University of Sheffield

‘Propaganda for things as they are’? British Newsreels in Everyday Life, c.1920-c.1939.

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Abstract:

British newsreels were short non-fiction films, issued twice-weekly as topical summaries of the news that were included in most commercial cinema programmes. Hitherto, inter-war newsreels have been viewed as a mass propaganda medium for political and social conservatism. This thesis aims to overturn this conceptualisation, by positing that newsreels were a relatively progressive medium, central to processes of political and cultural democratisation occurring in British society between c.1920 and c.1939. It achieves this by contextualising newsreels within the local civic cultures of towns and cities across Britain, where the medium was exhibited, marketed, and often produced. Indeed, newsreels were an everyday means by which local publics saw themselves represented and also a way that citizens participated in urban political cultures. The argument is therefore twofold. First, newsreels visually represented a new consumer-citizenry, helping cinemagoers to envision their role within a participatory democracy. The medium routinely projected the civic ethos of non-partisanship and an entitlement to participate in public life irrespective of class or gender. Second, the social practice of watching newsreels actively helped to create the consumer-citizenry that was in turn projected in newsreel content. Thus, this thesis foremost demonstrates that newsreels were the primary commercial civic medium in Britain between the wars.

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Contents

Introduction

Going to the cinema to watch a film programme was among the dominant pastimes of inter-war Britons; approximately 40 per cent of the population went at least once a week by the 1930s.[1] The programme which patrons saw on each cinema trip was also much more than just a single film. A typical show lasted between two to three hours, and usually contained two feature films alongside an assortment of short films such as cartoons, comedy shorts, serial melodramas, cinemagazines, and newsreels. This lattermost short film, the newsreel, was a five- to-ten-minute non-fiction film, eventually issued twice each week as a topical summary of the news. In 1938, the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, founded the previous year to represent the collective interests of newsreel production companies, agreed to define their product as, 'a series of films published not less than once weekly…mainly composed of items of "up-to-the-minute" news'.[2]

In inter-war political and intellectual circles, three shibboleths were forged concerning the content and impact of newsreels. The writings of filmmaker and critic Andrew Buchanan articulate well these ingrained contemporary assumptions. Buchanan produced his own commercial cinemagazine between 1931 and 1936, first called *Ideal Cinemagazine* and later *Gaumont-British Magazine*. He identified himself and his product with the left-leaning Documentary Film Movement in Britain, the group of filmmakers and critics centred around periodicals like *Sight and Sound* and *World Film News*.

The first truism was that newsreels were a 'mass' medium that foremost operated on an (inter)national level. In a 1934 edited collection of essays, Buchanan suggested that 'the news-reel, like the newspaper, has developed into a habit, so that cinema-goers miss it if it is not shown, even though they may gaze at it without interest when it is'.[3] Like the popular press and the radio, newsreels were seen as an ubiquitous part of everyday life, a uniform product experienced by a 'mass' national audience who were themselves increasingly homogenous by virtue of their common consumption practices. Mass media begot a mass society, globalised yet also standardised.[4]

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[1] Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: 2002), p.2
[2] Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and history: British newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: 1979), p.26.
[3] Andrew Buchanan, 'Axes to Grind': the Film as Propaganda' in R. S. Lambert (ed.), *For Filmgoers Only: The Intelligent Filmgoer's Guide to the Film* (London: 1934), p.43.
[4] For another contemporary example of this criticism of mass media and commercial leisure, see J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: 1934), pp.109-110, p.118, pp.219-220.

Secondly, intellectual critics generally asserted that newsreels were poor quality films that failed to offer 'real' investigative journalism. Buchanan dismissed mainstream commercial newsreels as 'devoid of originality, and padded out with extremely unimportant events'.[5] In a later 1945 essay, he further summarised the usual litany of complaints levelled at the newsreel, that it was 'carelessly constructed, superficial, too brief, and lacking impartiality; in other words, technically, artistically, and politically it fails'.[6] Newsreels were roundly dismissed as superficial dross, the poor relative of the documentary film and the nadir of the commercial film programme.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, newsreels were widely criticised for being a propaganda medium, that is, they were accused of projecting an ideologically biased worldview. Left-leaning critics like Buchanan argued that newsreels were 'a powerful medium for expressing the type of propaganda which encourages the continuance of things as they are'.[7] Fellow left-wing journalist Cyril Wray echoed this in 1934, when he proposed that newsreels were nothing more than 'propaganda for things as they are'.[8] According to this view, newsreels were an ideologically conservative medium which advocated social and political inertia.

It is worth noting that these shibboleths were not just delimited to liberal-left intellectuals and filmmakers. Socialists and the British Union of Fascists (BUF) alike frequently decried mainstream newsreels' vested interests in the status quo. Both groups also attempted to produce their own newsreels as respective forms of counterpropaganda.[9] Likewise, the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association (CEA), which served as the main trade organisation for commercial film exhibitors, was inundated with complaints about newsreels' perceived propagandist elements from its regional branches throughout the period.[10] Even cinemagoers themselves, when surveyed by Mass Observation or writing to film fan magazines, condemned newsreels.[11] They too, sometimes grumbled about newsreels being a vehicle for political propaganda; mostly they criticised the medium for being utterly tedious. By the end of the inter-war period,

[5] *Ibid*.
[6] Andrew Buchanan, *Film and the Future* (London: 1945), p.38.
[7] Buchanan, 'Axes to Grind', p.43.
[8] *The Manchester Guardian* (10th August 1934), p.16.
[9] For socialist newsreels, see Bert Hogenkamp, *Deadly parallels: film and the Left in Britain, 1929-1939* (London: 1986). For the BUF's attacks on mainstream newsreels see for example, *The Blackshirt* (4-10 Nov 1933), p.1; *The Blackshirt* (20 Jun 1936), p.8. For the BUF's occasional attempts to produce their own newsreels, see *The Blackshirt* (30 Nov 1934), p.3; *The Blackshirt* (11 Jan 1935), p.12; *The Blackshirt* (18 Jan 1935), p.2; *The Blackshirt* (15 Feb 1935), p.9.
[10] This will be elucidated in chapter one.
[11] This will also be explored fully in chapter one.

it was widely held that newsreels were a 'mass' propaganda medium of dubious aesthetic and journalistic quality.

As will be elucidated below, historians who have studied newsreels, though qualifying or nuancing these shibboleths, have not deviated from them all that much. Newsreels are still seen as a mass medium which foremost operated at the national or international level. They have continued to be analysed as conservative propaganda, both in terms of their content and how they influenced audiences. Moreover, even newsreel historians have tended to treat them as a trivial medium that was ultimately peripheral to the cinemagoing experience.

This thesis sets out to show that newsreels, outside of overtly political content, were not 'propaganda for things as they are'. Instead, I argue that newsreels fundamentally changed how the public were visually (re)presented to themselves in everyday political culture. Newsreels were the primary visual medium that projected the shift from the representative democracy of Edwardian Britain, where public opinion was 'weighted' according to one's social status and where the public interest was considered to be best represented by conventional elites, to the participatory consumer-democracy which emerged from the 1920s onwards.[12] This new conception of the body politic held that all opinions were counted as equally important, and all citizens were ideally participants in public life. Newsreels therefore mirrored the seismic shift in political culture precipitated by the two Representation of the People Acts in 1918 and 1928, which enfranchised the vast majority of adult men and women.

Thus, the first premise of my central argument is that newsreels were a relatively progressive medium which projected a demotic, inclusive image of the British public in terms of both class and gender. In this they were perhaps not unique, as by 1939 the popular press and, later, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had also embraced participatory democracy. Though, as cinemagoing was most popular precisely with the newly enfranchised in the 1920s, newsreels certainly represented this new public to itself more directly and at an earlier stage than other media could achieve. Neither the BBC nor the popular press reached young, working-class men and women in any sizeable numbers until the mid-1930s.

What really distinguished newsreels from other media forms were the ways in which the medium engaged with audiences on the local level. This is the second premise of my overall

[12] For the prevailing Victorian and Edwardian conception of public opinion as weighted, see James Thompson, *British political culture and the idea of 'public opinion', 1867-1914* (Cambridge: 2013); David Vessey, 'Votes for Women and Public Discourse: Elite Newspapers, Correspondence Columns and Informed Debate in Edwardian Britain', *Media history*, 27 No.4 (2021), pp.476-490.

argument, that the social practice of watching newsreels actively helped to create the new consumer-citizenry that was in turn projected in newsreel items. Civic culture was central to newsreels' staple content and to how items were marketed and exhibited. Cinemagoers' consumption of newsreels thereby became a routine means of participating, if sometimes vicariously, in the public life of localities. Watching a newsreel often enmeshed practices of local citizenship with the consumption of commercial media. In this sense, newsreels helped to create the new category of consumer-citizen which emerged across the early to mid-twentieth century in Britain as civic and consumer identities became increasingly indistinct. Newsreels, then, were as much a part of local political culture as they were a means of representing it. Overall, my argument is twofold. I first posit that newsreels were a key civic medium that represented a new citizenry to itself and helped them to envision their role in a participatory democracy. At the same time, I also argue this medium altered the way inter-war consumers participated in everyday political culture by enmeshing commercial and civic practices.

This overarching thesis can be usefully broken down into three more specific claims. First, I argue that whilst newsreels were frequently considered a boring, rather banal experience by viewers, they were still actively watched on a regular basis. It was cinemagoers' routine engagement with newsreels that allowed the medium to become a vital part of inter-war political culture. Most newsreel scholarship has contended that newsreels were too ephemeral and trivial to elicit substantial engagement from audiences. In this view, newsreels were only included by cinema managers to 'pad out' the film programme and make it appear better value for money. They were the bit in the film programme when people went to the toilets, went to buy confectionary, chatted to their peers, or else found myriad means to otherwise ignore what was onscreen. Though newsreels were often perceived as dull by viewers, I suggest that this did not equate to them being dismissed. Despite their often-trite content and fleeting length, newsreels were nonetheless a highly influential form of ephemeral political culture for many Britons in this period.

Second, it was predominantly local or regional political cultures that newsreels were a part of, even issues that were produced by national companies. Cinemagoers routinely saw their own communities, not infrequently themselves, projected onscreen. Both newsreel producers and cinema managers recognised the appeal of projecting an audiences' own town or city onscreen in their local cinema. Moreover, public occasions were relatively easy to film as formal ceremonies with fixed schedules enabled cameramen to set up for the best shots with little difficulty. Thus, civic cultures were considered to have inherent news value and formed a

mainstay topic in the twice-weekly issues from all major newsreel companies. Furthermore, a variety of regional or local newsreel producers supplemented the national edition with their own footage, ranging from the professional *Scottish Moving Picture News* or Jacey News Cinema productions to quasi-amateur films.

Alongside the efforts of newsreel producers, cinema managers were key to newsreels resonating on the local level, as they often acted as intermediaries who tailored the exhibition context of uniform national newsreels to accentuate the civic elements of content. Frequently, the screening of a local newsreel was framed as a civic occasion in itself. This enabled cinemagoers to participate in their communities' political culture in novel and unprecedented ways. Thus, the production, marketing, and exhibition of newsreels meant they often represented, and were frequently integrated into, the political culture of the parish pump as opposed to that of the British nation or Empire. Newsreels, via the deliberate efforts of newsreel companies and cinema managers, thereby provided a visual medium which underpinned civic cultures in towns and cities throughout Britain.

Thirdly, even when not directly featuring civic culture, newsreels' 'interest' content more generally was a vehicle for the civic ethos of inter-war participatory democracy. 'Interest' content was a contemporary label for items which did not overtly cover formal politics, that is, topical or factual content not concerned with either British national politics or international relations. Sports, the arts, and informational items were the salient subject matter to be filmed as 'interest' items. The civic ethos which permeated British political culture in the inter-war period was largely derived from the late nineteenth-century philosophy of social idealism as formulated by T. H. Green and subsequently developed by his acolytes. In conceptualising the ideal relationship between citizen and state, social idealism stressed the active participation of all members in public life so as to foster political cohesion. Citizens had the duty to participate alongside the rights afforded them by the state.

In the inter-war period, social idealism diffused into most strands of thinking about relationships between citizen and state, often proffered as a remedy for perceived societal turmoil in the wake of the Great War. As Tom Hulme has revealed, popular civics education throughout Britain stressed that social idealism was best practised in the locality.[13] For many political thinkers, social idealism was primarily about the welfare provided by a proactive

[13] Tom Hulme, 'Putting the city back into citizenship: civics education and local government in Britain, 1918-45', *Twentieth Century British History* 26 No.1 (2015), pp.26–51.

municipal government in return for the active participation of residents in their local communities. Moreover, Robert Snape and Helen Pussard have demonstrated how theorisations of 'new' leisure in the 1920s also conceived of rational recreation, the sorts of hobbies and clubs run in village halls and community centres, as a means to increase active involvement in public life among citizens.[14] The core tenets of social idealism which pervaded political culture were a non-partisan inclusivity in the body politic and a call for active participation from all members of the public.

Newsreels were a purely commercial enterprise, produced for profit by companies which possessed no cohesive ideological mission. Yet, in their attempts to appeal to a 'mass' audience of mixed tastes, chiefly comprised of those newly enfranchised constituents of the body politic, producers created content that largely adhered to the core civic values of inter-war political culture. Thus, cinemagoing and newsreels led to consumerism and citizenship becoming heavily imbricated in this period. In many respects, it marks the advent of the public as a body of consumer-citizens, where consumption of media and participation in commercial leisure became a salient means of participating in the public sphere. It ought to be stressed there were limitations on who was included in this new public. Political extremists of all shades, both fascists and communists, were marginalised as they abrogated the values of non-partisanship and were therefore considered by producers as too 'controversial' to feature with any regularity in newsreels. Moreover, the cinema audience was racialised by newsreel producers and cinema managers alike as wholly white. People of colour were typically filmed as exotic spectacle for the public to view, firmly beyond the pale of the British public. Thus, newsreels projected the inclusive and exclusionary elements of the new consumer democracy.

Overall, then, newsreels were a highly influential civic medium in inter-war Britain. Their content consistently provided a routine visual representation of the public as consumer-citizens. This representation recast the public as significantly more inclusive in terms of class and gender. On a weekly basis, newsreels visually projected the interests and lives of working-class men, and women of all classes, in an unprecedented manner. As these two groups also comprised the majority of cinemagoers, newsreels (re)presented these new constituents to themselves as valued members of the public. Moreover, newsreels became integrated into civic culture itself. The public being presented in a newsreel was often the very same one sat in the cinema it was exhibited in. Thus, newsreels were often intimately connected with their

[14] Robert Snape and Helen Pussard, 'Theorisations of leisure in inter-war Britain', *Leisure studies*, 32 No.1 (2015), pp.1-18.

audiences in a way most other 'mass' media did not achieve until the late 1930s. Watching newsreels, and cinemagoing more broadly, became a key means not just of seeing the public represented, but of participating in civic cultures across Britain. Between the wars, then, newsreels fundamentally changed how Britons engaged with political culture as part of their everyday lives.

Historiography:

Newsreels as a form of conservative propaganda.

The last major studies of newsreels occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, chiefly those by Anthony Aldgate, Nicholas Pronay, and Rachael Low. [15] This amounted to a social history of the five main newsreel companies oriented around the production of newsreels. Both Aldgate and Low, for instance, dedicated much space to revealing producers' backgrounds and political sympathies.[16] Indeed, Pronay's first article on newsreels is subtitled 'audiences and producers', suggesting a preoccupation with the structure of newsreel production.[17] This is unsurprising considering when these studies were written. Early media history, written as histories of separate mediums, was predominantly social history. The history of radio, particularly the BBC, inaugurated social histories of British media.

In the beginning, there was Asa Briggs. He produced a monumental multivolume history of the BBC. The first volume declared it a history of the institution's organisation and its place in British society.[18] Focusing on the internal structure and societal function of the BBC at the macro level demarcated this as social history. David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell's later work stood firmly on Briggs's shoulders. Theirs was a history from 'the level of production', examining how policy decisions and organisational structures determined the BBC's programme output.[19] Likewise, early histories of the press preponderantly studied newspapers' institutional make-up and editorial politics.[20] Cinema history is somewhat more complex.

[15] See Rachael Low, *The history of the British film* Vol.6 (London: 1979), Nicolas Pronay, 'The newsreels: the illusion of actuality' in Paul Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (1976), pp.95-119, and Aldgate, *Cinema and history*.
[16] Aldgate, *Cinema and history*, chapter two 'Inside the Newsreels' and Low, *British Film Vol.6*, pp.10-11 and p.43.
[17] Nicolas Pronay, '1. Audience and Producers'**,** *History* 56 No.188 (1971), p.411.
[18] Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume One* (Oxford: 1961), p.4.
[19] David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939 Serving the Nation* (Oxford: 1991), p.xi.
[20] Siân Nicholas, 'Media History or Media Histories? Re-addressing the history of the mass media in inter-war Britain', *Media History* 18 No.3-4 (2012), p.381.

Originating in film studies, it always had a cultural strand that analysed film content.[21] Jeffrey Richards's pioneering work in the 1980s, however, consciously rejected theory-based film analysis in favour of social history methods. As cinema historian John Sedgewick denotes, Richards is part of 'a group of film historians who collectively emphasize context and evidence rather than theory'.[22] The structure of Richards's seminal book on 1930s cinema, *Age of the Dream Palace* (1984), is telling. It has three sections on cinema's social context, the political censorship of cinemas, and the British film star system.[23] Only the final section, 'The Films', covers what cinemas screened.[24] Thus, the early history of British media, including newsreels, was preoccupied ontologically with media as political and economic institutions.

Early newsreel history, moreover, understood newsreels to be a propaganda medium. This was in large part due to the overarching framework of inter-war political and social history, as formulated by those such as Ross McKibbin and Alison Light, which sought to understand why the Conservative Party dominated parliamentary politics in this period, concomitant with the related question of why the Labour Party failed to gain real electoral traction until after 1945.[25] Low and Aldgate, for instance, established respectively that the men who owned the newsreel companies were conservative businessmen, many with links to the Conservative Party.[26] Moreover, historians have explicated the censorship context of newsreels to highlight the restrictions on what they could screen. Though not censored by the British Board of Film Censors, newsreels were subjected to informal government intervention.[27] With regards to newsreels' politics, the conventional view is summarised by McKibbin, that 'the only part of the [film] industry…where there was a politically conscious self-censorship was in the production of newsreels – particularly in the 1930s when the newsreels were deliberately framed to support the National Government'.[28] Due to proprietors' sympathies and external pressures, newsreels were a conservative, usually also a Conservative, medium.

Newsreel content has therefore been 'read' for its ideological biases. Siân Nicholas has studied the construction of prime minister Stanley Baldwin's voter-friendly public image through his

[21] Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: 1995), pp.22-25.
[22] John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: 2000), p.ix.
[23] Jeffrey Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace: cinema and society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: 1984), p.v.
[24] *Ibid*, p.vi.
[25] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: 1998) and Alison Light, *Forever England: femininity, literature, and conservatism between the wars* (London, 1991).
[26] Low, *film*, pp.10-11 and Aldgate, *Cinema and history,* p.36.
[27] Low, *film*, pp.2-3.
[28] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures,* p.426.

portrayal in newsreels.[29] Filming his speeches in a homely manner, newsreels helped bolster the Conservative premiership.[30] Likewise, Philip Taylor has argued that newsreels were a key medium through which the National Government sold rearmament policies to the public in the mid-1930s.[31] He demonstrates this chiefly through a textual analysis of newsreel items on rearmament, showing them to present the government's position favourably.[32] In their party-political content, newsreels provided weekly advertisements on behalf of the Conservative-dominated governments of the period.

Even work by Mike Huggins on the less explicitly political coverage of sports argues it was trenchantly conservative. Items on horse racing emphasised the presence of respectable elites, especially royalty, to render them politically anodyne.[33] Coverage of football matches likewise elided contentious comments on hooliganism and emphasised royal patronage and teams' sportsmanship.[34] Huggins also highlights the mocking commentary over women's football, which he suggests cast female participation as aberrant.[35] In newsreel coverage of women's sports generally, Huggins argues it conformed with contemporary conservative attitudes that sport was an inherently masculine arena.[36] Thus, newsreels portrayed inter-war culture and society conservatively; they apparently acted as a bulwark for class and gender hierarchies. Orthodox historiography, examining newsreel production and content, characterises it as a manipulative medium which distorted reality to support government policy and temper social change. In this, newsreel historians have largely adopted the viewpoint of inter-war left-wing critics, like Cyril Ray and Andrew Buchanan, who dismissed the medium as a prop for the conservative status quo.

Only Luke McKernan has continued the study of newsreels as part of the British Universities Newsreel Project.[37] This, however, has been primarily an archival project to digitise and

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[29] Siân Nicholas, 'The construction of a national identity: Stanley Baldwin, "Englishness", and the mass media in inter-war Britain' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990* (1996), p.127.
[30] *Ibid*, pp.137-138.
[31] Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: 1999), p.95.
[32] *Ibid*, pp.100-101.
[33] Mike Huggins, *Horseracing and the British, 1919-39* (Manchester: 2003), pp.53-54.
[34] Mike Huggins, 'Projecting the Visual: British newsreels, soccer and popular culture 1918-39', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24 No.1 (2007), p.81.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] Mike Huggins, ''And Now, Something for the Ladies': representations of women's sport in cinema newsreels 1918–1939', *Women's History Review* 16 No.5 (2007), pp.695-696.
[37] See Luke McKernan and Nicolas Hiley, 'Reconstructing the News: British Newsreel Documentation and the British Universities Newsreel Project', *Film History* 13 No.2 (2001), pp.185-199; Luke McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (London: 2002).

catalogue newsreel items rather than a reassessment of newsreel historiography. McKernan's research has also remained production oriented. His most recent book was a biography of Charles Urban, an Edwardian pioneer of newsreel-style actuality films.[38] Thus, work in the last decade has done little to challenge newsreels' characterisation as a profoundly conservative medium.

Yet, there are at least two limitations which hampered this earlier research, and ultimately give reason to doubt its findings. First, there was the practical constraints of researching newsreels prior to the major digitisation projects undertaken in the 2000s. Having to make pilgrimage to the British Film Institute in London, or similar physical archives held by private companies, to view extant nitrate copies was exorbitant in time and expense. It meant that even methodically diligent scholars such as Pronay or Aldgate could only analyse a fraction of the issues that the five main newsreel companies produced across the twenty-year span under study. Hence, historians tended to prioritise viewing overtly political content such as coverage of government policies or major international crises.[39]

However, formal politics was only one aspect of what audiences saw in any given newsreel issue. The recurrent staples which filled most newsreel issues were less sensational and seldom involved politics directly. It was the mundane or routine aspects of public life, such as ship launchings, mayors' speeches, and civic ceremonies that filled newsreel items; the salient topic was sports. Studying a similarly ephemeral yet routine medium, theatre historian David Worral contends that no single theatrical performance generated meaning per se. It was the cumulative reiteration of themes, tropes, or character archetypes that built up theatre's meanings for audiences.[40] So too, it is likely that no single newsreel item, each of which averaged between one to three minutes, influenced cinemagoers to any tangible degree. Rather than studying exceptional items to reveal producers' intentions, as previous scholarship has done, this thesis will instead analyse the meanings newsreels produced for audiences through their mainstay items and repeated, indeed repetitious, projections of public life.

Secondly, a more profound problem is that prior scholarship held an outmoded conception of the cinema audience. To conceive of newsreels as propaganda relies upon an implicit

[38] Luke McKernan, *Charles Urban: Pioneering the Non-Fiction Film in Britain and America, 1897-1925* (Exeter: 2017).
[39] Taylor, *British Propaganda*, pp.95-97; David Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May Be Too Late* (Edinburgh: 2008), chapter seven.
[40] David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: 2013), p.41.

assumption of how they were received by cinemagoers. Indeed, propaganda necessitates a passive audience who uncritically absorbed the ideological messages being projected in newsreel content. Thus, to determine the size and demographic composition of British cinema audiences was assumed to reveal who were exposed to newsreels' propaganda, and therefore who were influenced by it. In this, newsreel historians were following the general trend prevalent until the 1980s in media history.

Being an offshoot of the wider field of social history, it followed that audiences were studied quantitatively by newsreel historians. Studying mediums as societal structures entailed audience reception being studied in aggregate. Briggs used statistics for radio licences, analysing them by income groups to demonstrate the pervasiveness of radio listening.[41] Scannell and Cardiff used contemporary social survey findings and radio licensing figures to determine radio ownership distribution across Britain and general listening practices.[42] The same social surveys used by Scannell and Cardiff formed the centrepiece of Jeffrey Richards's analysis of cinemagoing. He used them to determine the predominantly working-class background of cinema audiences.[43] Elsewhere, he analysed the findings of social research group Mass Observation (MO), who surveyed cinemagoers in late 1930s Bolton. From this, Richards determined Boltonian film taste and its variations based on gender and class by collating survey responses accordingly.[44] Pronay and Aldgate both utilized the same survey statistics that Richards used for cinemagoing to determine how many people were exposed to newsreels.[45] Thus, most media historians utilised the same set of contemporary statistics and social surveys to determine how many people used the particular medium, and the demography of the average media consumer. For these scholars, counting cinemagoers revealed the extent of newsreels' influence over the attitudes and opinions of British society.

Yet, media history has advanced significantly since the 1980s. It moved from social history of media institutions to cultural history of media content after the cultural turn of the 1980s and 1990s.[46] In the last twenty years, distinct cultural and social approaches have blended into a

[41] Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume Two* (Oxford: 1964), pp.253-255.
[42] Cardiff and Scannell, *Social History of British Broadcasting*, pp.362-365.
[43] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.11-13.
[44] Jeffrey Richards, 'Cinemagoing in Worktown: regional film audiences in 1930s Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 14 No.2 (1994), pp.151-154.
[45] Pronay, '1. Audiences', pp.412-413 and Aldgate, *Cinema and history*, pp.54-55, pp.61-64.
[46] For cinema, see Marcia Landy, *British Genres: cinema and society, 1930-1960* (Princeton: 1991) and Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: cinema and society from 1930 to the present* (London: 1999). For newspapers, see Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the popular press* (Oxford: 2004), Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*: *sex, private life, and the British popular press, 1918-1978* (Oxford: 2009), and Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid century: the popular press in Britain, 1896 to the present* (Oxford:

sociocultural media history increasingly focused upon audience reception.[47] This approach has reconceptualised audience reception as 'lived experience', understood as the subjective experiences of individuals determined from records produced by audiences themselves.[48] Cinema history of the last decade has generally focused upon cinemagoing as a 'social act' undertaken by individual consumers.[49] Indeed, New Cinema History has made the subjective experiences of cinemagoers a primary ontological focus for cinema historians.[50] Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey pioneered this, using oral history to recapture experiences of cinemagoing from former patrons' memories.[51] From her project, Kuhn emphasised individuals' personal investment in films and the escapist entertainment they provided as oft-cited reasons for going to the cinema.[52]

Sam Manning's recent book on British cinema, charting the industry and cinemagoing from the late 1940s to the 1960s, has a similar argument. As Manning states, cinemagoing was 'a profoundly important social activity and provided a great deal of pleasure for millions of UK citizens. The cinema was more than just a place to watch films; it provided a range of important social functions'.[53] Thus, cinemagoers were active, discerning viewers with relative latitude to take what they wanted from the films they saw, as opposed to accepting any ideological message that was projected before them onscreen. Conceiving of newsreels as propaganda, then, is an unhelpfully reductive model for how inter-war Britons consumed newsreels as part of their everyday leisure.

2015). For radio, see Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and national identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester: 2010) and Emma Robertson, 'The Isolated Men in the Back of Beyond': Masculinity and the BBC Empire Service, 1932–45', *Gender and History* 29 No.2 (2017), pp.292-308.

[47] Jukka Kortti, 'Media History and the Mediatization of Everyday Life', *Media History*, 23 No.1 (2017), p.125.

[48] Michael Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal* 59 No.2 (2005), p.69.

[49] Cinema History denotes the field which studies cinema venues and their audiences, as opposed to Film History which focuses primarily on films as texts. The former has been preoccupied with the subjective nature of cinemagoing whilst the latter has continued to analyse films' ideological messages. For a discussion of this distinction see Daniel Biltereyst 'Audience as Palimpsest, Or the Structures of Cinematic Feeling: On Historical Film Audience Research and Cinema's Imaginative Power' in Kate Egan, Martin Smith, and Jamie Terrill (eds.), *Researching Historical Screen Audiences* (Edinburgh: 2022), pp.17-33.

[50] Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers, 'Cinema, audiences and modernity: an introduction' in Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers (eds.), *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New perspectives on European cinema history* (London: 2012), p.2. For the popularity of this approach, see the HoMER research network: (https://homernetwork.org/).

[51] Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*; Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: 1994).

[52] Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*, chapter nine.

[53] Sam Manning, *Cinemas and cinema-going in the United Kingdom: decades of decline, 1945–65* (London: 2020), p.3.

Despite these advances in how audience reception is studied, newsreels continue to be largely overlooked by media historians. This is likely due to the persistent claim from many cinema historians that newsreels were too ephemeral a medium to elicit any profound response from viewers. Studying American newsreels, Raymond Fielding has claimed that when audiences viewed newsreels, it was 'accidental, gratuitous, and peripheral to the entertainment' that cinemas provided through feature films.[54] Emily Crosby concurred, suggesting newsreels were frequently the 'boring' bit in the film programme when people went to the toilet.[55] Meanwhile, taking a more tempered if still lukewarm view, Nicolas Hiley concludes that 'audiences…liked newsreels, but they did not like them very much. They wanted them in the cinema programme, but they did not want them to take up more than eight or ten minutes'.[56] Hence, newsreels, when not seen as influential propaganda, have otherwise been dismissed as peripheral to the cinemagoing experience.

By contrast, recent work on audience reception in cinema history has generally been preoccupied with intense, emotive experiences. For example, Richard Farmer has examined the ways in which cinemagoing provided emotional catharsis during the mentally strenuous existence most people faced during the Second World War.[57] More recently, James Jones has utilized concepts from the incipient history of emotions to re-examine MO archives of Bolton cinemagoing.[58] Using MO observations and survey responses, Jones argues that cinemas were unique venues where, in the dark, cinemagoers could express emotions ordinarily censured in public.[59] Melanie Tebbutt, adopting a similar approach and source base, has also unearthed how the cinema served as an 'emotional refuge' where boys and young men could express conventionally feminine emotions like grief that were otherwise considered taboo for manly

[54] Raymond Fielding, 'The Newsreel Flickers Out: Decline and Disappearance' in Jane Mercer, Clyde Jeavons, and Daniela Kirchner (eds.), '*The Story of the Century': An International Newsfilm Conference* (London: 1998), p.104.
[55] Emily Crosby, 'The 'colour supplement' of the cinema: the British cinemagazine, 1918-1938' in Emily Crosby and Linda Kaye (eds.), *Projecting Britain: The Guide to British Cinemagazines* (London: 2008), p.15.
[56] Nicholas Hiley, 'Audiences in the Newsreel Period' in Jeavons, Clyde, Mercer, Jane, and Kirchner, Daniela (eds.), *'The Story of the Century': An International Newsfilm Conference* (London: 1998), p.59. Luke McKernan makes a similar conclusion see Luke McKernan, *Topical Budget: The Great British News Film* (London: 1992), p.67.
[57] Richard Farmer, *Cinemas and cinemagoing in wartime Britain, 1939–45: The utility dream palace* (Manchester: 2016), p.222.
[58] James Jones, 'These Intimate Little Places': Cinema-Going and Public Emotion in Bolton, 1930-1954', *Cultural and Social History* 16 No.4 (2019), p.452. See also James Jones, 'Emotional Communities in the Cinema: Tracing Emotion in the Mass Observation Cinema Records, 1937-1950' in Kate Egan, Martin Smith, and Jamie Terrill (eds.), *Researching Historical Screen Audiences* (Edinburgh: 2022), pp.102-119.
[59] Jones, 'Intimate Little Places', p.452.

youths.[60] Collectively, this scholarship has portrayed the cinema as an important site for the expression of affective subjectivities.

Building upon the rich work into audience reception spearheaded by New Cinema historians, this thesis unearths hitherto neglected sources such as film fan magazines and qualitative social surveys alongside re-examining more conventional sources such as Mass Observation to understand what audiences made of newsreels. Yet, moving away from the history of emotions, it reveals that newsreels were not ignored even when considered rather dull fare. They were actively, albeit casually, consumed by a discerning audience as an integral element of the cinema programme. Much like advertisements or other ephemeral media, newsreels' reception was that of casual but consistent, cumulative engagement. Newsreels thereby formed an influential component of mundane political culture.

Newsreels and political culture between the wars.

Exploring how the public was represented to itself through the routine medium of newsreels, this thesis also engages with the burgeoning historiography of inter-war British political culture. This moves the analytical focus beyond the furrow of media history, and into broader debates surrounding the political, social, and cultural history of twentieth-century Britain. Following the agenda set by Ross McKibbin's groundbreaking work, political historians have worked to explain the supposedly trenchant conservatism of Britain in the 1920s and 1930s.[61] Some, such as Phillip Williamson and David Jarvis, have focused on the proactive work of the Conservative Party machine, which effectively 'sold' popular conservatism to voters as patriotic, moderate, 'common-sense' public opinion.[62] More generally, historians have also argued that conservatism suffused popular culture during these two decades.

McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures* (1998) is key here. A central argument of the book is that the vibrant associational culture of inter-war Britain, typified by voluntary organisations such as the Women's Institute or Rotary Clubs, served as a seedbed of anti-socialist sentiment amongst

[60] Melanie Tebbutt, 'Crying for Flicka: Boys, Young Men, and Emotion at the Cinema in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s', *Journal of Social History*, 56 No.1 (2022), pp.144–167.
[61] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* and Ross McKibbin, 'Class and conventional wisdom: the Conservative party and the "public" in inter-war Britain' in Ross McKibbin (ed.) *The Ideologies of Class: social relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford: 1990), pp.259-293. For more recent work in this vein, see David Thackery, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England* (Manchester: 2013).
[62] Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative leadership and national values* (Cambridge: 1999); David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and class politics in the 1920s', *English Historical Review*, 111 (1996), pp.59–84.

its largely middle-class memberships.[63] Through these seemingly non-partisan associations, conservative norms and mores were inculcated widely amongst the electorate. Moreover, Alison Light influentially characterised inter-war culture as that of 'conservative modernity'.[64] Light coined this phrase to suggest that inter-war British culture was accommodating of social change whilst it concurrently maintained the hegemony of Edwardian values.[65] Cinema, in the landmark studies of both McKibbin and Richards, was seen as a lynchpin of this, a modern medium that staunchly adhered to and upheld conservative political values and social mores.[66] Hence, inter-war political culture was considered to be profoundly conservative (often Conservative), even as it adapted to novel technologies and acknowledged societal change.

Yet, in the past decade several historians have challenged this characterisation of a conservative inter-war public. Pat Thane and Helen McCarthy have undermined it significantly by examining the thriving associational life of voluntary organisations, like the Women's Institute or the League of Nations Union, which they argue promoted an activist citizenship detached from partisan politics among their large memberships.[67] McCarthy persuasively contends that in their 'apolitical' centrism, these organisations were not bulwarks of conservatism. Instead, associational culture promoted democratic participation that eschewed party-political divisions.[68]

Women's historians have been at the forefront of this new research, revealing the extent to which voluntary organisations, societies, and clubs were an important means for women to participate in public life.[69] It was, however, largely middle-class or elite women who engaged with these organisations, and almost exclusively women from those backgrounds who led them.[70] Where political participation beyond the polling booth has been unearthed for working-

[63] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, chapter 3.
[64] Light, *Forever England*, p.8. For how the conservative cultural zeitgeist reshaped the idea of the public into a passive, individualised and conservative entity, see Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post–First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 75 No.3 (2003), p.561.
[65] Light, *Forever England*, pp.10-11.
[66] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.456.
[67] Pat Thane and Helen McCarthy, 'The Politics of Association in Industrial Society', Twentieth *century British history*, 22 Vol.2 (2011), pp. 217–229; Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal* 50 No.4 (2007), pp.891-912.
[68] McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics', p.892.
[69] Catriona Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928–39', *Women's History Review* 9 No.2 (2000), pp.411-429; Catriona Beaumont, *Housewives and citizens: domesticity and the women's movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester: 2015).
[70] Emily Mason, *Democracy, deeds and dilemmas: support for the Spanish Republic within British civil society, 1936-1939* (Brighton: 2017), pp.14-15; Sarah Hellawell, 'A Strong International Spirit': The Influence of

class women, it has tended to be in exceptional circumstances. For example, Annemarie Hughes, examining Scottish women's political activism in this period, revealed that working-class women protested, sometimes violently, but that this was largely confined to moments of political unrest or severe socioeconomic strife.[71] James Hinton has persuasively argued that this was primarily due to the constraints placed upon most working-class women by their work, homelife, and income.[72] In short, they lacked the time and resources to commit to long-term, sustained participation in associational life. By contrast, going to the cinema was relatively inexpensive and, with both evening and matinee performances most days, could fit around other responsibilities.[73] Thus, a trip to the neighbourhood cinema, and therein watching a newsreel, enabled working-class women and youths to be included in, and actively participate in, local public life in a way that associational culture often failed to facilitate. Commercial political culture like newsreels, then, was accessible to those newly enfranchised citizens who otherwise had comparatively little to do with civic culture as part of their daily lives.

Another strand of research into the inter-war public, led by Tom Hulme and Charlotte Wildman, has revealed a vibrant civic culture in Britain between the wars. Hulme persuasively argues that 'existing work on citizenship has been mostly seen through the lens of the national, at the expense of' local or municipal identities.[74] Revisionist urban historians instead argue that civic culture and identity remained buoyant throughout the period, with Hulme proffering the 1930s as 'the zenith of local government civics'.[75] This was a blooming culture which found expression in sundry well-attended parades, ceremonies, and festivities. Historical pageantry, carnivalesque spectacles that trumpeted an idealised version of local history and community, were held in towns and cities across Britain between the wars.[76] Meanwhile, sundry industries and local organisations also ran a plethora of beauty contests, such as the Lancashire Cotton Queens or the Macclesfield Silk Queens, where young women were chosen to embody the virtues of various regional and civic identities and subsequently act as representatives of their

Internationalism on the Women's Co-operative Guild', *Twentieth Century British history*, 32 Vol.1 (2021), p.94; pp.96-97.

[71] Annmarie Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland, 1919-1939* (Edinburgh: 2010), pp.7-8, see especially chapter seven.

[72] James Hinton, *Women, social leadership, and the Second World War: continuities of class* (Oxford: 2002), introduction.

[73] Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England 1920-1960* (Manchester: 2000), pp.165-166.

[74] Hulme, 'Putting the city back into citizenship', p.28. For a similar argument see also Laura Carter, *Histories of everyday life: the making of popular social history in Britain, 1918-1979* (Oxford: 2021), p.6, p.11, p16.

[75] *Ibid*, p.29.

[76] Tom Hulme, "A nation of town criers': civic publicity and historical pageantry in inter-war Britain', *Urban History* 44 No.2 (2017), pp.271-273.

communities during a term in office.[77] Civic weeks, such as those held in Manchester and Liverpool, were major occasions in inter-war cities, with extensive programmes of municipal pomp, pageantry, and entertainment.[78] Local voluntary associations often participated in these events. For instance, League of Nations Union peace-themed *tableaux vivants* and carnival floats were included in civic festivals, such as at Blackpool Carnival in 1924 and Preston Guild Celebrations in 1922.[79] Thus, an array of organisations and events weaved together to support flourishing civic cultures across Britain.

Wildman further contends that between the wars 'local government moved towards a more demotic and inclusive civic culture'.[80] This is a general trend in the scholarship, which presents local authorities as attentive to an increasing public desire to participate in civic occasions.[81] Shifting away from the government-centric viewpoint of prior research, this thesis presents the cinema manager as another agent in local communities who brought a democratic ethos into civic culture. It thereby questions the extent to which municipal authorities were visionary harbingers of change. Rather, collaboration between state institutions, civil society, and commercial enterprises shaped the public sphere as it was experienced in localities. Moreover, this research into civic culture has almost entirely focused on social and cultural practices. What is presently neglected is how civic culture was routinely mediated by film. This thesis argues that newsreels (re)presented civic culture as an inclusive, non-partisan, and democratic realm of public activity. In the vision of civic culture it projected and through its function as part of that culture, the newsreel was a key 'civic' medium throughout the period.

Finally, many historians continue to see commercial media as antithetical to active citizenship.[82] Robert Snape has recently suggested that only leisure organised by the voluntary sector had 'cultural and social motivations' to propagate 'social citizenship' as opposed to

[77] Jack Southern, '"Lancashire Accents, Lancashire Goods and Lancashire Girls": Local Identity and the Image of the Cotton Industry in the Inter-war Period', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 12 No.2 (2017), pp.85-87.
[78] Tom Hulme, *After the Shock City: Urban Culture and the Making of Modern Citizenship* (London: 2019), pp.71-72.
[79] Helen McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c.1919-56', *History Workshop Journal* Vol.70 No.1 (2010), pp.113-114. For another good example of local organisations' deep involvement in civic culture, see Eleanor O'Keeffe, 'Civic veterans: the public culture of military associations in inter-war Glasgow', *Urban History* 44 No.2 (2017), pp.293-316.
[80] Charlotte Wildman, 'Urban Transformation in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918–1939', *The Historical Journal* 55 No.1 (2012), p.122.
[81] Ben Roberts, 'Entertaining the community: the evolution of civic ritual and public celebration, 1860–1953', *Urban history*, 44 No.3 (2017), pp.456-459; Hulme, *Shock City*, pp.105-106.
[82] Brad Beaven, 'Going to the Cinema: Mass Commercial Leisure and Working-Class Cultures in 1930s Britain' in Brett Bebber (ed.), *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth Century Britain* (Manchester: 2012), pp.63-83.

commercial leisure, which operated 'for profit' alone.[83] This implies commercial entertainment eschewed public service and could only provide passive diversion that negated a 'New Leisure' of civic recreation. Brad Beaven, in his study of imperial celebrations in local communities, also contends that commercial leisure such as music hall displaced imperialist civic pageantry across the Edwardian and inter-war periods.[84] Again, passive consumption in lieu of public-spirited social citizenship. This thesis will show that active citizenship was not the exclusive preserve of voluntary organisations. Nor did commercial entertainments prove detrimental to civic participation: the cinema was in many ways vital to sustaining urban civic culture. The private enterprises studied in this thesis will be presented as a key means by which more, especially working-class, citizens participated in democratic forms of political culture. In this sense, the cinema, and in particular newsreels, must be granted a larger role in the revisionist narrative of a thriving, increasingly democratised inter-war public sphere.

Newsreels as national media for a mass society.

Historians have typically conceived of media as a homogenising force operating on a national scale. Dan LeMahieu pushes this furthest in his thesis that media in the 1930s produced a 'common culture'. This culture, he argues, was a national one that to a large extent superseded class, gender, and regional identities; most Britons were consuming, and therefore familiar with, the same films, books, radio programmes, and newspapers.[85] Though other historians flag up the persistence of regional variations and other factors which rendered media's impact more heterogeneous, they have continued to frame inter-war media as a predominantly national phenomenon. Adrian Bingham's studies of the popular press, Cardiff and Scannell's work on BBC radio, and all previous research of newsreels have adopted a national framework to understand the general influence and impact of these media on the British Isles.

For the press and BBC, this framework feels apt, at least from the production side. Newspaper proprietors like Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook consciously aimed to capture a national 'mass' market and sold their newspapers throughout Britain accordingly.[86] Likewise, from very early in its broadcasting, BBC radio was intended to cater to the tastes of the British nation as a whole. Its first director John Reith embedded an ideological nation-building ethos into its

[83] Robert Snape, 'The New Leisure, Voluntarism and Social Reconstruction in Inter-War Britain', *Contemporary History* 29 No.1 (2015), p.52.
[84] Brad Beaven, *Visions of empire: patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939* (Manchester: 2017), chapter seven.
[85] Dan LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: 1988), p.4.
[86] Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, chapter one.

content from the outset, aiming to provide an 'uplifting' common culture intended to unite listeners across Britain and its Empire.[87] Thus, radio and newspapers were produced and distributed as one ostensibly uniform product and were designed to appeal to the (national or imperial) masses.

More recent work has nuanced this by drawing out the regional aspects of both radio and newspaper production and consumption. Thomas Hajkowski, adopting a four kingdoms framework, has revealed that the BBC's regional broadcasting was crucial to the construction and nurturing of inter-war regional identities.[88] The BBC, from its various regional broadcasting stations, acknowledged that Britons had local identities which needed to be appealed to in radio programming. Though even here, in terms of the monarchy and the Empire, Hajkowski concedes that the BBC aimed to bind together a patriotic national-imperial public; allegiance to crown and colonialism trumped loyalty to Scotland, Wales, or one's hometown.[89] The BBC therefore functioned as a two-track medium attempting to fulfil its nationalist ambitions whilst concurrently respecting regional sensibilities.

Likewise, scholars such as Rachel Matthews have demonstrated that local newspapers survived the advent of the national popular press, and continued to attract dedicated readerships.[90] Indeed, several press historians have shown how newspapers remained vehicles for representing local identities, often serving as 'the ubiquitous civic voice' in this period.[91] Readers continued to pore over their local morning paper whilst also reading the *Daily Mail*. Regional variations have thus been brought to the fore, qualifying prior national studies.

Cinema history has followed a somewhat different trajectory, as to varying degrees the local and regional has always been present in analyses. Richards's study of Bolton cinemagoing, for instance, was used to compare local tastes in films with national social surveys.[92] Since then, there has been a veritable cottage industry producing case studies of local cinemas.[93] Sam

[87] Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History of British Broadcasting*, pp.277-303; Eve Colpus, *'The Week's Good Cause*: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Interwar BBC', *Twentieth Century British History* 22 No. 3 (2011), pp.305-306. For the Empire Service's attempts to forge a common imperial culture, see also Emma Robertson, 'I get a real kick out of big ben': BBC versions of Britishness on the empire and general overseas service, 1932-1948', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 28 No.4 (2009), pp.459–473.
[88] Hajkowski, *BBC and National Identity*, chapters four to seven.
[89] *Ibid*, chapters one to three.
[90] Rachel Matthews, *The history of the provincial press in England* (New York: 2017).
[91] Michael Bromley and Nick Hayes, 'Campaigner, watchdog or municipal lackey? Reflections on the inter-war provincial press, local identity, and civic welfarism', *Media History* 8 No. 2 (2002), p.197.
[92] Richards, 'Cinemagoing in Worktown', p.164
[93] See for instance Julian Poole, 'British cinema attendance in wartime: audience preference at the Majestic, Macclesfield, 1939-1946', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 7 No.1 (1987), pp.15-34; Sue Harper, 'A lower middle-class taste-community in the 1930s: Admissions figures at the Regent cinema,

Manning's study of post-war cinemagoing is indicative of this trend towards local-level analysis, as his work is anchored around case studies of Belfast and Sheffield.[94] In the last decade, there has also been dedicated studies of Scottish and Welsh cinema cultures to highlight the distinctive elements both between and within the four kingdoms.[95] Cumulatively, these multifarious studies serve to unpick the national image and highlight the sheer heterogeneity of cinemagoing for audiences across the British Isles. As Hiley states, 'there was no single cinemagoing experience'.[96]

Newsreels, however, have yet to be incorporated into this decentred cinema history. Generally, they continue to be viewed from the production side as a (trans)national product aimed at a mass audience.[97] Recently, scholars studying twentieth-century American and European newsreels have begun to pay attention to the production and exhibition of local newsreels.[98] There has also been some pioneering work by Gil Toffell, Robert James, and Rosalind Leveridge into cinema managers as influential public figures within their communities.[99] Building upon such nascent research, this thesis uncovers the widespread production of local newsreels throughout Britain. It also illuminates the key role cinema managers played in tailoring often-generic newsreels to appeal to the tastes, interests, and identities of their patrons. Of equal significance, it reveals the concerted efforts that national newsreel producers made to adapt their product for regional or local audiences.

In many respects, this is what distinguished newsreels as a medium in the inter-war period. Local and national newspapers were rival products that were always aiming at two very

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Portsmouth, UK', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 24 No.4 (2004), pp.565-587; Guy Barefoot, ''Always a Good Programme Here': The Records of the Tudor Cinema, Leicester, 1924-1932', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 8 No.1 (2013), pp.26–39.

[94] Manning, *Decades of Decline*.

[95] Trevor Griffiths, *The cinema and cinema-going in Scotland, 1896-1950* (Edinburgh: 2012) and for Welsh cinema, see Jamie Terrill, 'Filmgoing or cinemagoing? The role of the film text within cinema memory', *Alphaville*, No.21 (2021), pp.178–192.

[96] Nicholas Hiley, '"Let's go to the pictures': the British cinema audience in the 1920s and 1930s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* No.2 (1999), p.40.

[97] Emily Rutherford, 'Researching and Teaching with British Newsreels', *Twentieth Century British History*, 32 No.3 (2021), pp.441-461 and Scott Althaus, 'The Forgotten Role of the Global Newsreel Industry in the Long Transition from Text to Television', *The international journal of press/politics*, 15 No.2 (2010), pp.193–218.

[98] See the research articles in the special issue Daniel Biltereyst, Brett Bowles and Roel Vande Winkel 'A Newsreel of our own': the culture and commerce of local filmed news, Introduction', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 32 No.3 (2012), pp. 355–360. See also Martin Johnson, *Main Street Movies: the history of local film in the United States* (Bloomington: 2018).

[99] Gil Toffell, *Jews, cinema and public life in interwar Britain* (London: 2018); Rosalind Leveridge, '"Proud of Our Little Local Palace": Sidmouth, Cinema, and Community 1911-14', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 8 No. 4 (2010), 385-399; Robert James, ''Make Your Public Curious': Cinema Management, Film Advertising and Audience Taste in England, c.1920-c.1960' in Kate Egan, Martin Smith, and Jamie Terrill (eds.), *Researching Historical Screen Audiences* (Edinburgh: 2022), pp.129-132.

different markets, even if readers frequently purchased both. The BBC, meanwhile, juggled its regional content with its Reithian mission to broadcast a common culture. By contrast, newsreels were often tailored to local communities whilst featuring a generic cavalcade of national events. In many ways, then, this thesis bridges the gap between the production of national 'mass' news media and its exhibition on an intensely local level. It emphasises the constant interplay between the national and the civic which occurred in the everyday consumption of newsreels by cinemagoers.

