating to the definition of 'British' that was the most contentious. The draft bill suggested that the film must be made by 'a British controlled company', photographed in a studio in the British Empire and that no less than 75 per cent of the payments made to personnel were to be paid to 'persons domiciled in the British Empire'. In addition, there was a stipulation that the 'author of the scenario, or of the original work on which the scenario is based, must be a British Subject'⁴⁷⁰.

In a letter to the Dominions Office on the same day, the Board of Trade expressed its concerns about the interpretation of section 26, and opened a dialogue that would

⁴⁶⁸ Whereby cinemas were booked months in advance by the same company.

⁴⁶⁹ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

seek to solve these issues. The Board suggested that films made by 'British protected persons, or nations of a territory in respect of which a mandate has been accepted by H.M., or films of which the author...is such a person will not be able to claim treatment as British films.'⁴⁷¹ This was seen to be particularly important in cases such as Palestine, and the Board argued for the stipulation to be extended to cover Empire territories whose individuals were not British subjects. However, the Board believed it would not 'meet with any favour if we were to attempt this by suggesting that 'British subject' should be defined along with "British Empire" in section 26(5) [of the Bill].'⁴⁷² It was clear that there was a reining in of resources, artificially created by distinguishing between films made by people born in Britain or 'legitimate' Empire nations and 'British subjects' who were not. The concept of 'Britishness', with regard to the cinema, began to take on financial qualities that went beyond artistic or cultural arguments. This was a significant ideological development when compared with the more expansive conception of 'Britishness' expounded only a few years earlier in the Imperial and Colonial conferences. However, to establish this, the Board of Trade had to offer a definition of 'Britishness', with which to discriminate one 'British' subject from another. The suggestion was to change article 26 (3) to '[The film] must have been made by one or more persons being British subjects or natives of any territory in the British Empire, or by a British controlled company.'⁴⁷³ The Dominion Office did not object to the suggestion⁴⁷⁴ but insisted that if it was not merely to be 'window dressing', then the definition of 'British controlled company' should be amended, because companies with dummy shareholders could

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

be formed to evade the provisions of the bill.⁴⁷⁵ In addition, the phrase 'To persons domiciled in the British Empire' was described as an 'absurdity', because '(1) Persons are not domiciled in an Empire and (2) domicile is a highly technical expression and incapable of ascertainment without considerable trouble – of in many cases [without] any degree of certainty at all.'⁴⁷⁶ Other aspects of the bill were also problematic; sub-clause (3) enabled renters who had a surplus of British films to transfer their additional quota to another renter. This loophole had the potential for abuse by American distributors, who could heavily promote their prestige productions in cinemas suffused with their cheaper, 'British' pictures that had been rushed into production. However, with Cabinet agreeing the bill with minor alterations from the Home Affairs Committee,⁴⁷⁷ it was felt that it could be presented to Parliament in its current state.

This major development was to have repercussions permeating every aspect of the industry for at least the next decade, and was instrumental in creating better conditions for British film production. Set up with the express purpose of developing Britain's fledgling industry, it has come to be remembered as the creator of 'quota quickies,' which despite being generally derided for their perceived inferior quality, provided a number of opportunities for qualifying producers to get their films made, and most importantly, exhibited. This powerful financial incentive even extended beyond the smaller indigenous production companies it was established to support, with the Canadian government in particular concerned that its productions would not

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

be recognised as part of the quota, even it was part of the British Empire. The problem hinged on the Act's provision that some films were exempt from classification as quota products. These were:

- a) Films depicting wholly or mainly news and current events;
- b) Films depicting wholly or mainly natural scenery;
- c) Films being wholly or mainly commercial advertisements;
- d) Films used wholly or mainly by educational institutions for educational purposes;
- e) Films depicting wholly or mainly industrial or manufacturing processes;
- f) Scientific films, including natural history films.

While productions fitting the above criteria could be eligible for the exhibitor's quota, perversely, they could not be classed as part of the renter's quota. The Canadian government objected that their productions were produced as governmental work by the Motion Picture Bureau of the Department for Trade and Commerce and were not to be classed as commercial ventures; therefore, they should be able to be registered as quota films for both renters' and exhibitors' quotas.⁴⁷⁸ These films, part of the 'Seeing Canada' series, were presented as films of 'national value' and their great impact on the tourist industry was noted.⁴⁷⁹ Interestingly, the Canadian Embassy in London contacted LS Amery to recommend the potential effects that film could have had on providing an 'added impetus' to Britons immigrating to Canada

⁴⁷⁸ TNA: PRO: BT 64/86.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

and the subsequent trade benefits that might have incurred.⁴⁸⁰ In a further letter, the Embassy argued that a 'well known distributor' would put their productions in at least 600 cinemas if they [were] eligible for quota provisions.⁴⁸¹ Despite these assurances, the Board of Trade did not believe such films had 'special exhibition value' - the phrase inserted into the Act as a clause for films that were a 'good box office proposition' - to gain quota recognition. As these films gave 'no impetus to the filmmaking industry in the Empire' (due to being short films with little commercial value) it was felt that special dispensation was not appropriate in this instance. What is interesting about this is that although Canada was a legitimate member of the Empire, and thus had historically strong trade links with Britain, it was still restricted under the terms of the Act from benefiting financially and culturally from British legislation. Despite the obvious reciprocal benefits such an endeavour could have produced (especially in light of the economic concerns expressed by Empire colonies and Dominions with regard to importing British films), the government still refused to accept 'foreign' material into the country on the same terms as 'British' product.

Despite this, the Act was paradoxically instrumental in *increasing* foreign involvement in the British film industry. In particular, this originated from American companies who produced 'quota quickies' in order to secure distribution for their prestige products on which they made the majority of their money. Regardless of this and other criticism that has been levied at the 1927 Act, if one accepts its definition of a 'British film',

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

then it was undoubtedly a success - by 1932, the indigenous film industry had increased its market share in British cinemas to 24 per cent.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² Street, Sarah (1999), 'British Film and the National Interest', in Murphy, Robert (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p.19.

Chapter Nine: 'Our Language in Our Country'

In hindsight, the Cinematograph Films Act was just one product of a general vein of opinion in Britain during this period, one that tended towards consolidation, protectionism and consensus, and ended up logically with the formation of the National Government in 1931. Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labour Party and newly elected Prime Minister in 1929, said in his first debate in Parliament that year:

I wonder how far it is possible, without in any way abandoning our party positions...to consider ourselves more as a council of state and less as arrayed regiments facing each other in battle.⁴⁸³

In many respects, this was the view taken by American distributors, who were willing to forge close links with British companies in order to reap the perceived financial benefits that the Cinematograph Films Act promised. Instead of competing with each other, several alliances were formed between British and American companies during the Twenties and Thirties, encompassing distribution deals, loans of actors and most importantly, the formation of British production arms of American companies.

Clearly, the Cinematograph Films Act instigated a direct reappraisal of what could be defined as 'British'. Prior to this Act, there was an unclear sense of what a 'British' film actually was, confounded by the paradox that British films were minority productions, and were seen by audiences as essentially 'foreign' to their weekly

⁴⁸³ Lee, Stephen J (1996), *Aspects of British Political History 1914-95*, London: Routledge, p. 98.

visual diet from Hollywood. Legislation of this sort was intended to rally the industry around a clearly defined vision of what a British film should be. Of course, it was also offered as a means to allay the concerns resulting from what was perceived as a pernicious foreign influence – namely America. In fact, the opening sentence of the Act describes itself as ‘An Act to restrict blind booking and advance booking of cinematograph films’,⁴⁸⁴ a clear rebuke to the American industry. The other competing solutions – one based on an inappropriate and ill-thought form of taxation, and the other on a false belief in the power of the Empire to support an indigenous industry – did not come to fruition in their purest form, but did help shift the debate about ‘Britishness’ from a parochial, class-focused discussion into an economic issue with an international perspective. This shift was only entrenched further by the introduction of sound in 1929 and the opportunity for the public to hear the voices of the characters on screen. Hence, many British filmmakers viewed the end of the 1920s as a chance to address the criticism that had been levelled at the industry, neatly summarised by WS Lamb’s comments regarding the recently completed Indian Cinematograph Committee Report:

It can be said now that English producers, with all their technique and experience, have not yet produced, they are not now producing, films that can be called truly English or British. There is an alien influence, and, in order to get something really national into their films, they have to uncreate.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ Anon (1928), ‘The Cinematograph Films Act, 1927’, *Kinematograph Year Book*, p.188.

⁴⁸⁵ BL: L/PJ/6/1747.

However, as an opposition to the pervading Americanisation of British cinemas, even the quota was not enough. John Grierson, who would become the lead arbiter of the British documentary movement in the 1930s, wrote in 1927 of the 'English and American Attitudes to the Public', quoting Joseph Schenck as saying 'quotas, contingents and the like don't mean a damned thing.' Grierson's contention that this was a reflection of 'the American certainty that until England is prepared to study the cinema public...no final threat can come from her, either in the international market or her own',⁴⁸⁶ seems a particularly incisive indictment of the period. Inadvertently, the measures introduced by the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act would lead to an upsurge in the amount of foreign influence on films produced in this country. Due to events beyond the control of the legislators, the 1930s would develop into a profoundly important decade in the development of 'Britishness' and an identifiably British film culture, with allegedly 'British' 'quota quickies' seen alongside major 'British' films from studios such as Gaumont-British and London Films. Both of these, however, were heavily influenced by foreign capital, ideas and personnel.

The introduction of sound in late 1929 further linked American interests to the British industry. The 'dull subtitling, poor quality post-synchronization (sic), and amateurish dubbing of foreign imports'⁴⁸⁷ quickly led to the public preferring English language productions. The concern for many was that this language would be delivered in the American idiom. As one critic argued, 'if the films we are promised under the quota system do not improve on the debased and hysterical standards now so slavishly followed, the Americanisation of the screen will be complete, even if the British quota

⁴⁸⁶ TNA: PRO: BT 64/86.

⁴⁸⁷ De Grazia, Victoria (March 1989), 'Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920-1960', *Journal of Modern History*, 61, p. 69.

is raised by 100 per cent.⁴⁸⁸ This type of criticism was nothing new - commentators had been disparaging the use of English in films even before they included audible words. Intertitles were often lambasted for improper use of English, or more generally for reducing the language to a series of limited, functional words that provided the essential information and little else. An article in the *Saturday Review*, entitled 'The Degradation of English', was as early as 1920 criticising the 'style of English conversation [which] to-day becomes increasingly like that of a cinema caption. Like the cinema caption, it serves its purpose; it is brief and violent and strange; and its vocabulary is almost unknown to the dictionaries.'⁴⁸⁹ This criticism extended to press releases, of which critics were scathing about the ability of British studios to adequately promote their products, and more importantly, the influence of the Americans on this promotional material.

Many of the tales sent out for publication are of not only an incredible triviality, but are written in execrable English conforming to no known laws of composition, grammar or punctuation. Nor is allowance made for psychological differences between the American and the English public.⁴⁹⁰

But with synchronised sound, the number of words used increased tremendously and the pronunciation of this language was now also apparent to the audience, who

⁴⁸⁸ Clayton, Bertram (March 1928), 'Much Ado About the Movies', *Fortnightly Review*, 123: 735, p. 380.

⁴⁸⁹ Anon (July 1920), 'The Degradation of English', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 130: 3378, p.69.

⁴⁹⁰ 'VS' (February 1930), 'Light on the Film Trade II – Publicity and the Picture', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 149: 3878, p. 220.

were wont to copy what they heard. In fact, in the same year as the Cinematograph Act was passed, AG Atkinson could comment in the *Daily Express* that

the bulk of picture goers are Americanized (sic) to an extent that makes them regard the British film as a foreign film...We have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intents and purposes, are temporary American citizens.⁴⁹¹

Other critics were even harsher:

[The film] debases the currency of language, and that vile disservice is the result of the “talkie”, that bastard art form which has supplanted the silent film with all its magic powers...The actual words of Transatlantic jargon are offensive; their sound intolerable.⁴⁹²

Much has been written about how this technical innovation ended several careers, but there has been much less discussion about how this event affected the public's sense of identity. Most obviously, for the first time British accents could be heard on screen, and because intertitles were no longer necessary, neither was there any requirement for the audience to be literate. But by the introduction of sound, Britain was finally able to contribute an aural indication of ‘Britishness’ that in an instant established conceptions of class and enabled filmmakers to draw on the verbal

⁴⁹¹ De Grazia, Victoria, p. 53.

⁴⁹² Herries, CP (July 1932), ‘Are Films Degrading?’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 154: 4002, p. 40.

tradition that had until that point been denied to them. Naturally, filmmakers had always subtly hinted at nationality via the use of title cards and music – in fact, the 1925 edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Music for Pictures* explicitly stated that

[If] you have a picture playing, for instance, in China, you will have to find all your accompaniment material in existing Chinese music, both to cover atmospheric situations as well as to endow your characters. If there happens to be two Chinese characters and one English you will of course cover your English character, by English music for the sake of contrast.⁴⁹³

But the profound difference in being able to hear dialogue, and the impact this had on the public can be seen in its rapid rise to ubiquity – by 1930, only one year after the first British synchronised sound film was released, 63 per cent of British cinemas were wired for sound.⁴⁹⁴ More profoundly, ‘All the talkies shown in Britain in the first year of the sound film were in English’.⁴⁹⁵ By 1933, the BBFC recorded only one silent feature film out of 1800 films submitted, and it noted that ‘by far the majority of exceptions entailed the elimination of objectionable sounds or inadmissible words.’⁴⁹⁶ The impact of sound is also vividly recorded in the series of ‘motion picture autobiographies’ collected by JP Mayer via an advertisement in *Picturegoer* in the 1940s. Time and time again, his respondents referred to the importance of dialogue

⁴⁹³ Rapee, Erno (1925), ‘The Music For Your Picture’, *The Encyclopaedia of Music For Pictures*, New York: Belwin Inc, http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/1_erape2.htm (Accessed 11 May 2011).

⁴⁹⁴ Street, Sarah (1999), p.19.

⁴⁹⁵ Low, Rachael (1997), *Filmmaking in 1930s Britain* (2nd Edition), London: Routledge, p. 91.

⁴⁹⁶ BFI: BBFC Annual Report (1933).

on their cinema experiences in the Thirties, and appeared to show a preference for those that disliked the American accents heard in Hollywood films and instead favoured listening to British voices. Thus, while a 19 year-old male student would recount that 'There is nothing I dislike more than an imitation of Hollywood in British films; imitation in dialogue, accent, and action',⁴⁹⁷ an 18 year-old girl would say that

I still talk to myself, and films have undoubtedly influenced me here because I always talk to myself in an America accent, and often think that way too. Most of the films I have seen were American because American films are the best.⁴⁹⁸

A 23 year-old housewife would also recount:

I prefer *good* British films to American ones, because they always seem more natural, though a British film can be spoiled for me by a too, too devastatingly superior accent from the chief actress (the actors don't seem to offend so often in this way).⁴⁹⁹

And a 25 year-old female telephone operator would say that

in most cases my favourite films have been British films or American made films with British stars. Therefore I definitely prefer a film in

⁴⁹⁷ Mayer, JP (1948), *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*, London: Dennis Dobson Ltd, p. 141.

⁴⁹⁸ Mayer, JP, p. 20.

⁴⁹⁹ Mayer, JP, p. 224.

which I can listen to the perfect English diction which is so refreshing after the Yankee jarring effect.⁵⁰⁰

It was this 'effect', one that clearly labelled films as 'British' or 'foreign', that had the biggest impact on the cultural portrayal of identity, and was an issue that would shape and challenge the filmic representation of Britain and its relationship with the rest of the world throughout the 1930s.

It was therefore unsurprising that the impact of sound, and its perceived threat to the national language and character, quickly came to the government's attention. As the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Oswald Mosley was charged with finding solutions to Britain's unemployment, and it was for this reason that on 1 September 1929 Adrian Brunel wrote to him about the employment of Britons in the film industry, which Brunel regarded as of 'urgent national importance.'⁵⁰¹ Brunel enclosed a booklet entitled 'The Political Significance of the Present Position in the British Film Producing Industry'. In this document he lamented at first America's stranglehold on the world's film market (which he put down to the British film industry not being a protected trade) and the refusal of the British government to create an official film department at the end of the First World War.⁵⁰² Brunel argued that 'At the close of the War we found ourselves with a depleted, impoverished, old fashioned and out of practice film production industry, impeded at every step by officialdom.'⁵⁰³ Britain's response was compared with the 'Kontingent Regulations' instigated in Germany in

⁵⁰⁰ Mayer, JP, p. 227.

⁵⁰¹ TNA: PRO: BT 56/10.

⁵⁰² Brunel had managed the putative government film department during the Great War; Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

1922, a quota that 'required all importers of films into Germany to cover their imports with home product on a 50/50 basis.'⁵⁰⁴ Anti-Americanism was also clear:

[America's] general method had been to come into the production field of the country making the effort to establish itself, and by the excessive prices she could pay for artists, directors, technicians, equipment etc., send the prices up so high that they became beyond the purses of the local producers. Then, signing up on contract the best of the available talent, she would export it all to Hollywood.⁵⁰⁵

And further:

Whatever the causes of the introduction and sudden success of talking films in America, I think it cannot be controverted that despite American trade lenders' pious assertions to the contrary, she has utilised this invention to crush the British film industry.⁵⁰⁶

He cited the excessive cost of synchronised sound equipment while American recording apparatus had been installed in British cinemas for American films.⁵⁰⁷ 81 American electrical engineers had arrived in Britain during the summer of 1929 to put this equipment into the picture houses,⁵⁰⁸ and to the public, and the industry, the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 76.

coming of sound was clearly seen as 'American'. In addition, Thorold Dickinson, travelled to America to study sound technique in 1929 and used this experience at Elstree in 1930.⁵⁰⁹ Brunel did not show a talent for predictions however:

American voice records badly. English voices record infinitely better – whether cultured or “uncultured”. A recent British talking film...was a hundred times more tolerable to our ears than any American talking film dealing with the same class of people...[I can] claim to be *au courant* with the intricacies of American dialect and yet a vast proportion of what is said in American talking films is utterly unintelligible to me, as well as offensive to my ears...even if it were prejudice, I maintain that it would be defensible, for it is our language in our country.⁵¹⁰

Nonetheless, Brunel's key concern about American influence was the degree of financial control US companies had over British exhibition, arguing that 'American money, which seems to be behind so many supposedly national enterprises, is buying up control of English cinema-theatres',⁵¹¹ a process which if realised, would have exacerbated the already paralysing practice of block-booking. Brunel claimed that the purpose of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act had been 'not merely to establish a British film production industry', but had been also to 'counteract foreign influences in our theatres', 'check the Americanisation of our Dominions', and 'to fight

⁵⁰⁹ Perkins, Roy and Stollery, Martin, p. 66

⁵¹⁰ TNA: PRO: BT 56/10.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

anti-British influences in foreign theatres by representation of British [obscured; probably 'life'] and the British viewpoint through our own productions.'⁵¹² Brunel's solution to this was to

enlist the active support of people of influence who will do something to counteract the foreign influences that are out to crush this medium of national expression and help us to prevent the complete undermining of the British film production industry...The British Cinematograph Production Industry is of national importance; it is, like the press, a mouthpiece of national expression. It must not pass into foreign control.⁵¹³

Mosley was in support of this aim, and agreed to help if Brunel could find 'anything that can be done in this direction'.⁵¹⁴ However, Mosley's resignation in May 1930, after the government's rejection of his proposals to deal with unemployment, meant that this promise was never acted on. More importantly, by the early 1930s, concerns over the 'slanguage' used in American pictures were beginning to abate.

The American accent, moreover, has not in practice proved such an obstacle as was anticipated. It is no longer possible to say that people go to the talkies out of curiosity or for the sake of novelty; they go because they like them, and they accept the American

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

accent philosophically as a temporarily indispensable ingredient of the entertainment.⁵¹⁵

Some critics even preferred the American voice, believing it to be particularly suited to the cinema:

The American language contains an excellent slang vocabulary and one that is well suited to the peculiar quick-fire dialogue that is necessary to provide a fitting background for films, especially comic ones. We take a long time to say things, and the frequent rustling in the cinema during a British picture shows that the lines which savour of the theatre (most of our dialogue writers are dramatists) are not nearly concentrated enough to fit the new medium.⁵¹⁶

But of course, by then, the transition to sound was doing more to establish the English voice in Britain's cultural landscape than Mosley could have achieved, albeit a voice that was consistently heard with an American accent. Nonetheless, British producers aside from Brunel were beginning to embrace this American influence, and in 1929 Michael Balcon and electrician George Gunn visited America to study sound techniques for Gaumont British.⁵¹⁷ In the same year, *The Manchester Guardian* recorded that much of the criticism afforded to the American voice was a peculiar form of cultural arrogance, noting 'it is a curious form of snobbishness that

⁵¹⁵ Arsons, IM (March 1930), 'The Future of the Talkies', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 149: 3883, p. 382.

⁵¹⁶ Forrest, Mark (September 1932), 'The British Cinema (2)', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 154: 4013, p. 329.