The Scope of this Study:

It is worth outlining here the parameters of this thesis to chart its geographic and chronological boundaries. First, being a study of the connections between national newsreels and local contexts, this project takes mainland Britain as its geographic scope. To this end, cinemas and newsreels across England, Scotland, and Wales are considered to provide useful comparison of the similarities and differences of watching newsreels in various localities. Moreover, an effort is made where possible to balance study of urban metropolises such as Sheffield, London, or Glasgow with smaller towns like Criccieth, Porthmadog, or Retford. In this way, the sheer eclecticism of distinct exhibition contexts is foregrounded.

Yet, this is still largely a study of urban cinemagoing. The main reason is the lack of substantial archives for rural cinemas. Cinemagoing did occur in rural areas between the wars, often through the initiatives of non-commercial organisations who organised screenings in village halls or toured in mobile cinema vans.[100] Nonetheless, it is also true that cinemagoing was most firmly embedded in everyday routines and leisure practices in urban areas: it is here where those most likely to have watched newsreels on a weekly basis are to be found.

Studying urban Britain in its totality, this thesis does not treat the city centre and suburban cinema as wholly different venues. The great movement of the British population from urban centres to living on suburban estates was a hallmark of the early twentieth century, the suburban semi-detached house comprising over half of all new builds between the wars. Much maligned by contemporary intellectuals as an antisocial realm of domestic privacy, scholars such as Mark Clapson and Laura Balderstone have demonstrated that suburban Britons actually engaged with

[100] For various examples from across the globe in the twentieth century, see Gennari, Daniela Treveri, Hipkins, Danielle, and O'Rawe, Catherine (eds.), *Rural Cinema Exhibition and Audiences in a Global Context* (London: 2018).

the associational life of their towns or cities just as much as those living in other areas.[101] As Clapson concludes, '[s]uburbanisation and other forms of urban dispersal in the twentieth century had perpetuated some key patterns in the social life of England, and had done nothing to erode sociability'.[102] This thesis continues to emphasise the commonalities and connections between suburb and centre in terms of political culture. The suburban Waverley Picture House engaged in similar exhibition and marketing practices for newsreels as those utilised by cinemas situated in Glasgow's city centre, albeit tailored to their respective audience demographics. The cinema provided a social hub and locus for political culture whether sited in the town square or on the outskirts of the municipality. Thus, within the confines of available source material, this thesis aims to be a geographically balanced study of urban cinemagoing.

As a study of mainland Britain, Ireland has been consciously excluded from analysis. Ciara Chambers has already provided comprehensive studies of both Irish and British newsreels being produced and exhibited in the Irish Free State after 1922.[103] Whilst Northern Ireland remained part of the British state, it is also kept peripheral to this study due to its unique exhibition context. Evidence in trade magazines suggests that the nationalist and sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland made for a highly politicised exhibition context not experienced in Scotland, Wales, or England. For instance, in 1939 one cinema manager in Belfast complained that an audience threw 'tomatoes and ink pots' at the screen when a newsreel item featured an appeal for volunteers to the British Territorial Army.[104] In 1940, it was even reported that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) issued bomb threats to cinemas screening British newsreels in Northern Ireland.[105] This is not to disregard Ireland entirely. As Mo Moulton has revealed, throughout the inter-war period Ireland and Irish peoples remained inextricable from the politics and culture of mainland British society.[106] Thus, Ireland is considered where applicable, even if it lies largely outside the purview of this thesis.

Finally, the overseas British Empire is not a central focus for this thesis. A wealth of scholarship has demonstrated the centrality of imperialism to political, popular, and civic

[101] Mark Clapson (2000) 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919', Contemporary British History, 14 No.1 (2000), 151-174; Laura Balderstone, 'Semi-detached Britain? Reviewing suburban engagement in twentieth-century society', *Urban History*, 41 No.1 (2014), pp.141-160.
[102] Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration', p.169.
[103] Ciara Chambers, *Ireland in the Newsreels* (Newbridge: 2012); Ciara Chambers, ''British for the British-Irish Events for the Irish': Indigenous Newsreel Production in Ireland', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 32 No.3 (2012), pp. 361–377.
[104] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 Feb 1939), p.29.
[105] *Kinematograph Weekly* (29 Feb 1940), p.19.
[106] Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in interwar England* (Cambridge: 2014).

cultures in the inter-war metropole.[107] Though imperial news featured somewhat frequently in newsreels, it was not one of the staple topics found in almost every issue like the monarchy or sports.[108] The Indian political activist and politician Mohandas Gandhi was only featured or mentioned fifty times in newsreels between his first appearance in 1922 and his death in 1948.[109] Thus, newsreels' imperial content failed to attain the routine prevalence, the 'everydayness', of other news categories.

Furthermore, unlike for civic events or sporting occasions, there is little evidence to suggest that newsreel producers thought of Empire as an especially favoured topic to film. Unlike the explicit ideological motivations of the BBC to broadcast an idealised image of Empire, both on the Home and Empire Services, or the imperialist agenda of the Empire Marketing Board's documentaries and poster campaigns, newsreel producers appear to have filmed imperial events sporadically, when they were thought interesting (often subsumed into the wider category of 'exotic' spectacle) or, perhaps more likely, uncontroversial enough to feature in an issue.

True, producers never set out to contradict notions of white Britons' racial superiority or Britain's liberal paternalistic vision of its Empire, both of which underpinned the imperial project. Some items, such as coverage of the Ashes cricket matches, Empire Day celebrations, royalty outside of Europe, or travelogue-style content were explicitly imperialist, and these are discussed in the relevant chapters. Notwithstanding intermittent forays into imperial propaganda, such an ideology was for the most part only implicit in newsreels' stock content.

Moreover, this thesis is not purely a study of newsreel content, but as far as possible an exploration of the dynamic relationship between newsreel content and its audiences. What evidence I have found in film fan magazines suggests that the exhibition of British newsreels in the Empire was patchy at best, with issues often severely out of date due to sluggish distribution systems. For instance, a 1932 letter to *Film Weekly* by a British solider stationed in Egypt, responding to letters by other servicemen bemoaning 'out-of-date newsreels' being screened in India, carped that a recent newsreel he saw featured footage of the 1930 FA Cup Final.[110] To do justice to how newsreels were consumed throughout the Empire would require

[107] John MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: 1986); John MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular imperialism and the military 1850-1950* (Manchester: 1992); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, Hall, Catherine, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: 2006).
[108] Hiley and McKernan, 'Reconstructing the News'.
[109] Jacqueline Audrey Gold, 'Moving Images: India on British Screens, 1917-1947 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Emory University: 2013), p.188.
[110] *Film Weekly* (17 Jun 1932), p.21.

dedicated research in the archives of postcolonial and commonwealth countries. As such, discussion of how British newsreels were distributed, exhibited, and received in the overseas Empire lies beyond the scope of this research.

The years c.1919-c.1939 are conventionally treated as a distinct period between the two world wars by scholars, but it is still worth explaining the rationale for choosing this chronology. Indeed, it does not map onto the golden age of cinemagoing, with cinema attendance actually peaking in 1946, and only really declining from the mid-1950s.[111] Moreover, civic culture did not dwindle with the onset of the Second World War. It certainly continued to flourish into the 1960s and has endured in some form or another to the present day.

Rather, what has guided the chronological restraint of this thesis is the radical shifts in censorship, exhibition, and production which the newsreel industry faced after 1939. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Ministry of Information stepped in to officially censor newsreels and restrict what they could film.[112] Moreover, wartime in general fundamentally altered the content of the newsreels, weighted in favour of graphic and serious political items.[113] Mass Observation reports and letters to film fan magazines also suggest that these changes, especially the increase in graphic war news and tighter censorship, provoked a sharp decline in newsreels' popularity.[114] Thus, how newsreels were produced, exhibited, and received transformed between 1939 and 1945.

Short non-fiction 'topicals' also existed prior to 1919, being among the first experiments in film. The medium eventually matured from topicals into the relatively stable newsreel format across the First World War. However, prior to the Great War, cinemas were rather protean as venues, filmgoing still preponderantly a carnival attraction or music hall novelty instead of an everyday habit.[115] During the war, whilst cinemagoing became widespread, the newsreel was coopted into the war effort from 1915, with *Topical Budget* eventually run by the British government.[116] Newsreels were filmed and screened in a highly distinct exhibition context and political climate before c.1919. The inter-war period is therefore adopted chiefly as a means to

[111] Manning, *Decades of Decline*, p.1.
[112] Grace Stephenson, 'British Newsreels at War, 1939-45: A Significant Source for Scholars', *British Journal for Military History*, 6 No.3 (2020), pp.151-154. See also British Film Institute Special Collections (hereafter BFI), *Minutes of the Council of the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Book One* (ITM-7303), pp.110-228; BFI, *Minutes of the Council of the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Book Two* (ITM-7304), et pacem.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] This is explicated in chapter one.
[115] Jon Burrows, *The British Cinema Boom, 1909-1914: A Commercial History* (Basingstoke: 2017).
[116] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, pp.35-63.

sustain tight analytical focus throughout. Hence, this thesis examines inter-war newsreels and how they were consumed as part of everyday political culture in towns and cities throughout Britain.

Sources and Methodology:

The main source base for this thesis is comprised of three digitised archives of newsreel items and production documents. Principal among them is the *News on Screen* archive established by the British Universities Film and Video Council. Founded upon the *Slade Film History Register*, an index of approximately 30,000 newsreel stories and issue sheets compiled in the early 1970s, the *News on Screen* archive essentially served as a large-scale digitisation project of newsreel item listings and production documents.[117] This has been achieved in several stages between 1995 and 2012. The prime utility of this database is a key word and date range searchable index of newsreel issues and stories. Comprised mostly of Pathé and Gaumont-British newsreel issues, it also includes several other newsreels in its index. This is invaluable for quantitative sampling of what items a typical Pathé or Paramount newsreel featured in any given year. It further enables some study of how the format and style newsreels evolved across the twenty years.

It should be stressed that this database, though extensive, is often patchy or incomplete with issues often missing (especially for the 1920s) and frequently little more than a title listed for an item. It also has supplementary materials, such as item scripts and shot lists for *Universal News* items in the 1930s. This ameliorates the imbalance of extant newsreel footage, which consists mainly of Pathé, Gaumont-British, and British Movietone newsreels. *News On Screen* is therefore the closest database to a comprehensive collection of information on both newsreel issues and production.

What it lacks, however, is the ability to watch the newsreels. To view newsreel footage, two other digitised archives have been used. Pathé's online archive is the principal source for qualitative analysis of newsreel items. It contains approximately 85,000 clips from Pathé's own newsreels and spin-off cinemagazines from the company's lifespan between 1896 and 1969.[118] Pathé have also partnered with the *Reuters Historical Collection* to add an additional 180,000 clips from other newsreels, chiefly Gaumont-British products but also some items from *Empire*

[117] Hiley and McKernan, 'Reconstructing the News'. See also: *News On Screen* Archive, (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/about/history).
[118] *Pathe News Archive*, (https://www.britishpathe.com/about/).

News Bulletin and *British Paramount News*.[119] Alongside this trove of footage was a dedicated archive for *British Movietone News*. At the outset of this thesis in 2020, the Movietone News archive had its own website with key word and date range search abilities. By 2023, this has been merged into the *Associated Press Newsroom* digitised film archive. It retains a separate identity via the Movietone YouTube channel, where all Movietone footage referred to in this thesis can still be found freely accessible via key word searches, though unfortunately lacking a date range filter.[120] Combined, these archives provide free digital access to an immensity of newsreel footage from four out of five of the main inter-war newsreel companies. Again, it is worth stressing that whilst these repositories enable unprecedented access to footage, they are still incomplete, occasionally inaccurate or misleading (clips are sometimes duplicated under different titles and issue dates, for instance), and often lack reliable contextual information. Notwithstanding such limitations, the four digitised archives outlined here provide the only practicable means of undertaking a large-scale study of newsreel content.

In many respects, the methodological issues posed by these archives, which all function via search engines and filters, are similar to those faced when using digitised newspaper archives. As Adrian Bingham suggests, key word searches can 'distort' the results, as incorrect terms can occlude pertinent search 'hits' due to the algorithms of the search engines. More critically, key word searches also lead researchers to 'discrete articles' which are deracinated from their place on a page of print, effacing the fact 'that newspapers were material objects that were bought, read and passed around'.[121] These potential problems are also true of newsreel digitisation. Key word searches on these databases bring up results as individual clips, which are not presented as full newsreel issues. These databases also provide negligible context for how newsreels were actually consumed. Each clip belonged to a newsreel issue, itself a canister of nitrate film projected in a particular cinema hall during a specific film programme. Moreover, being such an eclectic news medium, searching for almost any topic will result in at least a few clips. But as most items are often less than a couple of minutes in length, these clips (such as those of election speeches or major political events) do not necessarily reveal what audiences were consuming in the typical weekly newsreel. The risk of cherry-picking items for analysis is therefore quite high.

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[119] *Ibid*.
[120] *Associated Press Newsroom Archive,* (https://newsroom.ap.org/editorial-photos-videos); *British Movietone YouTube Channel*, YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/@BritishMovietone)
[121] Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians', *Twentieth Century British history*, 21 No.2 (2010), pp.229-230.

Both issues can be largely circumvented. To prevent arbitrary selection of items for analysis, quantitative samplings of issues by date range via *News On Screen* has been employed to get a sense of what typical newsreel and cinemagazine issues featured. Fortunately, a much more comprehensive quantitative study of the *News On Screen* archive has already been undertaken by its project leads, Nicolas Hiley and Luke McKernan.[122] Surveying the full archive, they determined the chief staple topics in newsreels, and this has guided which subjects formed the basis of my research. Hence, in accordance with Hiley and McKernan, monarchy and sports are given dedicated chapters here as the two most-filmed topics by all the major newsreels.

Also, as this is a study of how newsreels were consumed, it is important to be guided by what contemporaries perceived the average newsreel to feature. This is why civic culture came to be a central focus, as the widespread perception from inter-war patrons and critics was that civic events were a stock newsreel item. Quantitative studies and an exploration of the relevant contexts have therefore preceded key word searches. Key word searches have then been employed using a range of synonymous terms to find as many items across the period as possible covering newsreels' staple content. For instance, to source items covering royal civic occasions the terms 'royal visit', 'royal civic', 'duke', 'duchess', 'king', 'queen', and the names and titles of each member of the British royal family were input to collate as many pertinent clips as possible. By this mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis, a good sense can be gained of what most of the major newsreels routinely projected to their audiences between the wars.

To resolve the issue of deracination, that is, of analysing newsreel items without sufficient context of their exhibition or even of the subject matter that cameramen filmed, a range of supplementary digitised and archival material has been accumulated. This provides ample context where the newsreel archives do not. Inter-war cinema records, such as souvenir film programmes or booking diaries, are relatively rare but can be found in several British archives. To get a geographically balanced sample, cinema records have been studied in several regional archives, including those of the National Library of Scotland's Moving Image Archive in Glasgow, Sheffield Local Studies Library, Sheffield City Archives, the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, and the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford. From these sources, the exhibition context and marketing of newsreels in specific cinemas can be studied. Buttressing these are the digitised newspaper archives of Gale

[122] Hiley and McKernan, 'Reconstructing the News'.

ProQuest and the British Newspaper Archive (BNA). Together, they provide a wide-ranging collection of national newspapers from both the 'quality' and 'popular' press, alongside regional and local newspapers. Vital contextual information for how newsreels were discussed by the press, how cinemas advertised them in newspapers, and for civic culture more generally has been unearthed through these newspapers.

Crucially, the BNA has digitised the full run of exhibitors' trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* for the inter-war period. This helps to place individual cinema records in a wider context and provides further insight into newsreel exhibition. Also, consultation of film fan magazines, foremost *Film Weekly* and *Picturegoer*, have enabled readers' letters concerning newsreels to be studied, shedding precious light on audience reception. Further information on audience reception is gleaned from the MO studies of cinemagoing and newsreels in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These are all digitised on the *Mass Observation Online* archive. Between digitised newspapers and physical archives, the exhibition and marketing of newsreels can be illuminated. Furthermore, other archives, such as the British Film Institute, the National Railway Museum, and Sheffield City Archives have been consulted to provide information on newsreel production and specific topics filmed by newsreels. Thus, newsreel items are fully contextualised by relevant source material to ensure this is a study of how newsreels were consumed in cinemas.

One unavoidable imbalance of the following analysis is which newsreels are studied. Due to the available sources, Pathé, Gaumont-British, and Movietone are preponderant, though effort is made to include Paramount, Universal, *Topical Budget*, and other short-lived newsreels. Moreover, the differences of each newsreel brand are highlighted and acknowledged. Despite this, it must be acknowledged that all newsreels were generally variations on the same theme: they filmed the same staple topics, were exhibited in similar ways in commercial cinemas, and had the core editorial similarities of (after the transition to sound film) breezy commentary in Oxford accents and an admixture of 'interest' and 'serious' news items.

Furthermore, this thesis is not based upon extensive original research into how the national newsreel companies worked internally to produce twice-weekly issues. Here, I am largely informed by the exhaustive, rich work of Luke McKernan and the *News On Screen* project. The primary aim of this thesis is to invert the study of newsreels by starting with the audience sat in the cinema rather than with the production team toiling in the editing room. It is not a new history of Wardour Street. Rather, it is a novel exploration of newsreels as they were

exhibited in local cinemas and regularly consumed by cinemagoers. Overall, this thesis is a history of British newsreels as part of everyday life between the wars.

Cinemagoing and the film industry in inter-war Britain:

Before embarking on the thesis's findings, it is useful to establish the basic context of the cinema in Britain, both as a leisure activity and as an industry. As already noted, cinemagoing was a popular pastime for many Britons; cinema attendance, in an uneven pattern of peaks and troughs, rose throughout the period and eventually peaked in 1946. For the working classes, it became the single-largest expenditure on leisure outside of the home by the 1930s.[123]

Yet, this was not equal amongst all demographics. Mainly an urban activity, going to the cinema was far less prevalent in rural areas where there were fewer purpose-built cinemas. The key factors of gender, age, and social class also impacted upon a person's cinemagoing. Generally, it was the young (under the age of forty) working classes who were ardent 'fans' of the cinema.[124] Moreover, whilst youths of both sexes attended in approximately equal numbers, from young adulthood onwards women were more likely than men to go to the cinema habitually.[125] Indeed, it quickly became a truism amongst film producers and exhibitors that their market was mostly female.[126] Thus, the core demographic of cinemagoers, those for whom it was a routine part of their everyday lives, were young, working-class, and more often than not female. It is important for this study to highlight that this is the same demographics, working-class men, and women of all classes, who were enfranchised in the 1920s. Going to the cinema was therefore among the predominant leisure activities of those simultaneously being incorporated into the body politic.

Economic depression and long-term unemployment in Northern England, Scotland, and Wales also failed to impinge upon cinemagoing habits. It was the 'populous industrial regions', those most effected by economic hardship such as Glasgow or cities in Lancashire, that had the most cinemas per person and highest rates of attendance.[127] Likewise, evidence from social surveys suggests that 'cinema-going was as important to the unemployed as it was to those in employment', as it provided a cheap, warm place to sit for hours and distract oneself from the

[123] Peter Scott, James Walker, Peter Miskell, 'British working-class household composition, labour supply, and commercial leisure participation during the 1930s', *The Economic History Review* 68 No.2 (2014), pp.665-666.
[124] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.12-15.
[125] Richards, 'Cinemagoing in Worktown', p.148; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*.
[126] Chris O'Rourke, 'Imagining British film beauty: gender and national identity in 1920s 'star search' contests', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 19 No.4 (2021), p.342.
[127] Richards, *Dream Palace*, p.12

outside world.[128] Compared to other hobbies or commercial leisure activities, cinemagoing was a cost-effective evening's entertainment that all but the poorest could afford.

Cinemagoing was not an inherently democratic experience, however. In larger towns and cities, a range of cinemas of varying quality and entry prices existed, from luxuriously expensive 'super-cinemas' to down-market 'flea-pits' where a film programme could be seen for just a few pence.[129] Inside most cinemas, as in theatres, seating was divided into different price gradations: those in the cheap stall seats seldom mixed with those sat on the comparatively pricey balcony.[130] Notwithstanding this division of patrons, all watched the same film programmes. In the silent period, the typical film programme, screened at set times, consisted of a medley of 'shorts' and two feature films.[131] By the sound era of the 1930s, there was a gradual shift to continuous, rolling performance of truncated programmes of two feature films with fewer shorts.[132] The newsreel, however, was a staple short across the period, and did not suffer the obsolescence faced by serial melodramas and one-reel comedies in the latter half of the period. As Jeffrey Richards rightly stated, the cinemagoing experience was much more than simply watching the feature films.[133]

An immense industry lay behind the production of the films which filled these nightly programmes. Prior to 1927, the British film industry played second fiddle to the American industry which maintained a tight stranglehold on distribution and exhibition in Britain.[134] Indeed, by 1926, 95 per cent of films screened in Britain were of American origin.[135] This changed with the passage of the 1927 Cinematograph Act by the British government, often dubbed the 'Quota' Act. It stipulated that a certain percentage of films screened by British exhibitors had to be of British or Dominion origins.[136]

This galvanised the British film industry to vertically integrate production, distribution, and exhibition arms in a similar way to what the major Hollywood combines had achieved in the

[128] *Ibid*, pp.13-14.
[129] *Ibid*, chapter one.
[130] See the extant programmes in the National Science and Media Museum Collections, *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN/4/2.
[131] Barefoot, 'Always a Good Programme', pp.35-37.
[132] *Ibid*.
[133] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.19-20.
[134] Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s* (London: 1999), chapter five.
[135] *Ibid*, pp.70-71.
[136] John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, 'The film business in the United States and Britain during the 1930s', *The Economic History Review* 58 No.1 (2005), pp.79–112.

previous decade.[137] Thus, Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) emerged as British combines which respectively controlled production companies, film distributors, and cinema chains.

In the 1930s, American-owned combines such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, and Fox also established British production branches and purchased cinemas in Britain to enable some of their productions to qualify as quota films.[138] Moreover, cinemas not owned by these combines were also increasingly owned by large chain companies, with APC and later Odeon becoming the two largest cinema chains. Independent producers, distributors, and exhibitors were increasingly replaced by vertically integrated leviathans which controlled the entire process from the making of the film to its screening in the cinema.

This should not be overstated, however. In 1920, there was only one chain which had more than ten cinemas, that of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres with 68 venues.[139] Yet, by 1939 large-scale chain ownership still only amounted to 22 per cent of all cinemas in Britain.[140] Most cinema managers still ran their own cinemas, or else were part of small regional chains of around ten cinemas or fewer. Even within chains, it appears that individual managers had considerable licence in the daily running of their cinemas, such as freedom to advertise films in idiosyncratic ways. Moreover, cinema managers were highly active in the public life of their communities, often independent of the chain or conglomerate they were connected to.[141] Thus, the cinemagoing experience did not become significantly standardised as a result of vertical integration and chain ownership. Each cinema remained firmly connected to its local context, with managers accommodating their patrons' distinctive tastes. This is important when examining the cinema as part of the wider political culture of localities. Indeed, the cinema manager emerges as a key agent in this story of how newsreels became a civic medium.

In some ways, newsreels adhered to the general trends of the film industry outlined above. They broadly transitioned across the period from a competitive market populated by frontrunners Pathé and Gaumont-British and a range of smaller newsreels towards a vertically

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[137] *Ibid*.
[138] See for instance Mark Glancy 'Hollywood and Britain - MGM and the British "quota" legislation' in Jeffrey Richards (ed.), *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939* (London: 2001), pp.57-72.
[139] Richards, *Dream Palace*, p.35
[140] Susan Szczetnikowicz, 'British newsreels and the plight of European Jews, 1933-1945' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hertfordshire: 2006), p.52.
[141] Conner Rivers Scott, 'Civic Culture at the Cinema: Local Public Life and Cinemagoing in Inter-War Britain', *Cultural and Social history*, 19 No.5 (2022), pp.547-565.

integrated oligopoly of five main newsreel companies in the 1930s: Pathé, Gaumont-British, British Movietone, Paramount, and Universal.[142] Each of these newsreels were part of larger conglomerate businesses. As Scott Althaus has demonstrated, the newsreel industry was a transnational one which, through being owned by large multinational corporations, striking distribution deals in each other's home countries, or cooperating by mutual sharing of the items they filmed, straddled the globe.[143] Pathé and Gaumont-British were both originally French-owned, and maintained links with these French companies even after they established themselves as independent British newsreel companies. Paramount, Movietone, and Universal, meanwhile, were British branches of American film corporations.

Excepting Paramount, by the mid-1930s the other four companies had also all secured, whether by specific contractual agreement or by virtue of being part of a larger corporation which owned its own cinemas, guaranteed distribution to particular cinema chains.[144] For instance, *Gaumont-British News* was unsurprisingly shown in Gaumont-British cinemas, but a percentage of these cinemas had to screen *British Movietone News* via special arrangement.[145] Pathé products, meanwhile, were circulated to APC.[146] Thus, newsreels were palpably impacted by the vertical integration which occurred after 1927.

Yet, the newsreel industry also divagated from this narrative in some key respects. The most prominent difference was that newsreels were not produced like feature films, which had long production cycles and were worked on by a large team of specialists with the intention of creating one commercially (and often artistically) successful product. Newsreel production more closely mirrored the production of other news media, especially newspapers. The process started with the editor, who decided which stories would be filmed and coordinated the whole process. Cameramen were subsequently dispatched to the scene of events to capture the footage. Each company had a bevy of full-time cameramen in their own employ, and usually resorted to hiring additional freelance cameramen for big events. For mundane international affairs, British companies typically got their footage through overseas newsreel producers or distribution networks. For example, various American companies provided footage to their British subsidiaries. For 'hot' news topics or major events, like the Spanish Civil War or a royal coronation, companies sent their own cameramen overseas to 'scoop' the item. The subsequent

[142] Aldgate, *Cinema and History*, p.23, p.27.
[143] Althaus, 'The Forgotten Role of the Global Newsreel Industry'.
[144] Low, *British Film*, p.12
[145] Aldgate, *Cinema and History*, p.58
[146] *Ibid*.

footage was edited and formatted by a team at the home office, overseen by the editor. After the advent of sound film, commentary was also added to accompany the footage at this point. Prints were then distributed to cinemas throughout Britain and its Empire. This cycle was intense, starting with one newsreel produced each week in the early 1920s before eventually becoming a twice-weekly issue rate for most newsreels. Though varying in their internal arrangements and editorial styles, this production paradigm is applicable to all the major newsreel companies in this period. Newsreels were therefore produced as ephemeral media by a relatively small team working to a tight schedule.

Prior to the Quota Act, newsreels were also not impacted by the American market monopoly as profoundly as feature films were. Irrespective of their ownership or origins, newsreel companies based in Britain were for the most part independent enterprises which focused upon domestic news. True, American-owned newsreels tended to feature more American news due to the ease by which they obtained footage from branches across the Atlantic but notwithstanding this slight difference, all the major newsreels were foremost British products.

Another key distinction is that inter-war newsreels were exempt from the formal censorship imposed on feature films by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC). Though ostensibly a voluntary scheme of censorship, in practice the certificates issued by the BBFC determined whether a film could be screened commercially.[147] Due to the rapid production schedule and need for timely release so that content remained topical, newsreels were exempted from BBFC oversight. However, they often met with informal pressures for censorship, whether indirect requests from the government, protestations by exhibitors, or a more nebulous public 'outrage' articulated in the press.[148] Newsreel companies therefore self-censored their products heavily. Whilst newsreels were very much integrated within the business models and structure of the wider film industry, in terms of production and censorship they were a markedly distinct medium.

A final context that must be addressed is the advent of sound film between c.1929 and c.1933. This had a palpable impact upon the newsreel in terms of its format. For the first time, alongside enabling 'natural' sound from the items themselves and a booming musical backing track to be included, newsreel footage was overlaid with spoken commentary after 1933. This was provided in all British newsreels by an elite and, with the exception of Beryl De Querton who

[147] Richards, *Dream Palace*.
[148] Low, *British Film*, p.18; Aldgate, *Cinema and History*, p.79.

provided commentary on fashion for British Movietone, male Oxford accent. The tone of this clipped commentary was generally breezy and light-hearted, describing at lightening pace in an upbeat tenor the events depicted onscreen. Nicolas Pronay has argued that this change was fundamental, that only with sound commentary did newsreels become a proper news medium as this enabled punditry and ideological messages to be conveyed.[149]

I would suggest that Pronay's position is somewhat overstated. Even before sound, newsreels had copious intertitles which served to explain and ideologically tint the footage sandwiched between them. Moreover, the subject matter newsreels routinely filmed did not change significantly with the addition of sound commentary. The most noticeable alteration was increased filming of music hall variety acts, as jokes and performances could now be heard. Beyond this, the usual admixture of royalty, sports, civic occasions, 'interest' items, celebrity gossip, and politics filled both the silent and sound newsreels alike. Thus, sound chiefly precipitated stylistic alterations to the newsreel format as opposed to a wholesale transformation of newsreels as a medium. Since their inception in the 1910s, newsreels had always been a topical medium which mixed entertainment with punditry, however prosaic, on current affairs.

Thesis Structure:

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter picks up the production and exhibition context of newsreels begun in this introduction but takes a revisionist line of argument. It critically analyses how newsreels were produced, distributed, exhibited, and received to provide a novel view of this context. Indeed, it reveals that there was no single way in which newsreels were distributed and screened in this period. Moreover, it highlights that this heterogeneity was in large part due to the distinct ways newsreels were marketed and exhibited in local cinemas. Exhibition of a newsreel was often a highly localised affair. This chapter also sketches out what audiences made of newsreels. They were widely received as a dull and repetitiously banal experience, but this did not render their consumption insignificant or nebulous. Instead, audiences actively watched and engaged with newsreels, in a fleeting manner, as part of their everyday lives.

The second chapter explores how the commercial media of newsreels fundamentally changed civic culture in this period. It reveals how newsreel producers' editorial values rendered local

[149] Pronay, 'Audiences and Producers', p.412.

events and occasions desirable material for filming. Thus, civic cultures across Britain were regularly included in newsreel issues. More specifically, this chapter argues that newsreels were crucial in creating a new type of public figure, here termed the 'civic celebrity'. From the early twentieth century, the role of public figure became a hybrid one combining the functions of 'civic' representative and media 'celebrity'. Looking in turn at the British monarchy, mayors, and beauty queens, reveals how media such as newsreels enabled hitherto marginalised peoples, such as young working-class women, to take an active, prominent role in public life on a par with conventional elites. Simultaneously, the filming of civic celebrities accentuated the civic qualities of 'national' public figures such as the royal family, anchoring them in the local identities of the communities in which newsreels were screened.

Chapter three continues to explore newsreels' staple content by examining sports coverage. The popularity of sports content again supports the view that newsreels were not always overlooked by audiences. Sometimes, they could be a highlight of the programme. It argues that newsreels presented sports as an inclusive realm of civil society, embracing the sporting tastes of the working classes whilst also providing unprecedented access to the spectacle of elite sports for cinemagoers. In this sense, newsreels' sports content was far less conservative than previous historians have contended. Furthermore, local sporting traditions or occasions were prevalent in newsreels' content, providing another area wherein civic culture was given the limelight. Overall, this study of the single most-filmed topic highlights how newsreel producers fully embraced the civic ethos of participatory democracy in their most prevalent content.

The final chapter briefly surveys the eclectic and varied 'interest' items which appeared in almost every newsreel issue. It does this via a study of cinemagazines, offshoot products from the main newsreel which were closer to magazines and periodicals in style. Essentially, they were newsreels with the 'serious' political news taken out. This subgenre thereby provides the best means to study the heterogeneity of newsreels which covered everything from natural science to celebrity gossip to music hall acts. In examining this content, I argue that newsreels were prime vehicles of cultural democratisation in the inter-war period. Newsreel producers took a 'broadbrow' approach to which styles and genres of culture they filmed. Artforms considered 'middlebrow' by contemporaries were put alongside popular culture. Moreover, in its science-based items, newsreels provided accessible factual information intermixed with divertissement. Routine consumption of ephemeral, miscellaneous media such as newsreels baked access to culture into everyday leisure habits. Before the establishment of comprehensive

state education in the late 1940s, such miscellaneous 'interest' content meant habitual cinemagoers, principally working-class youths and women, were kept informed of, and sometimes actively engaged with, a wide range of inter-war culture. In providing both access to the gamut of culture and conveying a sense of entitlement to participate in said culture irrespective of cinemagoers' backgrounds, newsreels again resonated with the civic ethos of the nascent participatory democracy.

In 1988, Nicolas Hiley persuasively argued that fresh study of newsreels required 'a way of assessing…[them] which is not prejudiced against their content'.[150] This prejudice likely lay in many historians' ready adoption of highly critical inter-war shibboleths. Whether viewed as reactionary propaganda or simply as trivial ephemera, hitherto the newsreel has been at best misinterpreted and at worst condemned. This study does not seek to provide a redemptive hagiography of the medium. Many of the criticisms levelled at newsreels were justified. They were dull in their repetition and often superficial in their content. When dealing with overtly political subject matter, they were also consistently pro-government and unwavering in their support of establishment attitudes. But this is not the whole story of the newsreel as part of British political culture. Nor should it be grounds to suggest that newsreels were negligible in cinemagoers' lives.

This thesis instead seeks to assess newsreels on their own terms, out from under the shadow of assumptions propagated by inter-war intellectuals and then reified by a previous generation of historians. It finds that newsreels were an influential medium in the everyday lives of viewers. They were also part of progressive civic culture in scores of towns and cities across Britain. Ultimately, in their routine (re)presentation of local publics to themselves, newsreels provided the imagery and inspired social practices necessary for the twentieth-century formation of a civic democracy populated by consumer-citizens.

[150] Nicholas Hiley, 'The Pictorial Media' Review', *The Historical Journal*, 31 No. 1 (1988), p.245.

Chapter One: The local production, exhibition, and reception of newsreels.

In 1934, the *Manchester Guardian* interviewed famous stage actress Edith Evans for her opinions on cinema. She opined that 'one of the most vital things about the cinema seems to me to be the "news-reel", and the cinemas where only news items are shown. There one gets people as they really are! – and it is always interesting'.[1] Such enthusiasm for the newsreel was uncommon amongst contemporary observers. Most instead concurred with Cecil Day Lewis's poem 'Newsreel', which portrayed newsreels as the 'silver shadows' opiate which stupefied audiences into an unthinking 'watery, womb-deep sleep'.[2] The exhibition and reception contexts implied by both observers, Evans's compelling actualities screened in dedicated news venues on the one hand and Lewis's mind-numbing trivialities screened in darkened dream palaces on the other, have both informed subsequent assumptions in newsreel scholarship. Indeed, this chapter seeks to revise three major suppositions that persist around the context of how inter-war Britons watched newsreels, and what they made of them.

First, regarding newsreels exhibition, the prevailing view is still that of Aldgate: 'every cinema, at every performance, included a newsreel'.[3] There is an implied uniformity to exhibition, that cinemagoers saw each newsreel in approximately equivalent conditions. The number of cinemas in Britain is then often taken as a measure of newsreels' exhibition and influence.[4] This not only neglects alternative venues for newsreels, but downplays the heterogeneity between cinemas, and even between each screening. As will be demonstrated, no archetypal format existed for newsreel exhibition. Rather, they were consumed by audiences in myriad ways and places across the period. It is suggested that this versatility was what enabled newsreels to become embedded so effectively in everyday leisure routines.

Secondly, scholars have generally conceived of newsreels as a macro-level 'mass' medium, that is, a medium that was oriented to project news of national importance across the British state. Following from this, newsreels have been examined as to how they forged a unifying, conservative British identity.[5] I instead posit that newsreels were a more locally oriented

[1] *Manchester Guardian* (8th April 1934), p.25.
[2] Cecil Day Lewis, 'Newsreels', (1938) reprinted in Luke McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: The British Newsreel Reader* (London: 2002), pp.106-107.
[3] Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: 1979), p.33.
[4] For a recent example adopting this methodology see Szczetnikowicz, 'British newsreels and the plight of European Jews', pp.63-65.
[5] Primarily via sporting content. See Huggins, 'Projecting the Visual', pp.80-102. Also, work on newsreels as pro-government propaganda implicitly suggest this by studying national politics in newsreels. See Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p.95; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.426.

medium than previously thought. Localised publicity and production often tailored newsreels to regions or localities as opposed to an undifferentiated British nation-state. Far from a homogenous national interest, counties and cities were taken to have particular interest in themselves. Both the main newsreel companies and local cinema managers strived to capitalise upon these niche markets, and in the process appealed to sub-national, civic identities. They allowed people to regularly see themselves and their hometowns onscreen for the first time in British history. The public sphere that newsreels projected was as often that of the parish pump as it was any semblance of a national community.

Finally, the audience reception of newsreels remains contested among historians. American newsreel scholar Raymond Fielding has claimed that newsreels were ephemeral media that elicited negligible response from cinemagoers.[6] Recently, Emily Crosby has concurred with this, suggesting that 'a shorter item [such as the newsreel] might just as well have been used as an opportunity to use the facilities or catch up on the week's gossip as be watched avidly'.[7] By contrast, Emily Rutherford has asserted that newsreels 'were consistently one of the most popular items in the cinema programme, attracting a wide audience across demographic categories'.[8] Both extremes of boredom and engrossment are largely suppositions without much empirical support. By analysing several sources below, this thesis finds audience reception to sit between the two extremes contended above. In fan magazines, avid cinemagoers did consistently bemoan the dullness, or at least the repetitiousness, of newsreels whilst still actively watching them and perceiving them to be an integral part of the cinema programme.

Moreover, befitting an ephemeral medium, newsreels often elicited fleeting but palpable responses whilst being watched by casually engaged audiences, whether an offhand comment or brief applause.[9] Their banal nature did not render them an insignificant medium for audiences. Indeed, the most remarkable aspect of newsreels' reception is that they served as a novel, albeit mundane, means by which recently enfranchised working-class men and women vocalised their opinions in a public venue.

[6] Fielding, 'The Newsreel Flickers Out', p.104.
[7] Crosby, 'The 'colour supplement', p.15.
[8] Rutherford, 'Researching and Teaching with British Newsreels', p.455.
[9] This has only hitherto been studied in the context of American specialist news cinemas in the 1930s, see Joseph Clark, *News Parade: The American Newsreel and the World as Spectacle* (Minneapolis: 2020), chapter four.

These three arguments, taken together, fundamentally revise how newsreels should be contextualised and, crucially, how their impact should be measured. This chapter will present newsreels as a more heterogenous, localised, and engaging medium for inter-war cinemagoers than previous historians have posited. The impact of newsreels ought to be gauged as an ephemeral medium operating in sundry local contexts, as it is arguably on this micro-level of mundane weekly routines that newsreels' influence was cumulatively most profound. Moreover, audience reception is arguably less about whether producers' messages were 'absorbed' or whether the medium imparted news to viewers, or even whether it was popular. Rather, it is about how audiences interacted with the images they saw, and how their active, often vocal, engagement with newsreels became a means of everyday participation in political culture. This revised context, useful in itself, will also enrich the qualitative study of newsreels' content in subsequent chapters. In the following three sub-sections, I will explore in turn the heterogenous exhibition context, the localised nature of newsreels' production and publicity, and their audience reception. Combined, these sections will illuminate a fruitful new context for the study of inter-war newsreels.

Section One, the Versatility of Newsreel Exhibition:

As Hiley rightly argues, there was no paradigmatic cinemagoing experience.[10] As a consequence, there was also little uniformity to newsreel exhibition. Many studies focus on the major companies and the similarities between their products, and it is true that all newsreels shared a basic formula.[11] They all featured a similar admixture of 'serious' topical news and 'interest' items, and utilised similar intertitles and later sound commentary. However, there were always several brands of newsreels across the inter-war period, including smaller or short-lived enterprises. For instance, *Topical Budget*, produced by a British company from before the Great War until the coming of sound film in 1931, was successful enough to be a rival in the market against Gaumont and Pathé's products across the 1920s.[12] Likewise, both *British Moving Picture News* (originally *Scottish Moving Picture News*, as will be discussed below) and *Empire News Bulletin* had brief runs, likely with smaller distribution than their competitors,

[10] Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures', p.40.
[11] For a typical analysis stressing the sameness of newsreels produced by different companies, see Nicholas Pronay, '2. Their Policies and Impact', *History* 57 No.189 (1972), p.63. For a similar argument being made for American newsreels of the mid-twentieth century, see Clark, *News Parade*, pp.30-31.
[12] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, pp.13-16.

before winding down in 1929 and 1930 respectively.[13] These all point to a more varied range of newsreels, at least in the 1920s, for exhibitors to choose from.

By the 1930s, the 'big five' of Universal, Paramount, Gaumont-British, Pathé, and British Movietone had consolidated control of the market, limiting the brands of newsreel on offer. Notwithstanding the advent of this oligopoly, there were palpable differences between these newsreels in terms of style and editorial policies. The ordering of newsreel items was the primary difference which distinguished the format of each newsreel brand. Pathé had little consistent structure throughout the period, often putting items that linked together anywhere in the newsreel with a single commentator for all topics.[14] This contrasted with the slick ordering of British Movietone's newsreels, which not only grouped items by topic in established segments – fashion, foreign news, sports, and so forth – but had a specialised commentator for each topical section, including Beryl De Querton for fashion, the only female commentator of the inter-war period.[15] Thus, the order and style in which news was received by cinemagoers depended on which brand of newsreel a cinema subscribed to.

Editorial policies also varied between companies. While newsreels produced by Pathé, Gaumont-British, and British Movietone were generally compliant with conservative mores, those produced by American-owned Universal and Paramount occasionally pushed cultural boundaries.[16] These latter two companies also tended to produce issues that were more sensationalist in tone, with a penchant for graphic news. *British Paramount News*, it appears from the volume of media reportage and even parliamentary debate, was the most scandalous newsreel released in British cinemas. In 1933, Paramount were forced to withdraw an item which depicted an American lynching after vociferous protest in the British press.[17] They also were known to occasionally challenge government policy. During the 1938 Munich Crisis, Paramount ran interviews opposing the prime minister Neville Chamberlain's position of appeasement. The item was considered so subversive that it was quickly pulled from cinemas after informal pressure from the Foreign Office.[18] Indeed, by the time Mass Observation was investigating newsreels in 1940, an observer reported that Paramount had become renowned

[13] Janet McBain, *Pictures Past: Scottish Cinemas Remembered* (Edinburgh: 1985), p.23 and BUFVC, 'Empire Bulletin News', *News on Screen Archive* (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/11).
[14] BUFVC, 'Pathe Gazette, 1920-1970', *News On Screen Archive* (http://media.bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen2/newsreel/histories/pathegazettehistory.pdf).
[15] This mimicked its American parent company's newsreel *Fox Movietone*, see Clark, *News Parade*, pp.32-33.
[16] Szczetnikowicz, 'British newsreels', p.80.
[17] *Manchester Guardian* (2nd December 1933), p.13.
[18] Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media, 1937-38', *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 No.2 (1983), pp.288-289.

as 'always the most anti-government newsreel'.[19] In cultural sensibilities and political punditry, Paramount produced a racier product relative to the restrained tenor of competitors' newsreels. This diversity in content ought not be overstated. Indeed, all companies, including the ostensibly maverick Paramount, filmed the same staple items such as sporting events and civic occasions, and often edited them in a comparable style. Notwithstanding these basic commonalities, the newsreel brand that an exhibitor purchased to some extent altered the newsreel viewing experience for audiences.

What also brought some uniformity to newsreel exhibition were the links established between cinema chains and newsreel companies as the British film industry vertically integrated from the late 1920s.[20] For instance, Gaumont British Picture Corporation (GBPC) owned both Gaumont-British newsreel and a chain of cinemas, with the cinemas automatically subscribed to the newsreel. Likewise, *Pathé Gazette* was tied to Associated British Picture Corporation's cinemas, and Universal to the Odeon Cinema chain by the 1930s. Movietone also had some ties to Gaumont, and thus were automatically subscribed to by a small proportion of Gaumont-owned cinemas. Generally, Movietone and Paramount had to source regular subscription from independent cinemas. Thus, cinema circuits, with all the cinemas in each respective chain subscribing to the same newsreel, brought a degree of regularity to newsreel exhibition.

However even by 1939, the height of inter-war chain ownership, approximately 64 percent of cinemas in Britain were still independently owned, and independent exhibitors were relatively free to switch between brands.[21] The booking diaries of Harry Sanders, who ran three cinemas in North Wales in the early 1920s, are instructive here. While consistently including cinemagazine *Eve And Everybody's Film Review* across 1922 and 1923, the *Pathé Pictorial* cinemagazine and *Pathé Gazette* newsreel were intermittently shown, varying by week.[22] On 10 April 1922, both *Pathé Gazette* and *Pictorial* were booked to be screened together, whereas on 23 March the same year only *Pathé Gazette* was booked.[23] Moreover, whilst screening the two Pathé newsreels at his Porthmadog cinema, Sanders booked Gaumont's *Around the Town* cinemagazine on the same week for the Town Hall Cinema he also ran in Penrhydeudraeth.[24] By the late 1920s, now running cinemas in Bolton and Walkden, Sanders continued to

[19] University of Sussex Special Collections, *Mass Observation Online Archive*, File Report 0314 'Newsreels' (August 1940),
[20] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.35-37.
[21] Szczetnikowicz, 'British Newsreels', pp.63-64.
[22] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN2/1/1, SAN/2/1/3.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *Ibid*.

frequently switch his newsreel subscriptions with ease. Indeed, from the booking diaries it appears that only a month's notice was needed to end subscription to a particular newsreel.[25] Exploiting this to the fullest, across 1926 and 1927 Sanders booked *Topical Budget*, *Pathé Pictorial* and *Eve's Film Review* in various combinations.[26] Thus, independent exhibitors were not locked into their newsreel subscriptions, and as a result the newsreel cinemagoers saw in these venues could change frequently, or be screened in varied combinations of newsreels and cinemagazine brands as part of a highly malleable film programme.

Whether such a cavalier attitude towards newsreel choice was widespread amongst exhibitors is, however, questionable. Some exhibitors' freedom was purportedly diminished by block booking, a suspect business practice whereby film renters would force exhibitors to purchase unseen films in bundles which covered months' worth of film programmes, often lumping poor quality films in with star attractions.[27] Despite being made illegal by the 1927 Cinematograph Act, this practice allegedly persisted for newsreels into the 1930s, with exhibitors forced to block book a particular brand in order to receive the major feature films from the same producers.[28] Certainly, CEA branches across Britain complained perennially about this issue, accusing British Movietone, Gaumont-British, and Universal newsreel companies, the three linked to big film combines, of this malpractice.[29] It suggests that with the advent of an oligopoly amongst the newsreel companies, brand loyalty was to some degree imposed upon independent exhibitors by the rest of the film industry. This also rendered newsreel exhibition somewhat more uniform for cinemagoers on a week-by-week basis.

Nevertheless, independent exhibitors were always free to do away with the newsreel from their programmes entirely. Citing the exorbitant price, some exhibitors reported cutting the newsreel at various points throughout the 1930s.[30] Audiences, they claimed, did not notice the absence. Yet, in the trade press one can as easily find voices which lauded the newsreel.[31] For instance, one London manager declared that good newsreels, especially those featuring 'hot' news, packed out his cinema.[32] Likewise, a Cambridge manager included the latest Gaumont-British

[25] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN2/1/2.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.34-35.
[28] Sedgwick and Pokorny, 'The Film Business during the 1930s', p.85.
[29] See for example, *Kinematograph Weekly* (19 May 1932), p.34; *Kinematograph Weekly* (20 April 1933), p.11; *Kinematograph Weekly (*23 Nov 1933), p.19; *Kinematograph Weekly* (16 Jan 1936), p.14.
[30] See C. Davies, 'If Hore-Belisha were C.E.A. President!' *Kinematograph Weekly* (1935) reprinted in James Ballantyne (ed.) *Researcher's Guide* Vol.1 (London: 1983), pp.23-24; *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 July 1932), p.29; *Kinematograph Weekly* (22 June 1939). P.5.
[31] For two opposing views being featured in one issue see *Kinematograph Weekly* (14 Nov 1935), pp.4-5.
[32] *Kinematograph Weekly* (17 Oct 1935), p.1.

newsreel when he described the ideal programme for his audiences.[33] Some cinemas even put on all-newsreel matinees, to modest success.[34] Overall, the manager who cut the newsreel appears an exception to the rule; newsreels were generally viewed as integral to the cinema programme, something that customers expected to see included for the cost of their entry ticket.

The fact that many cinemas advertised which newsreel they were screening suggests that managers viewed them as an enticing, certainly a necessary, part of the complete film programme.[35] For example, in its advertising brochures, the New Picture House in St Andrews touted a 'full supporting programme' and singled out the inclusion of a '*Pathé Super Sound Gazette*' newsreel.[36] Likewise, the Waverley Picture House in Glasgow boasted in its brochures, that 'our programme includes two specially selected features, while comedies, topicals, and general interest subjects ensure for you a high-class, amusing, and instructive entertainment'.[37] Again, Gaumont-British's *Around the Town* was advertised repeatedly in bold print at the bottom of Waverley's main feature listings.[38] Cinema advertising coupled the inclusion of a newsreel with the promise of a full programme of attractions. The newsreel was perceived as a core element to the 'proper' cinema programme, and the lack of one implied worse value for money.

Indeed, at the grand opening of several cinemas, the inclusion of a newsreel was a *sine qua non* of the top-tier extravaganza programme, alongside live music and short comedies. In 1938 at the opening of the State cinema in Grantham, the programme included a Gaumont-British newsreel described as a 'up-to-the moment news reel [sic]'.[39] This was sandwiched between a Mickey Mouse cartoon, an organ recital, and two feature films.[40] Meanwhile, at the 1937 opening of an Odeon cinema in Bolton, the programme featured a Movietone newsreel alongside a marching band, a cartoon, and two Hollywood films.[41] To draw in crowds with a full programme inevitably meant a newsreel had to be included. Even as the average length of programmes shortened with the shift to continuous performance in the 1930s, the newsreel

[33] *Kinematograph Weekly* (1st March 1934), p.43.
[34] *Kinematograph Weekly* (17th December 1931), p.33; *Kinematograph Weekly* (29th June 1939), p.51; *Kinematograph Weekly* (1st June 1939), p.1.
[35] Lucy Faire, Mark Jancovich and Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: cultural geographies of film consumption* (London: 2003), p.114.
[36] National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, *New Picture House St Andrews Programmes*, REF 5/6/1 (22 Dec 1930-29 Jan 1931).
[37] National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, *Waverley Picture House programme*, REF 5/1/3 (Jan 1921).
[38] *Ibid* and Moving Image Archive, *Waverley programme*, REF 5/1/5, (Jan/Feb 1921).
[39] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN4/2/5.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Mass Observation Online*, Worktown Collection Box 36-D Entertainment Publications, image 309 of 578.

remained as other elements like serial shorts and live acts were slowly squeezed out.[42] Hence, though widespread as an integral element of the cinema programme, the variations between brands and exhibitors' formatting of their programmes meant that how a patron viewed a newsreel in the cinema varied significantly.