⁵¹⁷ Low, Rachael (1985), p. 127.

makes us insist on American players speaking English, when we ourselves feel no compunction in presenting *Macbeth* with a Cockney accent.'⁵¹⁸ And thus, what had been a consistent strain of anti-Americanism throughout the decade now started to shift - The Americans, with their 'functional' English and popular culture, had begun to appear less perniciously foreign than their European counterparts - who coincidentally, were about to become much more closely integrated with the British film industry.

⁵¹⁸ RH (6 April 1929), 'The Week on the Screen: The Coming of Sound', *The Manchester Guardian*, p. 9.

Chapter Ten: 'British Rubbish': The Post-Quota Twenties

The Board of Trade figures on imports and exports of cinematograph negatives, showed that in 1927, Britain imported £909,900 of negative films, reducing to only £797,559 by 1929. By the first nine months of 1930, this figure had dropped dramatically to £273,674, compared to £662,048 during the first nine months of 1927. Also, in 1927 British export of films totalled £8,717, which was up to £16,448 by 1929.⁵¹⁹ These figures at first suggest that the quota worked; It had succeeded in reducing imports and increasing the export of British made films. Some even felt that this was beginning to diminish the influence of Americanisation:

[Before the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act] The theatres were British, the audiences were British, but the films were for the great part American. To-day all this is in process of change... Science completed the process when it invented the "talkie." The British audience stood the American picture, much as it laughed at times over the grotesque mistakes that were made, but it cannot stand the American voice. It wants English as it is spoken in England, and slowly but surely it is getting it.⁵²⁰

However, in a prescient criticism of the quota system, RD Charques argued 'If, as is the case today, [the quota system] results merely in increased production and an unimproved artistic standard, its temporary economic advantage is likely to be a

⁵¹⁹ Oakley, Herbert S (January 1931), 'The Luck of the British Film', *Fortnightly Review*, 129, p. 77.

⁵²⁰ Oakley, Herbert S, p. 73.

great nuisance in the end.'⁵²¹ Linked to this notion of artistry, was what was by then becoming a common criticism, that questioned whether this increase in British films was producing authentically 'British' productions:

One of the most extraordinary things about British pictures is that, as a whole, they have never developed what one may call for want of a better word, a British spirit. In recent years it is possible to count on the fingers the pictures that one can really feel are British and not just weak imitations of what the Americans have seen fit to give us, or else weak imitations of the German psychological and technical influence...⁵²²

By the end of the 1920s, two companies had managed to rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of 'Black November' to dominate the British film industry, and their approach to the 'British' question was indicative of how the trade would develop over the next ten years. The first was British International Pictures at Elstree, run by John Maxwell, who had bought a controlling interest in 1927.⁵²³ The second major player was the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation Ltd, established in 1927. Gaumont owned Ideal Films Ltd, W & F Film Service Ltd, had a controlling interest in Provincial Cinematograph Theatres and the General Theatre Corporation, and was eventually linked with Gainsborough, formed in 1928. But it was British International Pictures that dominated late 1920s British filmmaking. Maxwell had made his name in

⁵²¹ Charques, RD (April 1929), 'British Film Production', *Fortnightly Review*, 125: 748, p. 533.

⁵²² Collier, Lionel, quoted in Higson, Andrew (2010), 'Transnational Developments in European Cinema in the 1920s', *Transnational Cinemas*, 1: 1, p. 72.

⁵²³ Sweet, Mathew, p. 77.

Scotland as a distributor and exhibitor, moving into film production in 1927 after buying out the consortium building Elstree film studios. Using his knowledge of film exhibition, by 1931 he had established 160 cinemas in the ABC chain and was able to create a vertically integrated amalgam of BIP, Wardour Films (his distribution arm) and ABC into the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) by 1933.⁵²⁴ Walter Mycroft, the English film critic for the *Evening Standard*, was employed as a literary advisor and scenario editor, although the visual style of the films was subject to a great amount of foreign influence. The Hungarian Alfred Junge became BIP's principal art director, and it also brought in Tim Whelan, Monty Banks and Harry Lachman from America and EA Dupont from Germany.⁵²⁵ The silent years at BIP were productive and high profile, with Dupont's *Moulin Rouge* (1928) and *Piccadilly* (1929) and Hitchcock's *The Farmer's Wife* (1928), *Champagne* (1928) and the *Manxman* (1929). While these were international in scope and ambition, the advent of sound meant that the films produced after 1929 were reined in so that they would appeal primarily to the British domestic market. Legislative pressure from the recently instituted Cinematograph Films Act also led to this situation, with multi-lingual films such as BIP's *Atlantic* (EA Dupont, 1929) not qualifying for registration as British films. However, the raft of these types of British features, which were if not co-productions with Central European companies, were certainly made with European distribution as their primary market, led to them being discussed as part of a 'Film Europe' movement. This loose collection of European studios and artists, took shape in 1924 and lasted until the introduction of sound ensured that

⁵²⁴ Porter, Vincent (30 June 2006), 'Film History, or Cinema History? The Case of John Maxwell', *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, Reading University.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

distribution of foreign language films was no longer viable.⁵²⁶ However, while it lasted, it provided enterprising companies like BIP with the opportunity to make films in multiple-language versions, and further muddled the waters of what comprised a British film, while the attention of the press focused on the ‘threat’ from America.

As the largest filmmaking concern in Europe in the 1920s, UFA, led by Erich Pommer, was integral to much of this activity. Pommer argued that ‘It is necessary to create “European films”, which will no longer be French, English, Italian, or German films; entirely “continental” films, expanding out into all Europe and amortising their enormous costs, can be produced easily.’⁵²⁷ By December 1927, Gaumont had signed a reciprocal distribution deal with UFA, which ‘was hailed in Britain as the first such major contract for a British firm.’⁵²⁸ These links would lead to several productions in which Pommer’s vision would be fulfilled - at least in content, if not necessarily financial success. One of the earliest collaborations under this agreement, Geza von Bolvary’s *The Ghost Train* (1927), was a case in point. Made by a British studio (in this case, Gaumont’s sister company, Gainsborough) in tandem with UFA, it was helmed by a Hungarian director, filmed in German and based on a recently successful British play by Arnold Ridley. For the few years that this movement lasted, these types of productions were common, but it was its influence on the style of British filmmaking, and the way that it opened the doors to the British film industry for Central European filmmakers, that was its biggest impact.

⁵²⁶ Thompson, Kristin, p. 105.

⁵²⁷ Thompson, Kristin, p. 113.

⁵²⁸ Thompson, Kristin, p. 116.

E. A. Dupont was one such director whose career benefitted from the fluid international transactions of the 1920s. His career has often been seen as emblematic of the cultural links between British and Central European cinema in this decade, and his second production made in Britain, *Piccadilly*, is a key example of this. The film's melodramatic exposé of London's night-life, centred on a love-triangle between a Chinese dancer, a night-club proprietor and his girlfriend, was in keeping with much of the portrayal of urban life in British cinema up until that point. The star (although she was not billed as such on its initial release) was the Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong, and Dupont took every opportunity to emphasise her character's 'exotic' Chinese background. This fascinating film suggested that deceit, violence and sex were all aspects of metropolitan life, and more importantly it explicitly linked these notions to foreigners, following in a tradition established by successful literary work such as Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights* (1916), and the novels of its English screenwriter, Arnold Bennett, which had touched on similar themes previously. As in the 1910s, the foreign woman was the catalyst for these illicit activities, with the audience encouraged to take a voyeuristic pleasure from her story, before being offered the moral reassertion that came with her death at the end.

The various Central European connections fostered by BIP, Gaumont and Gainsborough, with the later addition of London Films, were together to reinvigorate the British film industry and for the first time challenge Hollywood at its own game. Yet, despite nurturing these links, they did not neglect their quota requirements. In 1929, the excess of British 'long' films registered was 230 per cent, and while this declined drastically the next year, it was still 70 per cent over in 1930 and never went

lower than 44 per cent in 1932.⁵²⁹ This was due to the films being distributed by British companies – for example, Gaumont registered 206 feet of film in 1933-34 when its quota liability was only 44 feet. In the same year, Wardour released 109 feet compared to a liability of only eighteen, and this pattern was maintained amongst British Lion, Pathé and others. In contrast, the American distributors had a much closer link to the films produced and their liability. Columbia, MGM & Paramount matched their liability exactly (37, 98 and 108 feet respectively), and First National, Fox, RKO and Warner Brothers exceeded it by only one foot (46, 66, 89 and 50 respectively).⁵³⁰ Only United Artists surpassed it, producing 90 feet of film for a 59 foot liability, but this was due to its unique distribution structure and close links with London.

Data about the number of films released in the UK from 1927 onwards, sheds light on the impact of the quota on British and foreign productions, and helps to highlight both the benefits and problems of the scheme. First, the statistics about UK films as a percentage of total releases is clear on one point – the quota dramatically increased the number of officially classified ‘British’ films released in this country, from 4 per cent in 1927 to 19 per cent in 1930.⁵³¹ While the actual make-up of the production staff and financing streams were often only tenuously ‘British’, the opportunities this investment gave to young British technicians, directors, actors and other personnel, who would not have had the exposure normally reserved for American ‘B’ movies, would help develop an industry that would produce some of the

⁵²⁹ Rowson, Simon (1936), ‘A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 99, p.67-129.

⁵³⁰ Wood, Linda (1986), *British Films, 1927-1939*, London: BFI Library Services, p. 119.

⁵³¹ Wood, Linda (1986), p. 115.

finest examples of British film over the next two decades. Taken on these terms, the quota was an unqualified success. By the end of the 1930s British films constituted just under a quarter of all films released in the UK, and while many have been denigrated as ‘quota quickies’, they formed the backbone of a fledgling industry. But of course, the quota was about far more than increasing the volume of British films. It was also intended to reduce the number of foreign productions, particularly American, that were monopolising cinema venues. But in 1927, while 81 per cent of film releases were from the USA, in 1928 this had only reduced to 72 per cent,⁵³² and this figure hovered at around the low seventies and high sixties for the remainder of the decade. In terms of the numbers of films released, the decline appears more dramatic – in 1927, 723 American films were released in the UK and a year later this figure stood at 558 films – a drop of almost 23 per cent. Therefore, despite almost a quarter less American films being released in the UK in this period, the US market share only declined by 9 per cent.

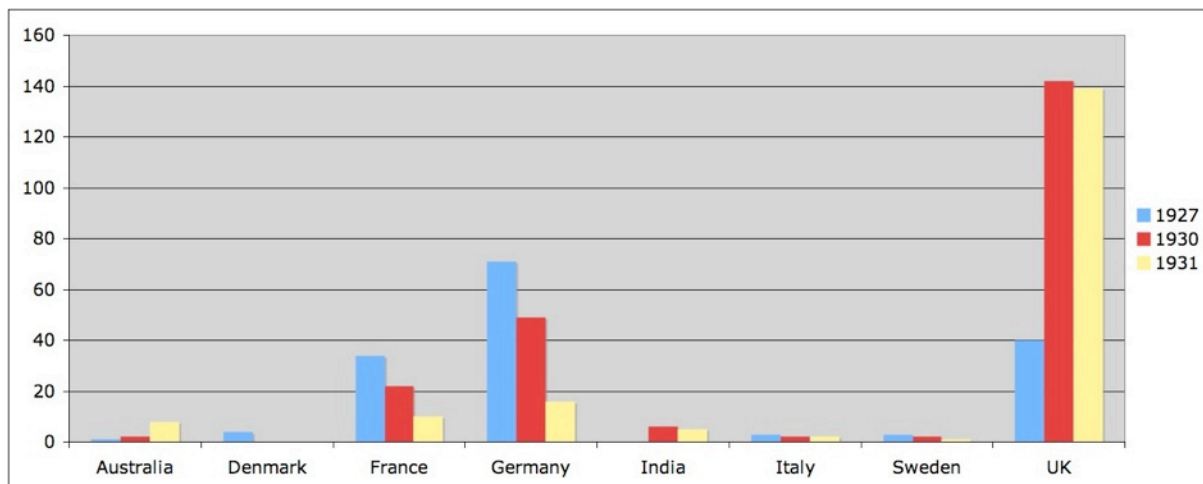


Figure 5: Films Released in the UK by Selected Countries, 1927-1931.

⁵³² Ibid.

It is at this point that data regarding the films released by other foreign nations is instructive. *Figure 5* shows the number of films released by the major film producing nations in Europe, and a few of the Empire nations, in 1927, 1930 and 1931. By 1930, after a couple of years of the film quota, there had clearly been a decline in the amount of work representative of continental Europe, with France and Germany recording slightly higher percentage declines than the US (35 and 31 per cent respectively). Clearly the film quota had a roughly equivalent impact on all foreign nations, and recorded an increase for the Empire nations, such as India and Australia, that benefited from acceptance under the quota rules as British. But only a year later, ten French films and sixteen German films were released – A decline of 71 and 77 per cent respectively from their 1927 figures. For although the quota, which had been in effect for two years prior to 1930, had made some reduction to the number of foreign films in the UK, a more profound change took place from 1929 that was more effective than any legislation in reducing foreign product – the introduction of sound. Previously, while cinema patrons could watch a French or German film with similar comprehension as they would a UK or US production, synchronised sound ensured that these films would rapidly come to be seen as difficult, ‘other’ or, if played silently with intertitles, as old-fashioned compared to the ‘talkies’. Kristin Thompson argues that by outlawing block-booking and blind-booking in Britain, ‘the government action favoured both British and European films over American’,⁵³³ however, this data suggests that in fact, it was only British cinema that benefitted from these changes, and that Germany and France in particular suffered irrecoverable damage to their opportunities for exhibition in Britain. The quota was thus only effective in two respects; first in that it ensured UK films were not

⁵³³ Thompson, Kristin, p. 127.

completely overrun by American content in the wake of the sound revolution, and second in developing a putative Empire cinema.

Data regarding the leading American distributors of British films in the UK also supports the view that the introduction of sound was more important than the quota in ensuring the increase in the number of British films in British cinemas. Figure 6 shows that in 1929, American majors still had a relatively low distribution of British films, but by 1932 this had dramatically increased - in most cases, at least three times the level of distribution in 1929.

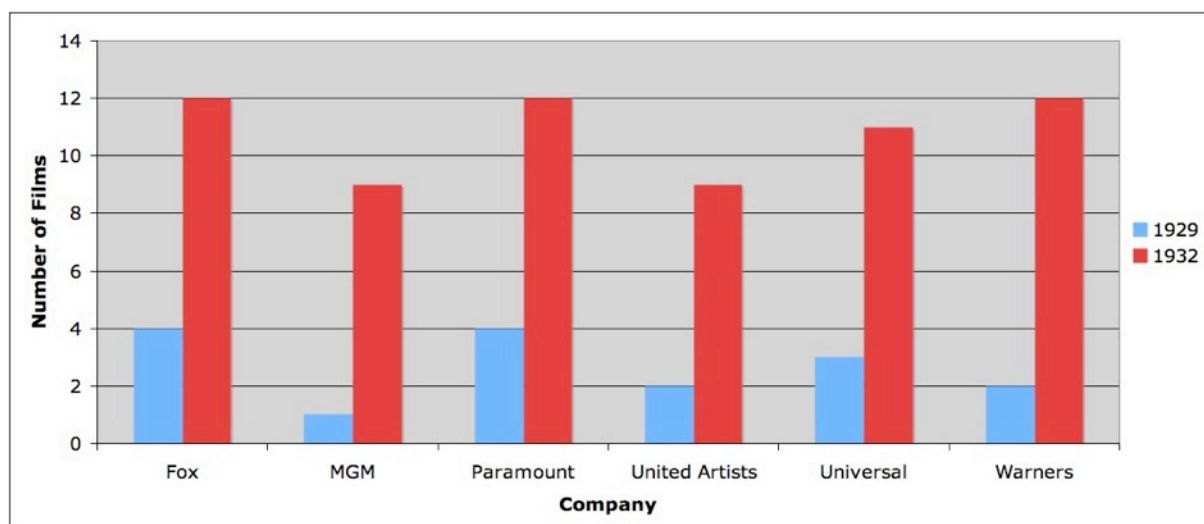


Figure 6: American Distributors of British Films, 1929 and 1932.

By the early 1930s, cinema in Britain was now firmly established as the pre-eminent entertainment medium, however, it was not the quota that would establish the distinctive qualities of national culture, but the technological changes that enabled audiences to hear actors speak in tandem with the image on screen. Although more by accident than design, the introduction of national accents and languages as the result of synchronised dialogue flew in the face of the new internationalism; instead,

audible dialogue precipitated a more parochial film culture, something that was particularly evident in Britain. But for many commentators, that was precisely the point of the quota. As Lord Newton would put it, 'All films are rubbish, but they might as well be British rubbish.'⁵³⁴

⁵³⁴ Clayton, Bertram, p. 373.

Chapter Eleven: 'British' Film Production in the Early Thirties

The 1930s was the decade of political nationalism, when countries across Europe sought to establish strong conceptions of what it meant to be a citizen of the state. Much of the impetus for this resulted from the economic slump at the end of the 1920s, but while these political imperatives were important, this was also the decade that saw massive developments in telecommunications, transport services and electricity, each of which contributed to a belief that 'nations' were more closely connected within and without their respective boundaries than ever before. By October 1931, Ramsay MacDonald's National Government had been elected with a 493-seat majority, and maintained power until June 1935, further entrenching the sense of collective endeavour. As had been the trend throughout the twentieth century, leisure time for the majority of the population increased, and by 1931 the census, for the first time, recorded a majority of men aged 65 or over as 'retired'⁵³⁵. While unemployment was high in the early half of the decade, for those in work real wages increased by over 50 per cent. Due to this, spending on non-essential items in working class houses rose to sixteen shillings a week⁵³⁶, and the public consistently spent over 20 per cent of their yearly recreational expenditure on trips to the cinema.⁵³⁷

Yet despite these optimistic signs, Paul Rotha would comment in 1930 that, 'The whole morale of the modern British cinema is extravagantly artificial.' He laid the

⁵³⁵ Clarke, Peter, p. 137.

⁵³⁶ Briggs, Asa (1999), *A Social History of England*, London: Penguin Books Ltd, p. 310.

⁵³⁷ Sedgwick, John and Pokorny, Michael (2005), 'The Characteristics of Film as a Commodity', in Sedgwick, John & Pokorny, Michael (eds.), *An Economic History of Film*, London: Routledge, p. 8.

blame for this on what he perceived to be an unjustified amount of praise and support lavished on British films:

If a few critics had consistently written the bitter truth about the British film, if they had criticised it ruthlessly and stringently according to its deserts, I am convinced that this country would have revealed at least half-a-dozen thoroughly capable, intelligent film directors and a group of perspicacious, courageous producers... Instead, there have been British film weeks and national film campaigns which have nourished the cancer in the industry. As it is, the British film is spoon-fed by deceptive praise and quota regulations, with the unhappy result that it has not yet discovered its nationality...The British film lacks conception. It has no other aim than that of the imitation of the cinema of other countries.'⁵³⁸

While the examples presented in earlier chapters suggest that Rotha may have turned a blind eye to much of the critical disapproval garnered by British films, his analysis was indicative of how the debate about British cinema would develop over the decade. For rather than vilify external competitors, such as was the case with Hollywood in the 1920s, in the Thirties the gaze turned inwards, to focus on the enemy within - identified as the foreign filmmaker working in Britain.

At the start of the 1930s, Gaumont-British and the Associated British Picture Corporation, continued to dominate the industry. Both attracted international

⁵³⁸ Rotha, Paul (1930), *The Film Till Now: A Survey of the Cinema*, New York: Jonhathan Cape & Harrison Smith Inc, p. 226.

personnel, mainly from Western Europe, after embarking on a series of co-production deals or collaborations with other European companies. Maxwell's attention had already turned to the more reliably lucrative fields of distribution and exhibition, and so Gaumont were able to take a lead in production, poaching from Maxwell notable filmmakers and technicians, such as Hitchcock. Isidore Ostrer announced an Anglo-German co-production policy with UFA in May 1932, although these films did not qualify for British quota.⁵³⁹ In addition, there were continual rumours that American interests (in particular, the Fox Film Corporation) were controlling Gaumont. In Parliament, questions about this first began to be asked on 21 April 1931, where John Remy Remer brought to the attention of the House that the American Telegraph and Telephone Company and the Western Electric Group had, by subsidiary companies, obtained control of Gaumont's operations. This prompted the President of the Board of Trade, W Graham, to circulate a statement detailing who owned Gaumont's shares, and showing that of the 10,000 that carried voting rights, 5,050 were owned by people of British nationality.⁵⁴⁰ The issue refused to die down, however, and there were further questions on 19 May 1931, 22 December 1932 (in which the suggestion that Fox was involved was first raised) and 23 February 1933. It seems that by the terms of the company, non-British shareholders were denied voting rights and so the Ostrer family kept the controlling interest.⁵⁴¹ Nonetheless, the persistent rumours about Gaumont's financial affairs were indicative of the importance ascribed to the notion of internal foreign influence during this period.

⁵³⁹ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 132.

⁵⁴⁰ HC Deb (21 April 1931) Vol. 251 cc785-7.

⁵⁴¹ Ryall, Tom (2001), *Britain and the American Cinema*, London: Sage Publications, p. 41.

The films Gaumont produced did not help to alleviate these concerns, as their foreign influences were often explicit. *The Ghoul* (Todd Hunter-Hayes, 1932) is a good example of the Anglo-European style typified by Gaumont during the Thirties, and was itself the result of a deal with an American company, Universal Pictures, that enabled the loan of its main horror star, Boris Karloff, and assured Gaumont of American distribution as well. The film depicts the story of Mahmoud, an Egyptian searching in Britain for a jewel called, 'The Eternal Light', famed for bringing immortality to the person who is in possession of it. Mahmoud discovers that it has been passed to a Professor Morlant (Boris Karloff), who is going to present it to the idol Anubis and thus gain eternal life. By the end of the film, Morlant has risen from the grave (revealed to be due to being buried alive, rather than any supernatural event) to claim the jewel after his servant steals it – only to have the police retrieve it and order restored. The plot features a very distinct distrust of foreigners, despite this, at times, being performed with humour (as in the scenes between Dragore, an Egyptian, and the British servant Kaney – who spends the majority of her screen time questioning him about his experiences in his home country), and the employment of a range of non-British production staff.

Its cinematographer, Gunther Krampf, was rapidly becoming a regular in the British film industry, as were several other German émigrés. At this time, technicians were usually signed up for individual films only, however, Krampf's case was unusual in that he had a long-term contract with Gaumont, which Tim Bergfelder points out was only available to art directors or cinematographers, the areas in which German technicians had an international reputation and thus could receive a work permit

for.⁵⁴² Krampf was not alone - by 1935 every major British production company had a Continental European cinematographer under contract,⁵⁴³ highlighting further the visual influence produced by foreign involvement. Krampf was joined by the German art director, Alfred Junge, who was a former art designer for the Berlin State Opera. His input on the set design is visible in almost every shot, from the detail in Cedric Hardwicke's office (shelves stacked to bursting point, visibly buckling under the weight) to a dramatically staged funeral procession. Junge's work, coupled with that of Krampf and the American director, Thomas Hayes Hunter, meant that the film's visual aesthetic was created predominantly by non-British crew. Perhaps one of the reasons for this, as Bergfelder suggests, is due to the fact that Gaumont's studios were based in areas where it wasn't possible to have any outdoor facilities (Shepherd's Bush and Islington). This resulted in the art department having much more importance than usual.⁵⁴⁴ Many of Gaumont's ostensibly 'British' films had similarly strong foreign creative influences, most notably in its series of some of Alfred Hitchcock's most celebrated British films, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Secret Agent* (1936) and *Sabotage* (1936), each of which benefited from the wide range of non-British technicians employed at Shepherd's Bush.

However, there was one company, established in the 1930s, which would surpass Gaumont in terms of both financial success and the international complexion of its

⁵⁴² Bergfelder, Tim (1996), 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German Film Technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s', in Higson, Andrew (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, London: Cassell, p. 23.

⁵⁴³ Gough-Yates, Kevin (1999), 'Exiles and British Cinema', in Murphy, Robert, *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p. 172.

⁵⁴⁴ Bergfelder, Tim, p. 27.

personnel. Presided over by Hungarian émigré, Alexander Korda, London Films was founded in February 1932 and within a year had reached enviable commercial heights with the most profitable British film of 1933, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda, 1933). Korda and his brothers had worked for Paramount in Hollywood and it was Paramount's need for quota film that led to his engagement in London. The Paramount connection was very fruitful, securing funding for a slate of up to twelve films in addition to the services of Charles Laughton, and Ludovico Toeplitz, director of the Cinecittà studio in Rome, provided the final finance necessary for *Henry VIII*, in return for becoming joint managing director.⁵⁴⁵ The budget was set at between £55-60,000, and production began on 17 May 1933. The final budget ran to over £93,000, but the film reaped a massive return, earning almost £215,000 by September 1933.⁵⁴⁶ Its success resulted in a seventeen-picture distribution deal with United Artists, with London films retaining 75 per cent of takings.

Henry VIII set the mould for *London Films'* success, and remained its most recognisable and profitable production. Despite the film's reputation for fervent 'Britishness', the American pressbook for *Henry VIII* is interesting, in that the majority of the posters and ghostwritten press notices avoided addressing the issue of nationality at all. One article argued that the 'humor (sic) is neither English nor American, but universal',⁵⁴⁷ attempting to disavow any suggestion that nationality should be a barrier to Americans considering watching the production. In a similar

⁵⁴⁵ Drazin, Charles (2002), *Korda: Britain's Only Movie Mogul*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, p.97.

⁵⁴⁶ Drazin, Charles, p.102.

⁵⁴⁷ BFI: American Pressbook for *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.

vein, an example review entitled ‘Laughton Superb as King Henry VIII in Amorous Mood’ claimed that Alexander Korda was a ‘notable *English* director’⁵⁴⁸ (my Italics), an assertion that did not bear scrutiny for critics such as Charles Davy, who despite this was still able to offer the film a grudging acceptance:

[It] should be observed that a film directed by a Hungarian and photographed by a Frenchman (Georges Perinal) can hardly be acclaimed as evidence of pure British genus. But our native geniuses may well feel grateful for the handsome advertisement “Henry” has given to the entire British film industry.⁵⁴⁹

Paul Rotha displayed a similarly mixed response in a piece for the *New York Post*:

Generally speaking, [The Private Life of Henry VIII] has received an unprecedented ovation from the press here as the dual result of its undoubted excellence and a carefully-planned long-range publicity campaign...it is to the ever-lasting disgrace of our producers here that it has been left to a charing Hungarian, schooled first in Vienna and Berlin and then in Hollywood, to come to London, form a small company and with discrimination select a bouquet of talented

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Davy, Charles (December 1933), ‘The Private Life of Henry VIII’, *Bookman* 85: 507, p. 439.

technicians and actors to appear in a picture about British history and traditions.⁵⁵⁰

A year later, Korda attempted to repeat the formula that had led to this initial success with *The Private Life of Don Juan* (Alexander Korda, 1934). Its failure - the film made a loss of over £60,000 - established that for Korda's films to succeed in Britain they would have to appeal to supposedly 'British' themes. While Korda liked to think of himself as a maker of 'international films' that would reach as wide an audience as possible, most of his subsequent productions were based on stories with an obvious British subject matter, and were far more popular with British audiences. London Films was therefore to all intents and purposes a prime example of a British film company, one that had seen incredible early success and which had suggested that the British film industry could be competitive with Hollywood. Despite the critics' initial tentative praise of its work, London Films became increasingly controversial, igniting debate about the level of British involvement in its productions and facing repeated accusations about breaking quota restrictions. What initially appeared to be a brilliant vindication of the Cinematograph Films Act, would by the latter half of the decade receive a hostile reaction from the main film industry union and be under investigation from the government. The crux of the controversy centred on the amount of foreign involvement in the company, particularly in the key creative roles.

London Films employed the highest proportion of non-British workers of any British film company in the 1930s, and in many instances this was a natural part of running an internationally recognised business. While there was a core of non-British

⁵⁵⁰ Rotha, Paul (1958), *Rotha on the Film: A Selection of Writings About the Cinema*, New Jersey: Essential Books Inc, p 123.

production staff in many creative roles, the most high-profile appointments were in the fields of acting and direction. For example, by 1935, the respected French director René Clair was paid a salary of £300 per month plus £100 per month expenses. In addition, he received 4 per cent of the profits accruing from the three motion pictures he was contracted to make.⁵⁵¹ Clair's financial deal paled in comparison to that of William Cameron Menzies, who signed to direct *Things to Come* (1936) only two years later on 28 March 1936. London Films agreed to pay the American director \$1000 per week (the equivalent of just over £200) for not less than 40 weeks.⁵⁵² In fact, a clause was installed within his contract that ensured London Films had first option on extending his deal by a further year – but this would be at a rate of \$1500 per week, rising to \$2000 per week (just over £400) should the option be taken for one more year after that.⁵⁵³ This lucrative agreement highlights the regard Korda had for American directors, and his belief that the public would respond to the prestige that hiring Menzies would bring - However, once again, this film was a box-office failure, making £110,000 less than it cost to produce and further reinforcing Korda's resolve to make explicitly 'British' pictures.

The criticism endured by Korda and London Films would often revolve around the appropriateness of paying these high salaries to international talent when, as was the case with *Things to Come*, it was not a guarantee of financial success and there was a British worker who was, it was claimed, able to do the same job for less. A good comparison was that of the American actor, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and the

⁵⁵¹ BFI: LFP C/023.

⁵⁵² BFI: LFP C/087.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

British actor Ralph Richardson. Fairbanks' first contract, for *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (Paul Czinner, 1934) was drafted on 15 August 1933, offering \$5000 (just under £1180) for expenses, and \$2500 per week up to a value of \$12,500 (Just under £3000 in five weekly instalments of £600). In addition, he was given approval of the shooting script and a guarantee that his name would appear 'twice the size of any other', all for the secondary role.⁵⁵⁴ By 16 September 1933, he had a 5 per cent deal on the profits that guaranteed him to take away not less than \$22,500 (or just over £5300).⁵⁵⁵ In contrast, Ralph Richardson's contract of 7 December 1934 offered him a minimum of £3000 for 24 weeks' work.⁵⁵⁶ By 10 December 1937, he had a supplementary contract for £400 per week,⁵⁵⁷ rising to just over £428 for the subsequent year and tying him in to four features (*The Divorce of Lady X*, *South Riding* (both Victor Saville, 1938), *Q Planes* (Tim Whelan & Arthur Woods, 1939) & *The Four Feathers* (Zoltan Korda, 1939).⁵⁵⁸ A later film, *The Lion Has Wings* (Adrian Brunel, Brian Desmond Hurst & Michael Powell, 1939) was completed outside of the agreement, for the nominal sum of £700. He was promised 7.5 per cent of the profits of *Q Planes*,⁵⁵⁹ but even so, in 1939 he was still earning over £100 less for leading roles than Fairbanks had earned six years earlier for playing the secondary part. This is not to say that Fairbanks' arrival was universally disparaged - on the contrary, many critics were pleased to have a popular actor in Britain:

⁵⁵⁴ BFI: LFP C/037.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ BFI: LFP C/106.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

The presence of Mr Fairbanks, and others like him, who have recently come over here with every intention of trying to remain, will infuse into the industry much practical knowledge which, for one reason or another, it has been acquiring without their aid very gradually.⁵⁶⁰

The Rise of Catherine the Great also featured the respected Hungarian actress Elisabeth Bergner, wife of the Hungarian director, Paul Czinner. They had made their names in Germany, but being Jewish had decided to immigrate to London at Korda's request in 1932. London Films had wanted them to produce an English and German version of the same picture for Pallas Film in return for 15 per cent of the net profits for the English negative and 35 per cent of the profits for the German negative (with a guarantee of RM140,000).⁵⁶¹ The Polish cinematographer Rudolph Maté was signed on for 9400F, and the German Carl Meyer was hired as scriptwriter for both versions, but by June 1933 these contracts had been scrapped and replaced with one for Czinner to direct an English Language film starring Bergner, which became *Catherine the Great*. In return, Czinner and Bergner received £2000 plus 35 per cent of all net profit generated by the production outside of the UK and its colonies, the USA, China and Japan – where they received 30 per cent.⁵⁶² *Catherine the Great* was a troubled production, with Korda and Czinner's relationship becoming strained mainly due to delays in filming, which eventually led to co-financiers Gaumont-British pulling out of the deal and Czinner and Bergner launching legal action to recover

⁵⁶⁰ Forrest, Mark (September 1933), 'Films', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 156: 4066, p. 355.

⁵⁶¹ BFI: LFP C/006.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

£13,658 of unpaid salary and damages for breach of contract.⁵⁶³ Needless to say, *Catherine the Great* was not as great a success as *Henry VIII* and Czinner and Bergner never worked for LFP again.

Korda had hoped that another regal narrative would appeal to a similar audience to that which had attended in their thousands for *Henry VIII*. However, he had been warned in a letter from Simon Rowson that he would have to strengthen its claims to 'Britishness', if he was to meet quota requirements and, by extension, be successful at the box office:

It will be necessary also that the other principal characters in the cast should be played by English actors, otherwise the cumulative effect of Bergner, Czinner, French studios, French technicians etc., will be so overwhelming as to make it impossible to claim for it otherwise than as a foreign picture with certain English-speaking characters.⁵⁶⁴

This view was becoming more common as Korda's use of foreign personnel became more obvious. By the mid-Thirties, London Films was even bringing in foreign film footage – *Sanders of the River* (Zoltan Korda, 1935) included 80 metres from a German production, *Fliegende Schatten/Flying Shadows*, (Felix Basch, 1916), which led to some distribution difficulty when an extension to the rights to this footage was

⁵⁶³ BFI: LFP C/006 (viii).

⁵⁶⁴ BFI: LFP C/006 (ii).

sought after the advent of the Second World War.⁵⁶⁵ Despite these concerns, and the expense of paying for foreign actors, directors and footage, Korda's approach was more pragmatic than he was often given credit for. If a £20,000 film was produced in Britain, it could not recoup its profits from the home market alone. Therefore, an appeal to an international audience was not a choice or planned strategy – it was an economic necessity if Korda wished to make a big budget production. His collection of Central European personnel ensured a demand for his products throughout the Continent, but if London Films was to sustain this level of production, it had to look across the Atlantic.

In order to break the American market, Korda accepted a role on the United Artists board in September 1935 and attempted to get it to base some of its productions at his newly-opened Denham Studios the following year. United Artists had to produce a number of 'British' films in order to meet Britain's quota restrictions, and a deal with London Films was an ideal opportunity to fulfil these requirements. It agreed to support Korda on his drive towards bigger budget prestige pictures, with a contract that committed him to a minimum of four films per year, but a maximum of six to ensure that London Films did not supply United Artists with low grade 'quota quickies'.⁵⁶⁶ This policy resulted in United Artists achieving average sales of more than £73,000 per film by 1936, over £50,000 more than its closest rival MGM. However, due to MGM's vast distribution slate (59 films compared to United Artists'

⁵⁶⁵ BFI: LFP D/018.

⁵⁶⁶ BFI: LFP D/044C.

21), MGM still made just under £1,900,000 overall, eclipsing UA's £1,541,176.⁵⁶⁷ MGM's influence lay within the ABC circuit, and along with Warner/First National provided most of the non-British content shown in ABC cinemas. Fox made a massive investment in Gaumont-British, leaving United Artists to pursue the final one of the 'big three' exhibitors, Odeon, establishing a 25 per cent share by 1935.⁵⁶⁸ From this foothold, United Artists began to distribute Korda's British products, a sound business decision based on the financial evidence at hand and the phenomenal success of many of Korda's prestige films. United Artists' link with Korda was undoubtedly the reason why it performed so well in Britain, and Korda's output appealed to specifically British audiences.

In fact, United Artists' mid-Thirties successes generally were equally weighted in terms of American and British product. For example, in 1935 three British United Artists films were in the top ten grossing pictures of the year, compared to two American United Artists productions, with the ratio becoming two to one in favour of British United Artists films in 1936. By 1939, United Artists released only one top ten grossing film, the British production *The Lion Has Wings*. The financial success of the involvement with United Artists led to Korda's next move towards competing with Hollywood; the creation of Denham Studios. Denham opened for business in 1936, the same year Korda became a naturalised British citizen, and formed the home for most of Korda's subsequent productions. Designed by the American, Jack Okey, it also provided the base for several offshoots from Korda's parent company, most of

⁵⁶⁷ Miskell, Peter (30 June 2006), "Selling America to the World"? The Rise and Fall of an International Film Distributor in its Largest Foreign Market: United Artists in Britain, 1927-1947', *The Emergence of the Film Industry in Britain*, Reading University.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

which controversially used high amounts of foreign personnel. Pendennis Productions, formed by Korda and Erich Pommer in March 1936, produced its first film, *Fire Over England* (William K Howard, 1937), at Denham in 1937. The film was directed by the American William K. Howard, and featured camerawork by the Chinese-American James Wong Howe. The second film produced by Pendennis, the Wolfgang Wilhelm penned *Farewell Again* (Tim Whelan, 1937), was directed by the American Tim Whelan with cinematography again provided by Howe. Victor Saville Productions followed swiftly after, and was officially registered in April 1936. It had the Hungarian producer Joseph Somlo on its board of directors, and produced its first film, *Dark Journey* (Victor Saville, 1936) as a vehicle for Korda's German contract star Conrad Veidt.⁵⁶⁹

Despite this, it has been the common assumption, first propagated by Rachael Low, that 'The more European filmmakers arrived at Denham, the more eagerly [Korda's] films embraced English subjects, English history and literature, traditions and even prejudices.'⁵⁷⁰ Putting aside the question of what constituted an 'English subject', Low was correct in her assertion that Korda aggressively promoted his films as 'British'. While the films seem to support this analysis, Korda's motivations are less clear. It is not self-evident why foreign producers, directors, writers and other artists would so readily embrace the trappings of their adopted culture, regardless of how superficial the level of adoption. Part of the explanation for this can be found in the pressure levied by the industry and government behind the scenes, and for Korda and his contemporaries, these forces, coupled with increasingly challenging financial

⁵⁶⁹ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 220.

⁵⁷⁰ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 221.

conditions, ensured that appeals to the English character were essential to function as a business.

Chapter Twelve: Anti-Foreign Sentiment in the 1930s British Film Industry

The international character of Korda's London Films did not go unnoticed during the 1930s. *World Film News* published details of the nationality of some of the industry's leading figures and lamented that 'On these gentlemen and their creative attitude to our English industries, our countryside, our people (and our banking system), we depend for the projection of our national life.'⁵⁷¹ By the middle of the decade, concerns about the influences of foreigners on indigenous filmmaking had reached the government, and, as in the 1920s, initially the main concern was tax avoidance. However, by then, the net had widened and was not solely focused on American contributions. In 1935, the Inland Revenue sought to address the issue of liability, arising from story rights acquired on a royalty basis providing for a) a lump sum payment plus a percentage of exhibition rights and b) for a lump sum payment on account of the guaranteed minimum percentage of exhibition rights.⁵⁷² Two copies of Gaumont-British contracts were prepared for the perusal of the Chief Inspector of Taxes, CH Rand. These contracts were for the purchase of film rights in the original play *Road House* by Walter Hackett, for a lump sum payment of £2,500, and secondly, a partial assignment of copyright in an original story by Ben Travers, entitled *Man Save the Queen*.⁵⁷³ It was felt by Rand that liability should arise in the latter case, in which the author's usual residence was not in the United Kingdom. However, there was an exemption in place in the 1927 Finance Act for cinematograph production copyright royalties, in order for British renters to avoid

⁵⁷¹ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 43.

⁵⁷² TNA: PRO: IR 40/4738.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

paying royalties on rents paid for films produced abroad. The Inland Revenue therefore had to determine whether this exemption could also hold true for royalties paid to foreign authors. WB Blatch, was of the opinion that copyright could exist in respect of a film 'whether the producer be British or Foreign' and his view was integral to the drafting of the Finance Act.⁵⁷⁴ The Inland Revenue solicitor supported this, and argued that the exemption related to the owner of the cinematograph film, not the literary copyright of the author of the film's scenario.⁵⁷⁵ An amendment to the Act to this effect was published on 26 September 1935,⁵⁷⁶ and the relative lateness of this amendment, almost ten years after the Finance Act, suggests the difficulties raised by the influx of foreign filmmakers during the early 1930's.