The distribution system for newsreels, by which issues were delivered from the production companies to cinemas, also meant that a uniform viewing experience was impossible to attain. After all, each print of a newsreel was physical film stock, stored in tin cannisters and transported via trains and motor vehicles. As the main companies had centralised production facilities around Wardour Street in London, it meant that a cinema's proximity to the capital determined how quickly the newsreel would be received. When a gas explosion occurred in London's warehouse district one morning in December 1928, newsreel cameramen were on the scene and footage was released by Gaumont-British to London cinemas the following afternoon; the other major companies had the footage ready for release by the West End's evening performances.[43] A 'scoop' could be available for screening in central London cinemas within twenty-four hours. For metropolitan audiences, news was often piping hot.

This was not the case for major provincial towns, at least where international news items were concerned. In 1929, footage of the Graf Zeppelin's first flight was rushed for West End release upon the film's arrival at Wardour Street, before having steady distribution to Britain's provincial capitals across the next few days.[44] There were some exceptions to this trend. When George V visited Liverpool to open the Merseyside Tunnel in 1934, newsreel companies ensured that footage of the ceremony, 'hot from the printers', was available to local cinemas 'the same evening, only a short time after the publication of the evening papers' before being sent on to London for general release.[45] Occasionally, then, the provinces pipped the capital for viewing 'hot' news, though only of newsworthy events which had occurred within the vicinity of regional cinemas.

It was rural areas which were generally last in the distribution chain. In 1934, a satire of rural cinemagoing set in Westmorland described that the newsreel seen here was '[g]ratifying because it took us back into the past and had no truck with contemporary events…We saw Hindenburg in the prime of his life with no hint of the fact that the tomb at Tannenberg had

[42] Barefoot, 'Always a Good Programme Here', p.32.
[43] *Kinematograph Weekly* (27 Dec 1928), p.21.
[44] *Kinematograph Weekly* (15 August 1929), p.29.
[45] *Kinematograph Weekly* (26 July 1934), p.25.

received him 16 days before'.[46] This description of a newsreel being so dated it functioned as history documentary was not far from the truth. In Campbeltown in rural western Scotland, the newsreel typically arrived at least twelve days after its initial release, by which point the 'news' the reel purportedly contained was stretched to the limits of definition.[47] Where one lived, practically speaking one's proximity to London or Britain's major railway hubs, therefore determined how topical the newsreel was that one saw.

Alongside geographic location, the quality of cinema that one attended also determined the freshness of the newsreel. Most towns or neighbourhoods had a hierarchy of cinemas, ranging from the up-market 'super-cinemas' to the ramshackle smaller 'flea pits', with a corresponding scale of pricing and programme quality.[48] This applied to newsreels as well, with the high-end cinemas having first-run of newsreels when they arrived in town, freshly changed twice-weekly, before they were then acquired by smaller and less affluent cinemas for discounted second and third runs, usually days after the issue's initial release.[49]

The vagaries of chance also interfered to upset the smooth distribution of newsreels. Sanders recorded that the newsreel he had purchased 'must be on the 11.25am train', presumably to reach his cinema on time for screening.[50] More than once, he noted the newsreels he had booked were 'not received', likely due to delays.[51] Moreover, poorly produced items could often impact upon how a newsreel was seen. In the early days of sound newsreels, it was reported that many had poor quality sound recording and made for a pained listening experience.[52] Thus, disruptions to transport and adjustments in technology further varied when and in what manner newsreels were viewed. That newsreels became a widespread fixture of cinema programmes did not, then, equate to the standardisation of exhibition across Britain. Newsreels' brand, place in the programme, topicality, and quality all served to make viewing them a fundamentally mutable part of cinemagoing.

Beyond the cinema itself, there were also several experiments with screening newsreels in unconventional venues. A 1921 advertisement in film magazine *Movieland* described how, by

[46] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 August 1934), p.5.
[47] McBain, *Pictures Past*, p.65.
[48] Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*, pp.54-55; Helen Richards, 'Memory reclamation of cinema going in Bridgend, South Wales, 1930-1960', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 23 No.4, (2003) pp.346-347. For a memoir of cinemagoing which details this price stratification and even makes reference to it in the title, see Leslie Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts: half a lifetime at the movies* (London: 1985).
[49] Althaus, 'The Forgotten Role of the Global Newsreel Industry', p.200.
[50] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN/2/1/2.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 November 1932), p.43.

exploiting a loophole of London County Council (LCC) film exhibition regulations, newsreels were to be screened in Soho restaurants that year.[53] Similar unconventional screenings occurred several times throughout the period. The Savoy Hotel, in both 1930 and 1939, was reported to have been exhibiting Pathé newsreels despite legal contestation from the LCC.[54] A London casino, at least for a brief period, likewise held midnight newsreel screenings in 1936.[55] An even more innovative, or perhaps bizarre, means of exhibiting newsreels was on board London North Eastern Railway (LNER) trains. Experimented with fitfully in the 1920s, the cinema train carriage became a fully-fledged part of rail travel via a joint venture between LNER and Pathé from 1935 until the outbreak of the Second World War.[56] Whether travelling by rail or playing at the roulette table, a newsreel was available to view. Such experiments, it seems, were restricted to exclusive venues for the wealthy. It was really only well-heeled Londoners or regular cross-country commuters who could see the news as part of their urbane lifestyles without having to ever set foot inside of a cinema. It suggests these experiments with novel venues were likely done as economical publicity stunts rather than as serious attempts to open up new markets for newsreel subscription.[57] Notwithstanding the minority attending such gimmick screenings, most Britons would have experienced newsreels within the weekly film programme at a purpose-built commercial cinema.

However, one atypical venue that proliferated with some commercial success in the 1930s was the specialist news cinema. The first British news cinema, as a featurette shown to its audiences purported, was opened in 1930 by British Movietone in Shaftesbury Avenue, likely to capitalise upon the company's early adoption of sound.[58] Most major provincial cities had at least one news cinema at the end of the period.[59] By 1938, for instance, Jacey Cinemas Ltd had opened news cinemas in Bristol, Manchester, and Birmingham.[60] The typical news cinema was a small venue, between 300 to 400 seats, and screened a continuous hour-long programme of news and

[53] *Movieland* (3 Jan 1921), p.49.
[54] *Kinematograph Weekly (*10 July 1930), p.41; *Kinematograph Weekly* (30 March 1939), p.7; *Kinematograph Weekly* (10 Aug 1939), p.11 and p.25; *Kinematograph Weekly* (27 July 1939), p.1.
[55] *Kinematograph Weekly* (9 April 1936), p.17.
[56] Rebecca Harrison, 'Inside the Cinema Train: Britain, Empire, and Modernity in the Twentieth Century', *Film History* 26 No.4 (2014), pp.32-57 and Rebecca Harrison, *From Steam to Screen: Cinema, the Railways and Modernity* (London: 2018), chapter four.
[57] Harrison suggests this to be the case for the cinema train, see Harrison, 'Inside the Cinema Train', p.39.
[58] *British Movietone News*, 'News Theatre Guide' (31 Dec 1930).
[59] For a general overview see Cy Young, 'The Rise and Fall of the News Theatres', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 2 No.2 (2008), pp.227-241.
[60] Joseph Neville Cohen, *Jacey Group Scrapbook* (n.d). Available online at: https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipMZXudf4ic0RA4XgRLxWYe2jPUeDHdlxJ7jNtBtS6qCwEdFyaTXsj2hDRm9T2lndw?key=ZlQ2aW5fc2IzbXlKT1B2N1BFaDBzdHdZdHJCTGZB

short films, mainly cartoons and travelogues, for the relatively cheap prices of 6d and 1s seats (see Figure 1).[61]

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis]

Figure 1: The rather spartan interior of the Tatler News Cinema in Birmingham, c.1930s (Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook*).

Historians have debated whether news cinemas can be taken as evidence of newsreels' popularity. Rachael Low argued that, as news cinemas mainly screened an assorted programme of 'shorts', with newsreels in fact comprising a small amount of what was screened, they do not reveal an audience hungry for newsreels.[62] More recently, Cy Young has argued that such venues were well-attended and do indicate a sizeable niche market for newsreel-style non-fiction content.[63] Many contemporaries saw them along similar lines as Young. The Movietone-owned Pavilion on Shaftesbury Avenue was reported to have been wildly popular,

[61] *Ibid* and *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 March 1935), p.20.
[62] Low, *Film,* p.15.
[63] Young, 'Rise and Fall', p.230.

attracting 4,000 patrons in its first 10 hours of operation.[64] Between 1930 and 1932, it was estimated to have sold two and a half million tickets.[65]

Many in the industry took this as the harbinger of a short film renaissance. Typical of the trade's attitude was a 1934 full-page laudation of news cinemas in *Kinematograph Weekly* by Keith Ayling. As co-proprietor and 'editor' of the Pavilion, he touted its commercial success as the advent of a zeal for news which other managers ought to heed.[66] News cinemas were certainly considered popular enough attractions that the Scottish Development Council had one erected at the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow.[67] Some news cinemas evidently garnered large audiences and were viable business ventures across the 1930s.

Yet many situated in smaller towns, especially seaside towns with seasonal fluctuation in audience numbers, failed to find profitability, and often reverted to exhibiting ordinary film programmes after an abortive stint with shorts.[68] Viable news cinemas were therefore primarily an urban phenomenon situated in city centres or railway stations, as they required a large, mobile population to make consistent profit. The audiences who experienced newsreels in these specialist venues, then, were generally only those who frequented urban centres or made regular trips into cities.

Where Low's point can be qualified is with regards to her claim that newsreels were relegated to secondary fare in news cinema programmes. It is true that many news cinemas periodically screened cartoon-heavy programmes and that managers gave precedence to cartoons in their marketing. Looking at advertising for Jacey's news cinemas, their Birmingham High Street and Bristol venues had a 'wonderful easter cartoon show' and a fortnight-long December 'Walt Disney Season', respectively.[69] The foyers of Jacey venues, moreover, were decorated with prominent adverts for cartoons whilst Disney characters festooned the walls, hinting at the great stock placed in these as attractions (see Figure 2).[70]

[64] *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 August 1930), p.23.
[65] Young, 'Rise and Fall', p.229.
[66] *Kinematograph Weekly* (11 Jan 1934), p.37.
[67] *The Scotsman* (20 January 1938), p.10.
[68] For example, see the closure of Brighton's news cinema even as another news cinema opened in Manchester *Kinematograph Weekly* (8 October 1931), p.31. See also Blackpool's news cinema, which started to show feature films due to small audiences for short film programmes, *Kinematograph Weekly* (17 August 1933), p.7.
[69] Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook*.
[70] *Ibid*.

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis]

Above: (Figure 2) 'A Trifle of Disney', the foyer advertisements for cartoons and newsreels in a Manchester news cinema, c.1930s (Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook*).

But news cinema programmes as a whole varied greatly. In London, for instance, whilst The Cameo news cinema mainly screened short comedies, The Pavilion exclusively showed British Movietone newsreels.[71] Indeed, newsreels remained a core component of news cinemas' marketing, even if it had to compete for space with cartoons. The consistent slogans of 'News!' and 'around the world in 50 minutes' employed by Jacey highlights how topical newsreels remained a prime selling point. Indeed, the company's opening programmes reinforce this. In 1932, the souvenir programme for the opening of the Birmingham High Street venue listed each item of news screened, alongside a disclaimer that '[n]ews items are included in the Programme as the news occurs. Therefore this Programme is subject to slight alteration'.[72] Thus, news was the centrepiece of the programme and its 'hotness' was touted. Likewise, the inaugural programme from Jacey's Manchester cinema in 1936 included *Gaumont-British News, Universal Talking News, Pathé Gazette, Pathé Pictorial,* and *Pathetone Weekly*. Even in special cartoon-heavy programmes, adverts assured patrons that 'all the news' was still included in these performances.[73] Contrary to Low's assessment, the newsreel was not trumped

[71] J. Neill Brown, 'The Industry's Front Page', *The Cine-Technician* (1939) reprinted in Luke McKernan (ed.) *Yesterday's News: The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (London: 2002), p.136.
[72] Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook*.
[73] *Ibid*.

by other items in the news cinema programme. Rather, it appears that news cinemas attempted to cater for two demographics concurrently: adults interested in topicals, and a younger audience desirous of cartoons.

Nevertheless, even if newsreels were not marginalised in news cinemas, it remains a moot point whether newsreels were popular for news cinema audiences. A more fruitful line of enquiry is to examine the kind of audience that news cinemas typically attracted. Louise Anderson's doctoral research, conducting oral history interviews with former cinemagoers in the Tyneside area, found that, in the 1940s, news cinemas were places used by a floating urban audience for loitering or killing time; there appears no dedicated coterie of newsreel enthusiasts habitually attending to see the latest news.[74] Interviews from Annette Kuhn's archive suggests that this was also true for the 1930s. Members of the Westhoughton History Society recalled that news cinemas 'were handy because you could go in there and just stay in for a short time…And then come out again…we used to go in if we'd been shopping or anything'.[75] The news cinema appears to have been a place that people went when they had time to spare in their city-centre routines, aided by continuous programmes which allowed audiences to drift in and out at will. Indeed, Matt Houlbrook has even suggested that the news cinemas became favoured cruising spots for sex partners among London's queer men precisely due to this ability to wander in and out at any point or else sit inside for long periods without rousing suspicion from the rest of the audience.[76] Whether preoccupied with the day's shopping trip or seeking sexual pleasure, the newsreels screened inside these venues appear to have seldom been the reason that most people stepped into a news cinema.

Indeed, managers were aware of their primary market. In 1935, *Kinematograph Weekly* summarised that they were 'designed…for the casual passer-by, who has at most an hour to spend'.[77] The fact that Jacey's two Birmingham news cinemas were built on High Street and Station Street is indicative of the floating audience of shoppers and commuters that such venues catered for. Moreover, it is unsurprising that many news cinemas were built in or around train stations.[78] In a 1934 article discussing general ways to improve train stations, Ivor Brown

[74] Louise Anderson, 'Else-where and Else-when: the formation of newsreel memory as a distinctive type of popular cultural memory' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Newcastle: 2010), pp.81-82.
[75] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, WH-95-194 *Westhoughton History Society Interview Transcript*, REF WH-95-194.
[76] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: 2013), p.59.
[77] *Kinematograph Weekly* (1 Aug 1935), p.4.
[78] See for example, *Kinematograph Weekly* (26 Oct 1933), p.35; *Kinematograph Weekly* (10 Dec 1936), p.13; *Kinematograph Weekly* (8 Dec 1938), p.4.

suggested, 'why not some entertainment for those who must wait [for a train] …a "news" cinema, with sixpenny and shilling seats. Obviously, you do not want a long film; just something with a brief appeal, a Mickey Mouse and a good newsreel, continuously available.'[79] Again, the news cinema was envisioned, and appears to have acted, as a place of 'brief appeal' when a train was delayed, and not as a haven for newsreel appreciation. The success of urban news cinemas as commercially viable venues across the period points to an audience for newsreel-style content, as Young suggests. However, that they were avid viewers is open to doubt. It seems that the typical news cinema crowd was a causal audience filling gaps in their routines. The news cinema therefore reaffirms the ephemeral nature of newsreels as a medium, designed to fill a spare ten minutes with something mildly interesting.

The sheer heterogeneity of newsreel exhibition highlights that the newsreel was a more versatile medium that previous studies have countenanced. This is arguably the reason as to why newsreels permeated the routines of everyday life and became successfully established as a widespread medium earlier than both radio and newspapers. As a malleable and ephemeral medium, it could be easily adapted by exhibitors to however and wherever they wished to screen it.

Section Two, the 'Mass' Newsreel in a Local Context:

Conventionally, mass media has been understood as a homogenising force which created a national 'common culture'.[80] Inter-war father of British public relations Sir Stephen Tallents dreamed of media functioning in this manner. He championed film as a propaganda vehicle for national British culture, centred on such institutions as the monarchy or Parliament, and annual national occasions like the Oxbridge boat races or the Wimbledon tennis championship.[81] Yet as Laura Carter denotes, in the last decade historians of inter-war Britain have moved away from the nation as their unit of analysis to instead focus upon the regional, civic, and local.[82] From municipal pageantry to local history museums or the BBC regional services, sub-national identities remained vibrant in inter-war Britain.[83] The village, town, or city, perhaps more so than the nation-state, was the primary site of communal belonging and the social practices of citizenship. Such revisionism by political and social historians begs the question of whether

[79] *Manchester Guardian* (13 Jan 1934), p.9.
[80] LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p.4.
[81] Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: 1932).
[82] Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life*, p.5
[83] For example, *Ibid*, chapter four; Hulme *After the Shock City*; Hajkowski, *BBC and national identity*, chapters four through seven. For a more extreme argument against British national identity being prevalent before 1945, see David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London: 2018).

newsreels functioned as a national 'mass' medium. Indeed, the extent to which newsreels operated as local media has been hitherto overlooked. Newsreel companies and individual cinema managers both proactively worked to make the newsreel appeal to localities by marketing and adapting their product accordingly through the production of regional editions and use of localised publicity. Newsreels, then, were not exclusively, nor often even primarily, a national medium in the sense of homogenising the British population through a socially unifying experience.

Of course, at first glance newsreels appear to have been a trenchantly national, even nationalist, medium in the primacy given to coverage of British politics and events. Perhaps the most blatant example of this is that the British monarchy was the largest single topic covered by newsreels across the period.[84] Newsreel producers were acutely aware of the 'national' import such footage had and publicised their monarchic patriotism. For instance, it was reported in 1936 that 'the newsreel films of the events in the life of His Late Majesty King George V, and scenes of his funeral' were presented by all five newsreel companies to the fledgling National Film Library, and thereby 'preserved for posterity'.[85] Thus, the nation's royal figureheads were constantly onscreen, and newsreel companies utilised such footage to highlight the historic value of their products to the nation.

However, it must be noted that this was as much an imperial monarchy as a national one, with much inter-war royal image-making fashioning the monarch as head of a paternalistic imperial family of nations and colonies.[86] Indeed, the newsreels' footage of key royal occasions was distributed across the British Empire. In 1935, the Prime Minister of New Zealand wrote to Universal to praise their special edition newsreel of George V's Jubilee.[87] It is therefore debatable whether this coverage served to bolster an exclusively nationalist Britishness or a transnational British-imperial identity.

More straightforwardly national was the occasional foray into Westminster, as national politicians formed a category of 'hot' news that newsreel producers liked to publicise. *Topical Budget* scored the first footage of a British cabinet session in 1922 to much advertising

[84] Luke McKernan, 'The Finest Cinema Performers that we Possess': British royalty and the newsreels, 1910–37', *The Court Historian* 8 No.1 (2003), pp.59-71.
[85] *Picturegoer* (21 March 1936), p.5.
[86] For radio helping to fashion this imperial monarchy, see John MacKenzie, ''In Touch with the Infinite' The BBC and the Empire, 1923-53' in John MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986), pp.165-191; Hajkowski, *BBC and national Identity,* chapter three.
[87] *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 Nov 1935), p.18.

fanfare.[88] Likewise, in 1931 Paramount was lauded for scooping an interview with Ramsay MacDonald on the newly formed National Government's policies; concurrently, all major newsreels sent cameramen to Downing Street to film the unfolding cabinet crisis.[89]

From around 1920, newsreels were also filming most of the big horse races, FA Cup, Ashes, and other major events of the sporting seasons each year.[90] Thus, national events formed both well-publicised scoops and mainstay content for newsreels. One Lancashire viewer, writing to *Film Weekly* in May 1931, moaned about 'why cinemas do not feature *local* news regularly. Something of interest is always happening, in even the smaller towns, which a great many would be glad to see on the screen'.[91] A 'common' culture of annual events and national institutions therefore featured in newsreels with some prominence.

Moreover, newsreels only made haphazard attempts to cater for the countries, besides England, that comprised Britain. For Ireland, *Topical Budget* stood out for its extensive coverage, with almost ten percent of all items being devoted to Irish politics between 1920-1922.[92] Moreover, some of this coverage was surprisingly sympathetic to Irish republicans whilst a peace deal seemed viable.[93] Beyond this, newsreels were often relatively tone-deaf when reporting on Irish affairs and took a conservatively pro-union, British stance.[94] Of the major companies, only Gaumont-British began to regularly produce special editions for Northern Ireland, featuring additional items relating to Irish news, in 1934.[95] By comparison, Universal did not produce special editions of specifically Northern Irish news until the 1950s.[96] Others did include special items in issues for release in Ireland alone, though seemingly not with any regularity.[97]

There is evidence to suggest that these overtures to Irish national identities were not overly successful. Several complaints were made in the trade press from Free State Irish cinema trade

[88] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, pp.124-125.
[89] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 September 1931), p.25.
[90] This will be covered in more detail in chapter three.
[91] *Film Weekly* (16 May 1931), p.16.
[92] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, pp.134-137.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Seán Crosson and Dónal McAnallen, ''Croke Park Goes Plumb Crazy': Gaelic Games in Pathé Newsreels, 1920-1939', *Media History* 17 No.2 (2011), pp.159-174; Ciara Chambers, 'The Irish Question: Newsreels and National Identity' in Ciara Chambers, Mats Jönsson, and Roel Vande Winkel (eds.), *Researching Newsreels: Local, National and Transnational Case Studies* (Basingstoke: 2018), pp.265-283.
[95] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive,* 'Gaumont British News' (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/12)
[96] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive*, 'Universal Irish News' (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/34).
[97]BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive*, *Pathe Gazette* (14 Apr 1921): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/81875)

officials that Ireland was ignored in the newsreels and that they remained 'as Un-Irish as ever'.[98] In 1939 and 1940, elements perceived as too British in newsreels provoked audiences to throw things at the screen and even prompted the militant Irish Republican Army to threaten Londonderry cinemas with bombings if they screened British newsreels.[99] Nascent nationalist tensions and sectarian politics in Ireland meant that newsreels often provoked ire for their perceived Britishness.

In Scotland, the situation was less fraught but nonetheless ambivalent towards newsreels' British biases. Of the main newsreel companies, only Movietone appears to have produced a special Scottish edition of their newsreel from 1940.[100] As will be discussed below, others did release extended or special editions of issues for Scotland on a semi-regular, if erratic, basis. The main bugbear, however, that inhibited the success of sound newsreels in Scotland was the commentary. The Scottish branch of the CEA reported that the 'Oxford Accent' of commentators was unsuitable for Scotland, where audiences often found it comically English and 'at the very first sound of a broad 'A' they started to laugh'.[101] In 1934, it was reported that Glaswegians were rolling in the aisles at the mispronunciation of Loch Katrine by a newsreel commentator.[102] At the outset of the Second World War, the Scottish CEA again lodged protest to the central branch about newsreel commentary, censuring the tendency of commentators to conflate Britain with England.[103] Less overt than in Northern Ireland, Scottish audiences still found the generic Britishness, effectively the middle-class Englishness, of newsreels' punditry hard to swallow.

Such clumsiness with regard to nascent Scottish and Irish national identities contrasts starkly with the BBC's successful regional broadcasting services in the 1930s. Despite antagonism from the BBC's central London headquarters which promoted a homogenous British identity centred on monarchy and Empire, these regional stations allowed for distinct Scottish, Northern Irish, and Welsh 'nation-building' cultures to be broadcast.[104] In comparison, then, the newsreels appear crass in their seeming disregard for the multi-national character of the British Isles.

[98] *Kinematograph Weekly* (27 Jan 1938), p.18B; *Kinematograph Weekly* (7 Feb 1935), p.27.
[99] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 Feb 1939), p.27; *Kinematograph Weekly* (29 Feb 1940), p.19.
[100] *Kinematograph Weekly* (11 Jan 1940), p.1
[101] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 Feb 1933), p.9
[102] *Kinematograph Weekly* (9 August 1934), p.13.
[103] *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 Dec 1939), p.15.
[104] Hajkowski, *BBC and national identity*, p.130.

Yet, neglect of Irish and Scottish nationalities is not the whole story. It is on a more local level, in appealing to sub-national identities, where the newsreel arguably connected with their audiences' lives. All the five major newsreel companies produced what were termed local issues. These were similar to general release issues but featured additional or extended items deemed of regional interest. As was explained by a Gaumont-British editor to readers of film fan magazine *Picturegoer* in 1928, 'a network of film correspondents in every large city in the Kingdom, enables them [provincial audiences] to see local events on the screen within a few hours of their taking place…the showing of local events on the screen in the news-films involves the preparation of perhaps ten different editions'.[105] 'Local', then, was conceptualised as broad regions surrounding major provincial cities.

Thus, in the *News on Screen* archive, items are demarked frequently for city-based regional editions only. For instance, the charter incorporation of Rugby township was included for local release in the 20 October 1932 issue of *Gaumont Sound News*.[106] Footage of a bridge being opened near Newport was similarly released in local issues of *Gaumont Sound News* the following year.[107] An issue in June 1933 had three extra items, all for different local editions: footage of Lady Hay's Wedding was only for Glasgow and Dublin release; an item entitled 'Army Athletics' was for Dublin and its hinterland, and coverage of 'Barnsley Miners' Demonstration' was unsurprisingly included just for cinemas around Barnsley.[108] In effect, these were three distinct issues of *Gaumont Sound News* tailored to local affairs and interests. Meanwhile *Pathé Gazette*, perhaps more bizarrely, only included a relay race from Plymouth to Exeter in Glasgow and Cardiff editions.[109] In March 1933, Universal even secured a tie-in with the Northern Edition of the *Daily Express*, 'covering the renting branches of Leeds, Newcastle, Manchester, and Liverpool', whereby the newspaper would both advertise the newsreel and act as a 'news service' to flag up pertinent regional news for Universal cameramen to film.[110] By August, this collaboration had been extended to the Scottish edition of the *Express* to aid in local news coverage.[111] Thus, the main newsreel companies all regularly

[105] *Picturegoer* (1 April 1928), p.64.
[106] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive, Gaumont Sound News* (20 Oct 1930): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/380708).
[107] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive, Gaumont Sound News* (6 Feb 1933): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/389902).
[108] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive, Gaumont Sound News* (22 Jun 1933): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/389805).
[109] *Pathe Gazette,* 'A Really Sporting Event' (5 Mar 1931) and BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive, Pathe Gazette* (3 Mar 1932): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/89729).
[110] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 March 1933), p.31.
[111] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 August 1933), p.22.

altered their general issues, or produced special editions, to tailor them to local interests, in many ways the animated version of provincial newspapers.

Moreover, not all newsreels emanated from London's Wardour Street. The most striking example is *Scottish Moving Picture News*. Founded in 1917 and winding down around 1922, this was a short-lived newsreel produced by Green's Film Service in Glasgow that, despite changing its name to *British Moving Picture News* between 1919-1921, filmed exclusively Scottish news for exhibition in Scottish cinemas.[112] Extant items reveal the regional ethos of this newsreel, including items on Scottish universities' events and the weddings of local notaries such as the son of Glasgow's Town Clerk.[113] Just how local these items could be is revealed in a 1918 item which depicted Scottish prisoners of war returning to Leith. It featured the intertitle, 'watch the PICTURE carefully, and see if you can identify anyone'.[114] The former prisoners and their relatives or friends were presumed to frequent the very cinemas in which this newsreel was being exhibited. Such a newsreel even provided an alternative, distinctly Scottish calendar of filmed annual events. In 1919, an item covering Bogside horse races was titled the 'Scottish Grand National'.[115] Thus, the familiar roster of national occasions filmed by the main newsreels were repurposed for a Scots national culture.

The most ambitious local newsreel produced, *Scottish Motion Picture News* was not alone in its endeavours. Proprietors of news cinema chains produced their own newsreels to further distinguish their fare from typical cinema programmes. Jacey Cinemas Ltd, discussed above, purchased 35mm cameras and owned a fleet of newsreel vans, dubbed 'the mobile film unit', which it used to film local events for its Bristol and Birmingham venues (see Figure 3).[116] Civic occasions appear to have featured in these newsreels, such as the 1938 Birmingham Centenary Pageant.[117] Thus, it was civic pride that was projected via such newsreels. On the side of the vans was written 'For Local Movie-News' and 'It May Be You!', which suggests that filming local events was a marketing ploy, as the presence of the van enticed people to come and see if they had been filmed.[118] Capital and Provincial News Theatres Ltd., with news cinemas in

[112]Janet McBain, *Moving Image Archive* 'Biography of Scottish Moving Picture News/British Moving Picture News': (https://movingimage.nls.uk/search?personality=10045).
[113] See examples from the Moving Image Archive, *British Moving Picture News* and *University News* compilation newsreel (c.1919-c.1925); *British Moving Picture News*, 'Wedding of Alys Couper and Douglas Lindsay' (Jun 1920); *British Moving Picture News*, 'Marriage of Green/McMahon' (c.1920).
[114] *Scottish Moving Picture News* 'Return of the Interned' (1918).
[115] *Scottish Moving Picture News*, 'Scottish Grand National' (Apr 1919).
[116] Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook.*
[117] British Film Institute Special Collections, Jacey Cinemas, *The Birmingham Centenary Pageant* 1938 (1938), REF 16182.
[118] *Ibid*.

Liverpool, Portsmouth, Southampton, and Brighton, followed suit and began to produce its own 16mm. 7-minute local newsreels for each venue from around 1937.[119] News cinemas thereby provided a regular local newsreel, oriented around civic or regional affairs, in towns throughout Britain by the mid-1930s.

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis].

Figure 3: 'It may be you!', Jacey Cinemas Ltd.'s Mobile Cinema Van for its Birmingham branches, c.1930s (Cohen, *Jacey Cinemas Scrapbook*).

Even individual cinema managers tried their hand at producing newsreels. In Scotland, both Harry Kemp, who ran the La Scala in Saltcoats, and James Nairn, who managed several cinemas, filmed local topical events to screen in their programmes.[120] The manager of the New Prince's Cinema in Stalybridge outside Manchester, in a similar vein to other local topicals, filmed the local Wake Week in 1927. It depicted hordes of local people boarding trains to go on holiday and the queue for a children's matinee at the cinema (see Figure 4).[121] Another

[119] *Kinematograph Weekly* (11 Feb 1937), p.1.
[120] For short biographies of these men and clips they filmed see: Eamonn Butler, *Moving Image Archive* 'Biography of Kemp family' (https://movingimage.nls.uk/biography/10050) and Julie McCrone, *Moving Image Archive* 'Biography of Nairn, James S.' (https://movingimage.nls.uk/biography/10026).
[121] Janet McBain and Maryann Gomes, 'As Others Saw Us- Local Cinema Newsreels' in Jane Mercer, Clyde Jeavons, and Daniela Kirchner (eds.), '*The Story of the Century': An International Newsfilm Conference* (London: 1998), pp.77-78. The clip itself is available at North West Film Archive, *New Prince's Cinema*,

gimmick to lure people into the cinema with a chance of seeing themselves or their friends and relatives, it again shows how local production was attentive to sub-national social calendars. The Stalybridge film was only possible due to the large numbers of holidaymakers present for the town's wake week, which gave the newsreel its topical value. On a more regular basis, in 1931 Maidstone cinema manager Dan Benjamin, filmmaker Patrick Gay, and the *Kentish Messenger* newspaper collaborated to produce a weekly newsreel 'confined to events of Kentish interest'.[122] A year later, the 'Kentish newsreel, giving publicity to especially Kentish occurrences' was still being produced for sale to county cinemas.[123] From the special editions of the main newsreels to regional newsreels and individual cinemas' sporadic productions, newsreels which projected to local audiences their own regional or civic cultures were a widespread, relatively unexceptional inter-war phenomenon.

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis]

Figure 4: Patrons and staff lined up for filming outside the New Prince's Cinema in Manchester, to be screened before themselves in the same venue, 'Stalybridge Wake Week' (1927), still taken from *North West Film Archive* Collections.

'Stalybridge Wake Week 1927': (https://www.nwfa.mmu.ac.uk/viewVideo.php?token=2352agw56q2d2604nxZYm7125b49Hq).
[122] *Kinematograph Weekly* (20 August 1931), p.32; *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 July 1931), p.29.
[123] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 March 1932), p.15.

Exhibitors, as much as producers, accentuated the local character of newsreels through their marketing strategies. Lavish publicity for cinema programmes, from decorating foyers to match the theme of the film currently exhibited to eye-catching posters and guest celebrity appearances, was a key part of cinema management.[124] Advertisements placed in the local press by cinema managers often featured the newsreel they subscribed to and if any 'hot' news was being shown that week.[125] Moreover, promotion of newsreels was actively encouraged by *Kinematograph Weekly*, which published several long articles exhorting cinema managers to make more of their newsreel in advertising.[126] Gaumont-British, in a bid to instil brand loyalty amongst their subscribers, also encouraged such publicity. From January 1935, Gaumont-British ran a monthly competition awarding £15 (or £10 if it was a Gaumont-owned cinema) to the manager who 'best exploits any special item of news contained in the G-B News during the month' in their marketing efforts.[127]

Such incentives galvanised promotion of the newsreels in ways that permeated local life. In Guildford, for example, manager Frederick Self began sending bi-weekly postcards to 'better-class hotels' and 'prominent' townspeople detailing the news contained in each Gaumont-British issue, with matching cards placed in the town's shop windows.[128] Moreover, any inclusion of local events in national newsreels were made much of in managers' efforts to promote their film programmes. Rochester manager, Graham Butcher, plastered the town in posters and flyers to draw the 'five thousand or more' employees of the local aeronautics factory to see the flying-boat they had built being launched in the Gaumont-British newsreel.[129] Similarly, when actress Joan Wyndham was filmed by Pathé appearing at a 'local fete' in Southall, the Dominion cinema, as the only cinema in town to screen Pathé newsreels, 'went all out to publicise this fact'.[130] Thus, cinema managers' publicity acted as a vital link between onscreen local news and the localities themselves. Civic elements were emphasized as being a major attraction in the cinema programme. To see a local fete alongside the Opening of Parliament or the Grand National would have given these events, and the respective local and national identities they symbolised, equal weighting to the mediation of them. Local and

[124] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.21-22. For typical examples see *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN1/1 and Sheffield Local Studies Library, *Harry Murray Press Cuttings Scrapbook Vols.1 and 2*, REF 725.82 SSTQ.
[125] Faire, Jancovich and Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience*, p.114.
[126] For instance, see *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 March 1935), p.4; *Kinematograph Weekly* (30 Jan 1936), p.36.
[127] *Kinematograph Weekly* (10 January 1935), p.151. Gaumont-British appear to have run a similar showmanship competition for main feature film promotion across their cinema chain, see *Kinematograph Weekly* (18 June 1936), p.26.
[128] *Kinematograph Weekly* (15 August 1935), p.40.
[129] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Dec 1936), p.46.
[130] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 July 1938), p.34.

national life was, then, equally newsworthy at the cinema. Such publicity rendered the newsreel a part of local civic cultures, and the implications of this will be explored further in the next chapter.

Newsreels, in conjunction with cinemas' marketing campaigns, were also a means by which local people could get their minute of fame. When a newsreel item featured the village of Bradford Abbas, which boasted to be home to the oldest collective population in England, the 'five old men and two old ladies' who starred in it were made guests of honour at the nearby Gaumont Palace cinema in Yeovil, where they watched themselves on screen and 'appeared on stage'.[131] Likewise, a man whose heart stopped for five minutes, featured in a Gaumont-British newsreel, was invited to a special screening at his local Kidderminster cinema, where he told his story to a packed house before the newsreel was shown.[132] In such instances, local residents were rendered minor celebrities, treated on the micro-scale to an occasion akin to a film star's appearance at a cinema. Events like these emphasised the proximity of items to the audiences' everyday environs. They rendered the newsreel a more intimate medium, attuned to local life as it showed people to themselves. What appealed most in newsreels, at least as far as cinema managers were concerned, were items with local flavour. Given the right publicity, these could rival the feature films in the interest they aroused from audiences.

The inclusion of a town crier, who rang his bell at a deafening volume, in the centre of the Gaumont-British opening title sequence was apt, then. It was an audience's desire for the sorts of local news that would be shouted in their own town's market square that inter-war newsreels consistently aimed to satisfy. This was concurrent with newsreels companies' more well-known appeals to a national or generic 'mass' interest. As the Gaumont-British commentator announced in the same title sequence, the newsreel was also 'presenting the world to the world'. Indeed, local newsreel production and publicity meant that the newsreels helped to sustain local identities and civic cultures as much as they fostered any cohesion around a national 'British' culture. In many ways, newsreel 'news' was where local life met 'mass' audiences, with countless local events (usually well-publicised by the town or city's cinemas) being screened to sundry non-local audiences across Britain. The localised elements of newsreel production and exhibition must be acknowledged to properly contextualise newsreels as a less nationalist

[131] *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 Nov 1935), p.40.
[132] *Kinematograph Weekly* (14 Feb 1935), p.41.

and homogenising medium than has been hitherto contended by a previous generation of historians.

Section Three, What Audiences Made of the Weekly Newsreel:

To date, newsreel scholars have generally taken a quantitative approach to audience reception, using attendance figures and social survey statistics to determine the size and demographics of newsreel audiences. Jeffrey Richards, examining cinemagoing generally, utilized MO's 1937-38 Worktown surveys and others such as Simon Rowson's statistical survey to determine that the typical cinemagoer was young, working class, and more often female than male.[133] Aldgate and Pronay used the same evidence as Richards to determine who watched newsreels; effectively they conflated watching a newsreels with cinema attendance.[134] Implicit in such quantitative methodologies is the assumption that to watch a newsreel was to be influenced by what it projected. Thus, for an prior generation of social historians, to count audience members was to assess a medium's impact on British society.

More recent work on inter-war British media, however, has demonstrated the high degree of agency that working-class audiences exercised in their cultural consumption.[135] Audiences to a large extent decided themselves what to make of the books they read and the films they saw. Indeed, cinema history has moved beyond a quantitative approach to audiences. Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacy spearheaded oral history projects with former cinemagoers in the 1990s.[136] Kuhn's influential book on 1930s cinemagoing, *An Everyday Magic: cinema and cultural memory* (2002), criticises prior cinema history. She contends cultural history generally neglected audience reception by exclusively studying film texts.[137] She also argues social history ignored the importance of films as cultural objects, reducing them to by-products of historical context.[138] As such, she combines textual reading of films with extensive interviews of individuals' memories of cinemagoing.[139] A surfeit of ethnographic studies interviewing former cinemagoers has followed Kuhn's initiative.[140] Much of this work is part of the 'New

[133] Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp.11-13 and Richards, 'Cinemagoing in Worktown', p.148, pp.151-154.
[134] Pronay, '1. Audiences', pp.412-413 and Aldgate, *Cinema and history*, pp.54-55, pp.61-64.
[135] For a key work summarising these arguments see Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester: 2010).
[136] See Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic* and Stacey, *Star Gazing*.
[137] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic,* p.3.
[138] *Ibid*, p.4.
[139] *Ibid*, pp.240-241.
[140] Patrick Glen, ''Exploiting the Daydreams of Teenagers' Press reports and memories of cinema-going by young people in 1960s Britain', *Media History* 25 No.3 (2019), pp.365-366; Helen Richards, 'Memory Reclamation', p.343; Sam Manning, 'Post-War Cinema-Going and Working-Class Communities: A Case Study

Cinema History' movement.[141] The introduction to a collection of essays, effectively a New Cinema History manifesto, articulates cinemagoing 'as a social act performed by people of flesh and blood' and champions it as the next frontier of cinema history.[142] Thus, the experience of cinemagoing, primarily studied through oral interviews, forms the core of recent research by cinema historians.

Notwithstanding this shift to a more qualitative means of gauging audience reception, the work of Richards, Aldgate and others is still valuable for unearthing the closest thing to a 'typical' audience member in inter-war Britain. The only work directly concerning newsreel audiences since the 1980s is a conference paper by Nicolas Hiley, published in 1998. This follows his more overarching revision of inter-war cinema attendance. Hiley, and more recently John Griffiths, have suggested that cinemagoing fluctuated across the inter-war period, with peaks and troughs instead of a linear increase in audience numbers to 1946. They also argue that the preponderance of working-class patrons was diluted around 1930 with the coming of sound and the replacement of many small cinemas with fewer, larger, venues.[143]

Hiley applies this to newsreel audiences and, whilst maintaining a quantitative methodology, nuances the orthodox viewpoint. He breaks down the homogenous newsreel audience into three distinct groups: those who saw a specific newsreel issue, those who went to the cinema habitually enough to follow the news via newsreels, and though who went to the cinema with enough regularity to become familiar with the newsreel.[144] Using his statistics for cinemagoing, he concludes that 'despite…large audiences for single issues, the number of people who could have followed the news through the British newsreels was remarkably small. Perhaps 7 million people in 1939…[however] the newsreels were a familiar form of reporting to most of the population'.[145] A well-known medium seen by the majority of Britons intermittently, those who watched them every week were a relative minority. In terms of audience reception, Hiley asserts that 'audiences thus liked newsreels, but they did not like them very much. They wanted

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of the Holyland, Belfast, 1945–1962', *Social and Cultural History The Journal of the Social History Society* 13 No.4 (2016), pp.540-541.

[141] Manning, 'Post-War Cinema-Going', p.539.

[142] Biltereyst, Maltby and Meers, 'Cinema, audiences and modernity', p.2.

[143] Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures', pp.39-53. For the argument that early British silent cinema had a preponderantly working-class audience see Nicholas Hiley, 'At the Picture Palace': The British Cinema Audience, 1895-1920' in Ian Christie (ed.), *Audiences* (Amsterdam: 2012), pp.25-34. For a more recent revisionist argument along similar lines for inter-war cinema attendance in Scotland see Trevor Griffiths, 'Quantifying an "Essential Social Habit": The Entertainments Tax and Cinemagoing in Britain, 1916–1934', *Film History: An International Journal* 31 No.1 (2019), pp.1-26.

[144] Hiley, 'Audiences in the Newsreel Period', pp.59-60.

[145] *Ibid*, p.61.

them in the cinema programme, but they did not want them to take up more than eight or ten minutes'.[146]

Since then, historians have made sharply contrasting claims for the reception of newsreels. Emily Crosby asserts that newsreels were often ignored by audiences who were busy buying confectionary or using the toilets.[147] Meanwhile, Emily Rutherford has claimed that newsreels 'were consistently one of the most popular items in the cinema programme, attracting a wide audience across demographic categories'.[148] Historians are therefore divided, with opinion running the gamut of potential audience reception. What all these views have in common is their guiding research questions. They ask whether newsreels were popular and the extent to which the ideological messages projected in items were absorbed by audience members.

Yet, a range of qualitative sources exist which suggest that popularity and influence over audiences' opinions are unhelpful means to gauge the reception of newsreels. The three main sources are cinemagoers' memories, letters to film fan magazines, and records produced by contemporary social surveys. This trio of sources, examined in turn below, reveals that whilst newsreels were often perceived as repetitive or dull by audiences, they were actively watched and frequently prompted vociferous responses from inter-war audiences. Watching the newsreel, and commenting upon it, was seldom about accepting or resisting its viewpoints. It was, after all, primarily a means of entertainment. Rather, such fleeting interaction with newsreels, whether via fan magazines or at the cinema, served as a significant means by which inter-war cinemagoers expressed their own opinions on the news in public spaces.

Oral history projects have captured the remembered subjective experiences of newsreels by interviewing former cinemagoers. It is acknowledged that such evidence does not grant direct access to the objective circumstances of the past but is, instead, heavily mediated by memory.[149] What it is useful for, however, is detailing the subjective experiences of audience members in a way that no other source can easily provide. The only dedicated oral history has been conducted by Louise Anderson amongst Tyneside residents for their memories of 1940s

[146] *Ibid*, p.59. McKernan reaches a similar conclusion in McKernan, *Topical Budget*, p.67.
[147] Crosby, 'The 'colour supplement', p.15.
[148] Rutherford, 'Researching and Teaching with British Newsreels', p.455. It is worth noting that for this Rutherford cites an article by Mike Huggins, who provides a statistical overview of how considerably more inter-war Britons received news of football via newsreels than through radio, newspapers, or live attendance at matches. It follows in the quantitative tradition of gauging audience reception, then. See Huggins, 'Projecting the visual', p.81.
[149] Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, pp.8-9.

newsreels.[150] In many respects, Anderson's project affirmed the prevailing assumption of newsreels as dull ephemera. From her set of interviews, she concluded that 'the act of newsreel viewing was revealed by many of the research participants as a secondary activity, a precursor to the main activity of cinematic experience'.[151] Moreover, Anderson's thesis discovered that 'a great deal of newsreel memory is characterised by a remembered lack of interest in, or dis-engagement with, the newsreels'.[152] Her interviews typically found memories were vague on details of specific newsreel items, and usually lacked emotional investment in what interviewees routinely saw.[153] In short, newsreels were too tedious to remain indelible in cinemagoers' minds.

This dovetails with Kuhn's interviews. Digitised as part of the *Cinema and Memory in the Digital Archive* project, there are several interviewees who refer to their reception of newsreels. They provide an array of contrasting opinions. Some recall them as a dull prelude that had to be endured. Myra Schneiderman stated that '[t]here were the newsreels, either *Gaumont-British News* or *Pathé Pictorial*…Today, these are valuable documentaries of political events of the 1930s, but I remember finding them unutterably boring'.[154] From another oral history project, South Londoner Peggy Smith recalled, '[w]e were bored to tears with the adverts and the *Pathé News*…Everybody was chatting like mad until the film came on'.[155] For some, the newsreels were superfluous padding in the programme.

Other interviewees, however, emphasised that the newsreel was a valuable news source for them. Dennis Houlston, for instance, stated that 'the news[reel] would be bearable 'cause we had no television. I mean this is your only way of seeing things happening, the launching of a thing, or a crash'.[156] The newsreel, for Houlston, was recalled as the principal source of visual news, especially stressing the spectacular elements like a ship launch or disaster item that neither radio nor newspapers could rival in presenting to audiences visually. Likewise, Anthony Venis makes the point that, as young people did not habitually listen to the radio or read newspapers, 'the cinema was where most people obtained their news' via 'watching the

[150] Louise Anderson, Louise, 'The Porous Boundaries of Newsreel Memory Research' in Aveyard, Karina and Moran, Albert (eds.), *Watching Films: New Perspectives on Movie-going, Exhibition and Reception* (Bristol: 2013), p.71.
[151] *Ibid*.
[152] Anderson, 'Else-where and Else-when', p.230.
[153] Anderson, 'Porous Boundaries', p.74.
[154] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Myra Schneiderman Interview Transcript*, REF MS-95-07.
[155] Allen Eyles and Margaret O'Brien (eds.), *Enter the Dream House: Memories of cinemas in south London from the twenties to the sixties* (London: 1993), p.20.
[156] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Denis Houlston Interview Transcript*, REF DH-95-034.

newsreels of, Pathé and Gaumont-British'.[157] This is echoed by other interviewees who claimed that as children and teenagers in the 1930s, they saw the news in the cinema more often than listening to it on the radio, with the newsreel remaining the primary source of pictorial news until the advent of television.[158] These interviewees placed newsreels within the wider media landscape to single them out as a vital news source in the period, especially for younger cinemagoers. Remembered experiences of newsreels, due to the highly individual nature of memories, are therefore eclectic on how they were experienced by young cinemagoers.

A common memory among most interviewees was the clear recollection of the generic features and overall format of newsreels. For instance, Thomas McGoran described the opening title sequences for each of the main newsreel brands, from Pathé's 'cockerel standing up on top of a church, or a spire or something [makes cockerel noises]: "Woo woo Woodle Doo!' to '*Universal News*…that started with a ball turning…and a voice booming out saying [intonation] "*Universal News* brings you news from the Universe!'[159] Others recalled the Received Pronunciation clipped accents, with Movietone commentator Leslie Mitchell named by several participants as the iconic voice of the newsreel.[160] Thus, the genre tropes and general style were well-remembered despite the content having been forgotten.

Indeed, most interviewees from Kuhn's oral history project recalled the newsreel as an essential part of the cinema programme, listing it alongside other shorts and features to emphasise the length of a 1930s cinema performance.[161] Helen Smeaton, for instance, recalled that, '[y]ou used to have always a newsreel…telling you what was going on in the world. And nearly always a comedy. I mean you were in there for a long time [laughing] if you went'.[162] Likewise, Maurice de la Bertauche, writing about his time as a projectionist, recalled that '[w]e put on a real programme in those days, invariably four hours long with feature film, second feature, newsreel, travelogue perhaps, trailers, plus an organ show'.[163] It is as an omnipresent background medium that newsreels are best remembered. In line with Hiley's quantitative

[157] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Anthony Venis Interview Transcript*, REF AV-95-202.
[158] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Margaret Young Interview Transcript*, REF MY-92-001.
[159] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Thomas McGowan Second Interview Transcript*, REF TM-92-009.
[160] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Tom Walsh Interview* Transcript, REF TW-92-011; *Margaret Young*; *Thomas McGowan*.
[161] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Rosalind Avadis Interview Transcript,* REF RA-95-199; Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Sheila McWhinnie Interview Transcript,* REF SM-92-004; *Westhoughton History Society*.
[162] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Helen Smeaton Interview Transcript,* REF HS-92-036.
[163] Cinema Memory and the Digital Archive database, *Maurice de la Bertauche Letter Transcript,* REF MD-95-097.

assessment, individual items appear to have left little lasting memories, but cumulatively the genre of newsreel was a familiar component of the cinemagoing experience and of everyday life.