This foray into taxation of foreign film industry employees extended to investigations regarding workers it believed to be avoiding taxation. The key contention was that some film industry personnel were employed in Britain, yet were receiving payment abroad. The first such case to be investigated was that of the German actor, Renate Müller, star of Gainsborough's *Marry Me* (William Thiele, 1932). *Marry Me* was a Gainsborough production, and the studio had hired Müller from the German company Fellner and Somlo. Gainsborough had worked in this way on several previous occasions, but it was drawn to Rand's attention that Müller had not been assessed for tax in this instance, despite being employed to shoot some scenes in Britain.⁵⁷⁷ Müller was requested for interview, but instead sent her accountant, Mr Phipps. Phipps argued that Müller 'did not get anything' from Gainsborough,

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ TNA: PRO: IR 40/6145.

although the Inland Revenue had been told she was paid £2000.⁵⁷⁸ In a heated exchange, the Inland Revenue informed Phipps that Müller had failed to attend an earlier appeal hearing on 13 March, and that unless evidence of the agreement between Muller and Gainsborough could be found the decision would be final. Phipps argued that Gainsborough had paid tax on Müller's previous film, the financially successful *Sunshine Susie* (Victor Saville, 1931), but due to the lack of box office returns generated by *Marry Me* they 'were not prepared to follow a similar course'. The meeting ended with an assurance from the Inland Revenue that it would contact Gainsborough for particulars of the agreement, which revealed that it had indeed paid Fellner and Somlo £2,000 for Müller,⁵⁷⁹ and faced with resistance from Phipps, proceeded to refer the case to the Inland Revenue's solicitor with other similar investigations.⁵⁸⁰

The first of these enquiries involved Madge Evans, who had starred in Gaumont's *The Tunnel* (Maurice Elvey, 1935), a thinly veiled propaganda film about the building of a tunnel between Britain and America. The production's opening score was a conflation of *Rule Britannia* and the *Star Spangled Banner*, and there were various references throughout to the commonality between Britons and Americans. Unfortunately for Madge Evans, that commonality also extended to income tax, and her accountants, Rawlinson, Hunter and Hennaforde were called in to an interview conducted by Rand on 15 November 1935. They had an appeal lodged against the Inland Revenue's demands for £5000 in tax, and Rawlinson's objection was that

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

Evans was employed by Metro Goldwyn Meyer (MGM) and her employment was in the main exercised in America – it was only a period of less than six months that required her to come to Britain for filming. Gaumont's contract agreed to pay MGM \$15,400 for Evans for a period of nine weeks, with an extension granted on the basis of \$1,711 per week. In addition, it was liable for travel expenses and income tax arising from the agreement.⁵⁸¹

Evans had also been referenced in a *Daily Express* article highlighting the issue of tax on foreign workers, as one of several foreign stars signed up to work on British films in 1935. The article stated:

38 front-rank foreign film personalities – stars, directors and writers – have landed in England during the past four weeks. 8 came to play; 30 to work...Some of the 30 workers will earn between them in Britain this summer not less than £130,000...⁵⁸²

After establishing the sense of an influx of foreign film personnel, the article continued:

Some of the film stars allege they are not receiving salaries from the British studios. All they admit is that the studios are paying their travelling and hotel expenses for the trip. Many a foreign star signing up abroad to work in a British picture does not personally enter into

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Anon (19 July 1935), 'Film Stars', *The Daily Express*.

an agreement. The foreign employing company contracts to supply a 'star name' to the British company. When the star comes to London, in some instances his salary, plus the travelling and hotel expenses continues to reach his foreign bank from his foreign employer.⁵⁸³

And then the crux of the issue:

The point the British income tax authorities have to decide, a point they may force to a test case, is whether an artist can be regarded as 'goods' and exchanged between owners upon a simple barter system.⁵⁸⁴

To further confuse the matter, American companies appeared reluctant to produce copies of their agreements, and several letters of correspondence passed between Evans' accountants and the Inland Revenue before a copy was obtained. Meanwhile, the successful German actor Peter Lorre had also lodged an income tax appeal on 15 July 1936, after also being assessed as liable for £5000 for his work on Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* (1936).⁵⁸⁵ In addition, two other artistes represented by Rawlinson, Hunter and Hannaford, Robert Young and Henry Wilcoxon, were assessed and found liable for £5000 and £9000 respectively. Young was also liable for Gaumont's production of *Secret Agent*, as they had borrowed his services from MGM, and Wilcoxon was in breach due to his work on *A Woman Alone* (Eugene

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Although Lorre was assessed under Schedule D as he was not under contract to a company and thus was regarded as self-employed. Evans was assessed under Schedule E due to her contract with MGM.

Frenke, 1936) for Garrett Klement, having been loaned from Paramount. Wilcoxon was an interesting case as he was born in Dominica in the British West Indies and began his career in Britain working for British International Pictures. But after a career breakthrough playing Marc Anthony in Cecil B Demille's *Cleopatra* (1934), he became a Paramount contract player and worked in America. Because he had already returned to the US before the investigation started, the Inland Revenue found it difficult to get in contact with him and could not receive a copy of his Paramount contract.

The Inland Revenue began work on turning these assessments into a test case, and wary of Wilcoxon's obstructive approach, by 1 September 1936 it had decided to focus attention on Evans, Young and Lorre.⁵⁸⁶ On 2 December 1936, the Special Commissioners ruled that Evans was liable for income tax under Schedule E, for contracted staff, however, as Young's case was substantively similar, his assessment under Schedule D for being self-employed was discharged and it was recommended that the other appellants were also reassessed under Schedule E.⁵⁸⁷ By 20 September, Rand recommended patience on progressing with each case, due to the ruling in a recent case, *Bennet v Marshall*, which appeared to suggest the liability should be assessed under Schedule D.⁵⁸⁸ This case severely weakened the Inland Revenue's position, to the extent that by 18 May 1939 Rand would write, 'It may well be that if the Evans appeal had been taken after the Marshall case had been decided the Revenue position would have been found to be much weaker. The other

⁵⁸⁶ TNA: PRO: IR 40/6145.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

cases may have to be given up.’⁵⁸⁹ Due to this weakened stance, with regard to agreeing a liability settlement with Madge Evans’ accountants the Chief Inspector had to suggest the following:

I have no objection to your going a good way towards meeting them in this case, provided that no point of principle is conceded which might be an embarrassment in the event of our taking some other case before the Commissioners.⁵⁹⁰

By 29 July 1939, the Office of the Special Commissioners of Income Tax were to report that Madge Evans’ liability was £1,721 less £221 for expenses, a net total of £1,500, £3,500 less than the original estimate over three years previously.⁵⁹¹ On 20 February 1940 the Marshall case ruled that ‘If the employee’s remuneration is normally received wholly abroad assessment should be under Case V of Schedule D’ unless the duties of the employment were ‘wholly performed’ in the United Kingdom.⁵⁹² This ruling led to the newly appointed Chief Inspector of Taxes, Mr Ounsworth, to clarify the Revenue’s position, stating in 1940 that ‘As these are cases of persons not resident in this country, they cannot be charged under Case V [Schedule D], as the charge under that Case is dependent on residence’,⁵⁹³ and further, that ‘the cost of living expenses is solely re-imbursement of expenses and

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

not assessable.’⁵⁹⁴ The collected papers were submitted for filing on 5 July 1940, and the subsequent year, MGM formally established itself in Britain to produce ‘quota quickies’ and ended much of Gaumont’s attempts to lure American talent to British shores.

In addition to these tax disputes, some parts of the British film industry were also beginning to become disgruntled with the *number* of non-British filmmakers. Transcripts of deputations from the leading film industry union of the decade, the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT) to the Board of Trade, reveal that the union’s political campaign focused directly on what was perceived to be a negative foreign influence on the British film industry, its ideals and, most importantly, the employment opportunities for indigenous technicians. In fact, one of its stated aims was ‘To check foreign employment if a Britisher is available, capable of undertaking the work required by the company.’⁵⁹⁵ The ACT was formed as a registered trade union in 1933, and first consulted the Ministry of Labour in July 1935. Part of the reason for the ACT’s increased pressure during the mid-Thirties was due to the general downturn in the British film industry and its effects on unemployment rates. According to the ACT’s own figures, between October 1936 and August 1937, unemployed technicians registered with the union increased from 40 to 200 persons, nearly a sixth of their total membership. They pressed their desire to be consulted in every case before a permit or contract extension was granted to a foreign worker, but the Ministry felt it could not concede these decisions to any trade union and refused to cooperate. The ACT claimed that in 1935, 110 permits had

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Anon (1934), ‘Trade Organisations’, *Kinematograph Year Book 1934*, p. 136.

been granted to foreign technicians, and although Rachael Low's analysis of the same year was slightly more conservative, the principle remained the same:

As far as mainstream feature films made during the course of 1935 are concerned, examination of screen credits reveals that some 55 senior European film makers and 25 non-Europeans, mostly American, worked on them...It became a bitter joke that to get a job in British films you only needed a foreign accent.⁵⁹⁶

As former scriptwriter and director Eddie Dryhurst recalled in an interview with Roy Fowler, many British workers grudgingly accepted this:

Roy Fowler: Was this noticeable to people at that stage that this foreign talent was coming in? And how was it felt about?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh you couldn't help noticing it, yes, Elstree was almost like - it was almost polyglot you know.

Roy Fowler: Was it a good thing, as they say?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I don't know, that's a matter of opinion I suppose. I don't think it was particularly a good thing, they were not men who had any great contribution to make to the business, most of them, I don't think.

Roy Fowler: What did the indigenous technicians...

⁵⁹⁶ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 28.

Eddie Dryhurst: The indigenous? Well I think they had to put up with it and like it or leave it.⁵⁹⁷

The international composition of British studios was well-established by the middle of the decade, and even a German journalist would remark 'At Elstree, all the Englishmen speak broken German and all the Germans speak broken English. An international hodge-podge language is emerging'.⁵⁹⁸

Throughout 1937, the Home Office recorded allegations brought by the ACT during a series of meetings and letters of correspondence. This dialogue began in June when the ACT Secretary, George Elvin, requested a meeting with the Ministry of Labour to discuss the employment of foreign film technicians. The government's initial position was simple; the British film industry needed 'foreigners who may not be 'aces' in the highest sense, but [were] possessed of some special qualification or technique not available here'.⁵⁹⁹ However, faced with increasing ACT pressure, the Ministry felt it necessary to consult the Post Office Film Unit about foreign involvement in British films. The General Post Office's former director, John Grierson, classified 'aliens' entering the country into three categories:

- A. Technicians of sufficiently high standard to justify indefinite retention.

⁵⁹⁷ BECTU History Project No. 36 (26 April 1988).

⁵⁹⁸ Higson, Andrew (2010), p. 71.

⁵⁹⁹ TNA: PRO: LAB 8/75.

- B. Technicians in respect of whom a permit is justified at the present time, but who might be trained for replacement.
- C. Technicians who should now go, and in regard to whom there might be some doubt whether real justification for granting permission to work here had ever properly existed.⁶⁰⁰

While noticing the usefulness of this in judging applications, the Ministry believed that the general slump in the industry since late 1936 meant that the ACT had several members who were not fit for the job. Nonetheless, according to the Ministry's records, it had

become the normal practice to refuse permits for associate or assistant directors, assistant cameramen, assistant producers and the like, as it is considered that posts of this kind should be filled normally by British personnel in order that the fullest advantage may be derived from the admission of the foreign experts.'⁶⁰¹

Despite this, there were several notable exceptions, such as the internationally renowned director Rene Clair, who was allowed to keep his personal assistant due to their longstanding association and the 'individualistic nature of Clair's work'.⁶⁰² In addition, the Ministry argued that due to 'the heavy slump [in the industry] it has been thought proper not to recommend cancellation in any but exceptional cases until the

⁶⁰⁰ TNA: PRO: CO 323/974/1.

⁶⁰¹ TNA: PRO: LAB 8/75.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

industry revives.⁶⁰³ However, in 1936, 118 permits had been issued to foreign film technicians, in comparison to 25 issued from 1 January to 1 June 1937.⁶⁰⁴ This proved that the employment of foreigners had already dramatically reduced from the previous year, and suggested that British producers were finding British talent to fill most positions. However, the Ministry's breakdown of the 25 new permits into production roles was indicative of the problem as the ACT saw it; of the areas that counted more than one permit granted, directors came out top with five, followed by cameramen and composers with three each. This implied that foreigners filled the most prominent creative roles, and that British creative personnel were being pushed to the sidelines.

Of the companies who were the greatest offenders, *Figure 7* shows clearly that Korda's London Films had the highest number of foreign nationals granted permits in 1936, particularly in the creative roles the report had identified. Five of the company's directors in the previous year were of foreign descent⁶⁰⁵ as were six cameramen. Four scenario writers, two composers and two editors completed the foreign creative dominance that London Films encouraged. Ironically, London Films was perceived to be the one company that put British values and stories on screen more than any other.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ However, an affidavit signed by CF Turner on 16 July 1940 asserts that the majority of the shareholders and company directors on that date were in fact, British; BFI: LFP D/44 A United Artists.

Company	Director	Cameraman	Scenario Writer	Producer	Laboratory Technician	Colour Cameraman	Editor	Dialogue Writer	Associate Producer	Art Director	Music	Colour Expert	Technical Advisor	Dubber	Scenic Artist
Associated Talking Pictures		1										1			
British Chemicalour															
Associated British Picture Corporation		1	1					1							
Jack Buchanan Productions	2			1	1		1	1	2						
Buckingham Films				1											
Criterion Film Productions		1					1								
Denham Film Laboratories					1										
Fox British	1		1												
Gaumont British Picture Corporation		1	1	1						1					
Liberty Films	1														
London Continental				1											
London Film Productions	5	6	4	2	2		2	1		1	2			1	1
Metropolis														1	
Mayflower			1												
New World Pictures	1			1			1								
Pascal Productions			1	1											
Technicolour					6	6						1	1		
Victor Saville Productions	1														
Wainwright Productions	1														
Warners First National	1		1												
Windsor Films				1											
Totals	13	10	10	9	9	6	5	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1

Figure 7. Source: TNA: PRO: LAB 8/75.

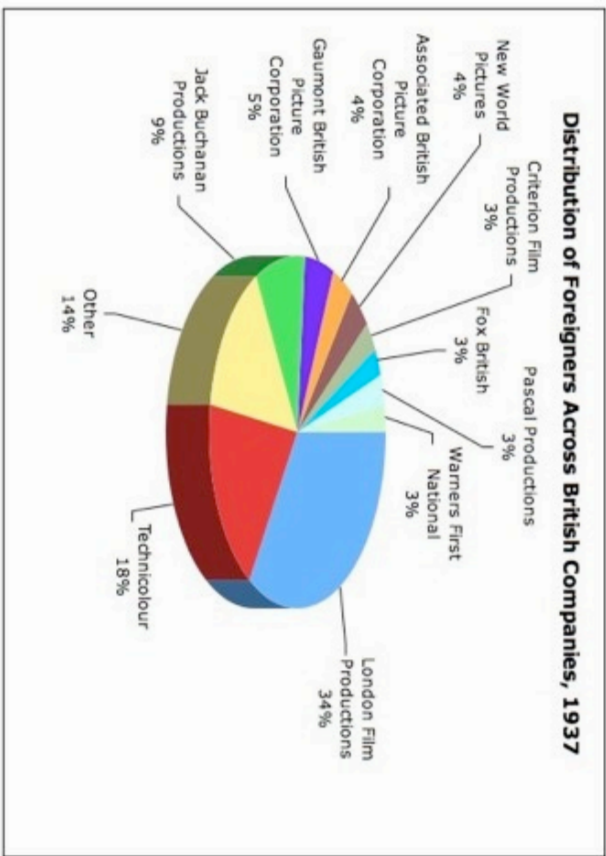
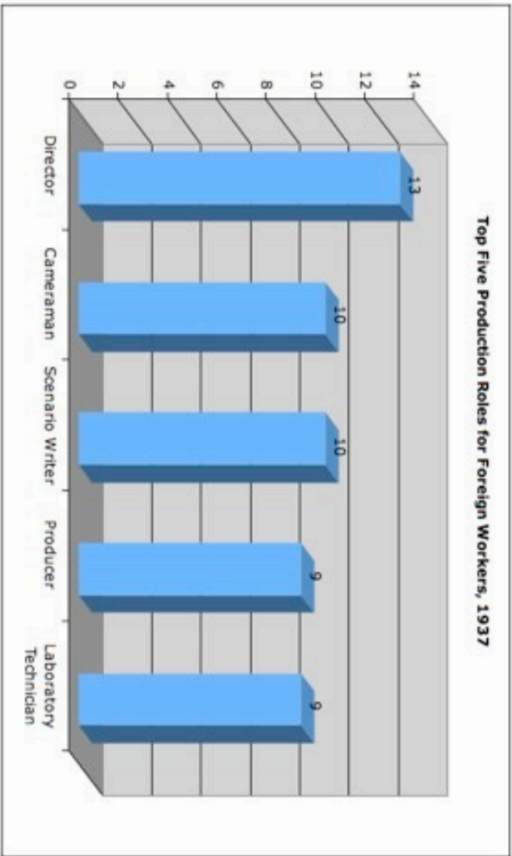


Figure 7 lists in detail other technicians on a permit at London Films, with the qualifying statement that the people identified were ‘departmental heads’ or ‘special technicians’ and had ‘working with them a further 167 British subjects’.⁶⁰⁶ Finally, the Ministry listed all foreign film technicians whose ‘conditions [had] been cancelled’ since 1 January 1936. This document featured several prestigious names, including Robert and David Flaherty (the Canadian director and assistant director of *Elephant Boy* at London Films), Alberto Cavalcanti (the Brazilian born future Ealing Studios director) at the GPO Film Unit and Vincent and Zoltan Korda. To fully explain their case, the ACT sent a formal statement to the Ministry of Labour of 28 June 1937. The crux of their argument was that over 250 British film technicians were unemployed, predominantly in the creative areas that the Ministry’s own findings had conceded were being taken by foreign nationals. They proffered a simple solution – ‘[Permits] to foreign technicians should not be granted when (a) British technicians are available and (b) they are competent to do the job.’⁶⁰⁷ One of their main issues was that most permits were granted on the basis that the foreign national trained a younger, British technician on the job. If this was happening, the ACT argued, then in future, companies should not need to reapply for permits in the same position, as a suitable British candidate would surely have been available.

To detail the point fully, the ACT provided a list of specific cases that named specific appointments of a number of key foreign technicians. This comprised several very subjective judgements, including one that the American film editor Francis Lyon (who had worked on *Things to Come* and *Rembrandt*) was ‘not more competent than

⁶⁰⁶ TNA: PRO: LAB 8/75.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

certain British editors unemployed at the time of granting the permit'. Austro-Hungarian Otto Heller (for whom Capitol-Grafton had applied for a permit), was classed as not to be 'ranked in the first flight of ace cameramen'.⁶⁰⁸ Most surprisingly, there was a complaint about Gunther Krampf's permit for the Jack Hulbert film *Paradise for Two* (1937), describing his camerawork as of a standard that 'could have been done equally' by a British cameraman, and a claim that Denham Studios had 'not a single key technical job held by an Englishman'.⁶⁰⁹ The ACT's ploy worked, and the Ministry looked at each case in more detail. Francis Lyon was granted his permit on 'the understanding that the company would appoint a British editor who would be likely to succeed Lyon' and after assurances that he was 'one of the best editors in the field.'⁶¹⁰ The impact of the Second World War made it difficult to determine if this actually happened (certainly the assistant editors of Lyon's last London Films production, *Knight Without Armour*, did not become fully fledged editors until the 1950s). Otto Heller was also given his permit, with the hope his prestige would help Trafalgar Film Productions Ltd out of financial difficulty - although the company ceased production in 1937. Korda's London films were the most resistant to the criticism, arguing that on account of its belief in Gunther Krampf's technical skill, it would postpone its production if he could not receive a permit, thus resulting in a loss of work for several more British subjects. In addition, they had transferred another foreign technician, the American editor William Hornbeck (who worked on *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Harold Young, 1934)), to Denham Film laboratories to 'absorb' him into the system (although he returned to London

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

Films in 1941 for *That Hamilton Woman* (Alexander Korda), and made a further two films with Korda).

To allay further concerns, the Ministry agreed to meet an ACT deputation on 13 July 1937. The ACT was represented by George Elvin and Thorold Dickinson, with H G Gee, EV Crookenden and WC Pendrey representing the Ministry. Gee established the Ministry's position that due to the inherent unpredictability of the film industry, a company embarking on a £100,000 plus production was unlikely to appoint a comparatively unknown British technician if they could appoint an internationally recognised foreign technician instead. Dickinson contended that if that was to be the case, a scheme should be implemented to ensure these technicians were established and possessed technical virtuosity. Interestingly, his argument was inextricably entwined with notions of 'Britishness', claiming that an American cameraman, Alfred Gilks, who had recently worked on *Thunder in the City* (Marion Gering, 1937) 'was technically poor...[and] owing to his lack of knowledge of England and English customs, he had been quite unable to grasp the *correct* atmosphere...(My italics)'⁶¹¹

Instead, The ACT wanted a scheme whereby a foreign technician, granted a permit on the basis that he or she trained a young British technician for the job, should be compelled to leave the country once the post had expired, enabling the trainee to take on the job. As an example, there was direct criticism of the cameraman Glen McWilliams, an American employed by Gaumont-British on a number of Jessie

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

Matthews vehicles, who had his permit renewed after training Derek Williams, whom the ACT would have liked to succeed McWilliams in the post. However, Pendrey argued that McWilliams's reputation was sound and that he had trained a number of cameramen over the period discussed (including Arthur Crabtree, who would go on to a directing career at Gainsborough) and had been specially selected by Matthews who had been given *carte blanche* to choose her cameraman as part of her contract.⁶¹²

Denham Studios was also discussed, with Elvin arguing that a British technician had never held a key job there, contrasting this with Victor Saville's productions that 'rarely resorted to the employment of a foreigner.'⁶¹³ Once more the Ministry deflected the issue, arguing that the volume of productions at London Films required a high proportion of foreign technicians. A similar argument was used to assuage fears about the rumours of impending MGM productions in Britain, thought to cost up to £1,000,000. The Ministry maintained that although it was likely MGM would employ foreign technicians in key roles, they had still to meet the criteria of being 'aces' in their field. Nonetheless, the ACT argued that two foreign black and white cameramen, the American Harry Strandling Sr. and the Frenchman George Perinal were receiving training from two colour experts, William Skall and Aldo Ermini, who had been 'let' to London films from Technicolor and whose permits were granted on condition they would train British subjects. It was found that these technicians were working with eight British trainees in addition to Strandling and Perinal at London Films, therefore rendering their activity acceptable. Finally, the ACT alleged that an

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

American, Elmer Williams, was working for Merrill-White Ltd without permission. After investigation, the Home Office discovered Williams was editing Herbert Wilcox's *Victoria The Great* (1937) at Denham Studios, although it assured the ACT that Williams was leaving the country on 21 July.⁶¹⁴

Buoyed by this meeting, the ACT decided to increase the pressure on the Ministry by requesting a meeting with the Minister himself, Ernest Brown MP. A letter on 6 September 1937 outlined the main points of the ACT's request, focusing primarily on the granting of permits to foreign film technicians. After outlining their stance and commending the implementation of the 'training clause', requiring foreign technicians to develop the skills of British crew under their tutelage, the ACT argued that 'in almost every case' the Aliens Order Act (1930) declaration, that 'no British subject (or foreigner long resident in the United Kingdom) will be displaced or excluded in consequence of the employment of the foreigner in question', had been broken and British subjects had been excluded from employment.⁶¹⁵ However, the ACT conceded that its own membership comprised several foreign technicians, for it was 'preferable to have his membership and so presumably his support rather than his opposition and so possibly his bad effect on his British assistants.'⁶¹⁶ Nonetheless, the ACT had previously opposed the renewal of work permits to its own foreign members and membership of the organisation would not guarantee any support on this issue. Wage comparisons were another major concern, as the ACT claimed that in the industry slump from October 1936 to the start of August 1937 (which saw ACT

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

technicians registered as unemployed increase by 500 per cent and wage cuts of up to 25 per cent for employed technicians), salaries to several foreign technicians had increased. The ACT urged the Ministry to halt the employment of foreigners, until employment of British technicians stabilised and the industry recovered sufficiently to consider international involvement.