Letters by cinemagoers to inter-war film fan magazines are another useful source to gauge audience reception. Contrary to Luke McKernan's assertion that 'no one wrote letters about them to the fan magazines', a number of film fans wrote to magazines venting their spleen about newsreels.[164] There are two discernible periods, in 1932 and between September 1939 and early 1940, when newsreels became a major topic for discussion in *Film Weekly* and *Picturegoer*. These magazines had the largest circulations of any fan magazines of the inter-war period, with *Film Weekly* eventually amalgamated into *Picturegoer* due to paper rationing during the Second World War.[165]

The Reviews Editor of *Film Weekly*, John Gammie, had been penning articles on newsreels' faults since at least August 1931, provoked by the teething problems of sound newsreels.[166] Across 1932, this crystalised into a featured series entitled the 'Brighter Newsreels Campaign', which Gammie framed as a discussion between himself, newsreel producers, and readers on the state of the medium. The formal campaign concluded in the 25 November 1932 issue.[167] At this endpoint, Gammie summarised the supposed achievements of his campaign, stating 'I can certainly claim to have stirred up an interest in newsreels among *Film Weekly's* readers which did not previously exist as an active force' and that 'we may look forward, within the next few months, to an era of brighter and better newsreels'.[168] During the campaign, *Film Weekly* published and drew from a glut of reader correspondence to present their opinions. The outbreak of the Second World War sparked a similar upswing in reader correspondence on newsreels in *Picturegoer*. Though seemingly not prompted by the editorial team, it is likely that an increased interest in war news led to critical reflection on the quality of newsreels in this period. Acting as fora for debate among their readerships at two distinct periods, these magazines provide great insight into what inter-war audiences made of their weekly newsreel.

[164] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, p.67.
[165] Mark Glancy, 'Picturegoer: The Fan Magazine and Popular Film Culture in Britain During The Second World War', *Historical journal of film, radio, and television*, 31 No.4 (2011), p.458; *Picturegoer* (7 Oct 1939), p.28.
[166] *Film Weekly* (29 August 1931), p.10. The archive is generally patchy on which issues of *Film Weekly* are included so it is difficult to trace the Better Newsreels Campaign with precision across 1931-1932.
[167] *Film Weekly* (25 Nov 1932), p.62.
[168] *Ibid*.

Moreover, it highlights the willingness on the part of avid cinemagoers, male and female, to make their often-frank opinions heard.

However, the mediated nature of this debate must be appreciated. Magazines do not provide direct access to cinemagoers' opinions. For a start, Gammie's editorial tone very much emphasised negative opinions on newsreels. 'Brighter Newsreels' implied present newsreels were dreary; readers were encouraged to be critics. Critique of newsreels was also longstanding within *Film Weekly*. Regular satirical column 'Cinecisms' by Ian Fox often took newsreels as its muse. In 1930, Fox presented a pastiche of the typical newsreel, carping 'I always like to see the King inspecting troops at twenty miles an hour…[and] it is not generally known that a great deal of unemployment among newsreel cameramen has been caused by the depression in in ship-building because no newsreel is complete without the launching of at least one liner'.[169] Many of Fox's barbs against newsreels' repetitive content and poor quality were to be regurgitated in readers' subsequent correspondence during Gammie's 1932 campaign. Thus, to some extent the editorial viewpoint predetermined the type of letters that were published and informed readers' negative opinions.

Yet, the magazine frequently included letters from readers who did not toe the editorial line, even publishing ripostes to those with which the editor disagreed. Moreover, the newsreels themselves were allowed to publish defences of their products. R. S. Howard of Gaumont-British, G. Cummins of Paramount, and other anonymised newsreel producers all wrote articles responding to readers' criticisms, often printed on the same pages as Gammie's invectives.[170] *Film Weekly* took pains to present itself as a balanced forum, where all sides of the debate were represented. It appears, then, that the campaign was designed to stir up controversy to boost reader engagement as opposed to serving as a didactic tract on the evils of newsreels.

Nevertheless, the act of writing to a film magazine also influenced how opinions were articulated. Letter pages often had a weekly theme announced in the previous issue, for example why a British town ought to be filmed, with a monetary prize given for published letters of 1s and the best letter being awarded £1 1s.[171] This arguably elicited fulsome, perhaps exaggerated opinions on topics which previously may have been given little thought. Moreover, letter writers to such magazines were the outspoken minority of film fans,

[169] *Film Weekly* (4 Oct 1930), p.22. For a similar send-up of newsreels by Ian Fox see *Film Weekly* (7 Feb 1931), p.19.
[170] *Film Weekly* (20 May 1932), p.7; *Film Weekly* (2 Dec 1932), pp.20-21; *Film Weekly* (18 Nov 1932), p.10.
[171] For examples see *Film Weekly* (4 Nov 1932), p.22; *Film Weekly* (17 Mar 1933), p.33.

themselves a relative minority of cinemagoers. The extent to which these published opinions are representative of cinemagoers is therefore debatable. Nevertheless, the sizeable readerships of these two magazines ought not to be discounted as marginal because, as avid filmgoers, they are apt to reveal how habitual cinemagoers perceived the newsreel.

With all this in mind, there were general trends in opinion during the *Film Weekly* campaign. Summarising correspondence the magazine had received, Gammie denoted three salient complaints levelled at newsreels by his readership. Foremost were complaints 'about the "periodical" subjects used so religiously by newsreels…the carnivals, the processions; the reviewing of troops, the launching of ships, the official visits of prominent persons…people have lost all interest in such events as a result of seeing them over and over again'.[172] This is a sentiment drawn from at least several readers' letters across 1931-1932. For example, David Mackenzie from Glasgow opined that he would 'ban all Lord Mayor's Shows, religious demonstrations, the opening of new slum dwellings, political expressions of statesmen, processions to the law courts, lifeboat launchings, French carnivals, and Bacchanalian celebrations' from the newsreels.[173] In the *Picturegoer* at a later date, T. J. E Warburton from St-Leonard-On-Sea, after recounting the same routine newsreel topics, carped that 'we, the audience, are getting just a little tired of seeing these things all the same! Can't newsreels be made more interesting? No newspaper could survive a week if it confined itself solely to such fare'.[174]

Others took issue less with the mundane content as with watching the same newsreels on repeat visits. N. de Y. Bateson from Cambridge, in a letter entitled 'Vary the Newsreels', thundered that '[t]o make matters worse, in many towns four out of five cinemas screen the same newsreels. The result is that filmgoers are often obliged to sit through the same newsreel two or three times'.[175] Echoing this, Frank Helver from Portsmouth wrote in to moan that '[w]hen one is a frequent visitor to cinemas one is often forced to see the same newsreel over and over again. Just as one reads a newspaper only once, so a newsreel is boring if seen a second time'.[176] A 1938 letter in *Picturegoer*, which won first prize, succinctly put the point across in a list of supposedly stereotypical things witnessed in every cinema: 'Everybody either lights up, feels

[172] *Film Weekly* (25 Nov 1932), p.62.
[173] *Film Weekly* (11 Nov 1932), p.11.
[174] *Picturegoer* (1 Oct 1938), p.26.
[175] *Film Weekly* (5 Dec 1931), p.21.
[176] *Film Weekly* (16 Mar 1934), pp.28-29.

for chocolates, or coughs at the beginning of the news'.[177] Thus, the newsreels were epitomised by their tedious repetitiveness, both in recycling stock content and in being seen multiple times by those who frequented cinemas.

The second major issue with newsreels was their occasional poor taste in showing graphic footage of disasters or warfare. L. C. Halifax is representative in their letter which argued, '[t]he fact that some Sunday newspapers have developed a salacious and degrading attitude to life in general is no criterion. Neither must we lose sight of the fact that it is optional whether one reads the reports of "seamy" happenings in newspapers. At a picture theatre one has no such option – unless a patron choses to close his eyes during the showing of a newsreel'.[178] Bernard Priest, from Shoreham-by-Sea, whose letter was printed below Halifax's, concurred that 'I quite agree that people do not want to see such scenes as railway accidents in newsreels'.[179]

This complaint became more pronounced in *Picturegoer* at the outset of the Second World War, as much war news was inherently graphic. In October 1939, C. Hatton from South-East London wrote that 'we go to the pictures to escape the disgusting sordidness of the world around us, and have no wish to be confronted with bestial spectacles of men murdering each other…I have seen dozens of patrons walk out when the news-reel has started'.[180] This only increased as the war progressed, with several readers writing in to decry the 'grim bomb scenes', 'horrific warfare', and the 'very bad taste' in which newsreels were depicting violence and death.[181] The typical newsreel audience, at least those who felt compelled to put their thoughts to paper, were disinclined to see gruesome imagery or topics felt to be in poor taste in their newsreels. On this matter in particular, what is striking is the forthright manner in which audiences articulated their opinions; they felt ardently and wanted their opinion conveyed to newsreel producers. It suggests that audiences came to newsreels with preestablished tastes which were expressed emphatically when newsreels failed to conform with them.

Unsurprisingly for a film fan magazine, the final issue was that newsreels supposedly lacked film star-related items. In April 1932, B. Babbage from Enfield suggested that '[i]t would be rather interesting if one of the film companies would start a newsreel just for the stars

[177] *Picturegoer* (26 Nov 1938), p.32.
[178] *Film Weekly* (2 May 1931), p.19.
[179] *Ibid*.
[180] *Picturegoer* (14 Oct 1939), p.29.
[181] *Picturegoer* (1 July 1939), p.29; *Picturegoer* (25 Nov 1939), p.31; *Picturegoer* (2 Nov 1940), p.19; *Picturegoer* (15 June 1940), p.19.

themselves. Famous public characters are filmed and recorded on newsreels, yet the people of film-land have no prominence at all'.[182] In May the same year, A. Homan from North London explicitly referred to Babbage's letter, and agreed that a 'short time ago a film was shown of several stars engaged in off-screen activities…I wish there were more like it'.[183] This complaint was less prominent that the other two, and likely reflected the interests of the magazines, which were filled with news and gossip appertaining to Hollywood celebrities.[184] Again, it shows a section of habitual filmgoers attempted to impose their own predilection for celebrity gossip upon newsreels. The magazines were conceived of as a broker between producers and audiences by those readers who wrote letters to makes suggestions for improvement.

There were many anomalies to these trends, with the magazine publishing idiosyncratic or contradictory opinions. For instance, in a *Film Weekly* feature entitled 'Brickbats and Bouquets', two letters, by D. Lumsden of Manchester and N. B. of East Sheens respectively, were directly juxtaposed in their respective praise and scorn for the commentary of R. E. Jeffrey in Paramount newsreels.[185] In 1937, *Picturegoer* attempted a similar feature by publishing letters with opposing views on whether graphic footage of warfare was a suitable topic for newsreels. D. Stirling from Edinburgh claimed such images helped to promote pacifism, but Miss Gertrude Hinsley of Manchester protested that 'to show us dead bodies being thrown on top of one another in a cart, and also an aerial view of it, is too much'.[186] These letters, printed beside one another, were captioned with an editorial note stating '[y]ou see? You can't please everybody!'.[187]

Other opinions were highly idiosyncratic. C. T. Graham from Bristol, seemingly acting as an iconoclast, argued in their letter that, '[a]lthough most people will not admit it, they *like* to see and hear of gruesome scenes and harrowing disasters' and advocated for more graphic content in newsreels.[188] Meanwhile, T. G. from South Kensington contended that 'Newsreel editors should all get together and have a private all-in wrestling match among themselves. Perhaps that would cure them of their inordinate interest in this particular disgusting form of "sport".[189]

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[182] *Film Weekly* (22 April 1932), p.18.
[183] *Film Weekly* (6 May 1932), p.21.
[184] For a typical example of this, see the film annuals produced by the magazine publishers which were comprised mostly of gossipy articles about film stars' lives and full-page headshots of the year's favoured screen stars. Anon, *Film Pictorial Annual 1936* (London: 1936); Anon, *Picture Show Annual for 1937* (London: 1937).
[185] *Film Weekly* (11 Nov 1932), p.11.
[186] *Picturegoer* (23 Oct 1937), p.29.
[187] *Ibid*.
[188] *Film Weekly* (18 April 1931), p.20.
[189] *Film Weekly* (11 Nov 1932), p.11.

G.R.R. Taylor presented an original idea in his letter, awarded first prize, that newsreels should dramatize or reconstruct scenes from recent crimes as a remedy to their present stale content.[190] The trends in these letters ought not be taken as wholly comprehensive, then, as there was always someone who held a countervailing or eccentric viewpoint. These idiosyncratic letters also reveal the high level of thought some individuals gave to the state of newsreels, and how the magazine served as a space for opinions to be vented publicly.

Notwithstanding these variations, and taking the letters as a generalised barometer, a negative view of newsreels prevailed in these letters. The main issue with newsreels was that their staple diet of content had, at least by the early 1930s, become monotonous. A desire for more exciting news, especially that from film-land, was palpable. There was also a prevailing concern, somewhat contradicting the supposed dullness of content, that newsreels were too vulgar in treatment of warfare, crime, and disasters. The readership of *Film Weekly* and *Picturegoer* desired a more varied, compelling newsreel, but one that did not stoop to the level of the scandalmongering popular press to achieve this. Perhaps the most useful insight revealed through these letters is that newsreels, if found wanting, were not merely glossed over but viewed critically by audiences who engaged with the entire cinema programme, not just the feature films. A set of habitual cinemagoers utilized these magazines as a public forum through which their tastes and opinions could be made heard, in particular by newsreel producers whom many readers evidently hoped to influence.

The 1930s was also the renaissance of the social survey in Britain, embraced by academics, voluntary organisations, and commercial enterprises alike. Such methodologies for studying 'ordinary' people, their opinions and habits, had taken off in the United States the previous decade before being imported to Britain.[191] Market research companies and opinion polling organisations, such as Mass Observation, Henry Durant's British branch of Gallup, and J. Walter Thompson's market research company, began collecting and publishing the attitudes and thoughts of the British population in this decade.[192] Meanwhile, the Victorian and Edwardian social survey endeavours of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree were revived

[190] *Film Weekly* (17 May 1933), p.28.
[191] See Laura Beers, 'Whose Opinion? Changing attitudes towards opinion polling in British politics, 1938-1964', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 No.2 (2006), pp.177-205.
[192] Joe Moran, Joe, 'Mass-Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus Group, 1937-1997', *Journal of British Studies,* 47 No.4 (2008), pp.830-831. For a more sustained American comparison see Sarah Igo, *The averaged American: surveys, citizens, and the making of a mass public* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2007).

to study working-class living standards.[193] The BBC also began tentative market research by establishing the Listener Research department in 1937.[194]

The cinema industry eagerly adopted survey techniques to better understand its customers. Sidney Bernstein, owner of the Granada chain of super-cinemas, conducted three questionnaires polling his audiences, which became famous in the trade.[195] Moreover, the cinema managers of Bolton collaborated with MO's 1937-38 Worktown project, allowing the observers to survey cinema patrons, with the manager of the town's Odeon even suggesting ways to better phrase questions.[196] Harry Sanders, in his monthly 'Managers' Chat' brochure sent to regular customers, conducted his own poll in 1939, asking readers for their preferred programme length.[197] The cinema trade became an object of sustained study for contemporary social surveys and often undertook its own protean market research using similar methods.

As noted above, many of these social surveys have been utilized by cinema historians for their quantitative outputs. What has been neglected from these studies is the qualitative notes that were made during social survey projects ahead of the final report. Observational notes from two different social surveys impart a sense of how people responded to newsreels at the moment of watching them. First, there are the observations undertaken by the Sheffield Social Survey Committee. Founded in 1928, this voluntary organisation of around 50 to 100 members conducted several surveys on social life in 1930s Sheffield, publishing pamphlets on a range of subjects from milk provision to housing standards.[198]

On a single Saturday in November 1930, observers were sent by the Committee to 21 cinemas in Sheffield to observe the children's matinee performances.[199] Five cinemas were visited a second time in early December.[200] At each cinema, an observer made rough notes of the programme being shown, and children's reactions to it. Admittedly, most observers appear to come from a middle-class background. Moreover, the survey, conducted as part of the

[193] Colin Linsley and Christine Linsley, 'Booth, Rowntree, and Llewelyn Smith: A Reassessment of Interwar Poverty', *The Economic History Review,* 46 No.1 (1993), pp.88-104.
[194] See for example Emma Robertson, 'Gendering transnational radio: women listeners and the BBC Empire and Overseas Services, 1932–1967', *Women's History Review,* 29 No.2 (2019), pp.199-200.
[195] Robert James, 'Popular Film-going in Britain in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 No.2 (2011), pp.274-275.
[196] Worktown Collection Box 36-A Cinema, image 38 of 578.
[197] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN/4/2
[198] Sheffield Social Survey Committee, *Sheffield Social Survey Pamphlets Bound Volume* (Sheffield: 1931-1933), p.1.
[199] Sheffield City Archives, *Material collected by the Sheffield Social Survey Committee, in preparation for a social survey of Sheffield,* (1930-1933), REF MD1231 – 25B.
[200] *Ibid*.

Committee's overarching aim of 'civic progress', was undertaken to study the supposed social problem of children's unsupervised cinemagoing. A middle-class reformist ethos therefore colours the observations to some extent. For instance, Grace Hadley's letter reporting back to the Committee after observing a December matinee at the Don Picture House, called the comedy short 'silly' and spent more space descanting on the unsuitable aspects of the film programme she saw than on how the children reacted to it.[201]

Nevertheless, it was noted that the newsreel was left out of the programme at only two matinees; the most typical matinee programme, shown at 12 of the cinemas, was a main film, a newsreel, and a one-reel comedy.[202] Being included in most performances, observers' notes reveal how children reacted to newsreels, even if this was not the main objective of the social survey.

It was the more spectacular footage in newsreels, namely sports and disasters, which elicited the strongest response from children. At Spital Hill's Coliseum cinema, a newsreel 'chiefly concerned with football' was apparently 'very interesting to the children, who applauded with enthusiasm'.[203] Similarly, at the Lansdowne Picture Palace, the observer recorded, 'News: A fire – some enthusiasm; Golf – little interest; Racing – great enthusiasm; cows at a show – some enthusiasm'.[204] At a performance which was generally described as 'very noisy', it can be assumed that the 'enthusiasm' for the fire, racing, and cows was expressed vociferously. Meanwhile, 800 children at the Walkley Palladium were 'Enthusiastic over news (20 min) picture showing topical events, announcements not heard, cheering patriotic scenes'.[205] If not exactly attentive, Sheffield's children reacted fulsomely to action-packed news items.

By contrast, mundane items were met with relative quietude. At the Heeley Coliseum cinema, during the *Topical Budget* newsreel, 'Children were quiet – no special interest shown'.[206] At the half-empty Scala, there was recorded 'no real enthusiasm' and at the Sunbeam Picture House, the response was 'moderate'.[207] In the Globe Picture House, the *Pathé Gazette* was met with quiet, but the observer nonetheless reported that the children 'were interested'.[208] The general tenor of an inter-war children's matinee, as revealed by Sarah Smith, was rowdy and

[201] Sheffield City Archives, *Sheffield Social Survey Committee,* REF MD 1231-32 (10 Dec 1930).
[202] Sheffield City Archives, *Sheffield Social Survey Committee,* REF MD1231 – 25B.
[203] *Ibid*.
[204] *Ibid*.
[205] *Ibid*.
[206] *Ibid*.
[207] *Ibid*.
[208] *Ibid*.

loud, often drowning out the film itself.[209] Quiet, as much as cheers or clapping, could thus arguably be taken as evidence of the newsreel holding the children's attention, even if they did not enjoy it as clearly as a newsreel packed with raging infernos and speeding motorcars. Overall, these findings from the Sheffield Social Survey suggest that not only did children actively watch newsreels, but that they also developed their own tastes in content.

This is comparable to surveys of children's cinemagoing undertaken by other groups. In Scotland, Richard Ford surveyed matinees and found children equally vocal when watching newsreels, as they often booed dictators and cheered sports.[210] The Odeon chain of cinemas surveyed its managers for what they observed during Mickey Mouse Club matinees in 1938. From this survey, it was reported that newsreels were 'usually welcomed with hand-clapping' and that royalty, sports, and military scenes were cheered loudly whilst dictators were, again, frequently booed.[211] Sheffield was not alone, then, with similar responses to newsreels observed from young cinemagoers across Britain. Children actively responded to newsreels according to their own desires for thrills and excitement. It was treated in a similar manner, watched with the same mixture of inattention and engrossment, as the main feature films.

For adults, there is comparatively slight extant evidence of their immediate responses to newsreels. This is likely due to the moral panic that surrounded the imagined impact of cinemagoing on children, which elicited several social surveys.[212] MO's survey of audience reaction to newsreels, conducted from the outbreak of the Second World War to the end of 1940, remains the principal source. The wartime context must be acknowledged when utilising these statistics. Wartime censorship and filming restrictions led to more 'padding' with light entertainment items and repetitive content.[213] This was coupled with an influx of harrowing items covering bombings and casualties which, the fan magazines explored above indicate, were generally disliked. Hence, the main wartime change, according to MO's aggregated statistics, was the erosion of newsreels' popularity. A majority of those surveyed liking newsreels in October 1939 shifted to a strong majority disliking them by October 1940.[214]

[209] Sarah Smith, 'A Riot at the Palace: Children's Cinema-going in 1930s Britain', *Journal of British Cinema and Television,* 2 No.2 (2008), pp.278-280.
[210] Richard Ford, *Children in the Cinema* (London: 1939), pp.135-137; *The Scotsman* (1 Aug 1939), p.13.
[211] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Nov 1938), p.1.
[212] Annette Kuhn, 'Children, 'Horrific' Films, and Censorship in 1930s Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* 22 No.2 (2002), pp.197-202.
[213] Stephenson, 'British Newsreels at War', pp.151-153.
[214] Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), *Mass Observation at the Movies* (London: 1987), p.409.

Notwithstanding the increasing dissatisfaction with newsreels, the observations complied by MO provide invaluable insight into how audiences, albeit mainly those based in London and Southern England, responded to newsreels in the cinema. Cheering and applause was a frequent response. At two separate showings at a Gaumont cinema in February 1940, there were bursts of clapping for military items in the newsreel.[215] Royalty and politicians were often cheered as well. A Universal newsreel featuring George VI and Winston Churchill screened at the Rex Cinema, Norwood Hills, received thunderous applause and loud positive comments from the audience.[216] Indeed, the Graf Spree scuttling, captured by a newsreel cameraman on the spot and rushed to cinemas, was observed to have received massive applause in the Cameo cinema, an audience that the observer thought was otherwise 'as a rule most unresponsive', and was still clapped a fortnight later in a suburban London cinema.[217] Next to cheering, laughter was a frequently observed response. Items screened in 1939 which featured the Duchess of Kent and David Lloyd George were reported as eliciting laughter from audiences.[218] Similarly, a 1940 item which featured a hitchhiker swearing, reportedly caused 'the loudest laughter the…[observer] has ever heard in a newsreel, lasting long enough to drown out the subsequent commentary'.[219] In the Uxbridge Odeon, a comic Gaumont-British item on snowfall, showing scenes of Dutch royalty ice-skating and American horses 'trotting on ice', also prompted 'repeated and gen[eral] laughter', the only audible response observed for this particular newsreel issue.[220]

Alongside these audible outbursts, many offhand, fleeting comments were observed from cinemagoers. Graphic newsreel footage of wartime casualties or bomb damage consistently provoked a smattering of 'God's', 'Oh's', and 'horrible's' from cinemagoers.[221] More mundane remarks were also overhead. During Commander-in-Chief Lord Gort's 1939 Christmas message, relayed in a newsreel item, a women remarked 'silly isn't it?'.[222] At the Studio Two News Theatre in February 1940, a man commented 'oh gosh, what a crowd' to his friend upon viewing a bustling football match.[223] During Movietone footage of a test dummy

[215] *Mass Observation Online*, Topic Collection Films 1937-49 (Box 7), 17-7-E Newsreel Report, image 331 of 928.
[216] *Ibid*, image 348 of 928.
[217] *Mass Observation Online*, Topic Collection Films 1937-49 (Box 7), 17-7-A General Newsreel Reports, image 3 of 928.
[218] *Ibid*, image 7 of 928.
[219] *Ibid*, images 52-53 of 928.
[220] 17-7-E Newsreel Report, image 332 of 928.
[221] 17-7-A General Newsreel Reports, images 4 and 14 of 928.
[222] *Ibid*, image 10 of 928
[223] 17-7-E Newsreel Reports, image 333 of 928.

being thrown from a Barrage balloon, the observer recorded that 'two youths behind me made some derisive remarks about the dummy, but coughing prevented me from hearing anything further'.[224] During another clip of the royal family, a man remarked the king looked young whilst a woman commented that the queen looked cold.[225] These spur-of-the-moment, prosaic comments imply that the audience were actively watching the newsreels and then engaging, in a spontaneous manner, with the images they saw and commentary they heard. An ephemeral medium begot an ephemeral reception, passionately felt in the moment, and publicly expressed, but without any sustained thought being expended on individual items. Cumulatively, however, on a weekly basis, such routine fleeting engagements with visual news served as a means by which audience members could express their opinions in a public setting. It was a small but significant way that individuals could participate in the public sphere by making their voice, and applause, heard in the cinemagoing crowds on an array of topics.

Although this survey is from outside of the inter-war period, there is evidence to suggest that the wartime context did not fundamentally alter the ways in which audiences responded to newsreels. The earlier Worktown project by MO produced a trace record akin to those of the wartime survey. A 1937 report on when audiences laughed during a Bolton cinema programme recorded 'news film. [item featuring] Family of 22 in Italy. General Laughter' from the audience.[226] Also, vociferous audience responses to 'controversial subjects in newsreels' was considered enough of a problem in 1935 that the *Morning Post* conducted an investigation into the matter.[227] The opinionated, engaged audience appears to have existed before 1939, and interacted with newsreels in a similar manner to that discovered by MO between 1939 and 1940.

Combining these three sources presents a nuanced image of audience reception. The newsreels were an expected, familiar part of cinemagoing, one that has lingered in memory as a generic feature of the typical inter-war cinema programme. Though often lacklustre in their routine mundanity, newsreels were watched with at least casual attention by most cinemagoers. Their dullness negated much enthusiasm, but as a piece of ephemeral media they were capable of provoking fulsome, fleeting responses from children and adults alike. In magazines, cinema 'fans' went so far as to publish their critical opinions on a range of issues related to the medium. Many more cheered, booed, or muttered to their neighbours in the cinema audience to express

[224] *Ibid*, image 330 of 928.
[225] *Ibid,* image 337 of 928.
[226] *Mass Observation Online*, Worktown Collection Box 36-B Cinema Observations, image 191 of 578.
[227] *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 Nov 1935), p.4.

their thoughts on the news. These responses, despite their brevity, were not insignificant. They indicate inter-war Britons engaged actively with visual news, especially those demographics such as working-class women and youths, who generally did not interact as much with radio and newspapers in this period. It suggests that watching newsreels, a moment when audience members expressed their own attitudes and opinions, either inside the cinema or in print, was an important experience of the public sphere, and being an active, vocal member of said public, in peoples' everyday routines.

Conclusion:

This chapter has overturned several historiographical assumptions concerning newsreels' exhibition context that have their roots in the observations made by inter-war intellectuals. The variegated circumstances of newsreel exhibition and production render any homogenised, national treatment of the medium and its impact on British society unhelpfully simplistic. Instead, this chapter has argued that it is on the local scale that newsreels operated most effectively in showing the public to itself. As will be expanded upon in the next chapter, the efforts of newsreel producers and cinema managers to localise newsreel content rendered it foremost a civic medium which resonated with sub-national identities in towns and cities across Britain. Likewise, a blanket quantitative analysis of audience reception, implicitly measuring newsreels' 'influence' by the medium's popularity or distribution statistics, also fails to fully grasp what audiences made of the news they watched. The newsreel was viewed with casual engagement on a routine basis by many Britons as part of their weekly trip to the cinema. It was also a rare moment when cinemagoers could vocalise their own opinions and tastes outside of the privacy of their homes or the ballot box. In this sense, the newsreel became an integral part of the mundane apparatus of everyday local political culture. In the following three chapters, moving from context to content, what newsreels screened to these semi-engaged, vocal, discerning audiences will be examined to reveal how inter-war publics across Britain were (re)presented to themselves. It will also continue to elucidate the civic role of newsreels in local public life.

Chapter Two: Newsreels and the creation of civic celebrities.

In 1922, *The Picturegoer* printed an article entitled 'Featuring the Famous' which discussed the array of 'public celebrities' routinely filmed by the 'barrage' of newsreel cameras.[1] It suggested how public figures as varied as prime minister David Lloyd George, socialite Lady Diana Cooper, American boxer Jack Dempsey, dowager Queen Alexandra, and playwright J. M. Barrie all possessed an innate charisma, termed a 'film face', that was conveyed through newsreels to audiences akin to that of actual film stars.[2] This highlights aptly the eclectic range of public figures who received media attention by the 1920s. It also hints at how newsreel companies frequently prioritised human-interest stories of people over those concerned with events or broader political issues. Inter-war celebrity culture burgeoned exponentially, and newsreels were evidently instrumental to this as editors and cameramen became insatiable for footage of celebrities to fill the twice-weekly issue.

However, newsreels did not merely increase the media exposure of conventional celebrities. Producers adopted a unique constellation of news values which altered who were considered 'famous' enough to be filmed. In a 1931 article, film critic C.A. LeJeune cautioned newsreel companies that 'the fact that a mayor, or even a Lord Mayor, shakes hands with a beauty-prize winner is not in itself a just excuse to get out the movie camera and shoot'.[3] This advice went unheeded as items featuring both mayors and beauty queens filled the newsreels. An issue without an appearance from either was a rarity. As newsreels were the principal visual news medium until the mid-twentieth century, a core news value for producers was that a subject had to be a visually interesting spectacle to be suitable news. If the subject was a pre-arranged event which allowed cameramen to know in advance where to position their cumbersome equipment, so much the better. The local civic occasion, often a planned parade or scheduled formal ceremony, fitted this criterion perfectly. As a consequence, civic culture became a mainstay of newsreel content.

Newsreels also adopted two news values from Fleet Street. First, as suggested by *Picturegoer*, if human interest could be found in a subject, then it was inherently a better news item. Second, newsreel producers readily embraced the sexualised editorial values of the popular press so that images of attractive young women were always considered newsworthy. These three news values of pre-planned visual spectacle, human interest, and 'sex appeal' influenced profoundly

[1] *Picturegoer* (1 Oct 1922), pp.17-19.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] C.A. LeJeune, *Cinema* (London: 1931), p.210.

what newsreel companies filmed as news. This gave rise to a novel means of representing public figures: portraying them as 'civic celebrities'.

This chapter argues that newsreels were crucial for the establishment and sustained visual representation of civic celebrities as a category of public figure throughout the inter-war period. In this, civic cultures across Britain became enmeshed in a (trans)national celebrity culture to an extent previously unacknowledged. The local public figure, albeit as a stock character, consistently made national news as never before. Simultaneously, prime ministers, playwrights, and sports champions were represented, via the actions of cinema managers and newsreel producers, as civic representatives for the local communities to which cinemagoers themselves belonged. Both national and local public figures, in their routine presentation in newsreel issues, were transformed into civic celebrities.

I have coined the term 'civic celebrity' to reflect the ways in which mass media, in particular newsreels, changed what it meant to be an effective public figure. From the early twentieth century, the role of public figure became a hybrid one combining the functions of civic representative and media celebrity. Historians have revealed that civic culture, a range of rituals and events open to all members of a local community, irrespective of political beliefs or background, and organised by municipal authorities, industries, and voluntary organisations, thrived in Britain throughout the early and mid-twentieth century.[4] The role of public figure was therefore 'civic' in the sense that they had to be an acceptable non-partisan representative who could officiate at such occasions. Newsreels frequently filmed local mayors and carnival queens giving speeches, leading processions, or performing other ceremonies. Through the focal point of civic celebrities, local civic culture was thereby represented to cinemagoers as a prominent, relatively inclusive sphere of public life. For 'national' celebrities such as royalty, local production and exhibition contexts often framed their newsreel coverage to bring civic qualities, such as a sense of local pride or identity, to the fore.

On the other hand, with the advent of mass media, to some degree public figures also had to function as celebrities. Simon Morgan defines celebrity as 'a known individual who has become a marketable commodity', that is, someone for whom there is a sufficiently interested audience to sell their image to.[5] Newsreel producers, seeing newsworthiness in human interest

[4] Roberts, 'Entertaining the community', p.445; Hulme, *After the shock city*; Jim English 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958', *The Historical journal*, 49 (2006), 247–276; Adrian Gregory, *The silence of memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (London: 1994).
[5] Simon Morgan, 'Celebrity: Academic 'Pseudo Event' or a Useful Concept for Historians?', *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (2011), p.98.

and visual spectacle of any kind, to a great extent diversified who could become a celebrity. Young working-class women, if crowned beauty queens, jostled alongside aristocratic socialites in the hotchpotch of newsreel celebrity content. Moreover, all celebrities were filmed much alike in repetitive, 'stock' footage of their activities. Such undifferentiated items had a 'levelling' effect, as more conventional celebrities such as royalty or Westminster politicians were represented in the same mundane manner as local public figures. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate how newsreels simultaneously made celebrities of local public figures and civic representatives of national celebrities.

In doing so, this chapter engages with the historiography of late modern celebrity. Two key assumptions have generally guided historians of celebrity. Following Leo Braudy's sweeping history of fame, it is the (inter)national fame of those with preestablished social status or reputations that historians tend to focus upon.[6] In the context of inter-war Britain, national politicians, foremost Stanley Baldwin, Ellen Wilkinson, Winston Churchill, and Oswald Mosley, have been studied to reveal how they utilised media celebrity to advance their political agendas and cultivate personal popularity.[7] Likewise, Ryan Linkof has explored the fixation of the inter-war British press on photographing the aristocracy, who, rechristened as 'Society', became major media celebrities.[8] Stefan Collini has also examined how the role of celebrity worked as both boon and constraint upon the role of intellectual in twentieth-century British culture.[9] By contrast, this chapter moves away from the national or global level of analysis to instead reveal how inter-war celebrity was often rooted within local public life. The concept of civic celebrity enables a fruitful analysis of the connections between international media and the role of public figures within local political cultures. It thereby posits that studies of fame must examine the specific contexts within which celebrities were received by audiences.

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[6] Braudy himself, for instance, examines the celebrity of such lofty figures as Alexander the Great, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, and Charles Lindbergh. See Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York: 1986). For a similarly sweeping history which focuses on major national public figures' interactions with media celebrity, see Charles Ponce de Leon*, Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940.* (Chapel Hill: 2002).

[7] Nicholas, 'construction of a national identity', pp.140-141; Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: 2010), pp.96-103; Laura Beers, 'A Model MP?: Ellen Wilkinson, Gender, Politics and Celebrity Culture in Interwar Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), pp.231-250; Richard Toye, *Winston Churchill: a life in the news* (Oxford: 2021), p.3, p.8, p.139; Julie Gottlieb, 'The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), pp.35-55.

[8] Ryan Linkof, *Public Images: Celebrity, Photojournalism, and the making of the Tabloid Press* (London: 2018), chapter four.

[9] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: 2006), chapter twenty-one.

Secondly, the relationship between consumers of a celebrity's image, often termed 'fans', and the celebrity themselves has generally been characterised as a strongly emotive investment on the part of the fan. Film scholars spearheaded this with studies of film stars and concomitant fan cultures.[10] Such work, in particular studies that focused on female cinemagoers, has suggested a potent empathetic, para-social relationship for fans with their chosen celebrity. Frequently, audiences identify themselves with idealised traits ostensibly possessed by the stars they idolise.[11] Even studies of political celebrity tend to see the cultivation of a celebrity status as a means by which politicians bolstered their popularity and garnered electoral support.[12] A good 'film face' meant voters would like or ideally relate to a politician and vote accordingly. However, this chapter instead suggests that the consumption of civic celebrities by cinemagoers was a far more mundane experience. The 'film faces' that newsreels presented were too fleeting, repetitive, and emotionally muted to inspire any deep affective bond.

This is not to say celebrities were always framed in this manner. Beyond the newsreels, feature film stars of the inter-war period certainly possessed an affective influence in the lives of fans who copied their favourite stars' hairstyle and clothing, even dreamt about them.[13] Moreover, celebrities such as royalty were, in exceptional circumstances, framed by newsreels in an almost histrionically emotive manner. Nor is it to suggest civic celebrities always held little meaning for cinemagoers. When marketed and exhibited in specific local contexts, these celebrities became potent representatives of an idealised civic pride and community identity. Yet outside of extraordinary newsreel issues or when screened before an audience unconnected to the civic culture onscreen, the routine celebrity image in newsreels was relatively banal. Civic celebrities were intended to be casually consumed akin to other aspects of the week's topical news. Inter-war celebrity, then, was frequently a localised experience, and a rather mundane one.

This chapter also engages with recent revisionist historiography on inter-war British civic culture. Hitherto, this has mostly been a history of social and cultural practices. Historians have explored what people in localities did, from parading in historical pageants to joining local

[10] For two landmark exemplars see Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: 1979) and Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: film stars and society* (Basingstoke: 1986).
[11] Stacey, *Stargazing*; Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*, p.134. For a rare study of male cinemagoers' emotional relationship with film stars, see Tebbutt 'Crying for Flicka'.
[12] Beers, 'Wilkinson', pp.232-233; Nicholas, 'construction of a national identity', pp.140-141.
[13] See Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*, pp.110-111; Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s' in Gareth Stedman Jones and David Feldman (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* (London: 1989), pp.245-271; For a contemporary source see J. P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences: Sociological Studies* (London: 1948).

voluntary associations, with little consideration of how media represented this political culture.[14] The exception to this has been the rich research into local newspapers, most notably by Rachel Matthews.[15] This research has revealed the local and regional press not only survived the advent of national mass-produced daily newspapers, but remained a 'ubiquitous civic voice' across the period.[16] Local newspapers, though increasingly absorbed into larger publishing companies, were circulated in confined geographic areas to relatively small readerships. What has yet to be studied in any depth by historians are the ways in which ostensibly 'mass' media like newsreels interacted, via the intermediaries of cinema managers and municipal authorities, with local civic cultures.

Similarly, where film has been considered as part of civic culture, it is non-commercial documentaries or municipal efforts to run local cinemas which scholars have explored.[17] Elizabeth LeBas has uncovered around 300 films that were sponsored or produced by municipal authorities in Britain between 1920 and 1980.[18] Largely welfare or health-related information films, these were typically exhibited in community centres or through mobile cinema vans.[19] Compared to the bi-weekly newsreel, these municipal forays into filmmaking were rare occurrences, with most local authorities producing two or three films.[20] Bermondsey council, among the most prolific sponsor of public health films, made just 34 between 1924 and 1948.[21] Moreover, LeBas maintains the dichotomy between the commercial and the civic when she states that 'the municipal film spectator was not a commercial film spectator. He or she was a citizen, not a customer'.[22] This chapter instead reveals civic culture to have had a rich and extensive filmic portrayal inside the commercial cinema between the wars. Building upon nascent research into cinema managers, it demonstrates the vital role commercial media

[14] For historical and civic pageants Hulme, 'A nation of town criers' and Zoe Thomas, 'Historical pageants, citizenship, and the performance of women's history before second-wave feminism', *20th century British history*, 28 No.3, pp.319–343. For the thriving mass membership voluntary associations, see Thane and McCarthy, 'The Politics of Association' and O'Keefe, 'Civic veterans'. For excellent case studies of municipal initiatives in Liverpool and Manchester, see Charlotte Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939* (London: 2016), chapter two.
[15] Matthews, *Provincial Press*.
[16] Bromley and Hayes, 'Campaigner, watchdog or municipal lackey?', p.197.
[17] Trevor Griffiths and Julia Bohlmann, 'Cinema for the Common Good: Municipalisation and Mass Entertainment in Early Twentieth-Century Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review* 99 No. 1 (2020), pp.111-112.
[18] See especially the filmography compiled in Elizabeth LeBas, *Forgotten Futures: British municipal cinema 1920-1980* (London: 2011).
[19] *Ibid,* p.14, p.86. For an interesting analysis on how these films related to wider civic culture in the postwar period, see Charlotte Wildman, 'A City speaks: The projection of civic identity in Manchester', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23 No.1 (20120, pp.80–99.
[20] LeBas, *Forgotten Futures*, p.31.
[21] *Ibid*, p.80.
[22] *Ibid*, p.14.

and venues played in local public life.[23] In their everyday lives, Britons often acted as consumers and citizens simultaneously. In many respects, newsreels, and their exhibition and marketing by local cinemas, profoundly altered how civic culture was represented whilst also nurturing it. Ultimately, commercial media such as newsreels need to be integrated into the revisionist narrative of inter-war British political culture.

This chapter has three main sections, each centred around a different type of public figure. First, a case study of the British royal family will be explored to demonstrate how newsreels presented 'national' celebrities. It reveals how, beyond the exceptional coverage of royal weddings and ceremonies, the everyday coverage of royalty was quite mundane. In this sense, traditional celebrities with preestablished rank or social status, of which royalty was arguably the apex, were portrayed akin to other civic celebrities. At the same time, the civic qualities of monarchy were often accentuated due to the local contexts in which newsreel items of royalty were exhibited, marketed, and occasionally produced. In both senses, portraying the royal family as civic celebrities brought them closer to the everyday lives and communities of cinemagoers. Next, this chapter will explore newsreels' overtly civic content to show how it formed a staple item which rendered civic representatives, principally mayors and mayoresses, celebrities. Again, local exhibition and production heightened the civic meaning of such items, which were otherwise rather standardised. Finally, a case study of beauty queens is used to demonstrate how the filming of civic celebrities by newsreel companies altered both who could become famous and who could become an accepted representative of political communities. This section teases out the gendered elements of this concept, as sexualised new values influenced producers' notions of viable civic celebrity. Coverage of beauty queens portrayed young, often working-class, women in the role of civic representative, which hitherto had been reserved for conventional elites such as aristocrats and municipal leaders.

Section One, The British Monarchy in Newsreels: Magic or Mundane?

Since at least the early modern period, the conscious crafting of a monarch's image via art, material culture, and symbolic displays has been crucial to projecting royal authority and power.[24] The advent of photography and mass-produced illustrated newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only rendered media more integral to a monarch's

[23] For recent work on cinema managers see James, 'Make Your Public Curious'.
[24] See for example, Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven, 2010); Roy Strong, *Splendour at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and the Theatre of Power* (Boston: 1976); Michael Braddick and John Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy, and Subordination in Britian and Ireland* (Cambridge: 2001).

increasingly ceremonial role as head of state.[25] Historians have characterised the inter-war monarchy as adroit manipulators of their image who effectively harnessed the boons of media celebrity without tarnishing the 'magic' of their regal authority.[26] Many point to these decades as a watershed moment when the royal family began, alongside its traditional image of ceremonial majesty, to cultivate a humanised image of itself as an ideal family.[27]

Edward Owens has recently synthesised this orthodox position utilising novel concepts from the history of emotions. He argues that, via shrewd stage management of ceremonial occasions and media image by palace officials and other elites, subjects forged strong empathetic bonds with the royal family which fostered an affective loyalty to the crown.[28] The inter-war monarchy harnessed media celebrity to elicit empathy and thereby act as a force for paternalist social cohesion within the British Empire. Akin to scholarship on celebrity more broadly, the royal family's celebrity is presented as an emotionally charged form of para-social consumption which primarily operated on a national-imperial scale. By the 1930s, Britons had become ardent 'fans' of their royal family.

Newsreels are typically presented as a key medium via which the monarchy forged their new inter-war dual image of domestic bliss and majestic power. The royal family constituted the single most-featured item in a survey of digitised newsreels by Luke McKernan and Nicolas Hiley.[29] Moreover, McKernan argues that the newsreel companies were keenly monarchist, 'almost slavish in their deference to royalty'.[30] To this end, as Jeffrey Richards has suggested, newsreels endlessly depicted British royalty performing official duties and ceremonies.[31] A royal family member launching a ship, such as the famous launching of the *Queen Mary* ocean liner by Queen Mary herself at Glasgow in 1934, is representative of this sort of item which

[25] John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: 2003); Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, chapter three.
[26] Laura Clancy, 'Queen's Day - TV's Day': the British monarchy and the media industries', *Contemporary British History,* 33 No.3 (2019), p.442; Laura Mayhall, 'The Prince of Wales Versus Clark Gable', *Cultural and Social history*, 4 No.4 (2007), p.539; Frank Mort, 'On Tour with the Prince: Monarchy, Imperial Politics and Publicity in the Prince of Wales's Dominion Tours 1919-20', *Twentieth Century British history*, 29 No.1 (2018), pp.25–57; Hajkowski, *BBC and national identity*, chapter three.
[27] Philip Williamson, 'The monarchy and public values 1900-1953' in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present* (Cambridge: 2007), pp.245-246; Rosalind Brunt, 'The Family Firm Restored: newsreel coverage of the British monarchy 1936-45' in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.), *Nationalising femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: 1996), p.143.
[28] Edward Owens, *The Family Firm: monarchy, mass media and the British public, 1932-53* (London: 2019), p.6, pp.19-20.
[29] McKernan and Hiley, 'Reconstructing the News', p.191
[30] McKernan, 'The Finest Cinema Performers', p.59.
[31] Jeffrey Richards, 'The monarchy and film 1900-2000' in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present* (Cambridge: 2007), pp.260-265.

presented royalty as ceremonial figureheads performing a public service for their subjects.[32] In this way, they were represented as dutiful servants of the British people. Concurrent to footage of royal service were items which presented the informal family life of royalty in an idealised manner. Though unissued, footage filmed by Pathé in 1937 of George VI feeding the ducks with his wife and daughters at Buckingham Palace is indicative of the access to the monarch's private life which newsreels aimed to provide.[33] Newsreels thereby integrated intimate domesticity with more formal images of royal engagements. In doing so, they became a key vehicle for the inter-war monarchy's image-making strategy.

This is certainly the case for the major national-imperial royal occasions which occurred across the period. Royal weddings or imperial royal tours, for example, were stringently stage-managed affairs which duly received special, dedicated coverage by newsreel companies. Owens has shown how newsreel coverage of the 1934 royal wedding of the Duke of Kent and Princess Marina presented a romantic image of marital love and glamorous spectacle.[34] British Movietone scooped unprecedented access as the Duke and Marina granted exclusive direct-to-camera interviews after their engagement. This was the first time British royalty were interviewed onscreen.[35] In the interviews they emphasised 'their emotional fulfilment, Marina's happiness at becoming a British royal and their modern glamour'.[36] Likewise, Movietone were also granted intimate access to the couple after the wedding, presenting 'the first film study of the Duke and Duchess of Kent since their wedding'. The footage was highly informal, the couple wandering the grounds of an estate with their Alsatian and posing for smiling close ups, 'enjoying the peace of the countryside'.[37]

Other items, akin to gossip columns in newspapers, provided audiences with insider knowledge of the preparations for the royal wedding itself. It depicted the band rehearsing, the outside of the new marital home in Belgrave Square, and the latest photograph taken of the couple together.[38] Such items as these served to present a humanised, albeit idealised, royal family to

[32] *British Paramount News,* 'Queen Mary Launches 'Queen Mary' Liner' (27 Sep 1934).
[33] *Pathe News*, 'Royal Family in Palace Grounds' (unissued, 1937).
[34] Owens, *Family Firm*, pp.49-51. See also Edward Owens, 'All the World Loves a Lover: Monarchy, Mass Media and the 1934 Royal Wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina', *English Historical Review,* 133 No.562 (2018), p.598.
[35] Owens, *Family Firm*, pp.49-51.
[36] *Ibid*, p.49.
[37] *British Movietone*, 'Royal Honeymoon' (6 Dec 1934).
[38] *British Movietone*, 'Ready for the Royal Wedding' (26 Nov 1934).

audiences by positioning them in close proximity to the supposed fairy-tale romance of the young couple.

The wedding itself was given momentous coverage in a 'souvenir issue' almost ten minutes in length covering the procession to Westminster Abbey, with still photographs of the service inside the Abbey.[39] The commentary was a veritable panegyric, suggesting the British royal family 'set to the world such an example of royal dignity and domestic felicity' and that the crowds themselves, 'all loyal and romantic people', were involved in making this day a brilliant jubilation.[40] The official wedding photographs of the royal family, garbed in full regalia, featured at the end of this special issue to underscore the spectacle. Thus, coverage of the 1934 wedding blended informal romantic domesticity with images of majestic pomp to convey a message of monarchist loyalty.

Such images were presaged in coverage of the 1923 wedding of the Duke of York to Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. In *Topical Budget*'s extra-length item covering the wedding, heart-shaped intertitles and close ups of the royal couple smiling on Buckingham Palace's balcony were mixed with distant shots of the formal procession to Westminster and intertitle statements of imperial loyalty such as 'the whole empire wishes them long life and happiness'.[41] Thus, royal weddings were prime occasions for newsreel companies to collaborate willingly in the image-making campaign of the British monarchy, presenting the royal family as worthy of empathy and deference in equal measure from their cinemagoing subjects.

Royal weddings were not the only occasions to receive exalted coverage in newsreels. Between 1919 and 1925, the Prince of Wales undertook exhaustive tours of the British Empire and Dominions, visiting forty-five imperial territories and travelling approximately 150,000 miles.[42] Newsreel coverage of these tours, as Frank Mort has revealed, was oriented around the prince's popularity, especially with women and veterans of the Great War. Focusing on his interactions with these two groups, newsreels alternately highlighted the prince's glamorous sexual allure and his manly rapport with fellow ex-servicemen.[43] For his 1919 tour of Canada and his 1925 tour of South Africa, special film companies produced multi-part series of

[39] *British Movietone*, 'Wedding of the Duke of Kent (Prince George) to Princess Marina' (29 Nov 1934).
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Topical Budget*, 'Duke and Duchess of York – Wedding' (31 Dec 1923). Available via *Associated Press British Movietone Collection*.
[42] Mort, 'On Tour With the Prince', p.28.
[43] *Ibid*.

extended newsreels, those for the latter tour 'approved by the Admiralty'.[44] Imperial tours undertaken by other members of the royal family were given similar treatment. For instance, Pathé produced a ten-minute special item, 'taken by [sic] authority by our own cameraman attached to the tour' of the Duke of Connaught's official visit to India in 1921.[45] Likewise, George V's 1935 Silver Jubilee prompted a feature-length newsreel retrospective on his reign to be exhibited in cinemas as part of the year's royal celebrations.[46] Thus, newsreel companies always rose to the royal occasion and willingly collaborated with palace officials to present the royal family as popular, paternalist heads of the British Empire.

The 1937 coronation of George VI was arguably the pinnacle of this sort of monarchist newsreel coverage. Owens has explored how Church of England and palace officials, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang, painstakingly orchestrated the day's ceremonies in a way that was acutely sensitive to producing an impressive media spectacle.[47] For the first time, newsreels were granted permission to film the coronation ritual inside Westminster Abbey. Cinemagoers were thereby given unprecedented access to the prime spectacle of royal authority. The recollections of H. W. Bishop, one of the cameramen assigned to film the coronation, suggest that filming was heavily restricted by officials. Each cameraman could only film from a fixed, hidden position so as to not invade upon the dignity of the ceremony. Final editorial control of the footage was conceded to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Earl Marshall, who viewed the first flash copy in a West End news theatre directly after the coronation.[48] Official control and newsreel producers' general deference to the monarchy ensured this film was a laudation of majesty.

British Movietone's special colourised edition of the coronation footage was distributed to forty-one countries, with an estimated 100,000,000 people having viewed the film over the course of the year.[49] The immense public interest in the coronation films was stressed in the cinema exhibitors' trade press. For example, at one cinema in Reading, it was reported that over 1,000 children along with scores of adults piled into a children's matinee because it exhibited feature-length newsreel footage of the coronation.[50] Hence, newsreels turned royal

[44] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Prince of Wales Tour Across Canada' (1919); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Prince of Wales Tour of S. Africa' (1925). *Pathe Gazette*, 'Prince of Wales Tour of South Africa – Part 7' (1925).
[45] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Duke of Connaught in India' (1921).
[46] *Devon and Exeter Gazette* (23 Nov 1934), p.11
[47] Owens, *Family Firm*, p.175.
[48] H. W. Bishop, 'newsreel cameraman' in Oswell Blakeston (ed.), *Working for the films* (London: 1947), pp.120-122.
[49] Szczetnikowicz, 'British newsreels', p.52.
[50] *Kinematograph Weekly* (17 Jun 1937), p.40.

occasions into major media spectacles, readily complying with officials' image-making efforts to project a Janus-faced royal family of ordinary, relatable humans and authoritative regal figureheads.

Yet, there is evidence to suggest such endeavours were not entirely successful. The newsreel industry was widely considered by the press and cinema managers to have botched the first issues, or 'rushes', of the 1937 coronation. *Film Weekly* opined that, 'the aftermath of the Coronation in film circles has been a sharp rap over the knuckles, administered by public opinion'.[51] The CEA conducted a drawn-out debate over the issues surrounding the coronation rushes. Many branches, such as the Glasgow CEA, reported severe delays in receiving footage.[52] Downmarket second- and third-run cinemas also complained to their CEA branches that the exorbitant fees asked by newsreel companies for coronation issues, including an extra '£10 10s for the Abbey Scenes', prevented them from purchasing issues. It was reported that 'in these cases patrons suspected the exhibitor not only of being mean but disloyal'.[53] As Alfred Snape, proprietor of a Manchester cinema circuit, bemoaned in *Kinematograph Weekly*, 'to dismiss the Coronation with a few flickers and flashes, a film of eight minutes showing time, is an absolute scandal'.[54] Whilst later special editions of the coronation fared better, it appears the initial distribution fiasco and 'flash copy' items were something of a disappointment for many exhibitors across Britain. Frank Mort has uncovered a diverse range of responses to subjects seeing or meeting British royalty during the Great War, from reverential euphoria to mild curiosity, underwhelmed disappointment, and even irreverence.[55] So too, contrary to the assumptions of Owens and McKernan, newsreels' monarchist rhapsodies for major occasions did not automatically equate to affective fealty from viewers. As the coronation coverage suggests, onscreen panegyrics could be marred by the inauspicious circumstances in which they were produced, distributed, and exhibited.

It is useful to situate coverage of the British royal family within newsreels companies' wider treatment of royalty as a variant of celebrity. Monarchy as a system of government, whether constitutional or more directly involved in governance, survived the upheavals of the First World War. Countries across the world remained monarchies of one form or another after 1918,

[51] *Film Weekly* (29 May 1937), p.7.
[52] *Kinematograph Weekly* (20 May 1937), p.27.
[53] *Kinematograph Weekly* (27 May), p.12.
[54] *Kinematograph Weekly* (20 May 1937), p.5.
[55] Frank Mort, 'Accessible sovereignty: popular attitudes to the British monarchy during the Great War', *Social History (London)*, 45 No.3 (2020), pp.328–359.

and many former royalty lived on in exile for decades. Newsreels, with their penchant for colourful, pre-arranged spectacle and human interest, eagerly filmed royalty and ex-royalty alike. They seldom, however, treated them with the reverence or deferential tact that was afforded to the British monarchy. Indeed, it is striking how such footage is marked by invasive informality. Many of the techniques that influenced how the British royal family were filmed from the mid-1930s had long been standard for other royalty.

For example, non-European monarchs were induced to pose for newsreel cameras from the mid-1920s. When visiting Manchester in 1927, King Faisal I of Iraq was filmed aboard a tug-boat in a panning close up with his retinue before being singled out for an extreme lingering close up, where he smiled and spoke directly to the camera.[56] Similarly, in an item entitled 'Arab Chiefs visit Pathé', a group of Arab dignitaries, in indigenous formal dress, were filmed posing and performing various incidental activities, such as reading a book, inside Pathé's studio on Wardour Street.[57] Literally staged, it featured lingering close ups on a young Arab boy, looking out directly to the audience.[58] The general lack of context and action in both items suggests that these dignitaries were filmed as an exotic spectacle for British audiences, who were imagined by producers as exclusively white.

British Movietone likewise saw non-European monarchs as a picaresque image for cinemagoers in Britain. Four years before Princess Marina's interview, it was Hailie Selassie who first spoke to cinemagoers directly during his coronation as emperor of Abyssinia. In November and December 1930, Movietone issued several items covering the coronation, wherein the spectacle of royal processions and Abyssinian dignitaries wearing indigenous attire were filmed. In contrast to the respectful distance and restrictions placed upon filming the British monarch's coronation in 1937, Selassie's crowning was filmed in a shadowy close-up that appears to have been taken with little pre-arranged set up.[59]

An article advertising Movietone's scoop of this footage in trade paper *The Bioscope* stressed the degree of proximity granted. It stated that it was 'owing to the great courtesy of the officials of the Court of Abyssinia, the camera and sound engineers were given unparalleled facilities for obtaining a unique record of this great Ethiopian ceremony'.[60] Indeed, the pilot who flew the film back to Britain in record time was 'decorated by the Emperor with a high Order', thus

[56] *Pathe Gazette*, 'King Feisal Visit to Manchester' (28 Nov 1927).
[57] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Arab Chiefs Visit Pathe' (c.1920s).
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] *British Movietone*, 'Coronation of Ras Tafari', (10 Nov 1930).
[60] *The Bioscope* (12 Nov 1930), p.21.

stressing the extent of willing cooperation from the Abyssinian court to make a film which granted intimate access to Selassie. In another item, Selassie gave a brief speech directly to Movietone's camera, the intertitle beforehand stating 'Interpreters forward! Emperor makes special talk for Movietone'.[61] That Selassie's speech remained untranslated for audiences, alongside the preoccupation of cameramen with obtaining close-ups of Abyssinian dress and rituals, implies these images were intended as the exotic spectacle of non-white peoples for a British audience that was assumed to be white.[62]

An 'editor's note' screened before the coronation footage foregrounded the sense of imperial swashbuckling when it stated, 'British Movietone News triumphs in its policy of bold adventure. These sound pictures, taken 5,200 miles away, are first screened on the same day as…the first newspaper photographs'.[63] Likewise, an article reporting the film's flight back to Britain dwelt upon the dangers of flying over the African continent, as the pilot 'was flying at about 200 feet over uncharted jungle by night…he could actually see the tigers and other big game'.[64] Distance, speed, and the perils of a hostile environment were emphasised to frame the cameraman's exploits as a 'bold adventure' into a far-off land to bring back spectacular images for viewers. In many ways, this characterised the newsreel cameraman as a latter-day version of the rugged, manly imperial soldier or explorer.[65]

These stock characters of martial manliness were added to the pantheon of masculine British imperialist heroes in the late nineteenth century and continued to be lionised well into the mid-twentieth century through juvenile fiction such as *Boy's Own Paper* and in Alexander Korda's popular cycle of 1930s imperial epic films.[66] Situated in this imperialist cultural context, the newsreel cameraman filming Selassie's coronation was transfigured into a manly hero braving an 'uncharted' land for his fellow Britons' entertainment. When covering non-European royalty, informal proximity was not necessarily employed by newsreel companies to forge

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[61] *British Movietone*, 'Addis Ababa Celebrates The Coronation' (1 Dec 1930).
[62] *Ibid*.
[63] *Movietone*, 'Ras Tafari'.
[64] *Bioscope* (12 Nov 1930), p.21.
[65] This was similar to how American newsreel cameramen were portrayed in the 1930s, though here the Sino-Japanese war meant that cameramen were painted as white saviours in Asian settings redolent with orientalist tropes. see Clark, *News Parade*, chapter three.
[66] Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal* 45 No.3 (2002), pp.643-644; Graham Dawson, *Soldier heroes: British adventure, empire, and the imagining of masculinities* (London: 1994), pp.171-172; Jeffrey Richards, 'Popular Imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature' in John MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular imperialism and the military 1850-1950* (Manchester: 1992), pp.101-102; Jeffrey Richards, ''Patriotism with Profit': British Imperial Cinema in the 1930s' in James Curran and Vincent Porter, Vincent (eds.), *British Cinema History* (London: 1983), pp.253-254.

empathetic bonds between cinemagoer and royal celebrity. Rather, it was to capture an unfamiliar exotic spectacle, with the great distance between British viewer and overseas subject underscored. Such content was therefore intended to be consumed primarily as an exciting novelty.

Informal human interest also characterised newsreels' coverage of European monarchs, as producers vied to capture the personal lives of royalty. Cameramen were occasionally sent to cover European royal processions and formal ceremonies which displayed regal majesty.[67] Yet equally prevalent in the weekly newsreel were more informal 'snapshots' taken of royalty, such as Pathé's 1919 film of King Alfonso XIII of Spain walking through a park in Paris.[68] By the early 1930s, European monarchs often stood before Movietone's camera to give short interviews.[69] Movietone's 1932 item which featured the christening of Princess Ileana of Romania and Hapsburg former Archduke Anton's child at Mödling provides a good example of this increasingly informal approach to filming European royalty (and ex-royalty).[70] The item's title, 'Movietone attends royal christening', implied the cameraman, by proxy the cinema audience, were invited guests and thereby privy insiders to the occasion. Much of the footage was comprised of unguarded close-ups from the garden party of ex-royal guests, their seemingly un-staged conversations audible throughout. The highlight of the item was two direct-to-camera posed interviews in English, the first with the royal couple together and the second by Princess Ileana alone.[71] This latter interview is striking for the way it foregrounds Ileana as an unexceptional woman enjoying the conventionally feminine joys of motherhood. Posed in an armchair cradling her baby, she beamed to the camera, stating 'I have always loved children all my life, but I have never known what it is like until I have one of my own. My little Stefan' before an extreme close-up shot captured Ileana kissing her child.[72] Thus, European royalty were frequently treated as regular celebrities whose intimate lives were good subject matter for human interest news items.

[67] For examples, see *Pathe Gazette*, 'King and Queen of Spain' (9 Jul 1923); *Pathe Gazette*, 'King and Queen of Spain' (29 Nov 1923); *Pathe Gazette*, 'King and Queen of Spain' (20 Jun 1927).
[68] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'King Alfonso XIII of Spain in Paris' (27 Oct 1919); *Pathe Gazette*, 'King and Queen of Spain' (13 Dec 1923); *Pathe Gazette*, 'King Alfonso XIII of Spain' (c.1910-1919); *British Movietone*, 'Royal Visitors See Monaco Grand Prix' (9 Apr 1934).
[69] *British Movietone*, 'Pomp and Ceremony at Royal Marriage' (24 Oct 1932); *British Movietone*, 'King Alfonso Sees Dartmouth Cadets' (7 Apr 1932); *British Movietone*, 'King Zog's Wedding' (2 May 1938).
[70] *British Movietone*, 'Movietone Attends Christening of Heir of Archduke Anton' (5 Sep 1932).
[71] *Ibid*.
[72] *Ibid*.

Occasionally, newsreels also disregarded attempts by ex-royalty to protect their privacy. Several scholars have looked to the British Prince of Wales as the member of royalty who struggled most with the invasive photographers and cameramen who hounded him.[73] Ryan Linkof posits that the controversial methods the press used to obtain snapshots of unguarded intimacy between the Prince and his mistress Wallis Simpson in the late 1930s were a major turning point in development of paparazzi-style photojournalism.[74] Yet, European ex-royalty were often filmed by newsreels in this invasive manner willingly, as evidenced above, or not.

After his abdication as emperor of Germany in 1918, Wilhelm II lived in reclusive exile in the Netherlands, and attempted to keep the world's media out of his estate.[75] Despite this, Pathé produced several items in the early 1920s detailing their efforts to film the former German royal family. One item in 1922, for instance, opened with the title, 'Ex-Kaiser's Secret Wedding! Police Patrols miles of wire netting and every precaution is being taken to prevent photographs being taken of ceremony - but we are trying!'.[76] The footage featured long distance shots through fences of Wilhelm's residence and several shots of cars arriving and leaving, including a snapshot through a car window of two guests, 'Prince Eitel Frederich and Dr. Vogel, the Court Preacher'.[77] It also included several shots of press photographers and newsreel cameramen attempting to film over the police perimeter or crowding wedding guests' cars as they arrived at the nearby town. It was as much the spectacle of the media chase to 'snap' Wilhelm as it was footage of the ex-emperor himself that was considered newsworthy.

An almost identical item was produced in 1923 of newsreels attempting to film the former Crown Prince Wilhelm at his castle in Silesia, with the intertitles stating '"Not in" to photographers! "Little Willie" has remained in hiding at his castle at Oehls [sic] since secret flight from Holland - but we shall get him!'.[78] Newsreels' invasive lack of reverence is likely attributable to the widespread antipathy for the former German emperor which tinged British public opinion in the immediate aftermath of the Great War.[79] Even if exceptional in its paparazzi style, it is nonetheless indicative of the ways in which non-British royalty were

[73] See for instance Mort, 'On Tour With The Prince', pp.51-55.
[74] Ryan Linkof, '"The Photographic Attack on His Royal Highness": The Prince of Wales, Wallis Simpson and the Prehistory of the Paparazzi', *Photography & Culture*, 4 No.3 (2011), pp.277–291.
[75] Sally Marks, '"My Name is Ozymandias" The Kaiser in Exile', *Central European History*, 16 No.2 (1983), pp.122–170.
[76] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Ex-Kaiser's Secret Wedding' (2 Nov 1922); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Wedding No One Saw' (9 Nov 1922).
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Not In To Photographers' (10 Dec 1923).
[79] William Schabs, *The trial of the Kaiser* (Oxford: 2018).

treated as media celebrities with little regard for their royal status. Like any other variety of celebrity, non-British royalty were either to be 'scooped' as a novel spectacle or else have their private lives encroached upon for gossip column-style news.

Occasionally, this lack of respect for royalty provoked consternation when it was perceived to stray into poor taste. In 1934, King Alexander II of Yugoslavia was assassinated alongside the French foreign minister at Marseilles. Newsreel cameramen, already filming the ceremonial drive into the city, were on-hand to capture graphic shots of the violence. Indeed, Pathé's item featured lingering, vivid close-ups of the dying king in the backseat of the car, with explicit commentary describing the victims as gunned down in 'a hail of lead'.[80] Paramount's item, meanwhile, focused on the aftermath, filming the assassin as he was fatally wounded by a mounted policeman, mobbed by a violent crowd, and his bloodied body then dragged away from the scene.[81] Such footage pushed boundaries, being the first time a regnant monarch's moment of death was filmed and exhibited in cinemas.[82] The dramatic event was considered a valuable scoop by newsreel companies, so much so that Pathé's attempts to get rush copies across the Atlantic resulted in a fatal plane crash which itself, ironically, featured in newsreels.[83]

However, the graphic film sparked controversy in Britain. The subject was debated in Parliament, with one Conservative MP asking Home Secretary Sir John Gilmour, 'is it not a fact that the recent assassination pictures were revolting?'.[84] The press likewise decried the footage being shown in cinemas. A column in the *Observer* opined that 'it is still an open question whether this frank display of recorded horrors is in the best interests of the public' as 'by Thursday night there was hardly a picture audience in this country that did not know in detail exactly how King Alexander died'.[85] Thus, some considered this footage to have violated a taboo in its supposedly morbid disrespect towards royalty. Overall, then, newsreels' treatment of royalty was not entirely successful in preserving a reverential aura, whether due to shortcomings of distribution or the invasive manner in which they sometimes filmed royal celebrities beyond Britain. As film critic Robert Herring denoted in 1938, if newsreels failed 'to do justice to a happening, as many thought the Coronation films failed, there is an outcry.

[80] *Pathe News*, 'Assassination of King Alexander' (1934)
[81] *British Paramount News*, 'France: King Alexander of Yugoslavia Assassinated on State Visit' (11 Oct 1934).
[82] Jelena Culibrk, 'Moulding and Mutilating: Newsreels, the British State, and Yugoslav 'Exceptional' Socialism, 1946-1961', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 41 No.3 (2021), pp.481-482.
[83] *Pathe News*, 'Tragedy Follows Tragedy' (29 Oct 1934).
[84] *House of Commons, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* Vol.293 Col. 339 (1 Nov 1934).
[85] *The Observer* (14 Oct 1934), p.31.

If they do more than justice, as some thought the reel of King Alexander's assassination did, there is an outcry'.[86]

Coronations and assassinations were, however, exceptional items when compared with the typical 'royal' content of the weekly newsreel. As Movietone's Beryl De Quinton stated in her commentary over the Duke and Duchess of Kent's nuptials, a 'royal wedding is not an everyday affair'.[87] As has been shown, major 'national' royal occasions received extensive newsreel coverage, curated extra-length items, and often special 'souvenir' issues. Tightly stage-managed production ensured these items served as panegyrics to the British monarchy. However, major royal occasions were relatively rare across the two decades. These moments are therefore atypical of how the British royal family were seen in cinemas on a weekly basis. As Frank Prochaska has revealed, charitable and welfare-related visits or events comprised the bulk of royal public activity each year.[88] Within the decade from c.1920, the royal family performed approximately 3,000 public engagements of this sort, with the Duke of York alone undertaking roughly 80 official visits a year.[89] A royal family member touring a hospital, visiting charitable institutions, or opening civic amenities therefore formed the staple royal item in an average newsreel.

Such items seldom received the same careful curation or rhapsodic commentary relative to newsreels' coverage of larger royal occasions. For one, these items were often brief, most being around a minute in length.[90] They also tended to be filmed using the same stock shots. The planting of a tree from a middle-distance shot, for instance, appeared repeatedly in items covering royal engagements.[91] An item covering the Prince of Wales's 1923 visit to Birmingham, though of unusual length for this type of item, is representative of the standardised way newsreel cameramen routinely filmed British royalty. This item, like most civic royal items, was chiefly composed of middle- or long-distance shots of static ceremonies such as the Prince giving a speech at a power station and laying a foundation stone.[92] Likewise, shots of royalty entering and exiting the venue they were visiting, usually in the company of

[86] Robert Herring 'The News-reel' in Luke McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (London: 2002), p.108.
[87] *British Movietone*, 'Wedding of the Duke of Kent (Prince George) To Princess Marina' (29 Nov 1934).
[88] Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: the making of a welfare monarchy* (New Haven: 1995).
[89] *Ibid*, p.193.
[90] *British Movietone*, 'The Duke of Gloucester Speaks at Stanmore Hospital' (21 Jul 1930); *British Movietone*, 'Royal Tour of Lancashire' (19 May 1938); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Queen Mary Visits Manchester' (1927); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Duke of York' (26 Oct 1925).
[91] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Prince of Wales -Leicester' (1927); *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Duke with the Workers' (14 Mar 1929).
[92] *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Prince's Visit to Birmingham' (18 Jun 1923).

civic dignitaries, served as a standard shot in these items. It is fleeting, distanced, and seemingly un-staged images of royalty that predominate in the typical newsreel. These stand in stark contrast to the informal close ups and orchestrated vantage points that filled the shot lists for major royal occasions.

The intertitles for routine royal items were also generally delimited to factual descriptions of where the event was taking place, and what ceremonial duty the royal family member was performing. Indeed, a recycled title was a variation on 'Royalty Busy With Numerous Engagements' or 'Their Majesties' busy day', which titled items where recent official royal activities were briefly listed with accompanying stock footage.[93] Commentary and intertitles were thus far more emotionally muted in the everyday coverage of the British royal family going about their public duties.

Furthermore, the rigid court calendar meant that the activities of the British royal family were generally unchanging from year to year. Thus, newsreels had to make do with filming the same events. For example, the visit of the royal family to the British Industries Fair became an annual staple. Across the twenty-year period, cameramen filmed it almost identically: close-up scenes of Queen Mary wandering the stalls with other royalty in between the staple entrance and exit shots of the royal party chaperoned by dignitaries.[94] The only innovations made to these shots by the 1930s were scenes of the Duchess of York watching a fashion parade, and the cameras getting slightly better close-up panning shots.[95] The item remained unaltered otherwise. So too, the royal family's annual ride to Crathie church in an open landau carriage from Balmoral Castle became a mainstay newsreel item where cameramen could get good close-up images of British royalty.[96] The royal visit to Chelsea Flower Show was also filmed annually, and identically, by newsreels as a prime opportunity to get informal shots of the royal family, overlaid with commentary describing them in a humanised style.[97] Even items which focused

[93] *Pathe News*, 'Their Majesties' busy day' (1931); *Pathe News*, 'Royal engagements- their majesties' busy day' (1938); *British Movietone*, 'Recent Activities of Royal Family' (27 May 1935); *British Movietone*, 'Royalty. Busy With Numerous Engagements' (2 May 1937).
[94] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'The King and Queen Visit The British Industries Fair At White City' (24 Feb 1921); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Britain's Shop Window' (21 Feb 1929); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Britain's Shop Window' (28 Feb 1927).
[95] *British Movietone*, 'The Queen Attends Industries Fair' (25 Feb 1932); *British Movietone*, 'Royalty See Industries Fair' (22 Feb 1934).
[96] *British Movietone*, 'Royal Lovers go to Church with King and Queen' (5 Sep 1935); *British Movietone*, 'The Royal Family at Crathie Church' (1 Sep 1938); *British Movietone*, 'Royal Family At Crathie Church' (11 Aug 1938).
[97] *Gaumont Graphic*, '1927 Chelsea Flower Show' (1927); *British Movietone*, 'The Chelsea Flower Show' (26 May 1938); *British Movietone*, 'Royalty at Chelsea Flower Show' (27 May 1937).

on royalty's personal lives, then, were repetitive in composition. Thus, the usual images of royalty in a weekly newsreel were highly repetitive, fleeting, and often emotionally muted.

Owens has found that audiences recorded raptures of emotion when engrossed in newsreels of momentous royal occasions like the coronation.[98] Yet, as highlighted in the previous chapter, the prosaic snatches that MO observers overheard, off-hand comments about how the king and queen looked, suggest a relatively dispassionate audience reception.[99] Mundane images of monarchy going about their daily engagements begot, it appears, a similarly banal response. Whilst major occasions could rouse enthusiasm from cinemagoers, audiences typically consumed images of royalty akin to those of other newsreel celebrities, that is, with causal interest.

This is not to say depictions of the British monarchy's 'good works' always held negligible meaning for audiences. As Prochaska argues, 'Palace reformers believed that providing information on the day-to-day work of the monarchy was essential' as it promoted a 'caring royal image'; the crown attentive to its subjects' welfare.[100] Newsreels were certainly diligent in keeping cinemagoers abreast of the service that royalty performed. Beyond basic information of the royal family's itinerary, however, it is doubtful cinema audiences gleaned anything more substantial.

Nevertheless, I argue that such items sometimes resonated with cinemagoers due to the local context of their exhibition. Jonathan Parry has persuasively argued that most celebration of royal occasions has 'taken place at a local level… [and] it was possible for local versions of royal celebrations to reflect different agendas and develop different identities because the image of royalty itself on these occasions was not particularly dominant or overbearing'.[101] By the inter-war period, most royal visits or celebrations doubled up in this fashion as royal and civic occasion. In 1929, Peterborough's civic week carnival was topped off with a visit from the Duke of Kent. The Duke duly performed rituals of civic patronage when he laid the foundation stone of the new town hall and opened the new children's wing of the Peterborough

[98] Owens, *Family Firm*, p.187.
[99] 17-7-E Newsreel Report, image 337 of 928.
[100] Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, p.187. For the royal family's cultivation of an image as dutiful servants of their subjects, see Williamson, 'monarchy and public values', pp.260-263.
[101] Jonathan Parry, 'Whig monarchy, Whig nation: Crown, politics and representatives 1800-2000' in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present* (Cambridge: 2007), p.71.

and District Memorial Hospital.[102] Thus, royal duties were frequently interwoven with civic culture, so that a royal visit often served as a celebration of local political identity.

By the 1920s, a royal visit to a town or city frequently resulted in the production of a special newsreel by local filmmakers or cinema staff. This had a precedent in Edwardian royal tours of English industrial regions. Frank Mort has revealed that local topicals were produced of both major tours in the 1910s, to be shown in the cinemas of the districts visited. Cinemagoers were 'treated to a powerful visual localism that anchored monarchy in the spaces, streets, and towns of the industrial North'.[103] It was a sense of regional pride and belonging, then, that suffused pre-war newsreel coverage of royal civic visits. After the Great War, locally produced newsreels of royal occasions continued to project civic pride, or perhaps more cynically, exploit commercially a community's desire to see itself onscreen.

A royal visit to Sheffield serves as a prime example of this kind of local production effort. In May 1919, George V and Queen Mary visited Sheffield to tour the steelworks and meet recently demobilised veterans. The visit was perceived as a symbolic means by which royalty could display concern for the local steel industry and express gratitude to ex-servicemen for their sacrifice. The visit appears to have been considered a successful performance of royal service; Queen Mary decided to keep a photograph of herself inspecting veterans in a personal photograph album of official engagements.[104] Pathé duly filmed the event for national consumption, in the typical way all such occasions were filmed. The item was under a minute in length and consisted of three middle-distance shots: their majesties exiting a building chaperoned by other dignitaries, their majesties' procession through the city in a carriage, and a brief shot of cheering crowds.[105] The only reference to location was in the title card, which stated, 'Sheffield. The Royal Visit - to the centre of the great steel industry'.[106] Thus, a form of civic shorthand, Sheffield as the steel city, was employed to distinguish footage that could otherwise have been filmed in any city.

In contrast to this truncated and undifferentiated treatment, the Sheffield Photo Company produced its own film of the royal visit. The footage was sold to the city's cinemas for screening two days after the visit, with a notice in the exhibitors' trade press pointing out that 'with four

[102] *Peterborough Standard* (14 Jun 1929), p.4.
[103] Frank Mort, 'Safe for Democracy: Constitutional Politics, Popular Spectacle, and the British Monarchy 1910–1914', *The Journal of British studies*, 58 No.1 (2019), pp.137-138.
[104] Royal Collections, 'Royal visit to Sheffield, 20 May 1919' (20 May 1919), REF RCIN 2303843.f. Available online at: (https://www.rct.uk/collection/2303843-f).
[105] *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Royal Visit to the Centre of the Great Steel Industry' (1919).
[106] *Ibid*.

cameras at work it will be possible to secure all the principal incidents, including the visits to the local steel works'.[107] The film itself was eight minutes in length, and focused as much on the crowds and local participants in the procession such as schoolchildren and ex-servicemen, each granted long panning shots, as it was concerned with capturing the King and Queen themselves.[108] Thus, local newsreel producers provided a more substantial film, wherein local cinemagoers could see themselves and their city feted. In this context, local newsreels accentuated the civic elements of royal visits.

Sheffield was not unique in producing local newsreels of royal engagements. In 1938, the Duke of Gloucester visited Swindon to open the 'New Civic Offices' and tour local industries.[109] The local *North Wilts Herald* filled its front page recounting the Duke's visit and its political purpose was made plain. The mayor's speech of welcome to the Duke was reprinted ad verbatim, opening with the claim that 'the progress and well-being of any town is dependent upon a lively sense of citizenship on the part of individual members of its community' before reassuring his audience that 'the people of Swindon have every reason to feel proud of their town'.[110] Thus, the pomp of the day was framed as a means to galvanise Swindonian citizenship. Inviting the Duke to formally open the civic offices, Chairman of the Finance and Law Committee, Alderman T. Newham, further claimed that 'Your Royal Highness's interest in the civic life of Swindon, as evidenced by your presence here to-day, will be a source of great encouragement to those who give their services to the cause of local government'.[111] The reciprocal relationship between royalty and municipal leaders was foregrounded here: local political culture was embellished by the presence of a Duke and all his attendant regalia whilst the royal family could portray itself as concerned about the civic affairs of its subjects. Capitalising upon the widespread interest in the occasion, the local Regent Cinema commissioned Movietone to film the Duke's visit. Alongside detailed shots of the Duke being greeted and chaperoned by civic leaders, there are several close-up shots of crowds cheering directly to the camera (see Figure 5).[112] The item was therefore designed to allow patrons to have as good a chance as possible of seeing themselves in the crowds as well as an opportunity to relive the civic occasion onscreen, likely with an even better view of proceedings than if

[107] *Kinematograph Weekly* (22 May 1919), p.124.
[108] *Yorkshire Film Archive*, Sheffield Photo Company, 'The Visit of their Majesties the King and Queen to Sheffield' (May 1919). Available online at: (https://www.yfanefa.com/record/4509).
[109] *North Wilts Herald* (1 Jul 1938), p.11.
[110] *North Wilts Herald* (8 Jul 1938), p.1.
[111] *Ibid*.
[112] *British Movietone*, 'Duke of Gloucester at Swindon – No Sound' (7 Jul 1938).

they were in the crowds. Indeed, the links between the cinema, and by extension its patrons, and the occasion were underscored as the item ended on a panning shot of the cinema's staff gathered outside the Regent.[113]

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis]

Figure 5: Crowds gathered to cheer a royal visit and for a chance to see themselves in a newsreel, filmed for the local Regent Cinema by British Movietone, 'Duke of Gloucester at Swindon' (1938), still from *British Movietone*, Associated Press Newsroom Archive.

Likewise, coverage of national occasions could also be inflected with a local angle. For instance, a Universal newsreel covering the week-long celebrations for George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 included an additional item focusing on Cardiff, entitled 'Cardiff Celebrates', for local release in their special royal edition.[114] Thus, national and local identities often intertwined in newsreels which featured footage of royal celebrations occurring in both London and Cardiff. These items suggest that national newsreel companies sometimes collaborated with local actors to produce items which appealed to cinemagoers' civic sensibilities. The national and the local, then, were by no means incompatible in newsreels.

Even when royalty was not present, occasions celebrating the monarchy could be filmed by cinema managers as primarily civic occasions. Ernest Bromberg filmed a regular silent

[113] *Ibid*.
[114] BUFVC, *News On Screen Archive, Universal News* (13 May 1935): (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/141456).

newsreel of topical events in Aberdeen for the city's cinema circuits throughout the 1930s. A special issue of this newsreel was entitled 'Aberdeen Celebrates the Coronation'.[115] It was comprised of rather shaky footage of the main municipal festivities marking the occasion, including a procession of civic leaders, aerial shots of a float parade through the city, military drills at the city's football grounds by local territorial army regiments, and poorly lit shots of a coronation ball held at the Palais Du Dance.[116] When local cinemas or newsreel companies produced their own filmed records of royal occasions, celebrating civic pride and identity were paramount.

If special productions were not forthcoming, local actors resorted to repurposing national editions. In 1938, the Film Society of Glasgow edited together a fifteen-minute compilation of the various newsreels' coverage of 'Royal Occasions in Scotland'.[117] Items for undifferentiated national consumption were thereby collated into a film that stressed the uniquely Scottish character of these royal visits for Glasgow's cinemagoers. Moreover, newsreel footage of 'national' royal ceremonies was utilised in civic rituals. General Film Distributors Ltd. and Gaumont-British newsreels, 'in association with local kinema managers', made formal presentations of feature-length coronation reels to the municipal corporations of both Sheffield and Newcastle. The Lord Mayors of each city accepted the footage in a small ceremony, with the intention being that the footage was preserved in the respective municipality's 'historic' film archives.[118] A similar presentation of coronation film was undertaken by General Film Distributors and Gaumont-British to the mayor of Harrogate at a local cinema's gala performance.[119] Not only did the 'national' occasion precipitate a civic ritual, the newsreel was treated as a formal gift which weaved royal tradition into local history. Hence, newsreels' routine royal items were often imbued with civic pride when they were marketed, edited, produced, and exhibited in local contexts. Whilst a brief item of a royal visit to Sheffield or Aberdeen elicited mild interest from a nondescript national 'mass' of cinemagoers, for those sat in the local picture house these films provided a powerful representation of the civic community. If the radio brought the monarch's voice into the private life of people's homes,

[115] Moving Image Archive, Ernest Bromberg, 'Aberdeen Celebrates the Coronation' (12 May 1937). Available online at: (https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0239).
[116] *Ibid*.
[117] Moving Image Archive, Film Society of Glasgow, 'Royal Occasions in Scotland' (1937). Available online at: (https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0188).
[118] *Kinematograph Weekly* (12 Aug 1937), p.9.
[119] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 Jun 1937), p.41.

the newsreel, with the aid of local intermediaries, integrated the royal family into the public life of Britain's towns and cities.

Section Two, Civic Culture on Film and Mayors as Media Icons:

Royal visits were just one event in a bustling annual calendar of civic pageantry and rituals. These ranged from ceremonies to commemorate municipal events and parades of local history to sundry charitable carnivals on behalf of local causes such as voluntary hospitals or indigent citizens.[120] To the irritation of many contemporaries, newsreel producers considered this civic culture to be eminently newsworthy. As early as 1914, journalist Lester Ruah bemoaned in the cinema trade press that:

'We are shown long and drawn out picturings [sic] of extremely unimportant doings of some village big-wigs of whom we have not the slightest interest whatever. We are shown… 'Dulltown Market Place', review of boy scouts and old age pensioners by puffed-up local nonentities; boring views of stone-layings [sic] and ship-launchings, with the greater part of the space allotted to the item occupied by self-important grocer councillors or brewery-mayors in their speech-making and hat wagging'.[121]

It is worth quoting this tirade at length for several reasons. First, it shows that from the outset of newsreels as a 'mass' medium in the 1910s, films of local public life were a weekly staple. Moreover, it was not just local affairs that were worthy of filming, but specifically the ceremonial spectacle of them: the 'boy scouts' procession or the 'speech-making and hat wagging' of civic dignitaries. Secondly, it reveals the widespread assumption held by many contemporaries who proffered opinions on newsreels that a 'mass' medium was inherently a national medium, and therefore ought to depict things of import to Britain at large. For Ruah, civic culture was patently not of national interest. Thus, the generally negative appraisal of newsreels by contemporary pundits and intellectuals can be partly attributed to the nationalist lens through which they viewed them. If one were looking for an imperialist-nationalist

[120] Roberts 'Entertaining the Community'; Dion Georgiou, 'Redefining the Carnivalesque: The Construction of Ritual, Revelry and Spectacle in British Leisure Practices through the Idea and Model of 'Carnival', 1870-1939', *Sport in History* 35 No.3 (2015), pp.335-363; Dion Georgiou, ''The Drab Suburban Streets were Metamorphosed into a Veritable Fairyland': Spectacle and Festivity in The Ilford Hospital Carnival, 1905-1914', *London Journal* 39 No.3 (2014), pp.227-248; Tom Hulme, 'The Mayflower and 'Mother Plymouth': Anglo-America, Civic Culture and the Urban Past', *Cultural and Social History* 18 No.4 (2021), pp.517–537.
[121] Lester Ruah, 'A Criticism of the News-film' (1914) reprinted in Luke McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (London: 2002), p.21.

'Projection of England', as many contemporaries were, then much newsreel content was bound to disappoint.

Finally, and crucial for this chapter, is the fact that 'grocer councillors' and 'brewery-mayors' were being routinely represented in newsreels. Ruah found this particularly galling, arguing, 'Why not simply show the actual laying or launching and omit all the ceremonial business – unless, of course, it stars someone *who is really famous* – say a prince, or a Cabinet Minister, or a music-hall artiste' [emphasis my own].[122] As he implied, prior to the First World War, fame was largely reserved for public figures of national stature; column inches and picture pages in national newspapers were seldom wasted upon 'local nonentities'. Newsreels, then, to some degree redefined who was 'really famous' by establishing the hybrid role of civic celebrities, projecting their image throughout the British nation and beyond. The category of civic celebrity rendered any suitably spectacular public representative worthy of having their image reproduced. By this logic, mayors and princes alike were filmed, often featured side-by-side in the weekly issue.

Newsreels were still considered to have an undue penchant for civic culture across the inter-war period. The *Film Weekly* satirist Ian Fox was typical in his wry critique. In 1932, for instance, he imagined the weekly newsreel to feature, 'a talkie recording of the all-England 'Animal Grab' contest, or the prize vegetable competition at the Bilgeworthy-under-Ditchwater annual flower show or the potato race at the Waggleton Girl Guides' summer outing'.[123] Moreover, Fox ridiculed newsreels for featuring mayors as notable personages, listing a fictitious item covering 'the Mayor of Chipping Blockley unveiling fifty hogsheads of home-grown beetroot'.[124] Responding to repeated criticisms in this vein, an anonymous 'newsreel editor' published a riposte in the magazine. They categorically stated that 'the laying of foundation stones and the launching of ships are invariably shown because they have special significance to the districts concerned…every incident shown, whether civic or sensational, is there because a percentage of the public demands it'.[125] Newsreel companies, then, were not always targeting a singular 'mass' audience. Rather, they attempted to cater for the tastes of local cinemagoers, who were assumed to have a desire to see their own communities and people like themselves onscreen. In this regard, local dignitaries were seen by newsreel producers as having a sufficiently interested audience for them to be filmed regularly. Between the wars,

[122] *Ibid*.
[123] *Film Weekly* (3 Jun 1932), p.24.
[124] *Film Weekly* (4 Oct 1930), p.22.
[125] *Film Weekly* (20 May 1932), p.7.

local public figures such as mayors or councillors were thereby rendered minor celebrities whose images appeared onscreen before the considerable proportion of the British population who habitually went to the cinema.

Whilst civic culture formed a mainstay of newsreels, it was, akin to royal items, filmed by the national companies in a rigidly standardised manner. Newsreels coverage of the Colchester oyster festival serves as an apt example. As David Cannadine argues, by the 1920s the festival, celebrating the annual opening of the town's oyster fishery, had become a highlight of the town's social calendar. An annual mayoral procession and civic banquet helped to symbolically constitute local identity for Colchester's residents.[126] As Cannadine concludes, civic 'spectacles were not just the expression of this sense of community: perhaps they were the community'.[127] When covering the festival across the period, newsreel cameramen invariably filmed the unique spectacle of Colchester's mayor sampling the first oysters and then partaking of gin and gingerbread with fishermen and other dignitaries. This was often dubbed 'ancient tradition' or a '900-hundred years old ceremony' to suggest it as a venerable local custom.[128] Thus, the event was portrayed as 'a great day in Colchester' which foregrounded the festive atmosphere and the township's historic pedigree.[129] Newsreel coverage of civic culture like the oyster festival was always upbeat in tone.

Yet, a standardised shot list meant the oyster festival item appeared identically each year: the dignitaries were filmed middle distance in a dinghy, followed by the mayor making a speech, hauling up the first catch, and finishing on the distribution of gin and gingerbread. These shots, if sometimes in a different order, were used unfailingly by Universal, Pathé, and Gaumont-British.[130] Moreover, while the ritual was filmed, its significance or municipal context was left unexplained in intertitles and commentary. As the Universal commentator pithily stated, 'Why gin and gingerbread? – after oysters – I don't know!'.[131] The breezy tenor of newsreel commentary often made local customs or ceremonies appear eccentric anachronisms. Empire

[126] David Cannadine, 'The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain: The Colchester Oyster Feast', *Past and Present*, 94 (1982), p.124.
[127] *Ibid*, p.129.
[128] *Pathe Gazette*, 'The First Oysters' (19 Sep 1927); *Universal News Commentary Script,* 'According to Ancient Custom' (2 Oct 1933). All Universal scripts are available online at News On Screen archive: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/search.php/document?editquery=1)
[129] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Mayor of Colchester Inaugurates the Colne Fisheries' (3 Oct 1932).
[130] *Universal News*, 'According to Ancient Custom'; *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Great "Opening" Day' (30 Sep 1935); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Oysters Are In' (20 Sep 1923); *Pathe Gazette,* 'The First Oysters' (21 Sep 1925); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Oyster Fishing Feast' (1927); *Empire News Bulletin*, 'Oyster Season Opens at Colne' (23 Sep 1929).
[131] *Universal News*, 'According to Ancient Custom'.

News's 1929 item was titled 'oysters again' and the intertitle before the ritual simply stated 'gin and gingerbread' without further elucidation of the ceremony's meaning.[132] Compounding the lack of detail, this item was just 33 seconds in length; no newsreel coverage of the event lasted much over a minute. Thus, such events were frequently deracinated from their distinctive civic cultures when filmed by national newsreels, reduced to a quaint spectacle as opposed to an important political display.

Colchester's festival was treated akin to a range of other civic occasions filmed by national newsreel companies. By the 1920s, the term carnival had become a fluid term used for a wide variety of local events that loosely shared an 'emphasis on ritual', a 'signification of revelry', and 'a privileging of the spectacular'.[133] Newsreels emphasised these themes when filming municipal carnivals. The commentary for Universal News's coverage of the Southend annual carnival was indicative of this, singling out the ceremonial crowning of the local carnival beauty queen by the mayor as a point worth explicating for audiences.[134] In a 1933 item entitled 'Miles of Smiles', the commentator described in detail that the mayor 'invests [the carnival queen] with either a chain of office, a badge for the enclosure, or a lucky charm. I can't quite see which'.[135] This implies that even when footage was unclear, commentators took time to apprise audiences of the event's ritualistic accoutrements. Other ceremonial aspects of the carnival were also covered, such as an open-air religious service of thanksgiving that marked the end of Southend's carnival week.[136]

Moreover, the mirthful tenor of the commentary conveyed a carnivalesque sense of revelry to audiences. For instance, in 1930 the commentator stated that 'the fun was fast and furious' whilst in 1933 the carnival was said to have rendered Southend 'a city of beautiful nonsense'.[137] Though newsreels' visuals would have amply conveyed the spectacular nature of the carnival, it was further accentuated by commentary which stressed the scale of the occasion. Statistics, such as that 'the procession was four miles long' and 'nearly half a million people lined the route', or less specific statements such as that the procession was 'miles and miles of beauty and colour' were utilised to sell the carnival as an immense spectacle for cinemagoers to feast their eyes on. Yet, these three themes were the hallmark of newsreels' coverage of carnivals

[132] *Empire News*, 'Oyster Season Opens'.
[133] Georgiou 'Redefining the carnivalesque', p.336, p.346.
[134] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Carnival Time' (1 Sep 1930); *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Miles of Smiles' (28 Aug 1933).
[135] *Universal News*, 'Miles of Smiles'.
[136] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Southend's Thanksgiving Service in Chalkwell' (8 Sep 1932).
[137] *Universal News*, *'Carnival Times*'; *Universal News*, 'Miles of Smiles'.

irrespective of local specificity. Carnivalesque revels and rituals were also filmed at events as varied as Nottingham's goose fair, Newport's hospital carnival, Torrington's May Day festivities, and Lyme Regis's town crier competition.[138] One local carnival was almost indistinguishable from another in the standardised films produced by newsreel companies, though all were presented as joyous occasions for civic celebration.

It is significant that mayors, above all other municipal leaders and dignitaries, featured prominently in newsreel content. Mayors were central to civic pageantry and ceremony since at least the early modern period, well-established in Britain as civic representatives.[139] Their ceremonial importance continued into the twentieth century. The mayor of Colchester, for example, took centre stage in arranging and performing the oyster festival rituals.[140] Thus, mayors played a key role as civic representatives for their locality, presiding over public occasions and performing symbolic rituals. As newsreel producers saw a need to film civic culture to appeal to local markets, they were also cognizant of the fact that as much of this content was to be distributed nationally, and that items needed to have sufficient general news value. To this end, producers anchored civic items around mayors in shots and commentary.

Being a prominent public figure in a locality, the mayor was assumed to be someone local audiences would either have an interest in as their own representative, or one who could be rendered interesting to wider audiences on the grounds of generic human interest. In 1935, a fishing competition between the aged mayors of Broadstairs, Margate, and Ramsgate was considered of sufficient interest in itself to feature in Universal's 'News in Brief' roundup of short news items.[141] A representative item was the opening of Mitcham fair the same year. This item opened on the mayor's ceremonial opening of the fair with a 'gilt key'. It further used him as a focal point for the ensuing fairground revelry, with shots of the mayor having 'three-penny worth of 'whoopee' on the round-abouts'.[142] Thus, not only were mayors inherently central to

[138] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Newport Carnival' (8 Aug 1932); *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Goose Less Goose Fair' (9 Oct 1933); *Universal news Commentary Script*, 'Nottingham "Goose" Fair' (10 Oct 1932); *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!' (28 Aug 1933); *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'In an Old Devon Town' (8 May 1933).
[139] There is a rich literature on the role of early modern mayors within political culture, albeit generally focused upon London. For a good recent example, see Tracey Hill, *Pageantry and Power: A Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor's Show 1585–1639* (Manchester: 2010).
[140] Cannadine, 'Colchester Oyster Feast', p.115, p.123.
[141] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'News In Brief' (11 Nov 1935).
[142] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Mitcham Fair Opens' (15 Aug 1935). For a typical example of mayor-centric ritual in newsreel commentary see also *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Beckenham a Borough' (30 Sep 1935).

many of the rituals and ceremonies that newsreels filmed, they also served as a human protagonist who editors could build an item's 'story' around.

Moreover, they were seen as newsworthy due to the splendour of their costumes. This was alluded to repeatedly in newsreel commentary. In an item covering the Lord Mayor of Liverpool's visit to New York in 1931, the commentator described, over footage of the Lord Mayor in full mayoral attire stood beside a macebearer, that 'robes and regalia are not part of the 'make-up' of the Mayors of American cities'.[143] Similarly, in 1932 the Lord Mayor of London opened a historical pageant in Essex. In Universal's coverage, the commentator denoted that the Lord Mayor's 'Mace of Office, liveried attendants, and his own gorgeous robes give an added brilliance to the pageantry'.[144] Another item which appeared in multiple issues was the civic procession of a region's mayors. The editorial logic behind filming these items was rendered explicit in coverage of a municipal parade of Yorkshire mayors to York Minster in 1935. The commentary stated that 'forty mace bearers, attired in their best bibs and tuckers, accompany the Lord Mayor and mayors of the Ridings…there are thirty thousand pounds worth of precious metal insignia hanging round the necks of those who enter the Cathedral'.[145] The impressive sartorial spectacle of mayors was considered newsworthy enough to feature them as the main characters of civic items.

In doing so, the traditional role of mayors as civic representative became enmeshed with the reproduction of their images as minor celebrities. Municipal leaders such as mayors were put on a par with British royalty in the sense that they both served as newsworthy civic celebrities. Indeed, Movietone perhaps best captured the proximity newsreels created between civic leader and royalty in 1938 when it filmed the Lord Mayor of Bath dancing with the Duchess of Kent at the city's assembly rooms as part of a royal visit.[146] Hence, civic culture achieved an unprecedented national prominence through newsreels. Mayors and ducal royalty sat, if only the once they danced, cheek-by-jowl and served a similar function as 'news' for newsreel producers. They were both civic celebrities, providing visually appealing ceremonial pomp and human-interest 'personalities'.

Much like royal items, the local exhibition and marketing of civic items ameliorated the undifferentiated content produced by national newsreel companies. Cinemas, both as venues

[143] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Liverpool's Lord Mayor in USA' (26 May 1931).
[144] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Essex Pageant' (7 Jul 1932).
[145] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'News In Brief' (12 Sep 1935).
[146] *British Movietone*, 'Duchess of Kent at Bath' (24 Oct 1938); *British Movietone*, 'Duchess of Kent in West Country' (24 Oct 1938).

that hosted civic events and as significant collaborators in municipal philanthropy, functioned as loci of urban public life in inter-war Britain.[147] The newsreel was often used by cinema managers as an impetus for hosting ceremonial occasions. For example, in 1931 the cinema proprietors of Loughborough formally presented the town council with a 'talkie film featuring the [town's] War Memorial carillon'.[148] Likewise, in 1938, the wife of the Lord Mayor of Birmingham was invited to a gala film programme at the city's Paramount cinema to watch a newsreel of her husband performing his ceremonial duties.[149] Thus, cinema managers often made an event out of the town being able to see itself onscreen.

Again, the civic qualities of newsreel items were often accentuated via specialised local circulation and production. For example, C.W. Scott-Buccleuch, manager of The Forum cinema in Southampton, 'compiled, with the cooperation of the newsreels, a film consisting of scenes of local events of national importance'.[150] He then presented the compilation to the city's mayor at a ceremonial screening at his cinema, and further promised it was 'the first instalment in a series which Mr. Scott-Buccleuch intends to present to the town from time to time'.[151] Meanwhile in 1938, Mr. Heddon, manager of the Savoy cinema in Teddington, successfully lobbied for his cinema to be the 'headquarters' of the town carnival. The cinema hosted the carnival queen election, acted as the 'saluting base' from outside which the mayor and other dignitaries viewed the carnival procession, and held related competitions throughout the week.[152] Heddon also scored a publicity coup by 'inducing the Pathé and Gaumont newsreels to take special films' of the carnival.[153] With the Savoy functioning as a hub for the festivities, the specially commissioned footage would have integrated the national newsreel into Teddington's carnival for patrons. These examples reveal how national newsreel producers were co-opted into propagating more distinctly civic films on the local level.