These remonstrations were deemed particularly prescient as Parliament was to discuss the renewal of the Cinematograph Films Act in November, and the ACT was keen to influence the legislation. This included a proposed requirement that a qualifying quota film should have not more than one foreign technician under permit, unless a British technician of the same grade and salary was employed in addition. To support their argument, the ACT forwarded correspondence it had received from its equivalent union in America, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), stating that although nationality had never been a reason for rejecting an applicant, it was not currently accepting any new members due to the large number of existing members currently unemployed. This was particularly important, because to gain employment in the American film industry, membership of IATSE was a necessary requirement.⁶¹⁷

The Minister of Labour declined the meeting request, citing the demands of other work he was engaged with, but instead suggested a meeting with the Parliamentary Secretary, SL Besso. Besso agreed to see the ACT on 2 November, asking Reginald Fennelly at the Board of Trade to attend due to the aforementioned questions

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

regarding the Cinematograph Act.⁶¹⁸ Prior to the meeting, Fennelly wrote to the Ministry with regard to the ACT's demands, asserting that in particular, the proposal that an eligible quota film must only employ one foreign technician would not be included in the Cinematograph Bill. He also deflected the wage comparison, saying that 'we would have enough troubles of our own under the new legislation without being involved in wage questions'.⁶¹⁹ Most importantly, Fennelly explained that although the Board of Trade had decided to maintain the 75 per cent British labour requirement for quota films, they were proposing that the allowance to exclude one actor or producer in arriving at this calculation be scrapped, replaced instead with the option to exclude *any* one foreigner from the calculation. This was a significant change that provided greater flexibility to employ foreigners, in light of the evidence that creative roles across the board were being filled by non-British citizens.

Anthony Asquith and Thorold Dickinson were the two most notable representatives of the ACT's November deputation. Maurice Elvey, representing the British Association of Film Directors, also joined them. Asquith claimed that 'there had been cases where other than first rate technicians had been granted permits.'⁶²⁰ Elvey stated that 'the large numbers of films being made by foreign directors was largely responsible for the decline of the industry from the position it occupied three years ago.'⁶²¹ Elvey claimed that he knew of 'no instance where companies who had applied for a permit had tried to find a suitable British director.'⁶²² The respected

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid.

French film director, René Clair, again came under scrutiny, with Dickinson arguing that although he had no objection to Clair directing original films, the director was engaged on an English version of a French film and Dickinson could see no point in Clair being allowed to do this. The resulting production, *Break the News* (Rene Clair, 1938), won a special recommendation for its story at the Venice film festival, and was the second film Clair directed in England.

The Ministry of Labour's response highlights the difficulties that nationality presented when determining film authorship. Besso argued that film directors were a special case, and that it was difficult to claim one director was better than another. This reason led the department to believe the same restrictions that applied to technicians could not be imposed in the case of directors. The argument corresponded to the requirements of the Cinematograph Act, which established a loophole enabling directors and one principal actor not to be counted as part of the 75 per cent British personnel requirement. The ACT also contested this criterion, arguing that it was possible to fill every major role in a production with a foreigner, and yet still remain within the required quotient to qualify as a British film. Once more, economic reasons were the Ministry's determining factor, with the Parliamentary Secretary, Gee, asserting that a 'long-sighted view was called for'. The encouragement of foreign production in Britain via these loopholes was the view Gee believed should be taken, with the ACT retort that this would only be practicable if policy enabled a progressive reduction in the amount of foreigners employed over a given period.⁶²³

⁶²³ Ibid.

Maurice Elvey, representing the position of British directors in a memorandum delivered prior to the meeting, also quoted the Aliens Order Act (1930), arguing that 'In almost every case the above declaration is broken as a British subject is invariably excluded in consequence of the employment of the foreigner in question.'⁶²⁴ Due to this alleged disregard of government policy, he argued, unemployment among British directors was 'at least 40 per cent'. More contentiously, Elvey claimed that '*so-called* British films made by foreign directors have disappointed British audiences and so brought the British industry as a whole into disrepute (my italics).' An annotation on the government files tersely noted, 'So have films directed by British directors.'⁶²⁵ Elvey continued: 'Foreign producers have been the worst offenders, insisting upon employing foreign directors of various kinds: racial sympathy inevitably plays a very big part.' Once again, an annotation suggested the government was less than sympathetic to the view, stating 'This may be so: but much employment has been given by the foreign companies.'⁶²⁶

However, Elvey betrayed the root of his argument in his following statement, namely the suggestion that there were inherently British traits that only a British director could convey:

[British Directors] have usually a wider technical knowledge, they know *our language*, they have a feeling for the *British sentiment and character*, they are familiar with the working conditions in our

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

studios, they are *less extravagant*, their interests are bound up with those of the British industry (my italics).⁶²⁷

Elvey's appeals to British sentiment and character, in contrast to the 'extravagancies' of foreign directors, encapsulated the assumptions at play in the ACT's approach. However, they fell far short of the reality of the British film industry, particularly in the 1930s, where foreign personnel demonstrated their ability to attract British audiences much more effectively than indigenous directors had. The government clearly felt this was the case, and by 10 November 1937, the decision was made that René Clair was eligible to work in Britain due to his 'outstanding genius as a director'.⁶²⁸ Nonetheless, the issue continued to be monitored until the advent of the Second World War, with venerable British institutions most likely to face 'protection' from foreign influence. Twelve days after the decision regarding Clair, the Ministry of Labour received confirmation that the Admiralty's Contract Department employed 'British subjects only...when scenes are being filmed in H.M. ships or naval establishments.'⁶²⁹ However, only eleven months later, the Air Ministry informed the Ministry of Labour that they would allow companies making service films to employ foreign nationals only if the film met the demands of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, with the proviso that exceptions can be made on occasions when 'the quality of the film might suffer if we rigorously excluded the employment of aliens.'⁶³⁰ It was felt the issue may have arisen because of a

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

proposed MGM British film, *Shadow of the Wing*, whereby a permit was issued for a foreign cameraman to work on the production. The film was not proceeded with.

In light of the ACT's remonstrations, the Board of Trade floated the idea of removing the 75 per cent British personnel requirement, 'because the Ministry of Labour already exercises close control over the employment of foreigners.' This approach extended to financial influence, arguing that

[A]s the quota legislation is designed to encourage the production of better films in this country, it may be considered that as few obstacles as possible should be put in the way of the big American companies planning production here, in the belief that this will be in the best interests of the industry and, in the long run, of British technicians themselves.

However, the Ministry of Labour's approach to its dealings with the ACT is perhaps best explained by a terse comment in material produced for the Parliamentary Secretary before the 2 November deputation:

[I]t cannot be too strongly emphasized (sic) that most of the difficulties [discussed] can be traced to the lack of any properly organised scheme of recruitment and training, which, in turn, can be traced to the lack of organisation which marks the British film industry. The companies distrust and dislike each other, and have not even formed any Association or Federation to protect the

interests of producers as a whole...So long as this state of affairs lasts, it will be difficult for the Department to do other than take a short-term view...[instead of] a long-term policy related to a thoroughly worked-out scheme of recruitment and training for the industry as a whole.⁶³¹

The ACT was right to assume that foreign workers had a major influence on the British film industry of the period. It was also right to argue that the presence of these workers called into question the very nature of what was a British film. Yet this was the decade when people like Michael Powell, Carol Reed, David Lean and Jack Cardiff all learned their trade, and when Alfred Hitchcock was courted by Hollywood. These were men who had embraced foreign influence, and used it to inspire and inform their work. In addition, the foreigners who were leading developments in British film were in fact often presenting a more explicitly patriotic cinema to the world than their indigenous contemporaries. Korda's work was of course the most profound in this respect, but this was also true of Gaumont-British and the several low-budget productions from the German-influenced Gainsborough. The ACT had made a strong case, but its concept of 'Britishness' had become divorced from an increasingly liberal government policy, at precisely the moment that crucial decisions were being made about the relative merits of having a quota system at all.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

Chapter Thirteen: Actions to 'Maintain and Establish the Industry'

By the late Thirties, despite Britain's general economic upturn, its film industry had reached another crisis point. Major financiers withdrew their support due to the prohibitive costs of filmmaking, which were estimated to be 70 to 80 per cent more than if filming in America.⁶³² Several productions from the boom years of 1936 and 1937 failed to turn a profit, and the response to this by financial backers can be seen by the fact that only 78 British films were registered in 1938, compared to 228 the previous year.⁶³³ Even the big studios were not immune to this downturn and, by March 1937 Gaumont announced that they were going to close their studios at Shepherd's Bush. Nonetheless, the audience base for cinema was still growing - albeit one that was still mainly attracted to American product. The average family in 1938 was spending 56 per cent of its income on non-essentials, with a large amount of this directed towards 'going to the pictures'.⁶³⁴ While big budget British productions were struggling to appeal to the public, quota productions were filling the gap in the market. Lawrence Napper argues that:

...as a direct result of their stringent finances and the limited release patterns open to them, the quota producers sought to portray England for two specific markets: the lower-middle class and the older generations of the working class.⁶³⁵

⁶³² Aldgate, Anthony (1981), 'British Cinema in the 1930's', *The Historical Development of Popular Culture in Britain* (2), Milton Keynes: Open University Press, p. 27.

⁶³³ Aldgate, Anthony, p. 26.

⁶³⁴ Stevenson, John (1990), *British Society 1914-45*, London: Penguin Books, p. 125.

⁶³⁵ Napper, Lawrence, p. 41.

Basil Dean's Associated Talking Pictures had been following this formula since it was established in 1929, and he had forged a successful business by working at the less financially risky, lower-budgeted end of the market. By 1930 he had arranged a deal with RKO to help produce and distribute ATP films, but this was concluded by 1932 after RKO had made it explicit that 'our function in Great Britain is to distribute quota pictures which you make for us'.⁶³⁶ But this was not to mark the end of ATP, and instead gave Dean the freedom to develop a series of comedies crystallised by the ebullient personality of Gracie Fields, arguably the most popular British film star of the decade. Dean produced *Sally in Our Alley* (Maurice Elvey) in 1931, and they were to make a further seven films together. Fields reflected the 'realistic' women portrayed in publicity material from the 1920s, and the development of the 'Our Gracie' moniker was vigorously pursued by Dean. Basil Wright, writing in *The Spectator*, described her as representing 'a common denominator for those millions of English folk who like the humour and sentiment of the type known as homely.'⁶³⁷ Jeffrey Richards identifies Joanna Macfayden's *World Film News* article from 1936 as encapsulating the essence of Fields' appeal:

Gracie's act puts men in a hearty family mood (no vicarious illicit love affairs here), the women adore her (they share her dress sense, there are no envious wish-fulfilments nor are wrecked marriages the basis of her entertainment) and children enjoy the general racket.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁶ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 154.

⁶³⁷ Sargeant, Amy (2005), p. 117.

⁶³⁸ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 171.

Placing her as part of a bizarre triumvirate of icons of national consensus, the 'elder sister' in the British 'family' headed by King George V (the 'grandfather') and Stanley Baldwin ('father'), Richards argues that each 'promoted consensus, co-operation and national unity both in their persons and in their actions',⁶³⁹ and that Fields' 'undisguised origins and naturalness' made her 'a potent symbol for the masses'.⁶⁴⁰ While this might be labouring the point, Fields did appear to represent 'authenticity' to many millions of cinema-goers, and this was the essence of her appeal. However, as has been shown in a previous chapter, this was a notion that was common to the cinematic portrayal of British women, and had been developed since at least the 1910s.

Capitalising on Fields' success, in 1935, ATP hired George Formby from the Mancunian Film Corporation and produced *No Limit*, directed by Italian American Monty Banks.⁶⁴¹ Dean set to work in marketing Formby as 'one of us', Fields' male equivalent. However, this was a departure from the normal portrayal of male British comedy stars, as Formby was the first to popularise the same sense of 'authenticity' as had been applied to British female stars. There was a consistency to their depiction, although Formby was more often than not the hapless, downtrodden fool who comes up trumps at the end, whereas Fields was always portrayed as more in control of her destiny. Regardless, both became extremely popular with the public and would be either at or near the top of polls of the most popular British stars of the late Thirties. However, not all responses were as positive, as the respondents to JP

⁶³⁹ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 172.

⁶⁴⁰ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 170.

⁶⁴¹ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 162.

Mayers' *Picturegoer* questionnaires demonstrates. Collated in the 1940s, they demonstrate how quickly Fields' star had fallen, after she had to leave Britain with her Italian husband at the outbreak of the Second World War. Of the many printed recollections, not a single one referred to Fields by name, while there were numerous accounts of the effects of George Formby films - if not all positive. For example, a 30 year-old female clerk stated:

British films have never in all my life, made the *slightest* impression on me. They are dull, ugly and uninspired – generally a stage success filmed because it was that or a poorly produced musical. There are very few real British film stars, and those stars of the stage who grace the screen at intervals are too old to photograph well, poor dears. The inanities of George Formby leave me cold, the American sense of humour I adore.⁶⁴²

A 16 year-old female clerk, who was more enamoured with British cinema, was also immune to Formby's charms, saying 'I go to see all British films with the exception of those made by George Formby. I have seen two of his films and they will last my lifetime...'.⁶⁴³ And a 25 year-old male engineering draughtsman made his distaste of Formby clear, placing him firmly in the category of 'Films I Don't Like':

George Formby films follows a strict routine:- George is a goomph,
George meets girl; George plays 'uke'; George beats villain; George

⁶⁴² Mayer, JP, p. 98.

⁶⁴³ Mayer, JP, p. 172.

gets girl. Intelligent use of this star, with good support would make all the difference in the world.⁶⁴⁴

This response to Formby appears to support Richards' assertion that the appeal of both Formby and Fields lay firmly with the working class. As the published respondents to Mayer's questionnaires were predominantly middle-class, their dislike of Formby and lack of acknowledgement of Fields provides a good indication of the schism in British cinema audiences during this decade. To further reinforce this point, many of the people surveyed by Mayer referred to the actress who has often been seen as the flip side of Fields and Formby, the third most popular star in 1930s British cinema, Jessie Matthews. *The Good Companions* (Victor Saville, 1933) was Jessie's breakthrough film, and she would work with Hitchcock on *Waltzes From Vienna* (1934), before starring for Saville again in her most popular film, *Evergreen* (1934). All of her major work was produced by Gaumont, and as such, was made with high-production standards and with an eye to the American market. This policy worked - in 1937 *Picturegoer* would argue that 'Jessie Matthews is the only English screen actress who, without having a Hollywood campaign devoted to her, has a name which is news in the United States and is strong enough to carry a picture.'⁶⁴⁵ Thus, when dealing with Matthews, we are addressing a very different type of British star - in my view, the first to cast off the constraints that had been applied to the portrayal of female British characters, and which had reached their apogee with Gracie Fields. Richards is eager to categorise Matthews as epitomising a psychological shift in the Thirties from notions of community to individualism, and the

⁶⁴⁴ Mayer, JP, p. 221.

⁶⁴⁵ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 207.

concomitant links between that change and working-class and middle-class identity. As both stars were also noted for the musical numbers in their films, he finds this trend was explicit in their lyrics:

Jessie's songs are of self ("I"); Gracie's songs are pre-eminently of the community ("we") – the difference between middle-class individualism and working-class solidarity.⁶⁴⁶

Yet, Matthews' popular success, and the way that she was marketed and promoted by the studio, suggests that on the contrary, Matthews represented a more profound change than just being a more refined and self-serving version of Fields. Examples from the marketing of *Sing as We Go* and *Evergreen* display a strikingly similar format - The films' stars naturally took centre-stage, but in the pressbooks for these productions, every inch of content was dedicated to Fields and Matthews respectively. The front cover of *Sing as We Go* may have depicted Fields as literally carrying the community in her arms, but this was still all about her, in much the same way that Matthews dominated the promotion of *Evergreen*. And this type of representation was seen throughout the marketing of 1930s British cinema, with similarly dominant portrayals found in the pressbooks of George Formby vehicles. What this represented was not the difference between classes (although the class elements were not at all disguised), but instead, a more general shift towards a focus on individual stars, that began to detach them from the previously held notions of what a British actor could represent. Matthews was the antithesis of the portrayals of British women from the Teens and Twenties, and her public would not have expected

⁶⁴⁶ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 208.

her to give up a promising career in order to return to her 'roots', as did Florence Turner in *A Welsh Singer* - but then again, the same could be said for Fields. Instead, both women represented the dream of success and the individualistic pleasures that would bring. Both were national icons, but their relationship with the 'nation' was far more complex than their predecessors' was.

What is beyond doubt is the hold that these stars had over British screens, which by the mid-Thirties numbered almost 4,500.⁶⁴⁷ However, just because the cinema was ubiquitous, did not mean that everyone responded to the same films, or that they even thought about what they were consuming at all. With the amount of attention garnered by film from all sources, the 1930s also witnessed the first attempts to study the British cinema audience. The first primary evidence of this nature was collected by Simon Rowson in 1934 and was followed by the Mass Observation movement from 1937 onwards. Later scholars have discovered cinema ledgers from the period, of which only a handful remain, which document the viewing habits of their respective geographical area and help to provide a wider context for the original statistical work conducted throughout the decade. Rowson's findings support the concept of a fragmented nation, with vast class delineations in the cinema theatre. His analysis of 650 million tickets sales in 1934 confirms that the majority of tickets sold were at a relatively low price. The highest percentage, just over 21 per cent, were sold at 12d, with just under eighteen per cent sold at 7d and just under sixteen per cent sold at 9d. Only twenty per cent of tickets were sold for 13d or more, and just over 23 per cent were sold for 6d or less.⁶⁴⁸ Rowson's data made it clear that not

⁶⁴⁷ Jeacle, Ingrid (2009), "Going to the Movies": Accounting and Twentieth Century Cinema', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 22: 5, p. 678.

⁶⁴⁸ Rowson, Simon, p. 69.

only was the majority of the audience paying for the cheaper seats (and hence were likely to be from a poorer, working-class background), but also challenged the notion that there was a great amount of choice available to consumers.

Owing to the growth and power of circuits, large and small, [the exhibitor] can only choose a programme from a fraction, sometimes only a small fraction, of the films ready for showing. A one-theatre proprietor in a neighbourhood of theatres belonging to a group or circuit of theatres under the same ownership is often compelled to show only the least attractive films because the larger companies exert their greater booking power to reserve the better and best pictures for themselves.’⁶⁴⁹

However, despite this problem of access often being ascribed to foreign-controlled distributors and exhibitors, Rowson was happy to stress his belief in the importance of showing a wide-range of foreign films in Britain:

there is in my opinion very considerable national advantage from the admission of foreign films to our screens. All who take a long view of the educational influence of the film, whatever its origin, must be prepared to look on it with the same approval as they would extend to everything else that adds to knowledge and experience. This admission does not go so far as to deny that good grounds might, nevertheless, exist against the exclusive or excessive dependence

⁶⁴⁹ Rowson, Simon, p. 88.

on a supply from any single geographical area, and especially if it involved the proscription of films made in our own country.’⁶⁵⁰

And despite the growing clamour against Korda and other foreign producers, Rowson argued that the proportion of British ‘subjects’ had actually increased in the early 1930s. He was confident enough in this view that he could assert that in 1934, ‘it is nevertheless true that, with very few exceptions, all the “British” films were made in Great Britain and all the films made in Great Britain were “British”’.⁶⁵¹ Nonetheless, by acknowledging that ‘the inferior British films are handled by the foreign companies, and the inferior foreign films are being offered by the British companies’,⁶⁵² he recognised that foreign companies were also contributing to a culture of British cinema being seen as inferior, and hence enhancing the prospects of their own non-British product at the box office.

This acknowledgement of the importance of cinema to British life, and more precisely to the British economy, was encapsulated by the deliberations over the impending renewal of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act. Lord Moyne was appointed on 25 March 1936 as Chairman of a committee charged with a remit to:

⁶⁵⁰ Rowson, Simon, p. 99.

⁶⁵¹ Rowson, Simon, p. 101.