Newsreels also sometimes covered national and imperial occasions from a local or regional angle. Empire Day was both a key example of this process, and an outlier which instead attempted to speak to the nation as a whole. As Jim English has shown, this national day of festivities was founded in 1904 to foment imperialist sentiment and patriotism through

[147] Leveridge, '"Proud of Our Little Local Palace'; Toffell, *Jews, cinema and public life;* Scott, 'Civic Culture at the Cinema'.
[148] *Kinematograph Weekly* (1 Oct 1931), p.45.
[149] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 Mar 1938), p.59.
[150] *Kinematograph Weekly* (13 Jul 1939), p.29
[151] *Ibid*.
[152] *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 Jul 1938), p.33.
[153] *Ibid*.

pageantry and rituals. He suggests that 'the annual festival of empire was able to traverse class lines and establish an imperial consciousness in the minds of working-class children…[and] also possessed a wider social currency…[as] celebrations spilled out into adult society'.[154] It was a widespread and popular celebration across Britain until at least the late 1930s.

Most major newsreel companies duly filmed the spectacle of pageantry each year. English argues that between the wars, Empire Day shed its jingoistic Edwardian pomp and instead wed itself to the new remembrance rituals of wreath-laying and sombre speech-making that arose with Armistice Day in the early 1920s.[155] Yet newsreels, seemingly unable to resist a jaunty spectacle, continued to emphasise the celebratory elements of the day. The primary image filmed of Empire Day was not the cenotaph wreath-laying, but the annual communal singing and procession of youth organisations in London's Hyde Park.[156] This event was couched in jubilatory patriotic titles and intertitles. For instance, the 1929 Empire Day item in *Gaumont Graphic* opened on a title card illustrated with a proud lion and union jack, and stated, 'A glorious "Procession of Empire" draws mighty crowds to Hyde Park'.[157] The item's footage featured a panning shot of cheering crowds and what was titled 'a stirring address' from prime minister Stanley Baldwin, gesticulating from a podium to the crowd.[158] Many other items dwelt on the attendance of royalty, such as the Duke of Connaught or Prince Albert, to take the salute at the Hyde Park procession.[159] The national-imperial figureheads and emblems of Empire were employed by newsreel producers to convey the imperialist ethos of the day, that patriotic subjects should rally around the flag and the monarchy as unifying symbols.

Moreover, Empire Day items which were often presented as microcosms of festivities that were assumed to be occurring simultaneously across the whole of the British Empire. Pathé used the opening phrase of 'Everywhere, Empire Day!' in several title cards, and in a 1933 title elaborated that 'Britishers throughout the World - particularly the schoolchildren - celebrate the greatest patriotic festival of the year'.[160] This was a rare instance of newsreels actively attempting to standardise an item, presenting Empire Day as a common unifying experience

[154] English, 'Empire Day', p.248.
[155] *Ibid*, p.261, p.275.
[156] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Empire Day in London' (1927); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Hyde Park Hosts London Empire Day Parade' (30 Jun 1923); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Empire Day Celebrations in Hyde Park' (1930); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day' (26 May 1930).
[157] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Empire Day in Hyde Park' (1929).
[158] *Ibid*.
[159] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Boy Scouts Empire Day Parade at Hyde Park' (28 May 1921); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Empire Day at Hyde Park' (27 May 1920).
[160] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day' (25 May 1933). See also *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day' (25 May 1926); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day' (25 May 1922).

for imperial subjects that collapsed the time and space which otherwise divided the metropole from its imperial possessions. Some coverage of Empire Day, then, attempted to project a singular nationalist-imperialist identity common to all 'Britishers' across the globe.

However, outside of the Hyde Park event, newsreel coverage of Empire Day tended to favour regional celebrations. Footage of provincial celebrations was quite similar to that from London, with shots of youth groups parading in uniforms and fancy dress alongside jubilant crowds, though on a humbler municipal scale.[161] In contrast to the standardised titles of Hyde Park items, however, the local context was detailed in titles which stated where the footage was filmed. Typical was a 1927 item in *Empire News Bulletin*, which stated, 'Empire Day in Birmingham - The midland city commemorates 'The Day' by a large assembly of boy scouts and girl guides'.[162] Likewise, each town or city's mayor replaced the national figureheads of London events as the chief dignitary. In Pathé's 1929 coverage of Newcastle's Empire Day celebrations, over half of the two-minute item featured the Lord Mayor and councillors in close-up shots taking the salute from girl guides.[163] Though vestiges of imperial symbolism remained in these local items, such as girls dressed up as Britannia or people waving union jacks, they sat alongside the familiar accoutrements and representatives of civic occasions. Though newsreel companies sometimes vaunted national-imperial identities and ideologies when filming annual British celebrations, as often this was filtered through a civic lens which 'nested' imperial patriotism within a general sense of local festivity.

Another, less dramatic example of this was in 1936, when Gaumont-British filmed former prime minister Ramsay Macdonald unveiling a memorial to Robert Burns in the Scottish town of Dumfries.[164] With Macdonald being a leading Westminster politician, this was filmed and released in the weekly *Gaumont-British News* as an item covering a national political celebrity paying homage to a globally famous Scotsman. Yet, an extended version, which included the footage not used in the nationally circulated item, was also released to an exhibitor in Dumfries.[165] Whilst the general distribution newsreel presented MacDonald as a nationally

[161] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Empire Day in Blaydon' (1927); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day Celebrations in Newcastle' (25 May 1925).
[162] *Empire News Bulletin*, 'Empire Day in Birmingham' (26 May 1927).
[163] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day Newcastle' (27 May 1929).
[164] Moving Image Archive, *Gaumont British News*, 'Burns Memorial' (24 Sep 1936). Available online at: (https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0547?search_term=local%20newsreel&search_join_type=AND&search_fuzzy=yes).
[165] *Ibid*.

famous figure, in Dumfries's cinema he was foremost a civic celebrity in an item promoting the town's own political culture.

Across the period, then, newsreels (re)presented the civic sphere prominently and consistently. As a 1936 advert for the Oriental cinema's newsreel of the local Market Harborough hospital carnival boasted, 'See the Carnival. See the Camera Man. See Yourself on the Screen'.[166] Local exhibition contexts such as this brought to the fore the sense of civic pride and belonging in these items that could otherwise be quite muted. Editors' penchant for civic culture meant that for the first time, municipal representatives were deemed newsworthy enough to receive national coverage on a routine basis. Concurrently, the contexts within which newsreels were screened at local cinemas meant ostensibly 'national' celebrities, the 'really famous', were frequently portrayed as icons of local political culture. In this sense, the civic celebrity became a mainstay of inter-war newsreels.

Section Three, Beauty Queens as Civic Celebrities:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, images of attractive women, in bathing costumes or otherwise scantily clad, emerged as a staple of mass media. The editors of the popular press saw inherent news value in such images for men, chiefly as sexual titillation, and women, to study the latest fashions.[167] As a result of this innovation in news values, beauty contests were considered topical events for media outlets to cover. Imported from America in the 1920s, commercial beauty contests had several distinguishing features: candidates were assessed by a panel of judges, they were chosen explicitly for their aesthetic qualities, and they were sponsored by commercial, associational, or municipal interests as publicity stunts.

The 1926 Paramount Pictures film *American Venus* typifies this style of commercial contest. The lead role was played by the winner of the Miss America beauty competition, with fellow contestants playing minor roles. The trailer for the film opened by listing the body measurements of the classical Venus Di Milo statue.[168] It was purportedly these measurements that the Miss America contest used to find a perfect 'Modern Venus' among participants. The women who entered the competition and starred in the film were explicitly being judged and praised for their physiques. The film also touted itself as 'an eye-feast of beautiful women and

[166] *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail* (28 Aug 1936), p.5.
[167] Joanne Meyerowitz, 'Women, Cheesecake, and Borderline material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid Twentieth-Century U.S.' *Journal of Women's History* 8 No.3 (1996), p.12; Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p.205.
[168] Anon, 'American Venus: Trailer with Louise Brooks' (1926), uploaded to YouTube (31 Jan 2012). Available online at: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA2Wvt64TPw).

luxurious settings', drawing attention to the 'latest, loveliest' fashions worn by the female stars.[169] The trailer suggests many scenes were an excuse to feature scantily clad women posed in *tableaux vivant*. Thus, it appears the film was principally a vehicle to show off women's 'sex appeal' for male titillation alongside presenting an aspirational image of fashionable glamour for female cinemagoers. Americanised contests, then, idealised a consumerist and sexualised femininity.

This style of femininity was not a wholly transpontine import. From the late nineteenth century, women were portrayed onstage in British theatres as sexually alluring and glamorous consumers through the Gaiety Girl archetype. This was a coquettish and fashionable female lead character who formed the centrepiece to a wildly popular sub-genre of musical comedies around the turn of the nineteenth century. As Rohan McWilliam concludes, the 'Edwardian stage was…alive with images of independent but commodified femininity'.[170] British popular culture thus had its own precedents for consumerist feminine glamour. The proliferation of commercial beauty contests from the mid-1920s, theoretically open to any woman who fit the age bracket entry requirements, brought sexualised femininity off the London stage and into the daily lives of many British women (and men).

Another tradition of electing young 'queens' existed in Britain as a distinct style of contest from the commercial beauty contest. This was the seasonal beauty queens, such as May or Rose Queens, who had been elected in parishes since the nineteenth century and presided for a day over local festivals.[171] The village of Heald Green's annual Rose Queen fete day is a useful paradigm for this seasonal role. The first Rose Queen contest was established in 1938 by St Catherine's Church Committee, the executive body of the local parish. The Rose Queen was chosen each year by fellow members of the St Catherine's Sunday school. Thus, seasonal queen events were typically run by civil institutions or voluntary associations such as the church committee and remained a highly local affair. Indeed, the seasonal beauty queen was foremost a ceremonial figurehead for civic occasions or philanthropic causes. The crowning ceremony of the Heald Green Rose Queen, for instance, cost 1d to attend and aimed 'to provide funds for

[169] *Ibid*.
[170] Rohan McWilliam, 'The Gaiety Girl and the Matinee Idol: Constructing Celebrity, Glamour and Sexuality in the West End of London, 1890–1914' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 1 (2023), p.16.
[171] Kate Smith, 'Change, Continuity and Contradictions in May Day Celebrations in Northamptonshire', *Folklore* 119 No.2 (2008), pp.145-147.

the decoration of the church'.[172] It had a clear purpose to improve the church's facilities. The fete day itself consisted of a large-scale procession around the village, with 'petal strewers', crown and standard bearers, and other children in fancy dress following the Rose Queen, herself costumed in regalia.[173] After a formal crowning ceremony, the queen gave a short speech of thanks before presiding over a garden fete and evening dance. [174] Thus, these were civic festivities, often to support charitable causes, wherein a young girl or women acted as a ceremonial representative for the local community.

Yet, commercial and seasonal beauty queens became increasingly indistinct as organisations borrowed elements from both when establishing their own variants. One prominent strand of British beauty contests were the 'queens of industry'. Inter-war businesses began to develop sophisticated marketing strategies and promotional campaigns as publicity became a central commercial concern.[175] To this end, industries began to establish beauty contests as a means of promoting their product or corporate brands. These typically involved a young female employee or male employees' relative being chosen from their photograph or a beauty parade. As a position women had to win by their looks, queens of industry were inspired by commercial beauty contests. Winners were, however, given a representative role akin to a seasonal queen. Queens of industry usually presided as a public figure over civic or works-related occasions during their year in office.

The first major queen of industry was the Railway Queen, established jointly by the railway companies and trade unions in 1925. The position was open to daughters, aged 14 to 16, of unionised railway employees who sent in a photograph to the Railway Carnival Committee (see Figure 6). A queen was elected annually from 1925 until the outbreak of the Second World War, and the contest itself endured until 1975. The role was quickly emulated by other industries. Already by 1928, the *West Sussex Gazette* railed against 'the silly American practice

[172] Heald Green Heritage, *St Catherine's Rose Queen Collection* (2022). Available online at: (https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1fClcxWNVfJPCIOaL1Q6BXfIwfYNuTMJF) and (https://www.healdgreenheritage.org/rosequeen)
[173] *Ibid*.
[174] *Ibid*.
[175] Richard Hornsey, '"The Penguins Are Coming": Brand Mascots and Utopian Mass Consumption in Interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 57 No.4 (2018), pp.813-839; Moran, 'the Birth of the Focus Group', pp.830-831. For a detailed example of the British railway industry, where both railway companies and trade unions proved adept at marketing in this period, see Laura Beers, 'Is This Man an Anarchist?" Industrial Action and the Battle for Public Opinion in Interwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010), pp.30-60; Ralph Harrington, 'Beyond the Bathing Belle: images of women in inter-war railway publicity', *Journal of Transport History* 25 No.1 (2004), pp.22-45; Harrison, 'Inside the Cinema Train'.

of calling people Kings and Queens of most things from bungalows to gem-heaps'.[176] In a more optimistic vein, the seaside resort of Morecambe was dubbed the 'Mecca of Queens' when it was visited by the Railway Queen, Cotton Queen, and Silk Queen alongside Morecambe corporation founding their own Carnival Queen contest.[177] In 1936, eighteen distinct beauty queens, including the Locomotive Queen and the Textiles Queen, featured in a procession at the Workington Infirmary Jubilee Carnival.[178] By late 1920s, beauty contests to elect young, working-class queens of industry burgeoned across Britain. The winners were expected to perform a hybrid role of civic representative and media celebrity. They were the quintessential civic celebrity between the wars, and also the most overtly gendered variant of the role.

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital version of this thesis].

Figure 6: A newly crowned Railway Queen photographed outside her home with her parents and contest organiser Harry Neilson, c.1930s, National Railway Museum Collections, *Railway Queen Photographs, 1925-1970s* (Ref 2018-237).

[176] *West Sussex Gazette* (30 Aug 1928), p.6.
[177] *Nelson Leader* (11 Sep 1931), p.5.
[178] *Penrith Observer* (1 Sep 1936), p.9.

Newsreels, adopting the sexualised editorial values of the popular press, readily featured beauty queens and contests in their issues. Pathé even set up its own Screen Beauty Competition in 1920, in conjunction with the *Express* newspapers. Young women across Britain were invited to submit their photographs at their local cinema to be appraised by a panel of film directors. A shortlist of semi-finalists were then filmed by Pathé and appeared in newsreel items for viewers to then vote on with specially issued poll cards in successive rounds until the winner was elected.[179] This mirrored beauty contests run by the popular press, in particular several organised by *The Daily Mail*, as publicity stunts to boost circulation.[180] It seems newsreel producers also saw these competitions as newsworthy due to the perceived 'sex appeal' of parading attractive, youthful women onscreen for male cinemagoers. This was quite apparent to contemporaries. Robert Herring, ever a perceptive critic, satirised newsreels' inclusion of this content on the grounds that 'Paterfamilias likes to remember his young days, so we have a beauty parade (commentary – 'bird show of another kind, let's hope they ARE kind')'.[181] Herring not only saw the excuse for their inclusion to be sexual titillation, but also that the items were frequently demeaning to the female contestants.

His parody of newsreel commentary was scarcely an exaggeration from that of actual items. The commentary for Universal News items covering beauty queens, for example, was often tamely ribald. Describing the 1933 'Belles of Scotland' beauty contest, the commentator verbally ogled contestants as he stated that 'the result will tell us - - if gentlemen do prefer blondes. The third from the right is rather - - and the second from the left too - - then there's the girl in the centre - - She's very - - although, I don't know'.[182] The unspoken gaps left room for innuendo as each contestant was singled out for the male commentator's appraisal. Likewise, footage of the Welsh town Merthyr's 1931 civic week beauty contest was overlaid with the commentary, 'Who could help obeying the commands of so charming a person as Queen Glenys Fenwi ok-Phillips? Why, if she ordered me to - er. no. I'd better not say it'.[183] The innuendo, which drew attention to the 'sex appeal' of beauty queens, was compounded by joking mockery of Welsh identity, that Glenys should have a stereotypically unpronounceable surname. The breezy tone of newsreel commentary meant beauty queens were often featured

[179] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 Jun 1920), 84. For more details, see O'Rourke, 'Imagining British film beauty' and Chris O'Rourke, *Acting for the silent screen: film actors and aspiration between the wars* (London: 2019), pp.110-112.
[180] Bingham, *Family Newspapers,* 205-206; O'Rourke, 'Imagining British film beauty', p.347; *The Daily Mail* (1 Oct 1928), p.11.
[181] Herring, 'The News-Reel' (1938) in McKernan, *Yesterday's News*, p.110.
[182] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Belles of Scotland' (10 Apr 1933).
[183] *Universal News Commentary Script*, 'Brighter Days in Store' (15 Oct 1931).

as titillating levity for viewers. In this sense, newsreels' treatment of beauty queens could occlude their civic role behind a fixation on their physical appearance.

It is worth noting that the Railway Queens, and beauty queens more broadly, were not always sexualised in the same explicit manner as other media images of young women such as female pin-ups. Scholars have discerned that the queen competition, which elects an idealised representative for a particular group, is principally about finding a woman who corresponds best to the ideals of the group or community.[184] Though contestants' attractiveness remained important in selecting beauty queens, physique was often muted as a criterion. Certainly, this was the case for the Railway Queen. As contestants were aged between 14 and 16, judging criteria referred obliquely to physical attributes. Alongside 'good looks', judges apparently selected a winner who was of 'good character', though quite how photographs revealed this was left unexplained.[185] Winning photographs were typically headshots, or holiday snaps which displayed a minimum of bare flesh.[186] The main photographs that circulated of Railway Queens were of them in full regalia, hardly risqué. Physique was therefore deemphasised in lieu of more 'wholesome' qualities. Indeed, winning photographs were often chosen by a committee of 'art experts' from the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.[187] This framed the process as one of disinterested experts assessing aesthetic qualities. At least as they were presented to the public, contests aimed to find a wholesomely attractive and respectable young woman to represent the respective company or industry.

In line with this, beauty queens were also perceived as newsworthy for their spectacular ceremonial role. Bedecked in a glamorous dress and regalia such as a coronet and chain of office, beauty queens were visually interesting civic representatives surrounded with pomp and pageantry. For example, the Railway Queens readily aped the trappings of the British monarchy to create their own, cheaper version of regal spectacle. Each queen had a mock coronation at Manchester's Belle Vue stadium. These were elaborate rituals which formed the centrepiece of the annual Railway Employees Carnival. For the first coronation in 1925, an advertisement claimed '100 ladies and 100 gentlemen are required, specially men who can manage horses'.[188] This hints at the scale of pageantry involved. The ceremony itself consisted of a transferal of

[184] Stephen Fielding 'The Changing Face of Little Italy: The Miss Colombo Pageant and the Making of Ethnicity in Trail, British Columbia, 1970-1977', *Urban History Review* 39 No.1 (2010), p.50.
[185] *Runcorn Weekly News* (28 Jul 1960), p.2.
[186] National Railway Museum Collections (hereafter NRM), *Railway Queen Photographs, 1925-1970s* (Ref 2018-237); Dorothy Northwood, *Dorothy Northwood Scrapbook*, Jill Dobson Private Collection.
[187] *Liverpool Echo* (13 Sep 1928), p.12; *Dundee Courier* (30 Aug 1934), p.5.
[188] *Railway Review* (7 Aug 1925), p.11.

regalia from the retiring queen to the queen-elect, a 'guard of honour' procession, odes to the new queen, and a pipe band.[189] Like the monarchy, then, the Railway Queen was the focal point for 'invented' traditions and rituals. They also had their own regalia, worn at official engagements.[190] Maids of honour were often chosen from local girls to carry the train of the Railway Queen's robe and accompany her during official engagements.[191] Thus, Railway Queens displayed faux regal splendour, providing a spectacle akin to that of actual royalty.

Contemporaries were cognizant of the parallels. In 1938, A. Towser from Margate wrote to the *Observer*, grumbling, 'Is it not time that we stopped this schoolgirlish folly? It is not good taste to drag in the royal name for this purpose any more than it is to talk of railway and sausage "kings'.[192] Seemingly an idiosyncratic opinion, it nonetheless highlights that the Railway Queens mimicked royalty enough to be distasteful to some. This is not to say that they were political equivalents. Railway Queens were in no way sovereigns, and, unlike the monarch, had no formal political power. Rather, it is to say that Railway Queens and other beauty queens of this variety utilised ceremonial spectacle akin to preestablished public representatives like the royal family and Lord Mayors.

Newsreels generally filmed industrial beauty queens when they performed ritual displays or presided over ceremonies. Competition organisers actively encouraged this by collaborating with newsreel companies. The Railway Carnival Committee, responsible for organising the Belle Vue coronation and the Railway Queen's official activities, collaborated with Gaumont Film Company so that the Railway Queen featured in *Gaumont Graphic*.[193] This deal was seemingly not exclusive, as other newsreels often filmed the Railway Queen. For example, the annual 'coronation' of the Railway Queen was filmed several times. These items emphasised the spectacular and ceremonial elements as opposed to 'sex appeal'. They typically centred upon a close-up shot of the crowning ritual, with the new Railway Queen receiving her regalia whilst seated on a throne and flanked by her maids of honour and other dignitaries.[194] Surrounding this centrepiece were shots of carnivalesque pageantry, such as the procession of

[189] *Queen Photographs*.
[190] See also NRM, *Velvet Railway Queen gown* (Ref 1990-7590 Pt1); NRM, *Railway Queen tiara* (Ref 1990-7590 Pt4/4).
[191] *The Scotsman* (5 Apr 1930), p.11; *Nottingham Evening Post* (26 Aug 1950), p.5; *Grantham Journal* (29 Aug 1952), p.1.
[192] *The Observer* (4 Sep 1938), p.8.
[193] *Railway Review* (13 Apr 1928), p.5.
[194] *Empire News Bulletin*, '"Railway Queen" Crowned' (3 Oct 1929); *Empire News Bulletin,* 'Railway Queen' (4 Oct 1928); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Railwaymen Celebrate Centenary' (1 Oct 1925); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Crowning of Railway Queen at Belle Vue in Manchester' (1928); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Queen of the Railways' (14 Oct 1928); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Manchester – Railway Queen (LNER)' (9 Sep 1937).

marching bands and people in fancy dress or the parade floats and Belle Vue's zoo animals. These shots were used to foreground the visual spectacle of the occasion.[195] Middle- and close-up shots of the crowds were also included to convey the immensity of the coronation's audience, and by extension the grand scale of the Railway Carnival itself.[196] The Railway Queen's coronation was therefore filmed primarily for its spectacular imagery.

Furthermore, the Railway Queen was also filmed 'working' at events. In 1929, Railway Queen Ena Best was filmed opening a new platform at the Victoria and Exchange train station in Manchester.[197] The item dwelt on her cutting the ribbon and being involved in the speech-making alongside other railway and municipal officials.[198] The same year, Best was also filmed inaugurating a Railway Works conference at Barry in Wales.[199] Her arrival and reception at the train station and procession through the town on a float comprised the bulk of the item.[200] It is foremost as a visually interesting public figure that Railway Queens were featured in newsreels (Figure 7).

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital copy of this thesis]

Figure 7: LeJeune's worst nightmare as the Railway Queen was filmed meeting local dignitaries in Barry, Wales, *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Railway Queen' (1929), still taken from Pathe News Archive.

[195] *Gaumont*, 'Railwaymen Celebrate Centenary'; *Pathe*, 'Queen of the Railways'.
[196] *Pathe*, 'Manchester – Railway Queen (LNER)'; *Gaumont*, 'Crowning of Railway Queen at Belle Vue in Manchester'.
[197] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Ena Best (Railway Queen) Opens Victoria and Exchange Stations' (1929).
[198] *Ibid*.
[199] *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Railway Queen' (16 May 1929).
[200] *Ibid*.

Alongside these more generic engagements, newsreels also gave some coverage to the Railway Queen's chief political purpose. In August 1928, the second Railway Queen Mabel Kitson was authorised by the Sheffield, Chesterfield, and District National Union of Railwaymen branch to act as their 'Ambassador' to promote 'international understandings…[concerning] the prevention of war and the advertising of its futility and harm'.[201] Anti-war sentiment and enthusiasm for international cooperation via supranational institutions, foremost the League of Nations, reached fever pitch in inter-war Britain.[202] The League of Nations Union, the most prominent in a range of voluntary organisations devoted to fostering public support for internationalism, had 400,000 members at its height in the 1930s.[203] The railway unions therefore threw their weight behind a popular, mainstream political cause. It is also unsurprising that they chose the Railway Queen as their anti-war champion. That peace was the bailiwick of women constituted, as Bingham posits, 'one of the most pervasive and stable sets of gendered stereotypes' in inter-war Britain.[204] As mothers and daughters of those who would be conscripted in future wars, women were considered to have inherent moral authority when speaking on anti-war subjects. Keen to support the mainstream peace movement, the railway industry chose a representative who, through her youthful femininity, would resonate with audiences.

The Railway Queens' ritual displays and itinerary both expressed their ideological role as 'Ambassadresses of Peace', an epithet frequently used in the press.[205] From 1928 onwards, each Railway Queen undertook an international goodwill trip abroad to meet trade unionists and make pacifist speeches. The first trip to France undertaken by Mabel Kitson was briefly covered by Pathé, who filmed her departure from Tilbury.[206] The title card explained that '16-year-old Mabel Kitson leaves for France to address French Railwaymen on International Peace'.[207] Thus, audiences were informed of the internationalist purpose of the Railway Queen. British Movietone next filmed the Railway Queen's overseas duties in 1936, covering Audrey

[201] Railway Review (24 Aug 1928), p.4; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer (21 Aug 1928), p.9.
[202] Martin Ceadel, *Semi-detached idealists: the British peace movement and international relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: 2000); Helen McCarthy, 'Democratizing British Foreign Policy: Rethinking the Peace Ballot, 1934–1935', *The Journal of British Studies*, 49 No.2 (2010), pp.358-387; Helen McCarthy, *The British people and the League of Nations: democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c. 1918-45* (Manchester: 2011).
[203] McCarthy, 'Democratizing British Foreign Policy', p.358; Mason, *Democracy, Deeds and Dilemmas*, pp.14-15.
[204] Bingham, Gender, p.204.
[205] *Northern Whig* (22 Aug 1928), p.9; *The Daily Mirror* (27 Apr 1929), p.16; *Dundee Courier* (4 May 1929), p.5.
[206] Pathe Gazette, 'The Railway Queen' (27 Aug 1928).
[207] *Ibid*.

Mosson during her trip to the Soviet Union.[208] The chain of office worn by Railway Queens, dubbed the 'International Chain', was comprised of gold links given to each queen during official overseas visits. It symbolised the uniting of railway employees around the world in an ever-growing 'chain of peace'.[209] Movietone's item featured close-ups on the International Chain and described in detail what it symbolised.[210] Audiences would have struggled to miss the political symbolism and internationalist purpose of Mosson's goodwill tour. The ceremonial 'work' performed by beauty queens was therefore frequently depicted in newsreel items.

Other queens of industry performed similar civic roles. For example, the Cotton Queen competition was established in 1930 as a publicity strategy to promote Lancashire's ailing cotton industry. Rebecca Conway argues that winners, chosen from female mill workers, were intended to represent 'the idealised mill girl of the 1930s, who drew upon new fashions…to create a feminine type…special to Lancashire'.[211] Likewise, Jack Southern argues that Cotton Queens were part of a broader campaign by the industry to propagate an attractive Lancastrian identity.[212] Thus, the Cotton Queen contest aimed to harness consumerist femininity to promote regional interests and identity.

Newsreels were drawn in by the 'sex appeal' of the competition. For example, Pathé's filming of the 1936 and 1939 Cotton Queen competition finals focused on the parade of contestants around a lido in Blackpool.[213] Though contestants were in gowns rather than bathing costumes, they were filmed walking directly towards the camera; the winner was shot in extreme close up smiling out to the audience. It was physical appearance and fashion that cameramen brought to the fore in these items. Sex appeal overrode the Lancastrian identity and civic mission of these women in Pathé's footage. Yet, in 1930 and 1931, Gaumont-British filmed the reception of Cotton Queens at the Houses of Parliament.[214] They were greeted by several politicians and visited to publicise the plight of the cotton industry. Newsreels therefore also filmed the queens going about their promotional 'work'. Thus, coverage of beauty queens often alternated

[208] *British Movietone*, 'Britain's Railway Queen is Feted in Moscow' (8 Jun 1936).
[209] *Daily News* (21 Aug 1928), 10; *The Daily Herald* (27 Aug 1928), 7; NRM, *The International Chain* (Ref 1990-7590 Pt2).
[210] *Movietone*, 'Railway Queen is Feted in Moscow'.
[211] Rebecca Conway, 'Making the Mill Girl Modern? Beauty, Industry, and the Popular Newspaper in 1930s' England', *Twentieth Century British History* 4 (2013), p.521.
[212] Southern, 'Lancashire Accents, Lancashire Goods and Lancashire Girls' p.85.
[213] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Cottom Queen at Blackpool' (30 Jun 1939); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Cotton Queen (AKA Blackpool)' (22 Jun 1936).
[214] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Lancashire Cotton Queen Visits Houses of Parliament' (1930); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Frances Lockett, Lancashire Cotton Queen, with Cabinet Ministers at House of Commons' (1931).

between, or more typically blended together, sexualised images of consumerist femininity and depictions of their role as civic representatives.

Beauty queen items were, like those covering other civic celebrities, relatively fleeting; the coverage of the Barry pageantry, at just over two minutes, was the longest Railway Queen item and the Cotton Queens were never given more than thirty seconds screentime. Moreover, newsreel editors framed beauty queens as frivolous titillation via sexualised commentary and shots which fixated upon their physical appearance. Notwithstanding this truncated and sometimes trivialising treatment, what is striking is that newsreel coverage helped to make beauty queens prominent civic celebrities. Concurrent to 'sex appeal', beauty queens were routinely filmed going about their work as civic representatives. The 'job' of beauty queen was well represented in content alongside their sexualised 'image'. In this sense, beauty queens were filmed in a similar manner to the British queen consort or female mayors. The category of civic celebrity therefore allowed young, often working-class women, to be represented as legitimate public figures, a role conventionally reserved for men and elite women.

Conclusion:

Civic culture sat at the very heart of newsreels as a medium. Newsreel editors, local producers, and cinema managers all shrewdly recognised that cinemagoers wanted to see themselves and their communities onscreen. To wit, civic occasions and festivities became a staple item in all national newsreels. Widespread production of local newsreels or special editions supplemented this, further satisfying patrons' apparent desire to celebrate their hometowns. Moreover, the concerted efforts of cinema managers meant that even the most unpromising or generic newsreel footage was frequently reworked into an exhibition of civic pride. Newsreels, then, could often be highly localised, tailored by managers or other intermediaries to the specificities of the civic cultures they portrayed. If they disappointed Stephen Tallents, Lester Ruah, and other critics who called for images of national importance, they appear to have pleased many cinemagoers who wanted to vicariously participate in the public life of their locality. In this sense, they were vital to the vibrancy of local political culture in this period.

Furthermore, newsreels did not just reflect civic culture, but democratised it. This was foremost achieved through the filming of civic celebrities. Newsreel editors' unique need for pre-planned visual spectacles mixed with the more general news value of celebrity human interest. In turn, the older role of civic representative, those public figures who represented political communities through ritual and symbolic display, intertwined with media celebrity, those

whose image could be readily commodified. This resulted in municipal leaders, especially mayors, getting unprecedented media exposure, remaining effective as civic representatives into the age of mass communications.

Meanwhile, national celebrities such as cabinet ministers and the royal family were simultaneously rendered representatives of local civic culture. Cinema managers, sometimes in collaboration with newsreel companies, made royal visits a celebration of a town and its inhabitants over any national or imperial community. Newsreels were therefore a great leveller, putting the local public figure (and by extension local political culture) on a par with the national. More importantly, the role of civic celebrity enabled new demographics to serve as public figures. The beauty queen ably met newsreels editors' gendered criteria, and quickly became established as a variant of civic celebrity. This enabled young, working-class women to achieve prominence in a political culture where they were otherwise marginalised. To some degree, this marked a shift from representing a political public of hierarchy and deference towards one characterised by non-partisan inclusivity and aspirational consumerism.

Thus, newsreels were not an inherently national medium. Indeed, local political culture is central to understanding the impact of newsreels upon British society. They were also not a unidirectional propaganda medium for social and political inertia. Through the newsreel, newly enfranchised citizens were able to access, and sometimes participate in, civic culture as part of their everyday lives. Moreover, through the concept of civic celebrities, newsreel companies, however unintentionally, helped to democratise who could legitimately represent this reconstituted body politic in terms of gender and class. Connecting the present analysis to that of the previous chapter, all three shibboleths concerning newsreels have been dismantled: they were actively watched, highly localised, and seldom conservative propaganda for Edwardian values. The next two chapters provide a more holistic view of newsreel content to demonstrate that it did not just embrace a civic ethos when covering political culture directly. Indeed, examining the other two staple topics of sports and 'interest' miscellany in turn reveals that newsreels were, outside of party-political or international relations coverage, the salient civic medium in inter-war Britain.

Chapter Three: Newsreels and the 'sport-loving nation'.

In 1935, film magazine journalist Wilson D'Arne lamented that 'the fact we are a pre-eminently sport-loving nation is hardly ever reflected on our screen, let alone catered for, except for the annual pictorial records in the newsreels of the Derby, the Grand National, Wimbledon, and the Cup Final'.[1] Newsreels, then, if only due to a dearth of alternatives, were seen to serve as the primary filmic representation of sports between the wars. Considering the apparent prominence of sports items in the bi-weekly issue, it appears curious that D'Arne relegated newsreels so glibly as a poor mirror for the sporting nation. However, it is arguably not just the lack of sports on film that D'Arne lamented. Rather, he invoked a specific political image of Britain as a 'sport-loving nation'. Tellingly, the annual events highlighted by D'Arne – the Grand National, Wimbledon, the Cup Final - mirrored those listed by Stephen Tallents as integral to projecting Britain's national self-image. As Ross McKibbin has posited, describing Britain as the preeminent 'sports-loving' country was a deeply political phrase which connoted 'an essentially Edwardian political rhetoric' of 'fair play', being a 'good sport', and deference to gentlemanly amateurism.[2] D'Arne, at least implicitly, desired to see an elite and conservative national identity projected onscreen through films of Britain's sporting culture.

If this was what D'Arne wanted, then it is understandable why newsreels were found wanting. It was verging on a truism amongst inter-war intellectuals that the rise of what J.B. Priestley labelled commercialised 'sports-turned-spectacle' was, as with so many other new forms of mass-produced popular culture, detrimental to civic culture; another opiate which induced passivity and apathy in spectators.[3] For these critics, it was hobbyists and amateurs, not spectators and professionals, who constituted the sporting public in any civic sense of an engaged and socially cohesive community bound by common culture. As this chapter reveals, newsreels thoroughly embraced the commercialised elements of sporting culture. Yet, this chapter argues that the commercialised elements of newsreels, both in content and exhibition, led to a 'civic' projection of sporting culture as inclusive, participatory, and often localised.

Commercialised coverage was the key to newsreels' inclusivity in terms of class and gender. It meant that conventionally working-class sporting interests, foremost football and betting,

[1] *Kinematograph Weekly* (14 Nov 1935), p.24
[2] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.385.
[3] Priestley, *English Journey*, p.126.

were given due prominence in routine content. Moreover, women's participation in sports was largely treated as either a praiseworthy novelty or as a matter of accepted fact. Professional sports players, both men and women, were lauded as major celebrities. Elite sports such as horse racing or the Oxford-Cambridge boat race were filmed as colourful spectacle and aspirational gossip rather than to provide edifying uplift or insider knowledge for the cognoscenti. In this sense, newsreels adopted a style similar to that of the popular press as opposed to assuming the patrician attitudes of the BBC or broadsheet newspapers. Thus, newsreels' content was inclusive of the new constituents who were playing and watching commercial sports in unprecedented numbers, likely as they were broadly commensurate with the cinemagoing demographic in this period.

Ever keen to imbue a story with human interest, newsreels also portrayed the sports spectator as an active participant in the event, often a rowdy reveller, as opposed to a passive bystander or deferential subject. This portrayal was buttressed by how newsreels were marketed and exhibited in cinemas. Various publicity techniques, from advertising to competitions, were utilised to ensure that patrons felt that they were vicariously participating in the sporting occasions they watched. Thus, pains were taken by both producers and cinema managers to present the sporting public as an active body, and to include the cinemagoer in this imagined body. Audience reception indicates that these efforts were frequently successful. Sports were the only subject matter in newsreels which approached anything like popularity. The annual sporting fixtures were considered guaranteed crowd draws by producers and could provoke wild enthusiasm from patrons. Providing slow-motion or close-ups shots of sporting controversies like a disputed goal was also one of the rare instances that newsreels beat press and radio as a source of genuine news. Many cinemagoers, being also avid sports fans, connected with what they saw onscreen. Newsreels thereby enabled sports to be part of everyday life for those who could not regularly attend games or play themselves. In this sense, the medium constituted as much as it represented the cultural side of participatory consumer-democracy in this period.

Finally, as with other 'national' content, it was not a monolithic Britain that newsreels portrayed or were exhibited in. Local sporting events, customs, and traditions appeared semi-frequently as yet another means of connecting the newsreel to civic culture. Cinema managers also worked to accentuate the local elements in a national event or else turn the exhibition of a major sports item into a minor public occasion. In particular, the sports 'star' was refashioned with ease into a significant variety of civic celebrity. The 'national' calendar of events and

lionisation of transnational sporting celebrities thus belied the localised exhibition context and bevvy of 'traditional' sport which newsreels featured. Hence, a civic ethos – localised context, facilitating active (if vicarious) participation, and inclusive non-partisanship – suffused newsreels' portrayal and exhibition of the 'sport-loving nation'.

Whilst acknowledging the central place of sports in the newsreel, historians have generally sidelined this content in favour of studying explicitly political items. Aldgate is typical in his suggestion that the preponderance of sports was one reason 'why [contemporary] critics felt the newsreel was basically trivial in content'.[4] The implication is that sports cannot provide much insight into the newsreel as a news medium, still less the medium's political role. Mike Huggins has sought to rectify this oversight with a series of articles dedicated to newsreels' coverage of sports. His analysis reinforces the general historiographical consensus, however, in his conclusion that newsreels were thoroughly conservative when filming sports. Items on horse racing emphasised the presence of respectable elites, especially royalty, to render them politically anodyne.[5] Coverage of football matches likewise elided contentious comments on hooliganism and emphasised royal patronage and teams' good sportsmanship.[6] Thus, newsreels apparently created a visual complement to the Edwardian rhetoric of sport, and, as with other topics, attempted to temper social change. This position echoes wider trends in media history, as many scholars remain wedded to the notion that newspapers, radio, and eventually television presented sports in a conservative manner which helped to shore up conventional hierarchies of class and gender.[7]

Meanwhile, social historians of sports have, in focusing on the agency of participants, dismantled an earlier dichotomy in historiography which tended to view sporting culture as either a form of social control or a means of grassroots resistance against institutional control.[8] Sport was as much an expression of personal desires and spontaneous play as it was a manifestation of particular societal structures or ideologies. As McKibbin puts it, 'tension between 'play' [approximate to grassroots cultural practices and individual agency] and

[4] Aldgate, *Cinema and History*, p.72.
[5] Huggins, *Horseracing and the British*, pp.53-54.
[6] Huggins, 'Projecting the Visual', p.81.
[7] Richard Holt and Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain, 1945-2000*, (Oxford: 2000), p.95; Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke: 2002), p.48; Mike Huggins and Jack Williams, *Sports and the English, 1918-1939* (London: 2006), p.27.
[8] Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1940* (Manchester: 2005), p.6; Tony Collins, 'Work, Rest and Play: Recent Trends in the History of Sport and Leisure' *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 No.2 (2007), pp.402-403. For a recent example see Robert Colls, *This Sporting Life: sport and liberty in England, 1760-1960* (Oxford: 2020).

'system' (i.e. organization) was fundamental to the development of sport in Britain, where modern sport largely began'.[9] This chapter aims to likewise redress the balance for the mediation of sport in the early to mid-twentieth century. Looking at newsreels' exhibition context and routine projections of sport reveals a civic sporting culture which aimed to include the interests of the newly enfranchised and encourage their vicarious participation as consumer-citizens. This is not to say newsreel producers never indulged in the conservative rhetoric of sportsmanship. In coverage of cricket, because of its proximity to intra-imperial and class politics, newsreels tended to give full-blooded support to the preservation of established social hierarchies. Yet in many respects, cricket was the exception which proved the civic and commercial rules which otherwise determined how newsreels filmed and exhibited sports in this period. This chapter posits that in routine coverage and exhibition of sports content, newsreels both represented and constituted an inclusive and frequently localised sporting culture in which cinemagoers were encouraged to participate.

This chapter has three main sections, in turn dealing with participation, inclusivity, and localisation. First, it examines audience reception and newsreels' portrayal of spectators to show how this content both represented an active consumer-citizenry and, in its enthusiastic reception, enabled vicarious participation in sporting culture. Secondly, it analyses the quantitative weighting of coverage for various sports alongside the qualitative treatment of these sports to demonstrate that this staple content was generally inclusive of working-class interests and women's increasing participation in a variety of sports. Cricket was the exception to this general trend, where Edwardian ideals were recapitulated in coverage. Finally, it unpicks the national calendar of sporting events to reveal that newsreel producers and exhibitors worked to film local customs and connect national events to civic cultures.

Section One, The Consumer-Citizen as Active Spectator:

As other historians have amply proven, sports were *the* staple subject matter filmed by newsreels in a purely quantitative sense. Hiley and McKernan estimate that sports comprised the single largest topic covered by newsreels, with over 30,000 individual items listed in the British Universities Newsreel Database.[10] For *Topical Budget* alone, horse races comprised around ten per cent of all items filmed during its production run.[11] Likewise, contemporary surveys, such as that conducted by *World Film News* periodical in 1936, found that sports

[9] Ross McKibbin, *Democracy and political culture: studies in modern British history*, (Oxford: 2019), p.117
[10] McKernan and Hiley, 'Reconstructing the News', p.191.
[11] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, p.99.

comprised the bulk of newsreel content.[12] Mike Huggins and Jack Williams are also correct that newsreels covered a range of sports and 'introduced cinemagoers to a far wider diet of sporting activities and events than they could experience directly'.[13] Thus, the full breadth of sports played in Britain appeared in newsreels.

Moreover, newsreel producers privileged major sporting events as among the most valuable kind of 'scoop' or story. Defending newsreels' staple content to *Manchester Guardian* readers in 1934, an anonymous newsreel editor asserted that, 'sport needs no justification. Its appeal is so nearly universal that one has only to observe what space the popular newspapers devote to it to see that the newsreels are not giving it undue prominence'.[14] A former cameraman also recalled that sports items were termed 'hardy annuals' in the industry because the sporting calendar formed the backbone of newsreel companies' filming schedules.[15] Year on year, sports were perceived as unfailingly topical and became a fixture of the bi-weekly issue.

Indeed, if filming sports required no written justification, producers backed up their claims with the considerable sums they were willing to spend on securing the exclusive rights to film 'hardy annuals'. For instance, *Topical Budget* paid the owners of Wembley stadium £1,000 for official rights to film the 1923 FA Cup Final.[16] Upon securing the rights to events such as the Grand National or cricket at Lords, this was subsequently trumpeted to exhibitors in lavish full-page advertisements as reason enough to subscribe to that particular newsreel brand.[17] Rival companies who failed to purchase the official rights resorted to 'piracy' to attain footage.[18] Various outlandish tactics were employed such as smuggling cameras into the grounds, standing on scaffolding to film over stadium walls, or even flying overhead to capture aerial footage, to the point where these disturbances sometimes interfered with the actual sport.[19] During the 1934 Ashes, Gaumont British attempted to prevent other cameramen from poaching footage of the test match by aiming flood lights into the stands, to which 'a section of the cricket spectators raised objections' as they were being half-blinded.[20]

[12] Aldgate, *Cinema and History*, p.76.
[13] Huggins and Williams, *Sports and the English*, p.34.
[14] *Manchester Guardian* (15 Aug 1934), p.18.
[15] Robert Humfrey, 'The News-Reel Cameraman' reprinted in Luke McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News: the British cinema newsreel reader* (London: 2002), p.119.
[16] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, p.97.
[17] For examples see, *Kinematograph Weekly* (5 Dec 1929), p.13; *Kinematograph Weekly* (17 Mar 1932), p.15.
[18] McKernan, *Topical Budget*, p.97.
[19] *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 Apr 1932), p.24; *Kinematograph Weekly* (14 Jun 1934), p.4.
[20] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 Aug 1934), p.13.

The bidding wars for exclusive rights and subsequent piracy proved so costly it served as an impetus for the establishment of the Newsreel Association in 1938, 'to eliminate competition in such matters'.[21] Even when companies collectively bargained for filming rights, they were willing to spend prodigious amounts. In January 1939, the Association offered the proprietors of Wembley Stadium £750 to film the Cup Final and other football matches held there.[22] In April the following year, the Association proposed to make 'an offer of £1,000 per annum for the duration of the [Second World] war' to film the Grand National and Topham horse races.[23] Across the period, the expense and effort of filming the major sporting occasions seldom proved economical. The 'hot scoop' of a particular match, or else a special edition of a 'hardy annual', was nonetheless considered worthwhile due to its apparent popularity with audiences. Hence, newsreel producers considered sports prime material for every newsreel issue, both quantitatively in terms of the breadth of sports worth coverage and qualitatively in terms of how newsworthy certain events were.

Inter-war critics disagreed with newsreel editors, seeing sports coverage as yet another mark against newsreels as a news medium. Buchanan, always a vocal representative of intellectual distain, decried the 'regular round of sporting events' and longed for 'the day when we shall see a news-reel that is made by *film-conscious* people, who will discard football matches…as having no connection with vital news' [emphasis in original].[24] Essentially trivial fare, repetitive sports items did not qualify as nationally important news.

At least with regards to sports, critics appear to have been at odds with the opinions of exhibitors and cinemagoers. Cinema proprietors and managers were ready to pay for premium sporting items. At a meeting of the Newsreel Association in April 1938, it 'was resolved that regular subscribers of news reels exhibiting at ages of three or six days old could have facilities to exhibit the Grand National at release date…[for] an additional charge of not less than ten guineas'.[25] This suggests that exhibitors were thought amenable to surcharges if it meant they could secure first-run issues of key sporting occasions. Moreover, the demand for sports films was great enough that independent film companies produced their own special editions. In 1936, Featurettes Ltd., under the ownership of former Pathé editor Harry Sanders and former Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer employee J.C. Jones, scooped an extended short film of the Petersen-

[21] BFI, *Newsreel Association Minutes Book One*, p.51.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] *Ibid*, p.160.
[24] Buchanan, 'Axes to Grind', pp.43-44.
[25] BFI, *Newsreel Association Minutes Book One*, p.16.

Harvey boxing match, securing exhibition in Leicester Square Theatre and advertising the footage as available for purchase by any interested exhibitors.[26] Similarly, British Lion Film Corporation announced a series of shorts covering tennis, featuring 'the most romantic personalities in what is far and away Britain's most popular pastime'.[27] A short film of a race horse's life cycle, from birth to winning the Grand National, was filmed in Duafaycolour in 1939 and featured commentary by 'Gaumont-British's own 'famous newsreel commentator' Ted Emmett.[28] Sporadic productions by smaller companies suggests that newsreels could not fully sate exhibitors' demand for sports films, or perhaps more specifically exhibitors saw potential popularity in extended films of sporting occasions which would only be granted a few minutes screentime in any standard newsreel. Either way, sports seem to have been considered a guaranteed hit for inclusion in any cinema programme.

Charles Penley, the general manager of the Astoria chain of super-cinemas in London, provided a rationale behind this viewpoint. In a 1934 article, he argued that, 'it is a striking fact that a Derby, a big fight and similar events of the past week are responsible for drawing in a considerable proportion of extra patronage…this shows the value of the newsreel, and managers should capitalise on the fact that they got the news to sell almost as quickly as the newspapers'.[29] Penley singled out Paramount's recent scoop of the Harvey-Petersen fight, detailing that this particular item 'gave rise to a good deal of controversy amongst sportsmen, for numbers paid return visits to see the film, and brought their friends with them to settle the argument'.[30] First, it is striking that newsreels beat other media to serve as an actual news source for sporting controversies. This phenomenon was reported repeatedly in the trade press. In 1932, Movietone 'scooped' footage of a disputed goal during the Cup Final. The images, taken on the Saturday, made front-page news as all the national daily newspapers were given cuts and reporters were allowed to attend a special screening on the Sunday afternoon. So newsworthy was the footage that one cinema manager on the Isle of Man chartered an aeroplane to get a copy flown from Liverpool to ensure the goal could be exhibited alongside Monday's newspaper headlines.[31] Again in 1935, Universal's footage purportedly settled the score of a controversial Cup Final tie between Chelsea and Luton, and 'all the important national newspapers on Sunday devoted either large front-page stories or main news-page

[26] *Kinematograph Weekly* (30 Jan 1936), p.29.
[27] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 Jan 1935), p.35.
[28] *Kinematograph Weekly* (31 Aug 1939), p.25.
[29] *Kinematograph Weekly* (14 Jun 1934), p.22.
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] *Kinematograph Weekly* (28 Apr 1932), p.31.

stories and picture strips taken from the film to the dispute'.[32] So too during the 1938 Cup Final, *Kinematograph Weekly* congratulated, 'Tommy Cummings, of Paramount News, whose excellent pictures of the crucial incident which led to the award of the penalty were so largely reproduced in Monday's newspapers'.[33] Perhaps uniquely amongst staple content, newsreels' sports items functioned as a 'hot' news source for audiences throughout the period, providing topics for conversation and an ostensibly empirical means of settling debates. According to Penley, and further implied by the confidence other exhibitors held in footage of sports, these items allowed cinemagoers to participate in sporting culture. Sat arguing with friends over what they saw, or preferred not to see, they were vicarious spectators, active members of the 'sport-loving nation'.

What evidence remains of audience reception supports this view of the engaged sports fan at the cinema. Even Gammie, at the height of his 'Brighter Newsreels' crusade, defended sporting news against 'grouches' from some of his readers. Several wrote in to complain of the length and repetition of sports items, which they found rather trying. One unnamed reader asked rhetorically, 'what could be more boring than the spectacle of an athlete displaying his prowess to the accompaniment of a nasal commentator?'.[34] N. de Y. Bateson from Cambridge, in a lengthy tirade against newsreels in general, singled out the excessive amount of football matches filmed and further complained that 'frequently one sporting event is featured to the exclusion of all other news. Any newspaper adopting these methods would die a deservingly sudden death'.[35] These readers appeared to be outliers, however, as Gammie argued that the majority of his readers considered sports such as the Derby or boat races 'red-hot news' and retorted that 'the amount of sport in newsreels seems to be due entirely to the enormous public interest in it'.[36] Though the magazine was always a disputatious forum of idiosyncratic opinions, the readership of *Film Weekly* largely concurred with exhibitors that sports items were as popular as any aspect of the newsreel could be.

Young cinemagoers in Sheffield also found sports items thrilling and engaged with them loudly. The 1930 survey's main report noted that if a newsreel featured football, it typically sparked 'much enthusiasm' from children attending the matinee.[37] At the Don Picture Palace

[32] *Kinematograph Weekly* (17 Jan 1935), p.36
[33] *Kinematograph Weekly* (5 May 1938), p.4.
[34] *Film Weekly* (4 Nov 1932), p.11.
[35] *Film Weekly* (5 Dec 1931), p.21.
[36] *Film Weekly* (4 Nov 1932), p.11.
[37] Sheffield City Archives, *Material collected by the Sheffield Social Survey Committee*.

in West Bar, the observer recorded that the 'only item of interest to children was the landing of Mr. Kingsford Smith, airman in Australia'.[38] The observer at Greystones Picture Palace on Ecclesall Road, watching the audience watch a silent *Topical Budget* newsreel, summarised that the 'children [were] interested in those films showing activity e.g. horse-racing'.[39] It was the spectacular sports which provoked yelling, cheering, and thunderous clapping from children's matinees. Though evidence remains suggestive, sports content not only provoked voluble enthusiasm from audiences, but it also enabled participation in sporting culture as a vicarious spectator in the cinema. Newsreel editors were therefore shrewd in privileging sports content above most other types of news. It quickly became a staple of almost every issue, with at least two or more items devoted to a diverse array of sports. Annual sporting events also became the 'hot' items which production schedules were organised around, with yearly special editions and much publicity afforded them. In turn, they were the only element of the newsreel that could be considered truly popular, or at least actively looked forward to as a highlight of the programme, among inter-war cinemagoers.

Whilst the cinemagoing sports fan engaged vicariously, the crowds who attended matches or games in person were regularly filmed by newsreel cameramen to form a core image, the spectator, which featured in almost every sports item. Arising in the 1880s with the 'New Journalism' style of writing newspapers and honed into a familiar aspect of the inter-war popular press were human interest stories which reported on the everyday as newsworthy. Such stories were designed to connect with readers' own lives and filled the column inches of Northcliffe and Beaverbrook's newspapers.[40] As has been shown, editors tried to heighten the human interest in newsreels by anchoring items around public 'personalities' or notable figures, and sports stars proved no exception.

However, it was not just the famous who were filmed to personalise sports news. Aware of the interest that could be derived from showing the public to itself, newsreel cameramen also unfailingly filmed spectators, these shots often rivalling coverage of the actual football match or horse race in length. Despite the assertion that sports needed 'no justification', record attendances and thronging crowds were highlighted in items to act as a visual barometer of football and horse racing's popularity, essentially justifying them as newsworthy. A typical example was the annual Scotland versus England football match, which frequently drew

[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy,* pp.22-24.

massive numbers and was filmed faithfully most years by Pathé and Gaumont-British. In 1921, the title card for Pathé's coverage read 'All Records Broken. 85,000 people pay £8,460 to see Scotland win Championship and England suffer biggest defeat for 21 years', followed by shots of massed crowds watching a pipe band and cheering.[41] Other footage from the early 1920s extolled the attendance figures in their intertitles and featured long panning shots of cheering spectators.[42]

With sound commentary, these figures became part of the typical match preamble to emphasise the popularity of the game, such as one stating,'64,000 and they all had to be fed' over footage of a man throwing hotdogs, a culinary novelty in themselves, into packed stands.[43] Thus, the crowd was presented as integral to the essence of a football match. For horse racing, the Grand National was likewise presented as inextricable from its multitudinous spectators. An event dubbed 'Aintree Sunday', where crowds gathered the day before racing began to walk the course and inspect the jumps, featured in Pathé's annual itinerary, and utilized crowd shots to show extensive interest in the Grand National.[44] Moreover, like big football matches, the large crowds attending the Grand National were stressed via title cards such as 'Aintree. Record Crowds. 150,000 people witness "Victory" Grand National' and the typical opening shot of local train platforms swamped with racegoers in a variety of attire.[45] One item of the Irish Grand National in 1927 had a title card which stated, 'People of all classes enjoy Ireland's Premier Steeplechase Race'.[46] Presenting the racing crowd as large and socially diverse ensured the event was not perceived as the exclusive preserve of the wealthy or titled. Thus, crowds were filmed in one sense to convey the 'mass' appeal of sports like football or horse racing, their popularity with a diverse audience of mixed tastes. The spectator of commercial sporting events was integral to why these sports were filmed at all. To borrow terms used to divide the inter-war press into the popular tabloids aiming at a wide mixed audience and the more upper-middle and elite-oriented 'quality' papers, the newsreels were evidently aimed at the 'masses' and not the 'classes'.

[41] *Pathé Gazette*, 'All Records Broke', (14 Apr 1921).
[42] *Pathé Gazette,* 'The Thistle Triumphs' (09 Apr 1925); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Football Again' (31/08/1921).
[43] *Gaumont British News*, 'Arsenal Plays Bolton at Highbury Stadium' (10 Jan 1938). See also Pathé, 'Highbury - A Football Classic' (5 Mar 1934).
[44] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Aintree Sunday' (23 Mar 1933); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Aintree Sunday' (17 Mar 1932); *Pathé Gazette,* 'Aintree' (23 Mar 1939).
[45] *Pathé Gazette,* 'Record Crowds Aka "Victory" Grand National' (1919). For a typical example of the crowded train platforms, see *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Grand National At Aintree' (27 Mar 1926).
[46] *Pathé Gazette,* 'The Irish Grand National', (21 Apr 1927).

Whilst used to stress the popular interest in these sports, crowds were seldom presented as masses in the contemporary sense. Originating in the nineteenth century, 'the masses' was a pejorative term used by intellectuals and political writers to characterise the working-class majority as either a dangerous rabble or, more commonly for the inter-war period, an unthinking, passive homogeny.[47] Instead, newsreels adopted a humanising cinematography in sports items. Crowds were generally portrayed as groups of individuals participating actively in the events. So integral were these sorts of shots to football coverage that Paramount staged its own fan scene due to newsreels being barred from the 1936 FA Cup Final. It involved two drunken fans of the opposing teams, one a Yorkshireman and the other cockney, bantering about their respective sides' success before both stating that neither saw the game and that they would catch it on the newsreel tonight.[48] Condescending in its portrayal of working-class fans as drunkards with caricatured accents, it nonetheless hints at why newsreels included so much footage of spectators. Indeed, Gaumont-British ended their 1920 Cup Final item with a close-up of an actual drunk spectator amusing the crowd around him.[49] Both the staged and real footage were good-humoured and convivial, reminiscent of the knowing 'in-joke' of music hall than outright mockery or condemnation.[50] These shots were employed to humanise the football spectator and attempted to present the carnivalesque atmosphere of the games for cinemagoers to share in the mirthful revelry.

More common, if subtler, were the shots of cheering crowds in close-up.[51] Some items were even focused exclusively on the crowd. In 1926, Pathé thought the introduction of hot dogs at matches was newsworthy, showing a vendor throwing them to crowds in middle shots.[52] Such shots presented the crowd in relative detail, allowing their cheering and expressions to be seen clearly. Going further, many items, to enhance their human-interest angle, picked out individuals in the crowd. For instance, in one item long shots of fans packing out the stands, some even up trees, were followed by two juxtaposed shots, as one intertitle stated 'we've won' with a sailor waving his Queens Park Rangers novelty bowler hat and the next stated 'we've

[47] Asa Briggs, 'The Language of 'Mass' and 'Masses' in Nineteenth-Century England' in David Martin and David Rubinstein (eds.), *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays presented to John Saville* (London: 1979), pp.62-83; Snape and Pussard, 'Theorisations of leisure', p.7.
[48] *British Paramount News*, 'Battle for The Cup. Stadium V Newsreel Overshadows Arsenal V Sheffield Utd', (27 Apr 1936).
[49] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Aston Villa V. Huddersfield in Football Association Challenge Cup Final' (25 Apr 1920).
[50] Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past and Present* 144 (1994), pp.167-169.
[51] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Cup Final' (27 Apr 1922); *Gaumont Graphic,* '1922 FA Cup Final' (29 Apr 1922).
[52] *Pathé Gazette,* 'All Hot' (29 Nov 1926).

lost' with a man buying a paper, reading the results, and grimacing.[53] Pathé's 1921 Cup Final opened with a lingering close-up of Spurs supporters in fancy dress, all singing whilst one played a banjo. It also showed the newsreels interacting with the crowds at the event, as a Pathé vendor was shown giving away team-colour buttonholes to spectators.[54] The shifting reactions of one young boy were used by Gaumont-British to convey the course of a match in 1938.[55] In their 1939 Cup Final item, Pathé's commentator drew attention to one spectator who was vigorously signing to the camera how many goals his team had scored.[56] By using individual members as a synecdoche for the crowd, football spectators were humanised as revelling individuals without being visually subsumed into a sea of flat caps and overcoats. Indeed, by the end of the period these shots had grown a touch hackneyed for some viewers. T. Warburton from St-Leonards-On-Sea, in a 1938 letter to *Picturegoer*, summarised wryly that, 'there is the football – or cricket – match, complete with gasometer or smart "shots" of the Sleeper, the Dozer, the Man with a Newspaper on his Head, the Man with a Rattle, the Small Boy in the Branches of a Tree, the Gorgeous Girl from Up North Munching a Sausage Roll!'.[57] Even as these routine images of the spectator became overly familiar stereotypes, it reveals that, wherever possible, newsreels disaggregated the crowd into a medley of individuals. The eccentricity of these characters, all generally partaking in the revelry, portrayed the crowds as active participants in the sporting culture of the match.

Furthermore, the crowd was not always depicted as harmonious. Occasional pitch invasions and crushes made it onto cinema screens. Again, however, this was consistently presented with good humour as part of the football experience. Pathé's 1923 item on the Cup Final was effectively a short film of riotous football fans. One intertitle stated, 'Rushing the Barriers', with several shots of people climbing over the pitch walls.[58] Another, that 'At 3 O'clock 10,000 people had invaded the pitch making play impossible'.[59] This was followed by footage from inside the stadium of the crowds on the pitch, a policeman on a white horse attempting to instil order.[60] A 1938 match, covered by Gaumont-British, was so crowded that some spectators are shown sitting on the roof of the stands.[61] The commentator responded jokingly, that 'to get a

[53] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Cup-tie-itis!' (13 Jan 1921).
[54] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Coal Strike Cup Final' (25 Apr 1921).
[55] *Gaumont-British News*, 'FA Cup Ties Sixth Round When Brentford Loses To Preston North End' (07 Mar 1938).
[56] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Cup Final 1939' (01 May 1939).
[57] *Picturegoer* (1 Oct 1938), p.26.
[58] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Wembley FA Cup' (07 May 1923).
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] *Gaumont-British News,* 'Wales Defeats England in the 1938 International Football Match' (24 Nov 1938).

comfortable seat at a soccer match these days, you've got to have influence'.[62] At its most extreme, newsreels covered crushes such as one in 1935. The commentator remained upbeat over footage of men being carried out on a stretcher and a dense crowd, stating 'a tremendous crowd…casualties were numerous…those behind cried forward and the crowd invaded the pitch'.[63] Even at its most dangerous, the crowd was still presented uncritically as enthusiastic fans attending the match in an unextraordinary manner. To be a spectator was not to be another number in an inert mass public or a member of a thuggish mob. Football crowds were personified through individuals and shown to be good-humoured, if boisterous, revellers integral to the mise-en-scene of the match.

Newsreel companies consistently prioritised the consumer when deciding how to film, market, and exhibit sports items. It was purportedly audiences' tastes which determined that sporting content should be privileged above all other topics in the newsreel. Moreover, the spectator – as a lively and newsworthy individual – formed the centrepiece of most sporting items. This arguably served as one of the most prominent ways that the cinemagoing public was shown to itself on a twice-weekly basis. For the many sports fans who could not attend events with any regularity, newsreels provided an important, vicarious, means of participating in sporting culture, whether using newsreel footage to settle arguments or to cheer on their team. The spectator was conceptualised and acted as a consumer-citizen, onscreen and off.

Section Two, Class and Gender in Sports Coverage:

It is true that newsreels covered the gamut of sports between the wars. However, key word searches of the Pathé and Movietone databases collectively reveal that some sports were filmed with more regularity than others. Horseracing brought up the most hits of mainstream sports, suggesting that it featured most regularly across the twenty-year period.[64] Football was the second most prominent key word.[65] Either of these two sports was almost guaranteed at least one item dedicated to it in every issue. These were also among the most commercialised of sports in this period.

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[62] *Ibid*.
[63] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Crowds Watch Everton Play Against Wanderers' (4 Mar 1935).
[64] *Pathé News Archive* key word search 'horse race' 1919-1939, brought up 908 Pathé news items and 364 Reuters item (this archive is predominantly Gaumont-British newsreel clips, with some *British Paramount News* and *Empire News Bulletin* clips). The *British Movietone Archive* key word search 'horse race' found 284 clips.
[65] *Pathé News Archive* search for 'football' 1919-39 resulted in 831 Pathé and 338 Reuters items, and *British Movietone Archive* brought up 255 items.

Priestley, watching a football match in Nottingham during his *English Journey* (1933), summarised how commercial the game had become: 'the heavy financial interests; the absurd transfer and player-selling system; the lack of any birth or residential qualification for the players; the betting and coupon competitions; the absurd publicity given to every feature of it by the Press'.[66] In Priestley's eyes, professionalisation in the form of wage-earning players and profit-seeking stadiums coupled with gambling and media interests to try and 'spoil this game'.[67] Football had also long been characterised as a working-class sport by journalists and writers, and this generally held true in terms of the avid fans of the game.[68] By contrast, horseracing was often perceived to be an elite activity, 'the sport of Kings'.[69] Nevertheless, Mike Huggins has revealed it had a socially diverse inter-war following. Indeed, the racing season was nigh inextricable from gambling. If not attending the races, betting on horses and reading the racing news became a favourite pastime for working-class men.[70] Whilst the weekly diet of sports may have been varied, then, newsreels prioritized sports with major working-class followings as mainstays. Moreover, when Priestley accused the popular press of 'absurd publicity', he could have pointed equally to the newsreels which held these two sports above all other news and had few apparent qualms about the commercialised aspects of them.

Other working-class sports, though not as numerically prevalent, also appeared in the key word search. Greyhound racing resulted in 9 Pathé, 12 Reuters, and approximately 5 Movietone clips.[71] From the opening of the first greyhound racecourse at Belle Vue in 1927, going to the dogs and gambling on them became a thriving leisure activity for a sizeable working-class minority across the inter-war period.[72] In newsreels, these items were mainly featured as novelties, such as showing the first dog races in Britain or a kennel run entirely by women, rather than as systematic reports on races.[73] Darts also appeared as a niche sport filmed by all

[66] Priestley, *English Journey*, p.127.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] Matthew Taylor, 'The People's Game and the People's War: Football, Class and Nation in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945' *Historical Social Research,* 40 No.4 (2015), pp.280-281.
[69] Matthew Taylor, 'Sport and Civilian Morale in Second World War Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 53 No.2 (2018), p.318.
[70] Huggins, *Horseracing and the English*, pp.1-4.
[71] Pathe and Movietone archive key word searches, date ranges filters of '1919-1939' and decade of the 1930s, respectively.
[72] Keith Laybourn, ''King Solomon's mines cannot compare with the money that has been raked in by greyhound racing': greyhound racing, its critics and the working class, c. 1926-1951', *Labour History*, 55 No.5 (2014), pp.608-611.
[73] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Greyhound Racing At Belle Vue' (1927); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Europe's First Greyhound Racing Track' (22 Jul 1926); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The Greyhound Girls' (5 Feb 1934).

the major companies, with 37 Pathé, 9 Reuters, and 15 Movietone clips.[74] Less formally commercialised, darts emerged in working-class areas, usually played in local pubs, and proliferated as a more standardised game with the formation of the National Darts Association in 1924.[75] Again, darts items tended towards light entertainment. In 1937, Movietone featured a staged comedy sketch, titled 'Debs'' And Duchesses Declare That Darts Are ''Too Thrilling', which foregrounded the working-class character of the sport by mocking aristocrats trying and failing to throw darts.[76] Satirising elites through a pastime likely familiar to most cinemagoers, here newsreels producers were acknowledging the social background of their regular audiences. Speedway motorcycle racing, meanwhile, garnered just ten hits in Pathé's database, and this, whilst consisting mainly of the England versus Australia speedway tests at Wembley, also included a student motorcycle race and women in Miami riding scooters. These sports were filmed to provide a sporadic dash of novelty for audiences rather than as a regular news source for devotees of the dogs or speedway. Nonetheless, they reveal that newsreel producers were happy to feature heavily commercialised sports and made some effort to acknowledge the varied interests of working-class cinemagoers.

Situating newsreels in the inter-war media landscape, they were closer in style and content to the popular press than BBC radio. The BBC fitfully covered horse races in the 1920s; only towards the end of the period was racing given consistent radio coverage.[77] Football was even more intermittent on the radio as clubs, fearing it would hurt gate receipts, remained hostile to BBC broadcasting.[78] When the BBC attempted to broadcast a greyhound race for the first time in 1940, as part of its wartime effort to better represent working-class tastes, it faced heavy criticism from the broadsheets and government officials.[79] In contrast, the popular press, such as the *Daily Express* or *Daily Mirror*, gave extensive coverage to these sports in their back pages.[80] Thus, in catering to working-class sporting interests, newsreels styled themselves as cinematic tabloids.

[74] Pathe and Movietone archive key word searches, date ranges of '1919-1939' and decade of the 1930s, respectively.
[75] Leon Davis, 'From a pub game to a sporting spectacle: the professionalisation of British Darts, 1970–1997', *Sports in History,* 38 No.4 (2018), pp.511-512.
[76] *British Movietone*, 'Debs'' And Duchesses Declare That Darts Are ''Too Thrilling' (8 Feb 1937).
[77] Huggins, *Horse Racing*, pp.49-50.
[78] Matthew Taylor, *The Leaguers: the making of professional football in England, 1900-1939* (Liverpool: 2005), pp.268-269.
[79] Taylor, 'Sport and Civilian Morale', p.337.
[80] Hill, *Sport*, p.45.

This is evidenced most strikingly in how newsreels portrayed gambling when compared with other inter-war media. Working-class betting was an object of condemnation from moralists, religious groups, and middle-class reformers throughout the period. The introduction of greyhound racing in 1926, with its new totaliser betting system and bevvy of bookmakers, sparked fresh moral panic and calls for further restrictions on gambling.[81] The burgeoning of legal turf-side, and rifer illegal street-corner, bookmakers further stoked anti-gambling campaigns. In Manchester alone, the census recorded 108 bookmakers in 1921, which mushroomed to 367 by 1931. A spate of local moral condemnation from religious organisations accompanied this.[82] Distaste for gambling among these pressure groups influenced some of the press. Even by 1937, despite the rest of the national press featuring detailed racing news, the *Manchester Guardian* refused to publish racing tips.[83]

By contrast, newsreels, following the popular press, referenced and filmed gambling without moralistic overtones. For horseracing, the odds of horses were frequently stated by commentators and shots of the bookies or totalisers at the race grounds were commonplace; one commentator summarised the Grand National for viewers in 1939 as 'worth almost £10,000 from bets, about a 1,000 a minute'.[84] Pathé even experimented with hiring 'the famous racing Journalist of *the Daily & Sunday Express*' G. H. Gilbey to provide punditry and tips for the 1933 Grand National.[85] This demonstrates the extent to which newsreels modelled themselves on the popular press in sporting content. There were also items on more controversial types of gambling. A 1933 *Pathetone Weekly* item featured a comedy greyhound race narrated by 'Charles Eade of *the Sunday Express'*. He joked about the old female bookmaker shown counting money, saying 'ah, the tote...the tote is fully mechanised and could handle thousands of pounds an hour, but she doesn't, one and fourpence on the black please'.[86] The assumption that the audience had some foreknowledge of totalisers, and the overall light-hearted tone, was a far cry from moral censure. Likewise, in 1937 Pathé ran an item on the football pools, showing a man filling in his pools card and checking the football results in the paper.[87] Gambling in a variety of forms was readily shown without condescension.

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[81] Laybourn, 'King Solomon's mines', pp.607-608.
[82] Jones, Stephen, 'Working-class sport: Manchester between the wars' in Richard Holt (ed.), *Sport and the working class in modern Britain* (Manchester: 1990), p.74.
[83] Huggins, *Horse Racing*, p.45.
[84] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Grand National 1939' (27 Mar 1939); *Gaumont-British News*, 'Young Mischief Wins Scottish Grand National at Bogside' (14 Apr 1938).
[85] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The World's Greatest Race - Sound Version' (27 Mar 1933).
[86] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Sportshots No. 14 - Going to the Dogs' (22 May 1933).
[87] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Filling Up - Football Coupons' (18 Jan 1937).

The apex of this attitude towards gambling was found in regular coverage of the Irish Sweepstakes throughout the 1930s. This was a lottery based upon three British horse races, started by the Irish Hospitals Trust to raise funds. By 1933, it had raised £27 million and it was estimated two thirds of tickets were bought in Britain.[88] Yet, the 1934 Lotteries and Betting Act, introduced at the hightide of anti-betting lobbying in Britain, outlawed participation in lotteries and clamped down on illegal betting.[89] It did not, however, prevent British media reporting on the Sweep, which the press continued to do and newsreels followed suit. [90] Newsreels also had an advantage over print media, as they could screen the pomp of the carnival procession that attended the lottery draw in the Irish Free State, presenting a sumptuous visual attraction to cinemagoers.[91] Moreover, commentary touted the rags-to-riches potential for winners of the Sweep. One commentator mixed humour with hope, positing that, 'the numbers may mean a fortune to the lucky holder but some of us who've not touched lucky wonder what the hoodoo was about'.[92] Another in 1935 rhapsodised that,

'bringing fortune large and small to hundreds of people all over the world...prizes from the magic drums will mean wedding bells for happy couples throughout the world, happy homes, and a life unfettered by worry...the drum is no respecter of persons, rich are made richer, but on poor folk too fate sometimes smiles kindly and the sweep is her messenger...before an audience of all classes, as they watch and wait, are [referring to the nurses who drew the winning numbers] personifications of fate, hope, and great expectations'.[93]

Newsreels presented participation in a lottery that was banned in Britain as a thrilling experience that could grant lucky recipients of all classes, but in particular the poor, the ticket to happiness through social mobility. Gambling was at worst harmless fun and at best a gateway to a prosperous life. The division between middle and working-class opinion on the Sweepstake was played out at the Darnall Cinema in Sheffield's eastern suburbs. A matinee audience of children watched a Gaumont-British newsreel 'comprising Irish Sweepstake pictures…[and] Girl Steeple Jacks. Children clapped in appreciation'.[94] The relatively well-heeled observer

[88] Emmanuel Roudaut, 'Tote Clubs", Dog Tracks and Irish Sweepstake: Controversy and Compromise Over Popular Gambling in Interwar Britain', *Angles* 5 No.5 (2017), p.9.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] *Ibid*, p.8
[91] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Ireland: Irish Sweepstake Draw for Grand National' (1932); *Pathé Gazette*, 'St Patrick's Day Special Edition - Grand National Sweepstake Procession' (21 Mar 1938).
[92] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Wheel of Fortune' (22 Mar 1934).
[93] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Irish Sweep Draw Aka the Honeymoon Sweep' (28 Mar 1935).
[94] Sheffield City Archives, *Material collected by the Sheffield Social Survey Committee*

who recorded this went on to grumble that 'the picture was certainly not very educational'.[95] The findings of the general report also claimed without relish that there had been observed 'Great clapping over [the] Irish Sweepstake'.[96] Children's desire too see spectacular entertainment and the sports they enjoyed was therefore met by newsreels' images of spectacular sweepstakes and thrilling commercial sports, much to the chagrin of middle-class moralisers. In terms of class, then, newsreels producers were relatively well-attuned to popular culture and aimed to represent the tastes and interests of their habitual working-class audiences.

From the outset of newsreel production, sportsmen were considered choice celebrities to capture on film. Adrian Bingham and Bernhard Rieger have, respectively, argued that sports stars were a reinvention of an older heroic masculine archetype, previously embodied by the imperial explorer or soldier.[97] They were a means for media producers to lionise an older form of elite masculinity with the fresh appeal of newly popular public figures. John Tosh defines this as a hegemonic 'manliness…often equated with excellence of physique, stoical endurance', and martial ability.[98] The rugged soldier or imperial explorer of juvenile fiction *Boy's Own Paper*, still sold in the 1930s, best typified this elite manliness of the true English gentleman.[99] There were certainly some sportsmen which newsreels garlanded with the Edwardian rhetoric of manly sportsmanship. As will be seen, cricketers were lauded as gentlemanly heroes of Empire. British aviators were also feted in a similar vein, frequently idealised by the inter-war media as masculine role models who were able to preserve their manliness under extraordinary duress.[100] They manifested manly attributes such as courage and stoicism in a new technological age.[101] Newsreels conformed to this when covering the feats of male aviators, who punctuated the news over the two decades in a series of record-breaking flights and attempts.

Item titles neatly encapsulated the overall ideological framing. Jim Mollison's attempted double Atlantic crossing was titled, 'The Greatest Air Adventure Ever' by Pathé in 1932.[102] The footage itself was lacklustre, Mollison talking to camera about his flight before a staged

[95] *Ibid*.
[96] *Ibid*.
[97] Bingham, *Gender*, pp.218-224; Bernhard Rieger, ''Fast couples': technology, gender and modernity in Britain and Germany during the nineteen-thirties', *Historical Research* 76 No.193 (2003), pp.383-384.
[98] John Tosh, 'Home and Away: The Flight from Domesticity in Late-Nineteenth-Century England Re-visited', *Gender and History* 27 No.3 (2015), p.563.
[99] Francis, 'Domestication', pp.643-644.
[100] Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the culture of modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: 2005), pp.122-123.
[101] *Ibid*, p.137.
[102] *Pathé Gazette,* 'The Greatest Air Adventure Ever! – Version One' (11 Aug 1932).

farewell to his wife Amy Mollison (née Johnson).[103] The title thereby attempted to imbue somewhat mundane scenes with the daring of adventure. Pathé's 1933 item of a record-breaking Royal Air Force pilot returning home was similarly dubbed, 'A Hero's Homecoming'.[104] Jubilant scenes, with the town's residents pulling his car amidst cheering crowds, presented the pilot's achievements as the epitome of human achievement. The commentary, which stated 'like all brave men he was modest', emphasised the aviator's bravery and reserve.[105] Thus, aviators were ideal gentlemen and thoroughly good sports.

However, the laudation of sportsmen more generally also included working-class professional athletes. These items were generally not freighted with the same ideological baggage of sportsmanship and manliness. They tended to be filmed foremost as notable celebrities with interested fan bases rather than as explicit role models. Moreover, they were not placed beneath amateur 'gentlemen' sports players. Many items were filmed to grant access to sports stars' personal lives. Boxing stands out as a prominent example in early Pathé items. Centred around London, as Matthew Taylor reveals, inter-war boxing had a core fan base of working-class Londoners and, indeed, most British boxers hailed from a background of manual labourers.[106] Cameramen filmed fighters such as Ted Lewis or Phil Scott in items which revealed their lives outside of the boxing ring such as showing them in training or with their children at home, Lewis even having his fortune told in one item.[107] This imbued the men onscreen with individuality and treated them akin to other celebrities.

Throughout the period, footballers were likewise presented as minor celebrities. A spotlight series on football teams, providing brief biographies and close ups of players, recurred in Pathé's supplementary cinemagazine *Pathé Sound Pictorial*, and later *Pathetone Weekly*, from 1934.[108] Like boxing, until the 1960s the typical footballer worked a manual job alongside playing for the team.[109] These working-class teams were given an equitable share of the limelight, standing beside cricketers and aviators in the newsreel pantheon of celebrities.

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[103] *Ibid*.
[104] *Pathé Gazette,* 'A Hero's Homecoming' (22 May 1933).
[105] *Ibid*.
[106] Matthew Taylor, 'Round the London Ring: Boxing, Class, and Community in interwar London', *London Journal* 34 No.2 (2009), p.140, p.149.
[107] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Kid And The Boy' (17 Nov 1921); *Pathé Gazette,* 'Kid Lewis' (8 May 1922); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Our Man For Dempsey' (3 Sep 1925).
[108] *Pathé Sound Pictorial*, 'Famous Football Clubs No. 1 - Newcastle United' (4 Jan 1934); *Pathé Sound Pictorial,* 'Famous Football Clubs in Training No. 8 - Sheffield United' (10 Jan 1935); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Famous Football Teams In Training No. 1 Leeds United' (24 Sep 1938); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Famous Football Clubs In Training "Birmingham"' (9 Jan 1939).
[109] Colls, *Sporting Life*, pp.246-248.

Indeed, a 1935 Pathé item called 'Personalities of the Moment' featured an interview of two new teenage players for Arsenal, with broad Welsh and Lancastrian accents respectively, in between footage of tennis player Fred Perry and American aviatrix Amelia Earhart.[110]

The interview-style item was perhaps key to the significance of working-class sportsmen's celebrity status. It gave them a chance to speak to audiences in genuine regional accents. After sound came to newsreels, an innovation in football items was the inclusion of post-match studio interviews with team captains. Though often stilted and full of anodyne sporting platitudes, interviewees stressed their civic pride and it allowed a rare means for regional accents to reach cinemagoers.[111] Jo Fox has argued that 'ordinary' people speaking in authentic working-class dialects and accents only started to appear regularly in popular cinema between 1939 and 1942.[112] Yet, despite the omnipresent Oxford accent of newsreel commentators, working-class voices like those of footballers and boxers found their way into newsreels. Though not the only time 'authentic' accents were heard in cinema programmes before 1939, it was likely the principal way such voices were heard routinely. Moreover, as letters to fan magazines and observations from exhibitors in the trade press attested, newsreel commentators' received pronunciation met with occasional derision and ridicule from audiences. If the cinemagoing public routinely saw themselves onscreen, this provided a rarer though still somewhat regular opportunity to hear from people who sounded like themselves. Thus, newsreels were generally inclusive of working-class tastes and sporting culture.

Turning from class to gender, the treatment of women's sports by inter-war media has proved an ongoing debate amongst historians. Reafaelle Nicholson, taking a similar position to many women's historians, has argued that most mainstream media, even if giving semi-regular coverage of women's sports for the first time, either marginalised it by relegating it to the women's pages or else were fixated upon the sex appeal of female competitors.[113] It was therefore left to specialist periodicals run by women's sports organisations, like the *Women's Cricket* magazine, to provide detailed, normative coverage of sportswomen.[114] Others, such as Adrian Bingham or Althea Melling, have argued that portrayals were more nuanced than

[110] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Personalities of the Moment' (17 Jan 1935). Note that the segment which originally featured Earhart is, ironically, missing in the extant clip.
[111] *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Captains' (27 Apr 1931*); Pathé Gazette,* 'By Three Clear Goals!' (1 May 1933); *Pathé Gazette,* 'Interview with Captains' (29 Apr 1935).
[112] Jo Fox, 'Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the "Ordinary" in British Films of the Second World War', *The Journal of British Studies* 45 No.4 (2006), pp.842-843.
[113] Rafaelle Nicholson, "our own paper": evaluating the impact of the women's cricket magazine, 1930-1967', *Women's History Review,* 24 No.5 (2015), p.684.
[114] *Ibid*, p.682.

unmitigated chauvinism.[115] In popular football fiction and the press, sportswomen were frequently characterised as legitimate players, independent and talented.

Hitherto, Mike Huggins has characterised newsreels as a rather reactionary medium when dealing with women's increasing participation in sports. In newsreel coverage of women's sport overall, he argues it conformed with contemporary conservative views of sport as an inherently male arena.[116] For example, Huggins highlights the mocking commentary which overlaid some women's football items as evidence that producers treated sportswomen as aberrant interlopers in what was rightfully a man's game.[117] It is also true that newsreels to some extent had an equivalent of the women's pages in *Eve's Film Review*. This was a cinemagazine supplement to the main newsreel aimed specifically at women, which ran between 1921 and 1933.[118] Pathé produced blocks of *Eve's Review*, bought by cinemas as a series of related issues on one theme or topic. One such series began in 1926 was called 'sports-lights'. Many items in this series were of women playing novel sports or purportedly playing a sport for the first time.[119] The humour was often derived from the women acting typically feminine whilst playing 'masculine' sports. For instance, one 1927 item made light of the fact that when not playing, women cricketers sat knitting.[120] In regular Pathé items of women's sport, male commentators were not above assessing a female athlete's looks. In a 1939 item entitled 'Women's Grand National', the commentator joked in a blatant double entendre referring to both the horses and the female jockeys that, 'as the papers put it, sixteen good-looking starters parade to the post, and you can take that which way you like'.[121] Sometimes relegating women's sports to their own segment and occasionally unable to resist a demeaning jest at sportswomen's expense, newsreels were hardly a feminist production.

Nevertheless, women's sports were included in the main newsreel issues.[122] If featured notably less than male sports, female sports were not wholly relegated to the 'women's newsreel' of *Eve's Review*. Moreover, scores of items presented a more positive image than Huggins contends. Many focused on the skill of female athletes. This was certainly the case for women's

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[115] See Bingham, *Gender,* pp.69-81; Althea Melling, 'Ray of the Rovers': The Working-Class Heroine in Popular Football Fiction, `1915-1925', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 15 No.1 (1998), pp.97-122.
[116] Huggins, 'Something for the Ladies', pp.695-696.
[117] Huggins, 'Projecting the Visual', p.81.
[118] British Universities Film and Video Council, *News on Screen Archive*, 'Eve and Everybody's Film Review'. (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/80#:~:text=Eve's%20Film%20Review%20was%20one,was%20incorporated%20into%20Pathe%20Pictorial).
[119] A typical example is *Eve's Film Review*, 'The Rival Sex' (26 May 1932).
[120] *Eve's Film Review*, '(Women Cricket)' (1927).
[121] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Women's Grand National' (6 Apr 1939).
[122] *Ibid*; *Pathé Gazette*, 'Women Footballers (26 Apr 1920).

football, where commentary and intertitles praised the talent of players. In the 1920s, Dick Kerr's team was arguably among the most famous women's football team in England. Formed during the Great War as a factory team in Preston, Kerr's women continued to play throughout the inter-war period. Already by 1921 the team was estimated to have played before approximately 900,000 spectators.[123] Embellishing their already considerable celebrity was the team's frequent lionisation in newsreels. One 1926 item opened with the intertitle, '"Weaker sex?" said the captain of the famous Dick Kerr Women's Football Team. "Not much weakness about us." Watching their training we agreed'.[124]

Surprisingly, women's cricket was also presented as a legitimate endeavour. A typical example was a 1931 *Eve's Film Review* item, titled 'Is Cricket A Suitable Game For Eve?', which answered this question by directly countering various arguments against female participation in a series of intertitles and visual demonstrations of women playing cricket.[125] Titles cards on other items, such as 'We Don't Play Dolly Cricket!' and 'Fine play', further stressed the competency and strength of female cricketers.[126] A 1937 item covering a women's Australia versus England Match presented it as a hopeful story of women convincing sceptical men of their skill. It ended with footage of old male spectators contrasted with the commentator's conclusion that, 'a lot of die hards who came to scoff remained to cheer, the ladies put up an excellent show, even if they didn't look like W.G. Grace'.[127] Framing the debate over whether women could play certain sports as a largely rhetorical question, the newsreels frequently stressed that women were able and legitimate players.

Outside of such explicit commendation of women players, it is worth noting that the majority of female sports items differed little from the filming of male teams, with the same stock shots showing women playing the game with little overtly gendered commentary.[128] The difference between the sexes was therefore minimised by the standardised way newsreel cameramen filmed sports, compounded by the fact that editors would put male and female sports items beside one another in a single issue. Thus, many items projected a normative view of female involvement in sport; derision, though present, was only one aspect of newsreel coverage.

[123] Colls, *Sporting Life*, pp.243-244.
[124] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Playing Adam's Game' (1926).
[125] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Is Cricket A Suitable Game For Eve?' (1931).
[126] *Pathé Gazette*, 'We Don't Play 'dolly' Cricket!' (4 Jun 1931); *Empire News Bulletin*, 'Cricket: Women's Cricket Match At Beckenham' (22 Jul 1929).
[127] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Women's Cricket Match Of England Vs. Australia' (14 Jun 1937).
[128] Taking football as an example see *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Football: Women's International Football at Herne Hill' (14 May 1925); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Football for Girls - Degrading?' (24 Mar 1930); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Aren't Girls Wonderful?' (9 Apr 1931).

Generally, items framed female participation as an understated matter of fact or else emphasised the skill of adept female teams and even explicitly countered arguments for their exclusion.

Moreover, sportswomen were filmed as celebrities alongside their male counterparts. For example, the heroism of pilots was not exclusively male. Items which covered Amy Johnson's achievements showed her being greeted by rapturous crowds, with close-up shots of Johnson and brief speeches by her, markedly like coverage of male pilots.[129] A 1936 item stated that Johnson proved, 'by sheer skill and daring there's no difficulty that can't be overcome'.[130] Asserting Johnson's bravado in overcoming adversity echoed commentary which touted the plucky resilience of male pilots. Johnson was portrayed as possessing typically masculine traits and receiving comparable praise.

This ought not be taken too far, however. Bernhard Rieger shows how, in wider media, Johnson had to use acceptable models of femininity, being girlish or assuming the styles of a respectable Society lady, to enable her laudation alongside male peers.[131] Newsreels likewise presented Johnson as bounded within conventional femininity. For instance, a 1930 Movietone item dubbed Johnson 'girl heroine of great flight'.[132] Both feminising hero to heroine and the juvenile epithet distinguished Johnson as a young woman. Most monikers given to Johnson were similarly feminising. She was called 'queen of the skies' and 'our first lady of the air'.[133] How Johnson could be presented was therefore sometimes delimited to respectable femininity.

Nevertheless, Johnson was still lauded, and over the course of the 1930s given considerably more screen time than her less successful husband Jim Mollison. Similarly, two female cricketers, Muriel Maxted and M. Turner, received items on their prowess, being dubbed 'Dr. Grace in Petticoats' and a 'Feminine Bradman' respectively.[134] Equating them to contemporary cricketing legends, it suggested that, safely situated in the boundaries of respectable femininity, women could be presented on par with top sportsmen in terms of skill. Even working-class sportswomen were occasionally filmed by newsreels. The Lancastrian accent of a women's

[129] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Aviation: Amy Johnson flight to Australia' (1930); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Bravo Amy' (18 May 1936).
[130] Pathé, 'Bravo Amy'.
[131] Rieger, 'Fast couples', p.387.
[132] *British Movietone*, 'Amy Johnson Meets the Test Match Victors and Australians Tell The World About Their Happy Tour' (4 Sep 1930).
[133] *Gaumont*, 'Aviation: Amy Johnson Flight to Australia'; *Pathé*, 'Bravo Amy'.
[134] *Pathé Gazette*, 'A Dr Grace In Petticoats' (29 May 1922); *Pathé Gazette*, 'A Feminine Bradman' (12 May 1930).

football captain in 1931, albeit in a light-hearted item, rang loud as she commentated over her team's training.[135] Like working-class men, women of all classes were given female sporting heroes to admire.

When considering newsreels' gendered coverage of female sports, it is vital to appreciate the comparatively limited means for inter-war women to see sport. Attending a match or game as a spectator was generally, though not exclusively, a male pastime; stadiums and grandstands were 'very much a male cultural domain'.[136] Recognising this, Stephen Jones has argued that 'films were an important alternative to sports, especially for women' as a leisure activity outside of the home.[137] However, this was not a world apart from sporting culture. Through newsreels, sport was brought to female cinemagoers every week, including normative images of women's sports.

It is worth comparing the immense numbers of cinemagoers, the majority of which were young women, to the readers of the *Women's Cricket* magazine, the first edition of which sold just 500 copies by the end of 1930.[138] For many women, especially from working-class backgrounds, the cinema was arguably one of the main places they would see sports. Moreover, even if relegated to *Eve's Film Review*, there is evidence to suggest women enjoyed this cinemagazine. Several women wrote to the producer Fred Watts to praise *Eve's Review* and often inquired for further information on specific items.[139] Simply because it was in the 'women's newsreel' did not mean it was necessarily of less importance, especially for women cinemagoers themselves. As a primary medium for presenting women's sport to women, the normative aspects of newsreels' coverage must be acknowledged. It provided one of the few means that most women could vicariously participate in sporting culture as part of their everyday leisure. As a gendered medium, newsreels were ultimately more inclusive than Huggins and others have claimed.

Those sports which were more socially exclusive, participation delimited by expense and convention to wealthy elites, also appeared in the yearly schedule of sports content. Indeed, the elite sports which Tallents listed as constituting the national self-image all featured in the newsreel production calendar: the Oxford versus Cambridge boat race, Henley Regatta, cricket

[135] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The Champions' (21 Dec 1931).
[136] Huggins and Williams, *Sports and the English*, p.14.
[137] Jones, 'Working-Class Sport', p.68.
[138] Nicholson, 'our own paper', p.687. For cinemagoing see Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures', pp.39-53.
[139] *Eve's Film Review and Pathé Pictorial* Correspondence (13 Oct-6 Nov 1928) reprinted in Emily Crosby and Linda Kaye (eds.), *Projecting Britain: The Guide to British Cinemagazines* (London: 2008), p.123.

test matches, and foxhunting. These were hardy annuals as much as football and the major horse races. Yet, seldom were Society sports used as an excuse to descant on the virtues of sportsmanship. Nor did they establish a deferential relationship between the audience in the cinema and the worthies being filmed. Rather, they were filmed foremost as spectacles of fashion and pageantry, where the power to look and judge rested firmly with the cinemagoer.

Many events held by public schools were treated as a means to film the spectacle of Society. For example, the Eton versus Harrow cricket match commentary, with complementing visuals, stressed it was little more than a parade for wealthy fashion.[140] The games ethic of gentlemanliness expressed through sports was displaced in favour of sartorial splendour. One commentator even ridiculed the publicly educated spectators onscreen by affecting a caricatured aristocratic accent over a close-up of a young man in morning dress: 'I say have you seen that old stinker Chumley he's got a marvellous sister''.[141] Another attempt at 'in-joke' camaraderie with cinemagoers at the expense of the onscreen aristocracy, it positioned the aristocratic youth as a figure of fun outside of the imagined cinema audience. More usually, elite sports were filmed as a mixture of colourful pageantry and aspirational fashion. The Royal Ascot horse race was perhaps the pinnacle of this; shots divided between royal pomp and the attire of attendees. The royal drive, when the royal family arrived in their gilt carriage and paraded the course, was treated as the visual highlight for cinemagoers to feast their eyes on.[142] Like the Eton-Harrow cricket match, Ascot commentary also dwelt heavily on the dresses worn by female racegoers. Paramount even went so far as to film an item which gave a preview catwalk of what was to be worn by Society women ahead of the 1938 Ascot.[143] This footage, much like the lavish art deco musicals of the period, aimed to provide an aspirational fantasy of haute couture and aristocratic spectacle for audiences who otherwise would not be able to attend or partake in these socially exclusive sporting occasions. Thus, whilst making audiences familiar with a range of elite sporting events, newsreels portrayed many such elite annuals primarily as escapist entertainment.

The main exception to this trend was cricket, where newsreel editors and commentators gave full-blooded airing to the conservative Edwardian values attached to sportsmanship. Cricket

[140] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Oxford and Cambridge Compete in Cricket Match' (11 Jul 1935); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Eton V Harrow At Lords' (12 Jul 1924); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Oxford University Steeplechases' (12 Feb 1931).
[141] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Eton Plays Harrow in Cricket Match' (13 Jul 1936).
[142] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Royal Ascot Procession with the Arrival Of The Royal Family' (19 Jun 1919); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Royal Ascot' (17 Jun 1932).
[143] *British Paramount News*, 'Preview of Fashions for Royal Ascot' (9 Jun 1938).

has the third-highest number of extant items in the digital databases behind horse racing and football.[144] It was also arguably the most ideologically charged sport for many contemporaries, being made to alternately stand for an elite Englishness, hegemonic masculinity, British imperial superiority, and the rationale behind class-based social hierarchy.[145] The 1932-33 Ashes controversy reveals how newsreels, when cricket became overtly politicised, toed the line and presented the English cricket team as paragons of imperial masculinity. During test matches played in Australia, the England team used a new form of bowling which became known as bodyline tactics. This bowling style angled a fast ball at the batsmen's body, forcing them to duck away or otherwise get hit by a high-speed projectile. The Australian press and cricket community declared bodyline ungentlemanly due to its seeming attempt to cause injury, whilst the British defended it as a legitimate masculine playstyle which merely exposed Australian cowardice. As one irate English columnist thundered, 'would they [Australians] have us believe that the manly game of cricket must, to suit their taste, be mutilated to be fit for eunuchs, not men?'.[146] Bitter debate about what, exactly, was cricket spiralled into a feud over who was exhibiting proper gentlemanliness and which nation could claim to be the more civilised.[147]

Relative unanimity amongst British media over England's righteousness meant newsreel companies adhered to the political consensus. A cartoon in *Pathetone* typified coverage with a self-assured defence of the England team's superior manliness. It asserted bodyline tactics were not designed to injure and, providing animated diagrams of bodyline bowling, demonstrated that it required considerable skill.[148] The implication was that England had not breached gentlemanly conduct by conspiring to injure fellow players and were simply better at cricket than the Australian team. Newsreels also uniformly revered England's cricketers. For instance, a Movietone item of England captain Douglas Jardine speaking at a dinner after winning the Ashes gave him centre stage to describe cricket as 'that beautiful, beautiful game, that is battle, and service, and sport, and art'.[149] Describing cricket as analogous to warfare and a selfless duty invoked the cult of games. This Victorian public-school ethos idealised team sports as the

[144] *Pathé* key word search 'cricket' found 591 Pathé and 179 Reuters clips, and *Movietone* key word search 'cricket' brought up 233 clips.
[145] Hill, *Sports*, p.54.
[146] Patrick McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935* (Basingstoke: 2004), p.99.
[147] *Ibid,* pp.97-98.
[148] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'That "Bodyline" Argument' (6 Aug 1934).
[149] *British Movietone*, 'Jardine Endorses a Cricket Definition' (21 Aug 1933).

crucible for forging martial and manly men to serve throughout the British Empire.[150] That Movietone devoted a full item to Jardine's speech, without commentary, suggests endorsement of his view of cricketers as national manly heroes. Moreover, Jardine jibed the conduct of the Australian crowds during the Ashes, joking that he wanted someone to 'draw an accurate picture of an Australian barracker in full cry'.[151] The British media coined the term 'barracking' for the supposed unruly conduct and coarse shouting from Australian spectators during the controversial test matches. It was taken as proof that Australians as a people lacked the masculine detachment and maturity of proper gentlemen.[152]

Barracking was also pointed out by newsreel commentators covering the test matches. A Movietone commentator noted England cricketer, 'Larwood is submitted to a good deal of barracking… [but] he is not deterred', which was followed by audible jeering noises.[153] As British newsreels highlighted and joked about barracking, they implicitly bolstered English manliness by comparison with the unsporting childishness of Australians. Hence, the Ashes controversy allowed newsreels to trumpet an elite English manliness, implying British superiority to the rest of the Empire in the process. Such coverage by newsreels essentially used cricket to resurrect and refashion the idealised manliness of the Edwardian period. The cricketer was another type of rugged English gentleman in the taxonomy of Edwardian manly icons, and newsreels readily recycled this during the 1932-33 Ashes.

Outside this extraordinary moment, however, cricket coverage was generally not prejudicial to imperial cricket teams. The bulk of cricket items were given to imperial matches, in which Australian and West Indian teams found favourable representation which stressed their talent and sportsmanship.[154] Indeed, the successful Australian cricketer Don Bradman became a greater celebrity than any other cricketer in inter-war British newsreels.[155] Domestic cricket, by comparison, was relatively marginalised. If featured, it was first-class county cricket that was considered newsworthy. League cricket, a distinct variant that emerged in the north and

[150] J.A. Mangan, *The games ethic and imperialism: aspects of the diffusion of an ideal*. (Harmondsworth: 1986).
[151] *Movietone*, 'Jardine Endorses a Cricket Definition'.
[152] McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win*, p.104.
[153] *British Movietone*, 'Leg Theory Bowling Traps Australians in Third Test' (16 Feb 1933).
[154] *Empire News Bulletin*, 'West Indies Give Fine Display Against England Cricketers' (30 Apr 1928); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Cricket Down Under' (30 Nov 1939).
[155] *Gaumont-British News*, 'Australia Versus Middlesex in 1934 Cricket Match' (28 May 1934).

midlands of England with a primarily working-class following, received no coverage by any of the main newsreel companies.[156]

Moreover, in the county and imperial matches filmed by newsreel companies, there was no comment on the social divide between amateur and professional cricketers in teams. The division between those amateurs who purportedly played for the love of the sport and those who were paid to play was broadly a class-based segregation. Amateurs were generally from wealthy or elite backgrounds when compared to professionals.[157] Amateur 'gentlemen' cricketers also captained nearly every county team as a matter of course, were considered the rightful arbiters of good sportsmanship in the game, and even used separate changing rooms and entrances to professional players.[158] Here, newsreels were at variance with the popular press, who were more critical of the distinction between cricketers, which was seen as stuffy and old-fashioned.[159] Newsreels producers, following their standard editorial policy when dealing with points of 'controversy', remained silent on the matter. Fixating on imperial cricket whilst ignoring popular alternatives, and rehashing many of the Edwardian sentiments cricket was supposedly emblematic of, cricket was where newsreels producers were most conservative in their treatment of sporting culture.