⁶⁵² Rowson, Simon, p. 102.

consider the position of British films...and to advise whether, and if so what, measures are still required in the public interest to promote the production, renting and exhibition of such films.⁶⁵³

The Commission's main concern was the alleged increase of American control of British film production and exhibition, amid claims that these companies were actively attempting to stifle the industry:

We have received evidence which suggests that, owing to the increasing strength of the home industry, foreign interests are adopting means which are tending to prevent a further expansion of the output of British films and are, moreover, endeavouring to obtain a further measure of control of the producing and exhibiting as well as of the distributing sides of the industry.⁶⁵⁴

This view was supported by none other than the newly naturalised Alexander Korda, clearly keen to protect his own stake at the heart of British film production:

If American interests obtained control of British production companies they may make British pictures here but the pictures made would be just as American as those made in Hollywood. We

⁶⁵³ Anon, 'The Moyne Report', British Media Inquiries, White Papers and Official Reports: Film and Cinema; http://www.terramedia.co.uk/reference/law/official_british_media_reports_film.htm#Moyne (Accessed 7 September 2009).

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

are now on the verge of forming a British school of film making in this country.⁶⁵⁵

The evidence supplied by the Film Producers Group of the Federation of British Industries goes some way to explaining this concern, and was indicative of the debate that had been raging over British cinema since at least the early 1920s:

the importance of [the industry] cannot be measured by figures alone since it is inalienably associated with national prestige and British moral and cultural influence both at home, in the overseas Empire and in the foreign countries, where the popularity of British films is constantly increasing. The British film production industry has world-wide interests and British films can carry British scenes, themes, culture and the message of Britain to the furthest parts of the world.⁶⁵⁶

Published in November 1936, Lord Moyne's report recognised the 1927 Act, and suggested that there was an 'absolute necessity for legislative action to maintain and establish the industry'.⁶⁵⁷ It recommended the extension of the quota regulations for another ten years, with an additional 'quality test' – that each foot of finished film should have cost at least £2 to make, in order to sift out American financed 'quota quickies'. In addition, Moyne proposed the creation of a permanent, independent

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 44.

⁶⁵⁷ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/269.

Films Commission to act as an industry regulator - although after lobbying from American studios,⁶⁵⁸ the Board of Trade rejected the idea. Yet it agreed with the main principle of Moyne's analysis, that the continuance of the quota system for a further ten years was 'necessary and desirable'.⁶⁵⁹

In July 1937, the Board of Trade complained in a memo to Cabinet that despite the film industry running a series of consultative meetings to discuss the Moyne Commission's proposals, the various interests involved had 'proved too divergent to enable them to agree even upon any point of principle, except the basic idea of a quota', and it was therefore necessary for the government to press ahead to with its own interpretation of the recommendations.⁶⁶⁰ The Board of Trade acknowledged that foreign-controlled renters were flooding the market with cheap 'quota quickies', which discredited British production as a whole. Thus, it concluded, one of the main objectives of the new act would have to be to include a test, to be applied before a 'British' film could count as part of the renter's quota. The method preferred by the Moyne Commission was a 'viewing test' conducted by its proposed Films Commission, but as the Board of Trade had decided not to establish this body, it settled on a cost-based approach favoured by most of the industry, despite its reservations that this would not have any major effect on the import of foreign films. As for what this cost should be, the Board of Trade supported a minimum cost of £7,500 in wages and salaries, assuming that this would be roughly 50 per cent of a preferred £15,000 total cost for a 'quality' British film. Of course, any film that cost

⁶⁵⁸ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 40.

⁶⁵⁹ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/269.

⁶⁶⁰ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/270.

less than this, could still go some way towards the renter's quota, thus ensuring low budget British films would still be possible to make. In addition, the Board floated the idea of allowing companies to employ any number of foreigners, technicians as well as artists, on a quota film, with the caveat that the combined salaries of these workers, in excess of 35 per cent of British labour costs, could not be counted as part of a minimum labour cost. Gee prepared a note to examine this argument and pointed out that in its favour it might be argued:

- 1) That it is unreasonable to tie the hands of the companies when they are being required to spend considerable sums on quota films.
- 2) That there are insufficient skilled British personnel on the technical side for the production of films of the quality aimed at.
- 3) That the onus is already on companies to show to the satisfaction of the Ministry of Labour that the employment of any foreigner on any film is reasonable and necessary, and that there is therefore no need to impose a separate restriction under the quota legislation which might deprive companies of essential foreign experts.⁶⁶¹

He also explained that the additional cost of foreign personnel this scheme would entail, would to some extent create a preference for British personnel. However, Gee noted that regarding the second point, 'this position is likely to continue if foreigners are allowed to be employed on quota films in greater numbers, and nothing is done

⁶⁶¹ TNA: PRO: LAB 8/76.

to create a proper scheme of recruitment, training and promotion for British technicians.’⁶⁶² He asserted that

There is little doubt that quota films have hitherto provided an important field for the training and development of British technicians although the prevalence of the “quickie” has meant that the work has often been done under unfavourable conditions (London Films go so far as to attribute the comparatively low standard of some technicians to their employment on quota films)...The Board of Trade may anticipate strong protest if it is realised that the restriction imposed on foreigners under existing quota legislation is to be removed without anything being done to ensure increased opportunities of advancement for British personnel.

On 9 August 1937, the Board confirmed that while one foreigner may have been excluded from the 75 per cent labour requirement of a British film, this was not to be the case with regard to the £7500 minimum labour cost requirement.⁶⁶³ This opened up the possibility that a film with one high-profile foreign actor (or director, screenwriter, etc.) could still qualify as ‘British’, as long as all other minimum requirements were met.

While these measures would help to maintain a solid foothold in British cinemas, the Board of Trade was also mindful of the difficulty faced by British productions abroad:

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

It must be borne in mind that one of the principal disadvantages under which British films labour is that the USA market is practically closed to them except in a few special cases. This is partly due to the resistance of the United States producers, who also control the theatres in key positions; and to a certain extent to the unsuitability of particular British films for the American market. The limited revenue available from the market in the United Kingdom and some parts of the Empire makes it difficult for Producers to undertake more ambitious schemes, and it is most important that every practicable step should be taken to assist them in entering the American market.⁶⁶⁴

To address this issue the Board of Trade proposed a 'reciprocity clause'.

The producers propose that where a Renter acquires the rights for one foreign country for a minimum sum of £20,000 of a British film, he should be allowed to count the acquisition of those foreign rights as equal to the acquisition of a British film. Under such a proposal, the Renter who holds the United Kingdom rights of the film would not, himself, how-ever, be able to count the film for quota purposes, and no Renter would be permitted to meet more than one-half of his quota obligations by this method. The real object of such a scheme is to secure the exhibition of British films in the United States, and

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

not merely to enable a foreign controlled Renter to meet his obligations by a series of payments for the foreign rights of British films, which would either not be shown in America at all or would be a bad advertisement for British films. It follows, therefore, that the payment made must be substantial and in relation to a fairly expensive British production.⁶⁶⁵

However, the government were to go further, with the Foreign Office and the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Ronald Lindsay, agreeing on a deal to water down the bill, so that films costing more than £5 per foot would count as triple quota - thus opening the door for American production companies to set up British units with high production values. This was cemented with later discussions between Oliver Stanley, The President of the Board of Trade, and the American Ambassador Joseph P Kennedy while the bill was being debated in the House of Lords.⁶⁶⁶ Upon publication of the Act, MGM was the most high-profile company to take immediate advantage. It announced that for the 1938/39 season it would cease making low-budget films and put into action a new policy of 'prestige' British productions. In real terms this meant an upward move from about \$25,000 for quota films to the \$1,000,000 required for 'A' class movies.⁶⁶⁷ The three films that it made at the end of the 1930s, *A Yank at Oxford* (Jack Conway, 1938), *The Citadel* (King Vidor, 1938) and *Goodbye Mr Chips* (Sam Wood, 1939) were testaments to this approach, each performing well both critically and financially. The latter two in particular, achieved much praise, and unlike

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Street, Sarah (1999), pp.23-24.

⁶⁶⁷ Ryall, Tom (2001), p. 52.

many other examples of ostensibly foreign film companies receiving criticism for the lack of British 'character' in their productions, these were treated as thoroughly 'British' productions, and had been made with their British 'qualities' in mind throughout production. *The Citadel* was a case in point, with the author of the source novel, AJ Cronin, selling the rights to Victor Saville who, as the new Head of Production at MGM-British, sought to capture the 'authentic social atmosphere of England' with the adaptation.⁶⁶⁸ On its release, Paul Holt in the *Daily Express* would comment that it was 'better than *Henry VIII* and better than *Victoria the Great* because it is more English than either of them,'⁶⁶⁹ and it became the highest-grossing British film in Britain that year. MGM's output was precisely what the government was hoping for - high-profile, critically acclaimed productions that benefitted from American finance and distribution agreements but yet to all intents and purposes were authentically 'British'.

Cabinet approved the draft Cinematograph Films Bill on 27 October 1937.⁶⁷⁰ The published Act increased the quota for British films to 15 per cent for renters and 12.5 per cent for exhibitors, and included the 75 per cent British crew requirement and £7500 minimum labour cost as supported by the Board of Trade.⁶⁷¹ Stanley said that he could not "exaggerate the importance of this Bill. This industry is no ordinary industry. It is not only a question of profits for British capital or employment for British

⁶⁶⁸ Dux, Sally (2012), 'The Citadel (1938): Doctors, Censors and the Cinema, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32: 1, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁹ Dux, Sally, p. 14.

⁶⁷⁰ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/90/A.

⁶⁷¹ Jäckel, Anne, p. 6.

workers, important as these are; it is something a great deal more.'⁶⁷² By 1938, all four of the major exhibition chains all comfortably exceeded the fifteen per cent quota, with Odeon leading the field with 30 per cent of its programmes, followed by Gaumont at 23 per cent, Union Theatres at twenty per cent and Associated British at nineteen per cent.⁶⁷³ It appeared that despite the problems of 1936, British cinema exhibition at least, if not British film production, was thriving.

⁶⁷² Stead, Peter (1981), 'Hollywood's Message for the World: The British Response in the Nineteen Thirties', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1: 1, p. 21.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

Chapter Fourteen: British Cinema Exhibition in the Late Thirties

A survey of Merseyside conducted in the same year as Simon Rowson's pioneering study of cinema audiences, concluded that 40 per cent of the population attended the cinema each week, and that this was predominately comprised of young people.⁶⁷⁴ Similar information was discovered by Seebohm Rowntree's 1936 study of York, and by the Carnegie Trust in Glasgow, Cardiff and Liverpool throughout 1936-9.⁶⁷⁵ However, this data does not necessarily mean that 1930s cinema had a particularly strong affinity with youth, or that the messages presented by it spoke directly to juvenile audiences, and much work since then has been conducted which augments these initial findings. Helen Richards' investigation of four cinemas in Bridgend, Wales, in her work on 'memory reclamation' of cinema-going is a case in point. From speaking directly to people who attended film screenings during this period, she concluded that 'It was the act of going to the cinema, the social space it provided, with whom they went and not necessarily the films that encouraged more than 60% of young people in the 1930s to attend the cinema twice weekly.'⁶⁷⁶ To support this claim, she analysed the way that Brigend's exhibition history was represented in the town's local paper, the *Glamorgan Gazette*, and in so doing demonstrated that it was clear from the outset that the 'experience' of cinema-going was as important in promotion as the films themselves:

⁶⁷⁴ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 12.

⁶⁷⁵ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 14.

⁶⁷⁶ Richards, Helen (2003), 'Memory Reclamation of Cinema Going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930-1960', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 23: 4, p. 343.

The owners of the Picture Palace, Bridgend, announced its opening with an advert in the 4 November 1910 edition of the *Glamorgan Gazette*...The advert establishes the conditions, but not the attraction, of film-going by simply stating the times and prices. Unlike [earlier adverts for Bridgend's Town Hall film screenings], this advert did not excessively promote the programme at the Palace. It placed an equal amount of emphasis on the hall's "good seating accommodation" as it did on the claim that "the latest pictures are shown".⁶⁷⁷

The entertainment pleasures offered by the cinema became in the 1930s, in Richards' words, 'multi-dimensional', although as she identified, this trend could be traced back to as early as 1912 with the opening of the Glamorgan 'Cinema'.⁶⁷⁸

Robert James' data, from the extant cinema ledger of the South Wales Miners' Institute cinemas from March 1937-December 1939, complements Richards' work, as it provides evidence of first, what a particular group of upper-working-class union reps programmed for the miners, and secondly how this working-class audience responded to this material. This was a delicate balancing act – as James explains, it was believed that the usual diet of mainstream Hollywood films would 'remove miners from the political arena', yet, the cinema committees had to offer films that were still popular.⁶⁷⁹ Like Richards, James concludes that 'quite often the films being

⁶⁷⁷ Richards, Helen (2005), p. 444.

⁶⁷⁸ Richards, Helen (2005), p. 446.

⁶⁷⁹ James, Robert (2007), "'A Very Profitable Enterprise': South Wales Miners' Institute Cinemas in the 1930s", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 27: 1, p. 29.

shown were not the primary attraction.’⁶⁸⁰ But when he analyses the films themselves, he observes a startling trend for American cinema, arguing that ‘as Marcia Landy has rightly noted, [Hollywood cinema was] often heavily critical of “entrenched wealth and privilege,” and were more willing than British-produced films to “pose radical social alternatives to oppression”.’⁶⁸¹ James believes that this appealed directly to the miners, who could associate with the anti-establishment themes of American films. Thus, he regards the Will Hay comedy *Ask a Policeman* (1939), which was also shown to the miners, as an example of a rare British production that performs the same function, and ‘constantly rejects the social mores and values of middle-class society’⁶⁸² While it is likely that, as James asserts, ‘these films were being employed at a conscious level by the cinema committee to awaken the audience’s class consciousness’,⁶⁸³ it is a leap, not supported by the available evidence to suggest that the audience responded to this on a conscious level. However, the point remains that there was an attempt here to control what messages were presented to the workers, and part of this included films that were seen to challenge existing social order. However, there was not a British or American production in this period that suggested how this order could be changed, and thus while these films may have helped to instil a ‘class consciousness’, they did not disrupt any of the existing notions of the established social structure that was presented to the miners. *Ask a Policeman*, for example, while gently mocking authority, ends up supporting the institution of the police force and the British tradition that this was meant to embody.

⁶⁸⁰ James, Robert (2007), p. 31.

⁶⁸¹ James, Robert (2007), p. 37.

⁶⁸² James, Robert (2007), p. 38.

⁶⁸³ James, Robert (2007), p. 39.

James' study had a precedent in another series of primary data collected in the 1930s, the wide-ranging Bernstein Questionnaires, collated from surveys in 1932, 1934 and 1937 from Sidney Bernstein's Granada cinema chain. The programming of these venues was under the ultimate control of one person, the Secretary of the Granada Film Society, Miss JM Harvey. Thus, like the South Wales Miners' Institute cinemas there was a compromise between what was deemed to be suitable, both for the reputation of the chain and Harvey's personal taste, and what was expected to appeal to a wider audience.⁶⁸⁴ James argues that a similar process of wish-fulfilment dictated the decisions made in the Bernstein chain, with Harvey's choices appealing to middle-class women who were 'allowed to contemplate, for a time at least, a world without social and gender constraints',⁶⁸⁵ in much the same way that he asserts the miners would enjoy anti-establishment fantasies. Likewise, he detects a similar association between working-class patrons and 'female stars who played strong, independent women',⁶⁸⁶ identifying amongst others, Jessie Matthews in *The Good Companions* (Victor Saville, 1933) and Gracie Fields in *This Week of Grace* (Maurice Elvey, 1933), who also both attracted a high number of votes from working-class men. However, once again, extrapolations are made that are not supported by the evidence to hand. For example, the relative lack of popularity of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) with Granada's middle class audience, despite it being voted as one of the 'all-time favourite films' by Granada's working-class patrons, was 'predictable when we bear in mind that the film champions marginal groups, celebrates popular cultural forms, and presents the state's representatives as social

⁶⁸⁴ James, Robert (2011), 'Popular Filmgoing in Britain in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History* 46: 271, p. 276.

⁶⁸⁵ James, Robert (2011), p. 277.

⁶⁸⁶ James, Robert (2011), p. 278.

pariahs.’⁶⁸⁷ Similarly, he claims ‘that it is hardly surprising to find working-class audiences failing to appreciate a film [*The Criminal Code* (Howard Hawks, 1931)] that did little to relieve their anxieties about their place in the world’,⁶⁸⁸ and that ‘*Trader Horn* champions the middle-class notions of imperial conquest, chivalry and masculine endeavour. The film thus had a distinctly middle-class appeal.’⁶⁸⁹ It is clear that there was a difference between the films that most middle-class and working-class viewers watched, but this could have been just as much because of prejudices about production values, or notions of taste, as it could have been about the more overtly socio-political reasons James ascribes to these responses. Without more detailed feedback from the surveys, it remains unclear as to why exactly these differences existed, but it is certain that if based purely on the films themselves, there was not a consistent, singular ‘national’ conception being presented that the majority of cinema-goers responded to.

John Sedgwick’s work acknowledges these differences, referring to the variety of ‘preferences’ audiences can have for products, and quotes Richard Maltby’s argument that Hollywood’s success was built on being able to provide a wide range of products to suit all audience tastes within the confines of recognisable genres.⁶⁹⁰

Sedgwick is eager to stress the dangers apparent in audience study, warning that ‘In analyzing (sic) the meanings that filmgoers derived from film, historians should be careful not to superimpose their own professional and often sophisticated

⁶⁸⁷ James, Robert (2011), p. 280.

⁶⁸⁸ James, Robert (2011), p. 283.

⁶⁸⁹ James, Robert (2011), p. 284.

⁶⁹⁰ Sedgwick, John (2006), ‘Cinemagoing in Portsmouth During the 1930s’, *Cinema Journal* 46: 1, p. 52.

interpretations onto their unwitting and generally abstractly conceived subjects.’⁶⁹¹ However, he believes that the variation in attendance figures for the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, in the 1930s suggest that ‘the primary reason for going to the cinema was to see the film being screened...[and similar evidence from other cinema ledgers] should give pause to film historians who place the experience of cinemagoing on a par with or above that of the film program (sic) in attracting figures.’⁶⁹²

According to Sedgwick:

[The results of the Regent ledger bear out] the 1937 *World Film News* survey of British exhibitors on box-office appeal, which showed that middle-class filmgoers were attracted more strongly to British productions than urban working-class filmgoers were.’⁶⁹³

Jeffrey Richards has made a similar claim, describing how Winnifred Holmes came to the conclusion that the ‘middle classes go for the film first and foremost, while the working classes [attend] rather as a regular habit, looking on the cinema in their district as a kind of club.’⁶⁹⁴ This notion of the more discerning middle-class viewer, predisposed to choose British films is persuasive, as this would also fit with the prevailing debates about the relative merits of British films that were current throughout the decade. However, all available evidence suggests that middle-class

⁶⁹¹ Sedgwick, John (2006), p. 53.

⁶⁹² Sedgwick, John (2006), p. 54.

⁶⁹³ Sedgwick John (2006), p. 66.

⁶⁹⁴ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 28.

patrons were less regular attendees in general, and that British films were only a small percentage of the total number shown in cinemas. Therefore, the large working-class audience that attended the cinema regularly would be more likely to see American product, by sheer virtue of its dominance and volume. With cinema bookers presenting only a small selection of films to their audiences, this apparent difference of choice may have in fact been largely dependant on extraneous factors. The success with working-class audiences of a select number of popular British films, such as those featuring Gracie Fields or George Formby, suggests that this supposed middle-class preference for British product may in fact have been overstated.

Sedgwick acknowledges that in the Regent, 'a weekly bedrock audience of five thousand would attend the cinema, irrespective of the film attraction.'⁶⁹⁵ The maximum weekly attendance figure the Regent could expect was just over 51,000 admissions, but the median weekly attendance throughout the 1930s was merely 14,577. In other words, at least one third of the regular weekly audience was attending regardless of what was being shown, and while Sedgwick is right to assert that certain films would dramatically increase or decrease this figure, this was still a significant number of patrons for whom the film in question was not the key factor of their attendance. In addition, while many people were clearly attracted by certain films, the ledgers did not record whether an audience member was attending more than once to see the same production. If so, this would be conclusive proof that it was elements of the film itself, be it the story, stars, cinematography etc., that were attracting them back for multiple viewings. Without access to this data, their choice to

⁶⁹⁵ Sedgwick, John (2006), p. 65.

attend seems to come down to one of two factors – either they were influenced by word of mouth, which would also lend weight to the idea that the film itself was the determining factor, or more likely, the advertising of the production was what drew them in, either via posters, reviews in the press or other marketing methods. Sedgwick's data does not conclusively prove that the public's film 'preferences' were determined by the content of films, and thus any claims made as to the effect of the messages in these productions are weakened. Instead, it is much more likely that audiences were attracted by the messages portrayed in the advertising of these productions, which could explain the apparent discrepancy between the high attendance of certain films and the critical responses received about them from surveys conducted at a later date.

One attempt to bridge this gap in the data was also made during the 1930s, with the most extensive survey of British life conducted that decade, known as Mass Observation. The researchers on this project focused specifically on the cinema-going habits of audiences in Bolton from 1937-38, and followed this with a wider-ranging general survey of film habits from 1937 onwards. The Bolton survey included interviews with exhibitors, observations of audiences during specific films, and statistical data about the types of people who attended, most of which supported the notion that for much of the public, the cinema was about the entire experience of an evening out, and not solely about the film in question. It also confirmed that this holistic approach was actively promoted by exhibitors, especially the Odeon chain, which in its weekly programme published a 'Manager's Chat' section, in which the General Manager would extol the virtues of his cinema in comparison to competing venues. For example, the 14 March 1937 edition declares that 'Mr Oscar Deutsch'

had 'insisted that only the 'Best' shall go into his theatres and that the 'Best' MUST BE BRITISH',⁶⁹⁶ before describing the new sound system installed in the theatre. Other examples of 'manager's chats' segments demonstrated a constant reference to the qualities of the venues, rather than any defining element of the film programme, and these documents are an interesting complement to the statistical information collated by other surveys in the decade.

One such example of the type of material Mass Observation collected that was not shown in other contemporary accounts, comes from its report on anti-Semitism in the East End of London in 1937. This was a collation of six weeks' worth of research into anti-Semitism, and as raw data it is instructive as to the representation of the 'other' in the East End of London during this period, and its relationship to the cinema. As to the life of Jews in general, the report was clear:

The most important point that has emerged unmistakably in the street counts, is that out of these thousands of people passing, in only 3 cases was a Jew in the same group as a cockney...This segregation, which has appeared in every institution we have investigated so far, except Left Wing political movements and Rent Strikes...must facilitate anti-Semitism and justifies the claim that the Jews live a separate life...⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Mass Observation (MO): *Bolton Odeon Programme* (14 March 1937).

⁶⁹⁷ MO: *Anti-Semitism Survey* (17 February 1937), p.8.

Most interestingly, this was borne out by the habits of Jews compared to the rest of the audience in East End cinemas. For example, on Monday, the split in East End cinema audiences between Jews and non-Jews was roughly equal, but by Thursday, the day before pay day, Jews made up 60 per cent of those attending. Even starker was the difference between the percentage of Jews who sat in the expensive seats compared to those in the cheaper seats. In three cinemas surveyed over a typical week, between 64-78 per cent of the audience in the expensive seats were Jewish, compared to only 3-21 per cent of the audience in the cheaper seats. This was in marked contrast to British cinemas during the 1910s, in which observations suggest there was a far greater mix of Jews and indigenous Britons.⁶⁹⁸ There was not enough data to conclusively ascertain why this was happening, although it seems likely that this evidence pointed to a key difference in the Jewish and non-Jewish cinema habit. The fact that there were more Jews in the more expensive seats, and that there were more Jews near the end of the week, suggests that these patrons either had more disposable income or were spending more of their disposable income on the cinema as opposed to other expenses. Either way, this points to this audience fitting the mould of the discerning middle-class viewer identified by other surveys from the period. Yet, there is a discrepancy here, for these other reports found the 'bedrock' of cinema audiences to be comprised of working-class patrons, whereas the anti-Semitism report seems to suggest that especially at the end of the week, cinemas in the East End of London were attended by middle-class Jews - thus questioning the notion of the selective middle-class patron. While it appears more likely that this was a relatively isolated case, this particular Mass Observation data

⁶⁹⁸ See for example, McKernan, Luke (2007a).

highlights the variety of cinema attendance patterns across the country, and thus emphasises the dangers in referring to a 'national' cinema viewing culture.

In the vein of the Mass Observation reports, Annette Kuhn's study of 1930s cinema-goers was an attempt to use memories of cinema-going to provide a more encompassing portrait of the cinema experience in the Thirties, based on a range of responses to questionnaires she produced in the 1990s. Her results show that for her respondents, the cinema was, as the published data suggested, a pursuit of youth, and for the majority, the bulk of their cinema-going took place between the ages of 10-25.⁶⁹⁹ However, her findings support the notion that the guiding influence on cinema attendance was not actually the films themselves:

When it came to choosing films, our respondents – especially the women – remember being guided most of the time by their favourite stars, though substantial numbers of men and women were influenced by posters, advertisements outside cinemas, and similar publicity. Nearly a third of all respondents admitted to going to see whatever film was playing...⁷⁰⁰

Kuhn notes that references to a specific cinema were more prominent than the films being shown when it came to decisions about visiting the cinema,⁷⁰¹ and concluded that:

⁶⁹⁹ Kuhn, Annette (1999), 'Cinema-Going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19:4, p. 534.

⁷⁰⁰ Kuhn, Annette, p. 534.

⁷⁰¹ Kuhn, Annette, p. 535.

Cinema-going, for this generation certainly, appears to have been less about particular films, or even films in general, than about experiences surrounding and part of the activity of 'going to the pictures', about the place of this activity in the context of their daily lives, interactions with family and friends, and comings and goings within and beyond the neighbourhoods in which they lived.⁷⁰²

Kuhn's findings have profound implications for scholars of British cinema, and the many claims made for its effect on audiences. Of course, once audiences were in the cinema, then a film could potentially make a profound impact on them, but Kuhn's work, along with much of the other evidence discussed in this chapter, shows that it was often other factors that led to audiences attending the cinema in the first place, and that this audience was fragmented and increasingly diverse. Yet, the question for both commercial filmmakers and the government at the end of the 1930s, was not who this audience was, but how to cater for it.

⁷⁰² Kuhn, Annette, p. 539.

Chapter Fifteen: 'The Lion Had Wings', 1936-39

While measures to support home grown British product were being confirmed by the renewal of the Cinematograph Films Act, the possibilities of Empire exhibition were also beginning to be realised by commercial companies. This was a natural development for producers like Korda, who from *Henry VIII* onwards had been looking for a way to reconcile his avowed Anglophilia with international productions. To promote this conception to the world was an obvious next step. Official colonial film promotion was still in existence in the early 1930s, an interesting example of which was provided by JS Huxley, who presented three educational films⁷⁰³ throughout East Africa as part of research for the Empire Marketing Board. Showing them to schoolchildren in the Government School in Old Moshi in Tanganyika, Huxley received several positive responses from the students.⁷⁰⁴ This was replicated in Kampala, Uganda, where Huxley estimated almost three quarters of the 'several hundred boys and girls' had never seen a film before:

At first the audience was obviously puzzled. After a minute or so, however, they adapted themselves to the new medium and then the fun began. Each new incident – the entry of a group of natives, the passage of a string of pack camels, the process of weaving or dyeing – was greeted with applause...The mixture of interest, excitement and naïve, high-spirited enjoyment was irresistible.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ *Cotton Growing in Nigeria, Fathoms Deep Beneath the Sea and The Life of a Plant.*

⁷⁰⁴ Huxley, JS (1930), 'Young Africa and the Cinema', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 159: 3919, p. 731.

⁷⁰⁵ Huxley, JS, p. 732.

Huxley's work would influence Major L. Notcutt of the International Missionary Council, who, with funding from the Carnegie Corporation made and distributed 'films of African life' throughout East Africa during 1935,⁷⁰⁶ as part of the wide-reaching Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE). However, these types of documentary films were by their nature not designed for traditional cinema exhibition, and as such, they were largely unknown outside of the select groups of East Africans they were screened to. Similarly, the short documentary *Wings Over Everest* (Geoffrey Barkas & Ivor Montagu, 1934), a particularly patriotic depiction of Lord Clydesdale's flight over Mount Everest, was an Academy Award winning but little seen film funded by the socialite Lady Houston, who, concerned over incidents of sporadic violence against British expats in India, felt that

some great deed of heroism might rouse India and make them remember that though they are of a different race – they are British subjects – under the King of England – who is Emperor of India – *and what more can they want?* (my italics).⁷⁰⁷

These productions were but one aspect of a general interest in images of the Empire in this decade, which would reach their peak with a number of high-profile dramas in the latter half of the decade. As Jeffrey Richards asserts, these fiction features 'were probably more valuable Imperially than any number of analytical and deeply argued lectures, speeches and editorials',⁷⁰⁸ and they were certainly popular with the British

⁷⁰⁶ Anon (July 1935), 'Films for African Natives', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 159: 4163, p. 294.

⁷⁰⁷ KIM (June 1934), 'Wings Over Everest (Clipped!)', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 157: 4102, p. 656.

⁷⁰⁸ Richards, Jeffrey (2010), p. 152.

public. In 1936, Gaumont-British released *Rhodes of Africa* (Berthold Viertel), which even at the time was noted for its tub-thumping approach to Rhodes' activities. Mark Forrest would write in the *Saturday Review* that 'The Gaumont British Company is in no danger of getting into hot water from errors of taste, but cinemagoers may well think how lucky South Africa was to have such nice people for pioneers, and be amazed at King Lobengula's spirited outburst.'⁷⁰⁹ However, Gaumont had originally intended to make a more balanced film, recording a scene in which Matabele chiefs criticised the British South Africa Company, only to remove this from the final edit.⁷¹⁰ Much of the principal photography was conducted by Geoffrey Barkas, whose *Palaver* had trod similar ground ten years previously, and while the film was not as explicitly racist as this predecessor, lines such as 'children must be punished', in reference to one of the adult Matabele, demonstrated its roots in Imperialistic propaganda.

Rhodes' success led Gaumont to produce *King Solomon's Mines* (Robert Stevenson, 1937) the following year, with the African location shots once again filmed by Barkas. However, star-billing in this production was given to the popular black actor, Paul Robeson, and channelled a more critical representation of colonialism via his character. As Paul Robeson Jr would put it in a biography of his father, 'it was a bit like [*Sanders of the River* (Zoltan Korda, 1935)] but without the pro-Imperialist slant and with fewer loincloths'.⁷¹¹ And the following year, Gainsborough's Will Hay

⁷⁰⁹ Forrest, Mark (March 1936), 'Rhodes of Africa', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 161: 4199, p. 416.

⁷¹⁰ Burns, James, 'Rhodes of Africa', *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/797> (Accessed 21 January 2013).

⁷¹¹ Robeson Jr, Paul (2001), *The Undiscovered Paul Robeson: An Artist's Journey, 1898-1939*, New York: Wiley, p. 239.

vehicle *Old Bones of the River* (Marcel Varnel, 1938), was to go as far as to satirise these Empire dramas - although both *King Solomon* and *Old Bones* still ultimately supported the notion of a benign British administration.

As the owner of the largest filmmaking concern in Britain, Alexander Korda's own contributions to the propaganda effort were the most widely distributed and successful. London Films began this trend with its 'Empire trilogy', the Zoltan Korda directed *Sanders of the River*, *The Drum* (1938) and *The Four Feathers* (1939), each of which had semi-official government help during production.⁷¹² Interestingly, these films were much more successful for Korda than his previous productions, with *The Drum* making over £64,000 profit⁷¹³ and *The Four Feathers* reaping over £300,000 in total at the box office.⁷¹⁴ Clearly, there was something about the gung-ho nationalism of these Empire productions that attracted a public, which films about individual icons could not match. In fact, *Sanders* was the production that started the late 1930s vogue for Empire films, despite being critically panned and disowned by Paul Robeson after seeing the completed film. Paul Rotha's review for *Cinema Quarterly* was typically acerbic:

A unit in Uganda with, I suspect, no script that mattered. A bright idea: Paul Robeson. Corollary: Nina Mae McKinney. Weeks and weeks of Africa – built at Shepperton and Elstree (They forgot the clouds are different) – and Negroes dug from agents' files and café

⁷¹² Richards, Jeffrey (1986), p. 150.

⁷¹³ Drazin, Charles, p.195.

⁷¹⁴ Drazin, Charles, p. 201.

bars. Later, much later, some hints thrown out by Bengal Lancer. It's Jubilee Year as well. So this is Africa, ladies and gentlemen, wild, untamed Africa before your very eyes, where the White man rules by kindness and the Union Jack means peace!'⁷¹⁵

But what is most revealing about Korda's Empire films was how he presented them to the public. Their marketing was significantly different to previous London Films productions, making explicit reference to 'foreignness' in a way that the non-British (although by then, naturalised) Korda had previously resisted. The American press book for *The Drum* (using the American release title, *Drums*) included a series of poster captions highlighting the differences between European and Asian culture. The first quotation described 'The savage heart of the East and the stout heart of the West in bitter struggle', followed by 'Come on...if you dare! To the romance of faraway places and the savage adventure of Empire building.'⁷¹⁶ That this was a film about the moral authority of Western Empire construction was confirmed with another caption, 'Men fight, live, love and die, bravely as the tide of Empire sweeps on.'⁷¹⁷ The pressbook also included ghost-written articles for use by local newspapers, one of which was headed 'Handling "natives" proves full course in diplomacy', and described how difficult it was for Zoltan Korda to negotiate the caste system: 'Korda saw that caste lines were meticulously drawn through acting assignments, living quarters and even kitchens so that none might be offended.' These references to 'natives', 'savage hearts' and 'faraway places' highlighted the

⁷¹⁵ Rotha, Paul (1958), p. 139.

⁷¹⁶ BFI: American Press Book for *The Drum* (entitled *Drums*).

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

framing of the indigenous Asians in the film as 'other', a people from which the valiant Westerners (especially British Westerners) could be distinguished. A more detailed ghost-written article appeared further on in the pressbook, which described the 'dangers' of the Khyber Pass in typically lurid fashion:

It is difficult to differentiate between the various tribes who live in these remote hills, constantly provoking horrible massacres... engaging in blood feuds and instigating unrest and ill feeling against the British...India is a breeding ground for disease and pestilence and shocking ignorance. Life here is truly lived in the raw, and the low standards maintained in the rude huts is nothing short of appalling.⁷¹⁸

However, for the first time in Korda's oeuvre, racial dimensions were inserted into the marketing narrative, with 'color' a key element of the advertising strategy. A full page proclaimed to exhibitors, 'Sell the Glorious Color (sic)', arguing that 'the story and locale of "DRUMS" make it natural for maximum color (sic) beauty.'⁷¹⁹ To make the claim even more explicit, the pressbook described 'the picturesqueness (sic) of the Hindu *characters* in their native dress...achieve their most spectacular effect in the beautiful color (sic) in which this film shows them (my italics).'⁷²⁰ While it may be an exaggeration to suggest that Technicolor was used purely because of the Asian races portrayed in the film, it is clear that United Artists, if not London Film

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

Productions itself was very aware of the racial implications contained within the story. Clearly, Korda made a decision that his first colour film would use the technology to its fullest, and a drama set in a land awash with ‘colored’ people would prove to be an ideal choice for Technicolor exploitation. What is certain is that the Indian audience did not greet the film’s racial politics favourably – it was withdrawn from Britain’s South East Asian colonies after rioting had followed screenings in Madras and Bombay.⁷²¹

The American pressbook for *The Four Feathers* also referenced the ‘gorgeous color (sic)’ of the Sudan, and its ghost-written articles followed the same route as the content produced for exploitation of *The Drum*, highlighting the ‘primitive’ nature of the indigenous peoples, in this case Sudanese. The piece explained that ‘8,000 savage Dervishes [were] filmed for the first time with every detail of their cruel warfare’, and if there was any doubt as to this ‘threat’ it proceeded to tell of 1800 camels ‘in a frenzied stampede on the *white man’s* stronghold (my italics)’.⁷²² Once again, race was a key determinant in the marketing of the film. Rachael Low’s assertion that ‘In the Thirties the cinema public as a whole accepted [Imperial films] as drama, not as expressions of approval for illiberal attitudes or racial exploitation’⁷²³ is persuasive, but it is clear that the marketing of these films exploited racial difference and sought to confirm the superiority of ‘British’ values.

⁷²¹ Arora, Poonam, p. 41.

⁷²² BFI: American Press Book for *The Four Feathers*.

⁷²³ Low, Rachael (1997d), p. 223.

By the end of the decade, the government had begun to augment much of this 'soft' propaganda emanating from the commercial film studios, directly intervening in distribution and censorship matters as a key element of its foreign policy. A government that was preparing for what appeared to be an increasingly likely European war, had a vested interest in what messages the public were being exposed to, and in 1936, the Committee of Imperial Defence held a sub-Committee on *Film Censorship in the Time of War or Emergency*.⁷²⁴ The Committee was chaired by Captain E Altham, Chief Naval Adviser to the Controller of Censorship, included RD Fennelly of the Board of Trade, and had consulted Lord Tyrrell and J Brooke Wilkinson, the President and Secretary of the BBFC respectively. Interestingly, much of the concern over censorship matters was directly linked to concerns about foreign nationals. The section of the report entitled, 'The Need for a Film Censorship in War', listed as the first restriction measures that would prevent 'the use of films for propaganda purposes inimical to the conduct of the war, especially since a large proportion of the films exhibited in this country are of foreign origin or under foreign control.'⁷²⁵ It was felt that the scope of film censorship should be extended to include non-fiction 'topicals and locals' and educational films, none of which were submitted to the BBFC up to that point.⁷²⁶ In addition, all films that had been previously passed during peacetime could have their certification revoked if the government or BBFC so wished.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ TNA: PRO: CAB 49/17.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

Censorship of British product was also not solely confined to the BBFC, and the government increasingly found itself in discussion with other countries that were unhappy with British film content. In 1938, the Secretary of State for India met Lord Tyrrell to raise concerns about a proposed film covering the Indian mutiny and the siege of Lucknow. He believed it would have had an 'unfortunate effect on public opinion in India and on relations between India and [Britain]'.⁷²⁸ In light of this discussion, the Board decided to refuse certification for the film. The cabinet minutes report the Secretary of State for Home Affairs as saying that

it would be undesirable to allow the impression to grow up that the government brought pressure to bear on the Board of Film Censors in matters of this kind...provided no pressure was brought to bear on the Board of Film Censors to refuse to allow the publication of the film, there could be no objection to a Minister of the Crown assuming full responsibility for having expressed a view as to the results which would be likely to ensue if the film was publicly exhibited.⁷²⁹

This censorship extended as far afield as Tokyo, as the following stilted telegram from 1937 would recount:

With regard to cinema films practically all of those which are shown in British Municipal area have already been shown in International Settlement in Shanghai where a strict censorship is enforced. It is

⁷²⁸ TNA: PRO: CAB 23/96.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

therefore rarely necessary for further censorship to be carried out in Tientsin. British Municipal Police however require all cinema theatres to provide in advance a list of films to be shown during current month. This list will be available to the Japanese gendarmerie through their liaison officer and arrangements will be made for a pre-view, at which a Japanese observer may be present, of any films which British or Japanese authorities consider likely to lead to a breach of the peace or to be otherwise undesirable. In this connexion it is understood that no objection will be taken to showing of newsreel films produced by recognised newsreel agents; but that no film will be shown which would be harmful to Anglo-Japanese relations (sic).⁷³⁰

In Palestine, the Board of Censors banned *Everything is Thunder* (Milton Rosmer, 1936) and *Sabotage* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1936) in 1937, allegedly because the German Consul took exception to a German girl harbouring a British spy (in the former) and the bombing of London in the latter.⁷³¹ In fact, S Noms of the Chief Secretary's Office, Palestine, wrote to HF Downie, Head of the Colonial Office's Middle East Department, to say the films had been banned because the situation in Palestine was such that any films that might have been 'prejudicial to public security' and 'misunderstood by the great majority of the Palestine population to the detriment of British reputation' were liable for censorship (for example, foreign agitators plotting

⁷³⁰ Craigie, Sir R, 'Negotiations at Tokyo over the Tientsin Dispute: Failure to Reach Agreement with the Japanese over the Question of Silver Stocks in North China', in Woodward, EL & Butler, R (1947), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* 3: 9, pp. 401-402.

⁷³¹ TNA: PRO: CO 323/1421/6.

to bomb London, as in *Sabotage*). He also noted that *Secret Agent* had previously been banned because of similar reasons. However, according to the letter, the German Consul had made representations about 21 films determined 'detrimental to German susceptibilities', although the results of these actions, nor the film titles, were listed.⁷³²

This concern not to offend German sensibilities extended to the eve of the Second World War and involved one of the most iconic and recognisable film stars of the decade, Charlie Chaplin. Conservative MP EH Keeling, wrote to RA Butler, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, to inform him that a constituent was anxious about a proposed new Chaplin film, provisionally entitled, 'The Dictator', commenting that 'it is most undesirable that such a film should be exhibited in this country', and criticising the satirical portrayal of Hitler. The constituent wanted the film forbidden from exhibition, with instructions being issued to 'Lord Tyrell's Board!'.⁷³³ In a fascinating example of the wide-reaching implications of the government's appeasement policy, even at this late stage in preparations for war, on Butler's request the Foreign Office News Department wrote to the British Consulate in Los Angeles, asking it to approach the production company and 'prevail upon them to treat the subject in such a way that it could be exhibited in this country without giving offence to Germany'.⁷³⁴ Unfortunately for the Foreign Office, it did not seem that 'anything [could] be done to check Mr Chaplin's enthusiasm and exuberance in his

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ TNA: PRO: FO 395/663.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

attacks on the dictators',⁷³⁵ as the details received about the film confirmed the fears of the constituent who originally lodged a complaint.

At this stage, the film was to focus on a dictator called Mr Hinkel and his rivalry with another dictator, Signor Gasolini, which hinged on each character's individual attempts to assert a physical height difference over the other, culminating in a scene in a barbershop whereby each dictator levered their chairs into 'alternately higher positions'. Hinkel's Director of Propaganda was to be known as Mr Garbage, and the countries involved were to be called Ptomania and Bacteria.⁷³⁶ The Consulate had talked to Chaplin personally, and described the fanatical enthusiasm with which he was entering the production of the film. It was noted that Chaplin had refused to forego his British nationality, and that his 'political outlook' made it unlikely that the consulate could influence him in favour of 'propitiating the personalities he is burlesquing'. In fact, it was thought that his likely response would be an 'immediate and final rebuff' as even though Chaplin himself believed it likely that the Hays office and the rest of the World would reject the film, he was willing to use his personal fortune to independently finance the film's distribution.⁷³⁷ Rowland Kenney wrote to J Brooke-Wilkinson at the BBFC to inform him of the upcoming film on 16 June 1939, asking that it be treated with the 'most careful scrutiny',⁷³⁸ to which Brooke-Wilkinson contacted Joseph Breen, his American counterpart, to clarify the situation. Breen asserted that Chaplin did not have a script, only the basis of his idea, and that he had passed on the concerns with enough clarity that he would 'have himself to blame

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

if he found the film could not be certificated in [Britain].'⁷³⁹ Of course, within three months Britain was at war with Germany and Chaplin's film, when it arrived, was greeted with open arms as a valuable tool in the propaganda war.

By 10 July 1939, the Foreign Office had produced a survey for Cabinet on its 'Foreign Publicity', including steps taken to use films as propaganda. Its stated aim was to 'educate foreigners in the British point of view',⁷⁴⁰ and it was beginning to seriously consider how the cinema could be directed to this objective. Interestingly, the report acknowledged that the use of film for this purpose was the 'least organised and least developed' form of propaganda employed by the department, 'though clearly it [was] one of the most important'.⁷⁴¹ The memo outlined the formation in 1936 by the British Council and the Travel Association of a Joint Film Committee, which also involved representatives from the Foreign Office, the Department of Overseas Trade, the General Post Office and the British Film Institute. The Joint Film Committee had distributed films to 72 countries during 1938-39, with investment of £4000 from the British Council for 'adapting and re-editing existing films' and foreign distribution rights. 57 of these countries saw the films exhibited in commercial cinemas, with the remaining fifteen being watched by members of Foreign-British societies. The British Council also had a presence at the New York World Fair and was committed to £25,000 worth of investment for films and projectors to foreign film societies. This work was augmented by smaller-scale activities, such as the Films Committee established in Scotland 'To promote the production and circulation of

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ TNA: PRO: CAB 24/288.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

Scottish Films of national interest and to administer funds for these purposes',⁷⁴² which was linked to the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. It was chaired by Sir Gilbert Archer and had been provided with funds of £5000 for film publicity from the Glasgow-born housing magnate Sir John A MacTaggart. £1000 of this was allocated to the construction of the Empire Cinema at the Exhibition, and the remaining number was provided as part of a fund for film production. There was an additional £1500 provided by Lord George Nigel Douglas-Hamilton, Commissioner for the Special Areas in Scotland, so that the commission was able to produce six documentaries, covering fisheries, agricultural research, sports, education, economic planning and a 'general survey film of Scotland'.⁷⁴³ These were shown in the Empire Exhibition cinema and released to 800 cinemas across the UK, and helped to contribute to what was by then, a wide range of work detailing the Empire.

However, the complementary themes employed by both the commercial film companies and the government-financed non-fiction initiatives meant that it was only a matter of time before both would converge in a single project. This moment arose in 1939, when Alexander Korda met with the Treasury to discuss what was to become the culmination of the British pre-war propaganda effort, *The Lion Has Wings*. Described by the General Post Office Film Unit (which had taken over the responsibilities of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit in 1933) as having 'brilliant artistic abilities and sincere desire to serve this country...combined with the artistic temperament to an extent which might cause embarrassment',⁷⁴⁴ Korda was typically

⁷⁴² TNA: PRO: CAB 24/281.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ TNA: PRO: TS 27/474.

enthusiastic about the project. Due to a clause Korda had inserted in his contract with United Artists in 1935, should the British government invite him to 'take part in the reorganisation of the British film industry, or a very substantial portion thereof', he would be able to work independently for a maximum period of eighteen months, after which he would return to United Artists for however many years remained.⁷⁴⁵ In fact, Korda had only one year left to fulfil, and so by working for the government he would effectively end his relationship with the distributor. The clause also ensured Korda would lose twenty per cent of all 'interests, securities, rights or other benefits' for the term elapsed, although he retained his full salary.⁷⁴⁶

GEG Forbes, now writing as Deputy Director of the Ministry of Information's Film Publicity Division, argued that the film would be 'excellent propaganda both here and abroad'.⁷⁴⁷ He stated that there had been 'frequent oral and telephone conversations' between Sir Joseph Ball, Director of the Conservative Research Department, Korda and himself 'on matters relating to the production of the film', as well as conversations with Korda about 'the present difficulties of the film industry'.⁷⁴⁸ Forbes highlighted Korda's unease over his contract with United Artists, and despite assertions that it could distribute the film, it appeared that discussions between the two had broken down to the point where Korda may not have been able to apply his name to the production. Mr Bleck, the company's business manager, assured the Ministry on further meetings that the contract was between London Film Productions and Korda personally, not the company Alexander Korda Film Productions, which

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

was dealing with *The Lion Has Wings*. He proceeded to write out a warranty to that effect, absolving the Ministry of any responsibility should there be a breach of contract.⁷⁴⁹

However, on 20 October 1939 everything changed. Korda approached Forbes and Ball, to tell them that his contract with United Artists was such that the only way he could attach any involvement to the film would be if it was to be the sole distributor. Despite the Film Publicity Division's concerns about a contract that 'bound it to leave the exploitation both in this country and abroad in the hands of a distributor of alien nationality,' it acquiesced, because Korda's involvement was desired and therefore the only option was for United Artists to handle the film.⁷⁵⁰ The Ministry agreed a 50/50 share in profits and attempted to get the film swiftly distributed; in fact, it was suggested that copies of the film for certain destinations could be dispatched by air for expediency.⁷⁵¹ Nonetheless, relations soured once more on 26 April 1940, when a 'preliminary investigation of [Alexander Korda Film Productions] records by the Ministry...furnished grounds for thinking that the costs [of the film's production, part funded by the Ministry] were in certain respects overstated.'⁷⁵² The issue hinged on an office Korda had to maintain in New York, as part of his UA contract. It had been agreed in principle that a proportion of this cost would be recovered from receipts from *The Lion Has Wings*, however the ministry were unhappy about how the cost was to be apportioned.⁷⁵³ Solicitors Slaughter and May were sent in to check Korda's

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

finances. They ascertained the costs of the film to be £31,500.⁷⁵⁴ E St J Bamford of the Ministry of Information agreed with HG Boxall of Alexander Korda Film Productions to receive £17,000 receipt monies owed.⁷⁵⁵

The Lion Has Wings was first shown in public on 30 October 1939.⁷⁵⁶ As an Alexander Korda production, the image of Big Ben with 'A London Films Production' was the first sight presented to the audience that sat down to watch the film. The opening voiceover intoned 'This is Britain...' and the remainder of the production sought to display the inherently British qualities that would lead to a quick resolution to the impending war against Germany. British 'pluck' was shown via soldiers writing jokes on bombs, and this quality was demonstrated as an enduring, longstanding aspect of the British. Finally, as the narrator declared that 'England stands on its guard as it was three centuries ago,' images invoked the spirit of Elizabeth I, with a dissolve from a fleet of Armada ships to a fleet of aircraft preparing for battle. The Foreign Office was eager to get *The Lion Has Wings*' message out into the wider world, presumably as ideological support for the war effort. In December 1939, a telegram was sent from Sir G Warner (Berne) to the British Ambassador in Switzerland, DV Kelly, asking whether he would be prepared to offer his patronage to the film, to be shown in Lausanne on 10 January. Kelly was given assurances that the French Ambassador would follow his lead, and that a portion of the receipts would be given to the Swiss Red Cross.⁷⁵⁷ Kelly agreed and the screening went ahead, developing this ideology in a portion of the world that Britain had fraught

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ CAB 68/2/25.

⁷⁵⁷ TNA: PRO: FO 371/23174.

relations with.⁷⁵⁸ The film's power as a piece of British propaganda was proven when, on its release, it was banned in a number of territories, including Finland, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.⁷⁵⁹

The British reaction to the film was documented in a specific Mass Observation report, and in comments from diarists recording their views for Mass Observation. For example, a medical student noted:

[*The Lion Has Wings*] is far and away the best propaganda film I have ever seen. The direction and editing is all good, and sometimes more than outstanding; the same applies to photography...The audience was unusually appreciative and demonstrative for London: Hitler and goose-stepping German troops were booed and hissed, the Royal Family and the Kiel raiders were cheered and clapped. Above all, I should add, the film is intensely exciting at times, and equally interesting at others.⁷⁶⁰

The collated report on *The Lion Has Wings* recorded that the film was observed five times at different cinemas, all in London. There were some interesting observations, such as every cinema recording a laugh when a Scot was seen tossing a caber, the

⁷⁵⁸ Import restrictions in Britain on Swiss goods, after Switzerland's refusal to unite behind Britain against Germany, saw Swiss trade figures plummet.

⁷⁵⁹ BFI: LFP D/44 United Artists.

⁷⁶⁰ MO: Mermion, DE, Diarist 5142 (1 November 1939).

boos and hisses at Hitler, and applause when the King appeared.⁷⁶¹ The audience response was surprisingly consistent across the five venues.

A wider survey of 200 people found that 110 of them had seen the film, of which just over 39 per cent recorded that they had a 'strong like' of it. Detailed comments revealed that many were disappointed with it, especially scenes that were taken from the air raid featurette, *The Gap*, and *Fire Over England*, and the belief that the England represented in the film was unrealistic. However, in the main, the comments received were favourable. *Kinematograph Weekly* recorded that nearly 200 copies of the film were playing simultaneously in North London and the Provinces, which was 'believed to be the largest number of copies of any feature film ever used for general release'.⁷⁶² The press response was even more favourable, with seven out of the twelve publications surveyed recording a 'strong like'.⁷⁶³ The promotion of the film drew on RAF attendances at cinemas, and references to the pomp of the military effects on display in foyers.⁷⁶⁴

By 21 September 1939, the Ministry of Information had produced its first report on war propaganda, *Propaganda: Appreciation of Action Taken and its Effect*. However, it was not until the second report, on 2 November 1939, that films were mentioned. There was a brief section announcing the release of *The Lion Has Wings*, with the promise that seven travelling cinema vans were in operation in Scotland and nine more were being prepared, and confirmation that all newsreel companies each had a

⁷⁶¹ MO: Report on *The Lion Has Wings*, pp. 4-12.

⁷⁶² MO: Report on *The Lion Has Wings*, p. 34.

⁷⁶³ MO: Report on *The Lion Has Wings*, p.27.

⁷⁶⁴ MO: Report on *The Lion Has Wings*, pp. 29-32.

representative attached to GHQ in France.⁷⁶⁵ The third report, of 15 November 1939, highlighted the release of the General Post Office Film Unit's *The First Days* (Pat Jackson and Humphrey Jennings, 1939), a documentary about London life during the opening days of the Second World War, and mentioned that the unit was also preparing a film on the balloon barrage (*Squadron 992* (Harry Watt, 1940)).⁷⁶⁶ Mobile film divisions were being assembled for deployment in Africa, and the report stated that:

[Favourable] comment on British films has been received from Denmark and Egypt; and in Japan, where a bureau of information has been set up, the German ambassador is reported to have expressed the fear that British propaganda was beginning to influence Japanese opinion.⁷⁶⁷

The success of *The Lion has Wings* meant that a move towards more government support of British film was inevitable. The official promotion of films via the Ministry of Information was proposed in a cabinet memo on 8 October 1939, in which it was decided to control it via one of the ancillary group of publicity-producing divisions, 'Films and Radio Relations'.⁷⁶⁸ Nine members of staff worked in the division, which had the stated aim of 'presenting pictorially to the many millions who visit [cinemas across the world] the case for democracies'.⁷⁶⁹ Many believed that official

⁷⁶⁵ TNA: PRO: CAB 68/2.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ TNA: PRO: CAB 67/1/34.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

intervention could not come soon enough, including Christopher Brunel (son of Adrian, and who would become a film editor in his own right), who wrote to Mass Observation on 1 November 1939, in response to reports it had produced regarding the efficacy of film propaganda. He also sent the first instalment of his war diary, and requested his father be included as an observer – Adrian Brunel had directed the government's Film Department during the First World War, and they both clearly believed in the power of film as propaganda. An excerpt from his diary records on 5 October 1939:

Had tea at Coventry Street Lyons, and went on to see some film technician friends of mine to discuss position of the film production industry in Britain...nine others, besides myself, only one of whom (C.T. a film editor), was working in the film production industry...The position of the industry seemed very black indeed.⁷⁷⁰

This was attributed to fears (later realised) that the government was about to suspend the 1938 Cinematograph Films Act, which made investment in films too risky for financiers. Concerns were also expressed regarding the resolve of the ACT to press for higher wages now that war had broken out, as it may have been deemed unpatriotic. The film department of the Ministry of Information was also criticised by all present as being inactive and staffed by 'influential persons [who] knew nothing about films'.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁷⁰ MO: Brunel, Christopher, Diarist 5036 (5 October 1939).

⁷⁷¹ MO: Brunel, Christopher, Diarist 5036 (17 October 1939).

In September 1939, once war had broken out with Germany, the Board of Trade sought to restrict film imports from the US and Canada, 'for the purpose of enabling us to concentrate all available resources in dollar exchange on the purchase of commodities which are essential for the prosecution of the war.'⁷⁷² According to the Board of Trade's own figures, the estimated annual payment for the rights of American films in 1937 came to £26,600,000, but it was acknowledged that

it would be impracticable to stop royalties going back to America by import control, because there are already large numbers of American films in this country. I should, therefore, contemplate coming to some arrangement with the American film interests by which the sums accruing to them from royalties would be reduced as much as possible.'⁷⁷³

The report concluded with a plea to 'make the best bargain I can with the American film interests for reducing the sums accruing to them for royalties etc.'⁷⁷⁴ These efforts were the culmination of two decades of concern over the American film industry and its influence in Britain, but by the late 1930s, these pressures seemed even more acute. For example, the trade journal, *World Film News* would write in 1937 that

⁷⁷² TNA: PRO: CAB 67/1/14.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

The Americans, with impressive supply of Hollywood pictures, have the necessary tank power to put native {British} exhibitors to their mercy. They are using it remorselessly. So far as films go, we are now a colonial people.⁷⁷⁵

British cinema in the late 1930s had explored all facets of the Empire; it had proclaimed it as emblematic of the British character while simultaneously and, often inadvertently, exposing its flaws. Yet, by the end of the decade, it remained beholden to Hollywood, dominated by its influence and reliant on its finance. British cinema had travelled the globe, but what exactly it was, what exactly it represented, and whether it would survive, was still uncertain. The lion had wings, but they had been clipped.

⁷⁷⁵ Jaikumar, Priya (Summer 2002), p. 120.

Conclusion – The Invention of British Cinema

The inconsistencies and contradictions highlighted by any analysis of ‘national’ cinema have led many authors to question the value of defining cinema in ‘national’ terms at all. Kristin Thompson, in her pioneering study of the pre-Second World War world film market, *Exporting Entertainment*, warns that

[We] should be careful when we formulate film history in terms of “national cinemas”...few national cinema industries operate in isolation; through foreign investment, competition and other types of influence, outside factors will almost invariably affect any given national cinema.⁷⁷⁶

Likewise, Alan Lovell believed that the search for British cinema’s national ‘qualities’ verged on the absurd:

[The] persistent linking of British film production with the question of national identity is odd. It has run through discussion of the British cinema for much of its history. That such a link exists is, at one level, a truism – any activity engaged in by British citizens can be seen as a way of constructing national identity. In discussions of British cinema it is taken for granted both that the link exists and that it is a politically important one – it often seems as if the cinema is the key tool for the construction of British national identity. At present, the

⁷⁷⁶ Thompson, Kristin, p. 168.

belief in the importance of the link seems to depend heavily on the unacknowledged acceptance of the old view of the cinema as having magical powers of expression.⁷⁷⁷

Yet as I acknowledged at the start of this thesis, this is not a work that seeks to challenge the notion of 'Britishness', or to debate to what extent the message of one film is more or less 'British' than another. In my view, all of the available evidence - the numerous international influences; the fragmented audience; the theoretical critiques etc., presents serious objections to the notion of a 'British national cinema'. Yet, there is also a wealth of material that points to the fact that cinema audiences believed that unique, definable 'British' qualities existed, and that some, if not all of these were displayed in 'British' films. What interests me is how this notion developed despite the multitude of data that suggests it is a mythology, and how it was to encompass and dispel all of these contradictions. These incongruous elements of British cinema are neatly summarised in an assertion by Tom Ryall that

It can be argued that the vigorous strands of popular culture evident in the music-hall based comedies of Gracie Fields, George Formby and Will Hay, in Hitchcock's thrillers, in the Jessie Matthews musicals and in horror/fantasy films such as *The Ghoul* (1933), *The Ghost Goes West* (1935) and *The Clairvoyant* (1934) do constitute a distinctive cinema of national identity.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁷ Lovell, Alan (1999), 'The British Cinema: The Known Cinema?', in Murphy, Robert (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p. 11.

⁷⁷⁸ Ryall, Tom (1999), 'A British Studio System: The Associated British Picture Corporation and the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in the 1930s', in Murphy, Robert (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), London: BFI Publishing, p. 34.

How can the comedies of Formby and Fields, whose appeal was limited to a predominantly working-class audience and which were helmed by émigré directors, represent Britain? How did the multi-national amalgams of films like *The Ghoul* and *The Ghost Goes West* come to be seen as part of a 'distinctive cinema of national identity'? Andrew Higson argues that 'to identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and stable set of meanings.'⁷⁷⁹ But Ryall's example suggests the opposite - that instead, British cinema from this period encompassed a diverse collection of films, and was open to a number of conflicting interpretations. This thesis has identified many of these apparent contradictions, and outlined how they were discussed and constructed during the first few decades of cinema in Britain.

Throughout, I have also sought to highlight elements of consistency in the use of the term 'British cinema', arguing that it was deployed in a way that appears to subsume the variety in evidence throughout British films. Thus, an exhibitor could say to Mass Observation's researchers that

People in the main don't come to see British Pictures unless it has a reputation (sic). It's the same for all British films, people look if it's British and then if it is walk away.⁷⁸⁰

It was this consistency that, even if used pejoratively as in the example above, would weave together the disparate strands of filmmaking in Britain into a conception that

⁷⁷⁹ Higson, Andrew (1989), 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen* 30: 4, p. 37.

⁷⁸⁰ MO: Worktown Survey: Letter from the Manager of the Bolton Hippodrome (28 July 1937).

resonated with the general public. As shown in Part One of this thesis, this process developed gradually over time, as the maturation of the organisational structures of film distribution and exhibition laid the foundations for an art form with a geographically national reach. The purpose-built cinema provided an environment in which national ideologies (amongst others) could be disseminated widely, to an audience primed to respond to them - as the British government would realise near the end of the First World War. As Ingrid Jeacle argues:

The act of 'going to the movies' constitutes not only an evening of light-hearted entertainment. It is a ritual of everyday life, a cultural phenomenon bound up in the pursuit of leisure. It is a forum where the audience both escapes from the everyday and is at the same time captured by a disciplinary regime, a regime that dictates appearance, mannerisms and commodity choice. Similarly, no film is value free.⁷⁸¹

In other words, the value judgements associated with films were affected by the context of cinema exhibition and, more widely, the cultural context in which particular films were presented. It was these contextual factors, encompassing marketing, the cinemagoing experience, critical reactions and, increasingly throughout the interwar period, government intervention, that helped to define the parameters of the term 'British cinema' in the public consciousness, and provided a coherency that, as shown in Part Two of this thesis, enabled it to be distinguished from other national cinemas, most commonly Hollywood. Therefore, the multitude of audience surveys

⁷⁸¹ Jeacle, Ingrid, p. 678.

and Mass Observation studies conducted throughout the 1930s would reveal that every interviewee was happy to discuss 'British' films without hesitation - there was a common understanding of what this term would connote, even if this was often negative. Part Three of this thesis demonstrated that while plot, subject, stars, location, etc. were all integral to a film's 'Britishness', the development of the concept of 'British cinema' in the previous decades ensured that, in the years in which British film arguably became most open to international influences, it was able to accommodate these diverse elements while retaining its distinctive qualities in the minds of cinema audiences.

Thus, Pre-Second World War British cinema presents an ideal example of the difficulties of conceptualising 'national' cinemas. Its complexity and fluidity challenges any attempt to go beyond the apparently more straightforward political definitions of a 'British' film, of the sort employed by the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act (which as we have seen, was also subject to interpretation). But what it demonstrates extremely clearly, is that 'national' cinemas are not created in isolation - instead, they are mythologies augmented over time, the result of a number of complementary factors. The 'tendencies' of British films that Rotha and others have searched for, most recently identified in *Stories We Tell Ourselves*, are but one part of the process of invention that creates 'national' cinema. The other factors at work, examined throughout this thesis and incorporating a wide range of industrial and cultural elements, are of equal importance and, when coupled with these 'tendencies', produce fictions as potent as anything depicted on cinema screens.

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