Section Three, Local Sporting Customs and Civic Exhibition:

By the end of this period, a roster of 'national' events such as Armistice Day and Empire Day, were well-publicised and performed across Britain.[160] Sports were key to this national culture, as Tallents suggested, forming an annual calendar of events and sporting seasons. Despite being often described as a catalyst for this, it was only by the mid-1930s that the BBC started to broadcast major sporting events annually.[161] From around 1920, newsreel companies had already settled upon a largely unchanging roster of 'hardy annuals' which were filmed each year. Pathé's end of year reviews were largely roundups of the year's sporting occasions. The 1934 Review of the Year, for instance, featured the Oxbridge boat race, the Grand National, the FA Cup, the Ashes, Yacht racing, the Derby, Wimbledon, and the Australian Air Race as

[156] Jeffrey Hill, 'League cricket in the North and Midlands, 1900-1940' in Richard Holt (ed.), *Sport and the working class in modern Britain* (Manchester: 1990), pp.121-122, p.130.
[157] Jack Williams, ''The Really Good Professional Captain Has Never Been Seen!': Perceptions of the Amateur/Professional Divide in County Cricket, 1900-39', *Sport in History,* 26 No.3 (2006), p.433.
[158] *Ibid*, p.439.
[159] Ross McKibbin, 'Class, politics, money: British sport since the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History,* 13 No.2 (2002), p.196.
[160] Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*; English, 'Empire Day'.
[161] Hajkowski, *BBC and National Identity,* chapters one through three.

some of the most important events of the passing year.[162] Likewise, a recurrent type of item in the annual itinerary of Pathé's issues marked the shift from cricket to football seasons, usually with a title such as 'Football Again. With the "fade out" of cricket, thousands of football "fans" flock to all Matches'.[163] Thus, newsreels did much to structure the national sporting culture around a series of annual events. Habitual cinemagoers were therefore well-versed by Pathé and Gaumont-British in what sports were occurring in which months from the early 1920s onwards.

Yet, the exhibition context created by cinema managers and proprietors localised sports items in the same way it did for other newsreel content. The items being projected onscreen were tied to the public life of the localities they were screened in, often being reshaped into an expression of civic pride as a result. In 1932, R. S. Howard, editor of *Gaumont-British News*, defended the amount of celebrity content in his newsreel by arguing that 'personalities of sport, business, and Society are usually just names to the average members of the public; the newsreel does something important, therefore, in bringing such figures to the screen'.[164] As has been demonstrated, the 'personalities' from a diverse range of sports were brought before audiences as newsworthy celebrities. Like other public figures, sports 'stars' acted as civic celebrities in this period. Indeed, some sports players were especially suited to become civic celebrities due to the localised proximity of their own celebrity status.

For instance, before the 1960s footballers' fame tended to be confined to the town or city where their club was based.[165] Newsreel producers attempted to harness this as part of their policy to include local interest items. When a team won the national FA Cup, their arrival at the club's hometown was often treated as a civic occasion by municipal leaders, with a motorcade procession through the town or city centre and a formal reception of the team by the mayor. Every year, cameramen from Pathé and sometimes other companies were dispatched to the relevant locality to film this event. Already by the early 1920s, a typical shot list had crystalised for filming a team's homecoming: panning shots of the decorated motorcade procession surrounded by dense crowds, shots of mounted police holding back thronging spectators, shots of supporters cheering direct to the camera, and close ups of the victorious team being greeted

[162] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Review of the Year 1934' (28 Dec 1934).
[163] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Cricket Fades, Football Again' (29 Aug 1927).
[164] *Film Weekly* (2 Dec 1932), pp.20-21.
[165] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.344.

with a speech by the mayor outside a civic building.[166] With the addition of sound in the early 1930s, the panning shots were overlaid with the jubilant roar of the crowd and the mayors' brief speech was often presented ad verbatim to viewers.[167] Principally these shots and soundscape were utilised to covey the scale and intensity of the celebration, that the whole populace of a locality had turned out to show their support. One 1935 item covering Sheffield Wednesday's homecoming opened with the title, 'Sheffield Stops Work', whilst over scenes of massed crowds the commentator stated that 'it's many a year since Sheffield saw scenes like this, the great city of steel is overcome in a delirium of joy'.[168] A football homecoming was portrayed as uniting the whole city in a shared sense of occasion which rivalled any other local event of this kind, excepting perhaps a royal visit.

Moreover, the civic purpose of the team's homecoming was underscored in mayor's speeches. The mayor of West Bromwich, welcoming home the local West Albion team in 1931, expressed the usual platitudes when he stated that, 'I want to welcome you in the name of the West Bromwich townspeople here today. You have wrought a great victory, we are proud of you and you have brought honour to our town'.[169] Allegiance to the local football team became linked to a more diffuse sense of belonging to the urban municipality. Support for the team, paying little heed to the fact that many cities and towns hosted multiple teams with fierce partisanship between them, became synonymous with a common civic culture.

However, as with other local interest items, national newsreel companies tended to film homecomings in a standardised way. For instance, both Pathé newsreels and *Empire News Bulletin* used similar title cards, 'Back Home With T'Coop' and 'T'Coop', for coverage of the Bolton Wanderers's homecoming celebrations in 1929. Bolton identity was thus clumsily shorthanded to a stereotyped dialect. This was recycled again in commentary over Sheffield Wednesday's homecoming, when the commentator mangled the phrase, 'T'Coop comes to Sheffield' in his clipped received pronunciation.[170] A generic and cliched Northern identity overrode any sensitivity to the sharply distinct Lancashire and South Yorkshire identities of Bolton and Sheffield, still less were the individual civic cultures of each locality heeded.

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[166] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Home in Triumph (Tinted)' (30 Apr 1925); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Tottenham's Joy Day' (28 Apr 1921); *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Cup of Joy' (28 Apr 1927).
[167] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Well Done United!' (28 Apr 1932); *Pathe Gazette*, 'F.A. Cup Winners' (30 Apr 1936).
[168] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Sheffield Stops Work' (2 May 1935).
[169] *Pathe Gazette*, 'A Triumphal Homecoming' (30 Apr 1931).
[170] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Back Home with T'Coop' (2 May 1929); *Empire News Bulletin*, 'Football: FA Cup goes Home to Bolton' (2 May 1929).

Nevertheless, sports items were often given special treatment in how they were screened at individual cinemas. When local teams appeared in newsreels, cinema managers capitalised upon footballers' status as resident heroes. For example, in 1938 members of Worthing football club were invited to watch newsreel footage of the Cup Final at the town's Odeon and then provide their opinions on the match for the audience.[171] Partly it was the players' expertise that was being used to draw in football fans and enhance their vicarious engagement with the newsreel through extended punditry. Yet it was also the role of footballers as civic representatives of their locality that managers hoped to capitalise upon, as patrons would come to support their team at the cinema and by extension demonstrate loyalty to their hometown.

The same year, Glasgow's Celtic and Lanark Football Club players attended the Picture House cinema at the manager's request to watch a Gaumont-British newsreel of a game they had played the previous Saturday before discussing it onstage. The event was well-attended and the newsreel of the match reportedly 'proved a big draw all week'.[172] Again, footballers were here feted as civic celebrities at the cinema to enhance local interest in the newsreel. Previously in 1935, the Picture House hosted Glasgow's other major football team, the Rangers, to watch newsreel footage of themselves winning that year's Scottish Cup Final. The team's captain was introduced to the audience by the manager and the trophy itself was displayed in the cinema's foyer.[173] What is remarkable about these two visits is that the Rangers and Celtic football clubs were deeply implicated in fierce sectarian and ethnic conflict between Glasgow's Irish and Catholic minorities and Scots and Protestant groups. The football season 'brought ethnic divisions to the forefront of civic life and turned religious affiliations into the source of intense antagonism. Hundreds and even thousands of people joined in the communal violence which marred meetings between Rangers and Celtic'.[174] The cinema therefore strived to serve as a non-partisan civic venue outside of the local sectarian tensions, though in practice the audiences who came to see each team were no doubt predetermined by which side they supported. Thus, newsreels' sports content, and its exhibition as a civic occasion, became a means for fans to express their club loyalties, and by extension attachment to their community.

Though particularly suited to the role, it was also not just footballers who were invited to be civic celebrities at local cinemas. In 1939, A. W. Manson, manager of the Roxy cinema in

[171] *Kinematograph Weekly* (12 May 1938), p.37.
[172] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Feb 1938), p.21.
[173] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 May 1935), p.128.
[174] Andrew Davies, 'Football and Sectarianism in Glasgow during the 1920s and 1930s', *Irish Historical Studies*, 35 No.138 (2006), p.201.

Swinton, after showing a Universal newsreel featuring the Lincoln Handicap horserace, brought onto the stage 'two well-known racing personalities' Billy Smallwood, a local trainer, and Mitchell, the jockey who rode the winning horse. It was reported that as 'the horse and its associates has a great deal of local interest, the audience was highly appreciative of this pleasant interlude'.[175] Similarly, when Paramount rushed footage of Jim and Amy Mollisons' transatlantic flight back to Britain in 1933, they ensured that a 'special edition…was despatched by air to Scarborough, the home of the Mollisons, for a special screening at the Capitol. The reel contained a message from Amy Mollison to her parents… [who] were invited to a special screening of the reel'.[176] Even the winners of a national horse race or globally renowned aviators could be refashioned into local representatives through the special exhibition of newsreels in their hometowns. Thus, cinema managers and newsreel producers transformed sports stars into another variant of civic celebrity.

As with most other staple newsreel content, sporting events were often, though not always, undifferentiated and standardised in how they were filmed and subsequently distributed across Britain in general release newsreels. Yet again, cinema managers utilised publicity techniques to anchor 'national' sports into the particular civic cultures of their locality. In May 1935, C.A. Cranthorn, manager of the Odeon in Blackheath, made a mechanised model of Wembley stadium for a window display at the cinema, with signs which stated 'Gaumont-British News…presents the Cup Final to Blackheath', enticing customers to come and watch the very scenes the model was inspired by. Cranthorn also purposely made the football pitch markings on the model incorrect, running a contest which asked members of the public 'to criticise the display and inform the management in writing of any fault they found'.[177] It shrewdly played upon the same impulse which drove habitual cinemagoers to write to fan magazines and vent their spleens. Moreover, Blackheath, being a West Midlands town situated near Birmingham, meant that 'all the football enthusiasts of the district are West Bromwich Albion supporters', the Birmingham team who had qualified to the FA Cup Final against Sheffield Wednesday around the time that Cranthorn ran his campaign which 'proved exceedingly popular' as a result.[178] When local teams played in national games, cinema managers readily stirred up regional loyalties to boost the newsreel. Interest in the national occasion was coupled with expressions of civic pride.

[175] *Kinematograph Weekly* (6 Apr 1939), p.29.
[176] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Aug 1933), p.5.
[177] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 May 1935), p.67
[178] *Ibid*.

Managers further co-opted other commercial venues or civic institutions into their publicity. In 1936, the managers of La Scala and Empress cinemas in Runcorn collaborated with the proprietors of the 'town's leading dance hall' to hold a Grand National ball.[179] In the middle of the dance floor were cardboard horses and gold-painted decorations depicting a scene from the newsreel, alongside 'index cards reminding dancers of the screening of the [newsreel] film at' both cinemas.[180] Thus, promotion of sports items in newsreels was another way that cinemas became connected to the wider apparatus of civic culture, collaborating with a range of institutions and businesses, if only to increase ticket sales.

The scale of publicity for major sports items rivalled that undertaken for feature films. In 1937 Tommy Farr, then the Empire and British Heavyweight champion, fought American boxer Joe Louis for the World Championship title. The Davis Theatre in Croydon pulled out all the stops to promote the extended short film of the fight which was to be exhibited at the cinema. The manager erected a 30-foot banner outside the cinema and distributed 30,000 flyers to Croydon addresses advertising the fight film. He also collaborated with the regional press to feature editorials on the boxing match and photographs of the fighters, and further arranged for the local shops to display stills from the film and boxing gloves in their window displays. A newsreel, which included an interview with Farr about the upcoming fight, was edited by staff of the Davis Theatre to include the intertitle caption, 'See the film of the fight at this theatre. Next Week'.[181]

Likewise, in 1932 the manager of the Picture House in Ludlow turned a minor local connection to the Grand National into a weekend-long publicity campaign for the newsreel of the race. Upon discovering that W. Parsonage, a town 'councillor and well-known [local] sportsman' owned the winning horse, the cinema manager 'ordered a special copy of the film of the race and showed this all day on the following Saturday. A sandwich-board man toured the town advertising the good news, and crowds stormed the Picture House to see their townsman winning the Grand National'.[182] When Parsonage returned home to Ludlow after the race, he was invited to the Picture House to see the newsreel and address the audience at a special evening performance.[183] Widespread interest in national events begot immense, frequent

[179] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 Apr 1936), p.46.
[180] *Ibid*.
[181] *Kinematograph Weekly* (23 Sep 1937), p.51.
[182] *Kinematograph Weekly* (7 Apr 1932), p.48.
[183] *Ibid*.

publicity of newsreels' sports content which spilled out of the cinema and into streets, shops, and homes.

There were even instances where local cinemas produced their own editions of sports newsreels. The enterprising projectionist of Liverpool's Tatler News Cinema attended the 1935 Grand National with his own camera. He proceeded to shoot a four-and-a-half-minute silent film, which was rushed back to the cinema via taxi to be developed and have intertitle cards written up. It was screened at the Tatler, to the accompaniment of much publicity including someone who was hired to ride through the city streets dressed as a jockey, by the 8:30pm performance on the same day as the race.[184] Beating all the main national newsreel companies in its local release, even the distribution of major sports could be altered by the initiatives of individual cinema staff. Hence, the exhibition context of newsreels meant that they formed a prominent part of a town or city's sporting culture, more often an expression of civic or regional belonging than any cohesive national identity. While newsreels helped to shape the British sporting calendar and familiarised most Britons with the same annual occasions, how these items were viewed in the cinema (or understood and participated in through advertising and publicity stunts around the town) was highly localised.

Newsreel editors, though prioritising 'national' events, also sent cameramen to towns and villages across Britain to film more esoteric sports. Local sporting customs were considered newsworthy for the same reasons civic ceremonies were, and such sports proved to be just as hardy annuals as the Grand National, Cup Final, or the Ashes. Shrovetide football matches, wherein a mob of locals roughhoused with a ball through town to get it into some form of goal, became a prominent fixture in companies' itineraries. In 1938, cinemagoing even ended up tied into the custom at Atherstone, as the local cinema manager brought the match's victors onto the stage for audiences to cheer.[185] The visuals of these items, from several locations in England, focused on the crowd of competitors and their rowdy scuffles for the ball.[186] Indeed, commentary stressed the raucous lack of rules and sense of play inherent to the matches. The teams were, as one 1936 Pathé commentator stated, 'anyone who cares to take part' and tactics were 'any means you like - including all-in wrestling and other gentlemanly behaviour'.[187] This

[184] *Kinematograph Weekly* (11 Apr 1935), p.30.
[185] *Tamworth Herald* (26 Nov 1938), p.8.
[186] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Shrovetide River Football at Ashbourne Derbyshire' (8 Feb 1921); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Ashbourne' (26 Feb 1925); *Pathé Gazette*, 'Celebrates the Advent' (18 Feb 1926); *Pathé Gazette*, 'All Through ... And All Around The Town' (2 Mar 1933).
[187] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Shrovetide Football' (27 Apr 1936).

was coupled with continued mention of the supposed historical origins of the sport, often said to be between 150 to 200 years old.[188] One item from 1934 stated grandiosely that its origins were 'lost in mists of our ancient history' but that 'old customs die hard- even in these modern days'.[189] Shrovetide football, then, was a boisterous eccentric custom, depicted by newsreels as a carnivalesque affair with deep roots in local heritage.

Studying popular sporting customs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Robert Colls argues that these were performative assertions of non-elite rights, a sort of popular constitutionalism demonstrating the importance of precedent by playing out old customs.[190] Moreover, he argues that by the 1920s, customary culture was largely usurped by a middle-class notion of public opinion which increasingly dictated political precedents and social mores.[191] Provincial newspapers do suggest that Shrovetide football was a contested 'tradition' by the inter-war period. In 1930, several participants were arrested for attempting to play the game in Durham after a police ban.[192] Likewise, Atherstone was the scene of repeated clashes with the police, who were brought in to protect shopfront windows on the high street.[193] In contrast to this parochial controversy, newsreels maintained a jocular tone even when covering the raucous elements. Shops being boarded up by local traders was presented as a normal part of fun.[194] The one item that did cover the crowd's scuffles with police in Durham treated it jovially, with a title card stating, 'Official ban did not prevent the game being played in Chester-Le-Street - Oh, no! the police were kept busy pouncing on ball after ball'.[195] Newsreels thus treated the event as harmless revelry and sided with the crowd over the constabulary. Thus, newsreels presented sporting traditions as hearty, if eccentric, expressions of 'ancient' popular culture and local identity.

Shrovetide football was not the only local sporting custom that made its way into newsreels. Many variants of the 'ancient' football match were screened from localities across England.[196] Southend's fancy dress beach football-cum-mudwrestling match was consistently featured

[188] *Pathe Gazette*, '200-Year-Old Football' (10 Mar 1924); *Gaumont-British News*, '1936 Shrove Tuesday Football Game' (27 Feb 1936).
[189] *Pathé Gazette*, 'All Through and Around The Town' (15 Feb 1934).
[190] Colls, *Sporting Life*, pp.126-127.
[191] *Ibid*.
[192] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (5 Mar 1930), p.8.
[193] *Tamworth Herald* (17 Feb 1934), p.8.
[194] *Pathé Gazette*, 'All Through the Town' (1927); *Gaumont Graphic,* 'Shrovetide Football' (1927).
[195] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Centuries' Old Football' (19 Feb 1931).
[196] *Pathé Gazette*, 'News in a Nutshell' (11 Feb 1937); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Shrove Tuesday Sporting Events in Derbyshire and Cornwall' (1930).

most years.[197] Cricket also had its share of quirky local events to be filmed, such as the comic charity match at Ilkley or the two professionals versus a full local team match on the Isle of Oxney.[198] Moreover, exhibition context could further connect newsreel coverage of such customs to the civic culture of a locality. In February 1935, the Scottish town of Jedburgh's cinema commissioned a *Universal News* cameraman to film the local 'Handba' match, a variant on the custom where two teams fought to get a football to their respective side of the town square.[199] This footage, replete with commentary in a Scots accent as opposed to the usual received pronunciation, was specially filmed for exhibition in the district's cinemas. Thus, newsreel coverage of local sporting customs was sometimes tailormade for localities by removing the alienating elements of the generic national edition. Grassroots customary culture, then, was not entirely quashed by a national, middle-class public opinion, as Colls maintains. Rather, the civic ethos of local sports was reproduced by newsreels in their annual coverage of sporting customs, routines, and traditions.

Conclusion:

Contrary to D'Arne's gripe, then, newsreels were integral to the everyday projection and practices of the sports-loving nation. Alongside the popular press, newsreels consistently portrayed sports as a commercialised realm of civic society, but one that was more inclusive and democratic precisely due to its consumerist aspects. The interests of a mixed audience, though with preference for working-class tastes, were given even-handed coverage. Social change linked to sports such as the proliferation of gambling and women's increasing participation in sport was also to varying degrees embraced as part of contemporary sporting culture. Spectators, moreover, were characterised as active participants in the games they attended or the sports they followed. By contrast, an older political rhetoric of sportsmanship remained relatively muted in staple content, with the exception of overtly politicised cricket matches. This democratic nation of sports lovers was also presented as a disaggregated collection of localities, each with their own customs and loyalties. Such localised coverage was further buttressed by the work of cinema managers, who tailored items to accentuate their local

[197] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Southend - Football in the Mud' (30 Aug 1937); *Pathé Gazette*, 'The Referee Gave it Up!' (7 Sep 1931).
[198] *Pathé Gazette*, 'Comic Cricket Match at Ilkley' (27 Sep 1937); *Gaumont-British News*, 'Isle of Oxney Cricket Team Defeated by Ashdown of Kent and Wensley of Sussex' (7 Sep 1936).
[199] *Moving Image Archive*, 'Gaumont- British News No.116, Jedburgh Handba" (7 Feb 1935). Available online at: (https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/1459?search_term=local%20newsreel&search_join_type=AND&search_fuzzy=yes).

relevance and often turned the screening of sports content into a civic event in itself. It was a civic and consumerist sports-loving nation which appeared twice-weekly in the newsreels.

The significance of this projection is apparent when considering the relationship between sports content and cinemagoers. In 1932, Amy Mollison attended a special screening of the newsreel at the Regal Cinema near London's Marble Arch. This particular newsreel 'contained special pictures of her husband, the Transatlantic Flier, landing in New York' alongside an interview in which Jim Mollison addressed Amy directly. Amy, 'on seeing the film, said it gave her a great thrill to be personally spoken to by her husband from the screen'.[200] This 'thrill' of connection with the newsreel, though perhaps unique in its personalised intimacy for Mollison, was not a wholly unique experience. Sports fans engaged fulsomely and enthusiastically with newsreels' sports items across the period. It enabled many cinemagoers to participate vicariously as consumers of sporting culture. It was also one of the few means by which spectators could see, and later hear, people like themselves whenever they attended a cinema programme. Newsreels therefore presented sports fans to themselves and allowed cinemagoers to become vicarious members of the sporting public in the process. Thus, newsreels were the central visual medium through which sporting culture became a part of everyday life for many Britons between the wars.

[200] *Kinematograph Weekly* (8 Sep 1932), p.33.

Chapter Four, 'A Fascinating Pot-Pourri':

Miscellany, 'Interest' Items, and Cultural Democratisation.[1]

In a 1934 lecture entitled 'Can the Film Educate?', documentarist Mary Field argued that '[i]n the ordinary cinema programme…the most instructive item is undoubtedly the news-reel…[as] it enables us to "experience" what otherwise would be quite beyond our powers to conceive'.[1] However, Field's praise for the medium was not unqualified. In particular, she disliked the arbitrary eclecticism of topics which were included in each issue, suggesting that, 'we should not be asked to switch our minds over from…a mine disaster to…a comic motor race in California'.[1] Newsreels were condemned, then, for their jarring miscellaneous format. Field was correct to perceive that all the major newsreels had a fundamentally mutable structure, as producers constantly changed both the number and the topical sequence of items in each issue. For instance, *Pathé Gazette* followed coverage of the 1926 General Strike with the 'first pictures ever taken in a gold mine, during visit of British Farmers, now touring South Africa, to famous Robinson Mine'.[1] Similarly, a 1936 *Pathé Super Sound Gazette* contained an item dealing with the Abyssinian Crisis alongside 'Gliding in Yorkshire', the burning of old railway carriages, and 'Hopping in Kent'.[1] Meanwhile the next year, *Gaumont-British News* sandwiched footage of General Franco's military advances during the Spanish Civil War between a new type of whaling harpoon in the Indian Ocean and a Penny Farthing race in Derbyshire.[1]

Political news, then, was just one component within a wide-ranging miscellany of content (see Figure 8). This format was largely borrowed from the popular press, originating in late nineteenth-century magazines such as *Tit-Bits*, which attempted to appeal to a mass market of mixed tastes by including a miscellany of informative and entertaining articles on a variety of subjects.[2] Likewise, much newsreel content was comprised of 'interest' items considered newsworthy because they were, as Pathé cinemagazine editor Fred Watts described them, 'the novel, the amusing, and the strange'.[1] At the end of 1935, Gaumont-British released a six-minute compilation 'crazy newsreel' which contained 'a cocktail of the loopiest items of 1935'.[3] It jumped from odd inventions to cute animals, folk traditions to daring stuntmen, the latest fashion trends to dance crazes around the world. This cavalcade of novelty was set to a

[1] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 Apr 1931), p.26.
[2] Kate Jackson, *George Newnes and the new journalism in Britain, 1880-1910: culture and profit* (Aldershot: 2001), pp.84-85.
[3] *Gaumont British News*, 'Quirky: The Craziest Newsreel Items of 1935' (26 Dec 1935).

syncopated jazz soundtrack and loosely linked together by relentless weak puns from the commentator.[4] Almost anything was considered newsworthy by producers if it could be framed as suitably novel, informative, or diverting.

Though newsreels' miscellany was, by definition, eclectic, in practice it broadly fell into three main categories. Indeed, one advertisement for cinemagazines, an offshoot sub-genre of newsreels which exclusively featured 'interest' items, declared that its main content was 'the latest developments in the realms of science, art, and sport'.[5] Sports, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was the predominant category in the miscellaneous content of the bi-weekly newsreel issue. This chapter mainly focuses on the other two main types of 'interest' items, those derived from the arts and sciences, broadly defined.

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital copy of this thesis]

Figure 8: The sheer miscellany of newsreels with an eclectic mixture of local and national, 'interest' and political news which featured in the grand opening programme of the News Theatre, Birmingham High St., 18 Jan 1932 (Cohen, *Jacey Scrapbook*).

[4] *Ibid*.
[5] *The Bioscope* (23 Apr 1930), p.27.

Contrary to the scorn of Field and other contemporary intellectuals, I argue that it was precisely newsreels' miscellany of 'interest' items, adopted from the popular press, which rendered them a key means by which culture was democratised in the inter-war period. This chapter builds upon the foundational work of Daniel LeMahieu and Christopher Hilliard on cultural democratisation in Britain between the wars. LeMahieu first argued that by the 1930s, mass media had precipitated a 'common culture' in British society.[6] This did not necessarily override other social identities or divisions of class, gender, regional identity, religion, and so forth.[7] Rather, participation in the same media provided 'a mutually acknowledged frame of reference' that was shared by all social classes throughout the British Isles.[8] Practically every person, irrespective of their background, were familiar with and could discuss Mickey Mouse cartoons.[9] In terms of cinema, LeMahieu focuses on feature films which blurred the border established between intellectual 'quality' and commercial popularity, such as those by Alfred Hitchcock or the later efforts of the Documentary Film Movement.[10] So too, with the exception of Jenny Hammerton's work on *Eve's Film Review* and Mike Huggins's articles on sports content, newsreel scholars have largely dismissed 'interest' items as trivial fare which padded out issues.[11] Yet, newsreels were not merely a vehicle for conservative political ideologies but were integral to the processes of democratisation in British society. As an ephemeral medium watched by millions every week, the 'interest' miscellany of newsreels imparted a wealth of cultural familiarity and references on everything from west end plays and famous authors to music hall comedians and rudimentary astronomy.

True, it was no substitute for formal education, nor did it enable the depth of engagement perhaps found in print media or radio programmes. Notwithstanding the medium's brevity, the gulf between commercial newsreels' coverage of the arts and sciences and more 'high-minded' non-commercial educational media was not as wide as has been assumed. For LeMahieu, one key characteristic of the common culture was a convergence across media in terms of style and format.[12] This chapter demonstrates that, whether intentionally or not, newsreels' 'interest' items, especially those focused on the sciences, were almost identical to media produced by science popularisers of the period. The key difference between them was that until the mid-

[6] LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p.4, p.228
[7] *Ibid*, p.227
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*, p.232.
[10] *Ibid*, pp.236-253.
[11] Jenny Hammerton, *For Ladies Only? Eve's Film Review, Pathe Cinemagazine* (Hastings: 2001); Huggins, 'Projecting the Visual'; Huggins, 'Something for the Ladies'.
[12] LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p.231.

1930s few media outlets, even radio and the national press, could rival the bi-weekly newsreel in terms of weekly audience numbers. In this sense, newsreels, through their miscellaneous format, were a pioneer of cultural democratisation between the wars, one that has been largely overlooked.

In his work, Hilliard has reconceptualised cultural democratisation. He questioned its basis in a shared 'corpus of texts and ideas', as few societies would ever meet the levels of consistent cultural participation required to fit this criterion.[13] Instead, Hilliard contends 'that if anything makes the place of literature and the arts in a society "democratic," it is a shared sense of entitlement to participate in cultural activities'.[14] What was truly democratic was a sense that anyone from any background could potentially participate, rather than what was being consumed. Newsreels' 'interest' items fostered this ethos of participation in several ways. Many of these items were intended to directly engage audiences via competitions or instructional content. Also, the arts and sciences were filmed and presented through direct address to the audience. Cinemagoers entered the artists' studio, sat in the front row of the theatre, or were given a quick lesson on various scientific phenomena by commentators. Evidence, discussed below, also suggests that this miscellany was successful as some audience members actively engaged with interest items and felt entitled to convey their preferences to newsreel producers.

Pushing Hilliard's argument further, I suggest that this sense of entitlement underpinned newsreels' construction of a nascent consumer-citizenry. Consumer sovereignty in cultural matters went hand in hand with the extension of who could participate in political culture; cinemagoers were entitled to consume and participate in all areas of public life. Yet, not all who entered the cinema would necessarily have felt included in newsreels' address. In interest items, as in other content, there was equally a process of exclusion at work. People of colour, disabled people, or anyone considered 'abnormal' in any way, though considered by newsreel producers to be a compelling subject to film, were not imagined to be part of the cinemagoing audience. Thus, the boundaries of who were represented as part of the 'normal' public were reinscribed inside the cinema as elsewhere in British society in this period.

Moreover, it is more 'substantial' media that scholars have studied when examining cultural democratisation or educational popularisation efforts. Hilliard based his key work on amateur

[13] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2006), p.5.
[14] *Ibid*, pp.5-6.

writers' clubs and other organised attempts to encourage budding writers.[15] Max Long has explored both documentary films and the BBC's radio broadcasts to assess how the public accessed knowledge of naturalism, whilst Laura Carter has studied various means, such as local museums and school curricula, by which a social history of everyday life suffused popular culture.[16] Paperback books have also garnered much attention as a means by which people engaged with self-improvement or a democratised culture.[17] Perhaps the zenith of this is Jonathan Rose's study of working-class autodidacts' reading habits. The traditional canon of novels provided revelatory moments of self-discovery and profound personal growth for many working-class readers.[18] Thus, engagement with associations, educational programmes, books, and radio programmes have collectively been flagged as the vehicles of cultural democratisation in Britain.

Newsreels, meanwhile, could barely muster an offhand comment from the cinemagoer on most occasions. Though newsreels were engaged with in a casual, semi-distracted manner, the ephemeral 'everydayness' of their consumption is key. The majority of the British population did not go to formal clubs, nor partake in other methods of self-improvement which required sustained effort and time. Reading was intermittent, and before the mid-1930s many did not listen to radio on a daily basis. I argue that routine consumption of ephemeral, miscellaneous media such as newsreels baked access to culture into everyday leisure habits. In the period before comprehensive state education, the 'interest' miscellany of newsreels meant habitual cinemagoers, principally working-class youths and married women, were kept informed of, entitled to participate in, and sometimes actively engaged with, a wide range of inter-war culture. To truly understand the process of cultural democratisation in early and mid-twentieth century Britain, ephemeral miscellany must be treated seriously as an object of historical analysis.

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[15] Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents.*

[16] Max Long, 'The Ciné-Biologists: Natural History Film and the Co-Production of Knowledge in Interwar Britain', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 53 No.4 (2020), pp.527-551; Max Long, 'Nature on the airwaves: natural history and the BBC in interwar Britain, 1922–1939 (William T. Stearn Student Essay Prize 2021)', *Archives of Natural History*, 50 No.1 (2023), pp.1-21.

[17] Christopher Hilliard, 'The Twopenny Library: The Book Trade, Working-Class Readers, and 'Middlebrow' Novels in Britain, 1930–42', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 No.2 (2014), pp.199–220; Hornsey, 'The Penguins are Coming'; Peter Mandler, 'Good Reading for the Million: The 'Paperback Revolution' and the Co-Production of Academic Knowledge in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain and America', *Past and Present*, 244 No.1 (2019), pp.235-269.

[18] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: 2001), pp.7-8. For another example of this, see Matt Houlbrook, ''A Pin to See the Peepshow': Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past and Present*, 207 No.1 (2010), pp.215-249.

Unlike the preceding chapters, cinemagazines form the basis of source material for the present analysis. Due to the diverse subject matter which fell under the category of 'interest', key word searches of the main newsreels are an impractical starting point from which to garner a good sense of this content. However, newsreel companies produced cinemagazines as an offshoot to the main newsreel, mirroring in style and content the preestablished distinction in print media between the newspaper and the magazine. That is, cinemagazines dealt exclusively with the miscellaneous 'interest' items and were devoid of political news. In 1931, *Kinematograph Weekly* summed up *Pathé Pictorial*, Pathé's cinemagazine, as covering 'interesting subjects dealing with work and play in various parts of the globe…great engineering feats, fashions, novelties, sports, pastimes, and so on'.[19] They therefore serve as a useful means to survey miscellaneous coverage of the arts and sciences.

Due to the composition of surviving footage in the archives, analysis is largely focused upon Pathé's three main cinemagazines of the period: *Pathé Pictorial*, *Eve and Everybody's Film Review*, and *Pathetone Weekly*. These have been selected as they have most complete extant archives of content.[20] Random sampling of content from three full years of issues has been undertaken for each alongside qualitative study of individual items through subsequent key word searches.

Pathé's oeuvre is also broadly representative of the sub-genre, and cinemagazines produced by other companies such as Gaumont-British's *Around the Town* were similar in content. *Pathé Pictorial*, released weekly from 1918 to 1969 and transitioning to sound in 1931, was the first cinemagazine screened regularly in Britain and formed the template of the sub-genre, featuring light entertainment, short travelogues, and informative titbits.[21] *Eve and Everybody's Film Review* was first released in 1921 as a cinemagazine designed specifically to appeal to women. It therefore featured mainly fashion, women's sports or occupations, and the arts until its final issue in 1933.[22] *Pathetone Weekly* started as a sound cinemagazine in March 1930, and became

[19] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Sep 1931), p.48.
[20] Combined, the *News On Screen* and Pathé archives allow for weekly issue listings and individual clips to be studied with some completeness as compared to the scant listings and clips available for cinemagazines not produced by Pathe. Though it is worth noting that even records of Pathe's productions, especially for the 1920s, are patchy and inconsistent.
[21] BUVC, *News on Screen*, 'Pathe Pictorial'. Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/20). It is worth noting that Pathe Pictorial changed its name between 1936 and 1944 to New Series Pictorial.
[22] BUVC, *News on Screen*, 'Eve and Everybody's Film Review'. Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/80).

notable for featuring mainly variety and music hall acts. It ran until February 1941.[23] Despite all having slight variations in the types of content favoured, there was considerable overlap between the three and they often featured similar items. This was likely because all three were eventually under the overall editorial control of Fred Watts. He started as editor for *Eve's Film Review*, assuming control of *Pictorial* from around 1928 and had editorial responsibility for *Pathetone Weekly* from its inception, by which time he was running Pathé's Periodicals Department as its general editor, a post he held until 1944. The strong commonalities in cinemagazine content therefore enable conclusions to be drawn about the 'interest' miscellany of newsreels overall.

This chapter has five main sections. A brief first section demonstrates that newsreel producers' intentions were twofold when it came to filming miscellany. Whilst the primary purpose of 'interest' content was to entertain cinemagoers, it was to some degree also sold for its educational value; 'interest' became a synonym for content which blended divertissement with information. The next two sections form the core of this chapter and deal with arts and science content respectively. The former demonstrates the range and accessibility of newsreel coverage of the arts, which provided cinemagoers with an omnivorous diet of the full gamut of contemporary culture. The latter section uses science content to compare newsreels with other educational media of the period. It highlights the similarity between commercial and non-commercial styles and posits that newsreels' miscellany was a filmic pioneer of educational 'interest' as a media genre. Both of these sections serve to show that newsreels were a key means by which cinemagoers were familiarised with a shared body of culture, and also, by virtue of the accessible style of interest items, were made to feel legitimate participants in all culture that was screened. Section four qualifies this rather optimistic view of cultural democratisation by exploring the exclusionary elements that were implicit in interest miscellany, which tended to reinscribe people of colour and disabled people as spectacle for an audience who were assumed to be wholly white and able-bodied. The final section briefly examines surviving evidence for audience reception, which suggests that much 'interest' content was designed to foster audience participation, and some viewers seized upon this content as a means of self-improvement and active engagement with cultural pursuits.

[23] BUVC, *News on Screen*, 'Pathetone Weekly'. Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/24).

Section One, Miscellany to Entertain and Inform:

The Pathé collection of cinemagazines marketed itself as having a wide-ranging appeal across diverse audience demographics. As a 1930 advertisement in *Kinematograph Weekly* declared, *Pathé Pictorial* was 'a weekly interest film to please everyone'.[24] The same advert stated that *Eve's Film Review* featured, 'all subjects appertaining to the Fair Sex, and with equal fascination for the men… [it will] delight Eve and please Adam'.[25] Thus, even a cinemagazine designed for 'Eve' also took pains to suggest it could appeal to men as well. After all, its full title, *Eve's and Everybody's Film Review*, further hinted at producers' overarching desire to cater for as wide an audience as possible. Indeed, akin to the popular press, cinemagazines were pitched at a 'mass' market, and therefore attempted to include an eclectic mix of content that would cater to all and any potential viewers.

Notwithstanding such stated intentions, there was a definite attempt to interest female cinemagoers in particular. *Eve's and Everybody's Film Review* stands out for its overtures to women. In its appraisal of the first issue of *Eve's Film Review* released in June 1921, *Kinematograph Weekly* judged that 'the average man will be able to bear this very feminine choice of subject for the short time the film is on, the limitation of its appeal is not serious in view of its special attraction for the ladies'.[26] Similarly, *The Bioscope's* article on the beginning of *Eve's Film Review* stated, 'Everything that appeals to the innate Eve in women will be covered by this feature, which in view of the large percentage of ladies who consistently patronise cinemas should supply a long-felt want'.[27] What is striking is that the type of content listed as typical fare for *Eve's Film Review*, 'fashion pictures, animated sidelights of society, music, art, sport and drama' were as often featured in *Pathé Pictorial* and later *Pathetone Weekly*.[28] Already by 1922, critics in the trade press opined that *Eve's Film Review* was 'good booking for any hall', without reference to the gendered specificity witnessed a year prior.[29] Thus, while miscellany was supposed to have 'mass' appeal, it is clear that newsreel producers still had their core demographic of working-class women in mind when choosing subjects to

[24] *Kinematograph Weekly* (18 Sep 1930), p.85.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 June 1921), p.40.
[27] *The Bioscope* (28 April 1921), p.46.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] *Kinematograph Weekly* (5 Jan 1922), p.60. For later similarities in how *Pictorial* and *Eve's Film Review* were appraised in the trade press see *Kinematograph Weekly* (12 Aug 1926), p.58.

film for cinemagazines.[30] Those who newsreel producers most hoped to interest with miscellany from the arts and sciences were, then, broadly commensurate with those who, in terms of their class and gender, newsreels provided novel representation for and incorporated into the practices of consumer-citizenship.

If the content aimed to engage with women and working-class youths, it is worth considering what the purpose of this content was. It is well-established amongst historians that newsreel companies primarily saw their product as entertainment.[31] For instance, in 1930 Cecil Snape, editor of *Universal News*, stated, 'the public gets enough of the turmoil of life outside the cinema'. As an antidote to 'turmoil', newsreels aimed to provide 'restful entertainment' for patrons.[32] Much 'interest' content was included to amuse cinemagoers. For example, many cinemagazine items featured children. An unnamed 'famous newsreel producer' explained the rationale behind this in 1931 when he wrote that, 'you can't beat a child story for putting human interest in a news-reel [sic]. The…antics of youngsters supply a spirit of comedy that is just as important for contrast to the more serious stories in a news film as comedy relief is in a feature production'.[33] Miscellany was often utilised to leaven a newsreel issue that was otherwise devoted to 'serious' political news.

What has been overlooked by historians, however, is the degree to which newsreel companies also marketed their product as educational. Also in 1930, Pathé's editor explained that newsreels, alongside featuring political news, were 'an invaluable means whereby the general public is kept *au fait* [sic] with the latest developments in the realms of science, art, and sport'.[34] This lofty mission statement in many respects echoed the inter-war purpose of the BBC as outlined by its first director, John Reith. Famously, Reith established that BBC broadcasting was not solely to entertain, but also to inform and educate.[35] Informative broadcasts and exposure to conventionally niche forms of culture through the radio was intended to 'uplift' listeners' tastes.[36]

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[30] This aligns with the film industry more broadly, which generally perceived its market to be preponderantly feminine. See O'Rourke, 'Imagining British Film Beauty', pp.358-359; Andrew Shail, 'Our Lady Cinema', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 21 No.1 (2023), pp.74–126.
[31] Low, *film*, p.43.
[32] Cecil Snape, 'Colour in topicals' *The Bioscope* (1930) reprinted in James Ballantyne (ed.), *Researcher's Guide to British Newsreels* Vol.2 (London: 1988), p.6.
[33] *Kinematograph Weekly* (8 Jul 1931), p.38.
[34] *The Bioscope* (23 April 1930), p.27.
[35] Cardiff and Scannell, *Social History of British Broadcasting*, p.7.
[36] *Ibid*.

Likewise, newsreel companies also took pains to sell their product as more than merely entertainment. By the early 1930s there was increasing concern amongst various government bodies, intellectuals, charitable organisations, and business groups that the educational potential of cinema was not being realised in the commercial British film industry.[37] Indeed, in 1929 the Commission on Educational and Cultural Film was founded, gathering representatives from a wide range of public institutions to discuss ways to rescue the British film industry from its supposed commercialised degradation, principally by stimulating the production and dissemination of educational films.[38] The report it produced in 1932 served as a major impetus for the founding of the British Film Institute the following year.[39] At several talks held by the commission with film industry spokespeople, Fred Watts was present as Pathé's representative, and seemingly as the face of the newsreel industry as a whole.[40] That Watts was chosen suggests that cinemagazine content was seen as the most educational element of what newsreel companies produced. Indeed, in 1931 Watts suggested to the Commission that, 'His own and other news-reel [sic] and magazine producers had libraries of films of educational value'.[41] In less lofty terms, cinema advertising for *Pathé Pictorial* often flagged its contents as 'Science. Nature. Interest'.[42] Other newsreel companies also attempted to cultivate such an image for themselves. In 1930, British Movietone announced that they intended to 'issue a regular programme of educational news-reels [sic] to schools and colleges which have equipment installed'.[43] Although the scheme appears to have not gotten much further than this initial announcement, it is still notable that Movietone was publicising its overtures to British schools as a purveyor of educational films.

The educational value of 'interest' cinemagazines was also endorsed by public figures outside of the industry. At the 1938 annual dinner for the British Kinematograph Society, Lord Horder, physician to George VI, stated in his after-dinner speech that 'the school film…the documentary…and the newsreel were the hope of the future of the kinema in the cultivating of

[37] See Ian Aitken, *Film and reform: John Grierson and the documentary film movement* (London: 1990); Emma West, ''Within the Reach of All': Bringing Art to the People in Interwar Britain', *Modernist Cultures*, 15 No.2 (2020), pp.225–252; Long, Max, 'The Ciné-Biologists'. On complaints about historical period dramas from the Historical Association, see Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: 1994). For a typical editorial bemoaning the parlous state of educational films, see *Kinematograph Weekly* (1 Feb 1934), p.4.
[38] *The Scotsman* (10 Jun 1932), p.9; *The Bioscope* (1 Jul 1931), p.30.
[39] Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, *The Film in National Life* (London: 1932).
[40] *The Bioscope* (8 Jul 1931), p.30; *Kinematograph Weekly* (9 Jul 1931), p.37.
[41] *Kinematograph Weekly* (9 Jul 1931), p.37.
[42] *Essex County Chronicle* (15 Aug 1919), p.1.
[43] *Kinematograph Weekly* (16 Oct 1930), p.50.

good taste'.[44] Likewise, across the late 1920s and early 1930s London County Council and British Instructional Films (BIF) collaborated intermittently to put on free educational children's matinees.[45] Alongside BIF's non-fiction short films, all these programmes featured *Pathé Pictorial* or a newsreel, usually both.[46] Thus, for some contemporaries there was no clear division between the cinemagazine 'interest' items and non-fiction films produced specifically to educate. Newsreel producers, then, sold 'interest' miscellany as both entertaining and, with some apparent success, also a means of educational 'uplift'.

Section Two, 'Broad-brow' Newsreels and the Battle of the Brows:

In inter-war Britain, cultural critics and intellectuals engaged in 'the battle of the brows', what has since been called a taxonomical 'culture war' which produced a contested but nonetheless widely shared classification system which stratified culture according to its attributes.[47] On one end of the tripartite schema were 'highbrow' cultural products perceived to have all the hallmarks of avantgarde modernism whilst at the other end of the scale were works pejoratively described as 'lowbrow' due to their commercialised, often supposedly Americanised, origin and style. In between these two was 'middlebrow' culture such as realist novels or musical revues, those which tended to forgo modernist aesthetics and at the same time repudiate the spectacle of Hollywood melodramas or pulp genre fiction.[48] Though newsreels generally eschewed the 'highbrow', they also largely obviated the 'battle of the brows' by providing in their miscellaneous content an omnivorous cultural diet of middlebrow and popular culture. To use the parlance of the period, newsreel producers adopted a 'broadbrow' approach which foregrounded cinemagoers' entitlement to be '*au fait'* with and participate in the gamut of contemporary culture.[49]

Despite cinemagazine producers' intended market, in the 1920s there appeared a seeming incongruence between the middlebrow tenor of cinemagazine content and its largely working-class audience. For example, excerpts from middlebrow plays and musical revues were

[44] *Kinematograph Weekly* (10 Feb 1938), p.15.
[45] *The Times* (9 Nov 1927), p.12; *The Times* (5 Mar 1928), p.21; *Kinematograph Weekly* (13 Oct 1932), p.42.
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] For a good contemporary example of how these terms were utilised to situate culture within a hierarchy and also to attack certain cultural forms or genres, see Virginia Woolf, 'Middlebrow: A Letter Written but Not Sent' (Jul 1942), *The Atlantic*, pp.43-47. For a nice overview of the 'culture war' see Catherine Clay, *Time and Tide: the feminist and cultural politics of a modern magazine* (Edinburgh: 2018).
[48] Lawrence Napper, 'Time and the Middlebrow in 1940s British Cinema' in Sally Faulkner (ed.), *Middlebrow Cinema* (London: 2016), pp.74-75.
[49] For research into the term broadbrow and its origins in this period, see Alexsis Weedon, 'The Origins of the Broadbrow: Hugh Walpole and Russian Modernism in 1917', *Book History*, 22 No.1 (2019), pp.280–302.

included in most issues. These items tended towards short previews, indicated by the title of one 1922 item, 'Peeps at "The Lady of the Rose"', peeps being the operative word for a minute-long clip of a dance number.[50] Yet, some items provided full scenes of a play, as in 1930, when one Pathé issue featured a six-minute precis of the comedy *Silver Wings*.[51] Thus, cinemagoers got at least some sense, however fleeting, of London's theatreland. Along similar lines, the fashion that featured in cinemagazines was the latest high-end fashion of Paris, with British Pathé presumably utilizing its French parent company's connections to obtain exclusive pictures. In October 1928, Fred Watts wrote a letter to berate French cameraman Monsieur Letrange for shoddy work filming fur coats. Watts complained that, 'The Modes themselves, with the exception of about two coats are hardly worth looking at. The mannequin is certainly one of the worst I have ever seen so far as her looks are concerned, and the film has been taken under poor conditions as regards light'.[52] That Watts fixated on the aesthetics of both the model and the coats implies that these items were intended to serve as a glamorous spectacle of fashion and beauty, though perhaps also, in a sexist manner, as titillation for male viewers. Indeed, the sensual glamour of fashion items is further suggested by the fact that colourisation, usually by the Pathécolour tinting process, was often reserved for the fashion item in an *Eve's Film Review* issue.[53] A dazzling splash of colour in an otherwise monochrome issue further accentuated the consumerist spectacle of fashionable elegant young women parading onscreen.[54] Intertitles would also typically tell the viewers that these clips were fresh from 'gay paree' or else have intertitles suggesting aristocratic pedigree such as, 'Besides a hat, M'Lady must have the newest in short sunshades' or 'M'Lady's Dress', the latter of which featured 'exclusive' pictures of the fashions designed for elite women attending the Ascot horse race.[55]

To some extent, this content was seen to be aimed at the well-heeled suburban cinemagoer. A 1921 article in the trade press suggested to exhibitors that the 'better class audiences will particularly enjoy' the content of *Eve's Film Review*.[56] Some exhibitors took heed of this euphemistic assessment that cinemagazines were best suited to middle-class audiences. For

[50] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Peeps at "The Lady of the Rose"' (23 Mar 1922).
[51] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Silver Wings' (26 May 1930).
[52] *Eve's Film Review* and *Pathé Pictorial* Correspondence in Crosby and Kaye, *Projecting Britain*, p.120.
[53] BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'untitled item two' (1 Dec 1921); BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review,* 'untitled item three' (9 Feb 1922); BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review,* 'untitled item three' (29 Mar 1928).
[54] For the use of colour to inspire consumer desire, see Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, 'Symptoms of Desire: Colour, Costume, and Commodities in Fashion Newsreels of the 1910s and 1920s', *Film History*, 21 No.2 (2009), pp.107-P4.
[55] BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'Eve's Little Extras (Pathecolor) filmed in Paris' (25 May 1922); BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'M'Lady's Dress' (9 Jun 1921).
[56] *Kinematograph Weekly* (2 Jun 1921), p.40.

example, the Waverley Picture House in Glasgow, which sold itself as 'suburbia's picture palace', consciously courted middle-class patrons.[57] In its monthly brochure, it prominently advertised its booking of *Around the Town* for its programme.[58] This was a short-lived cinemagazine produced by Gaumont-British, which mainly featured London-centred Society news and the metropolitan arts in its content.[59] This fitted well with the Waverley management's overall aim in its programming to ensure patrons could 'gain therefrom something to entertain and educate…[and see] all that is best in well-read books, topical events of the day, general interest subjects'.[60] Thus, middlebrow 'interest' content was sometimes used by managers to distinguish themselves as running a better type of cinema with a respectably edifying programme.

However, the inclusion of middlebrow content should not be assumed to have been exclusively for middle-class suburbanites. Useful here is Lawrence Napper's reconceptualization of middlebrow as a cultural category in inter-war British society. Contrary to other scholars, Napper's definition does not map cleanly onto middle-class culture. Though the middle classes were often the main proponents and consumers of such culture, middlebrow was not taken by contemporaries to be coterminous with any single social class. Often middlebrow novels, plays, or films presented class as a fluid concept and foregrounded the blurred nature of class boundaries in inter-war British society.[61] As Napper contends, 'the term [middlebrow] expresses a dynamic relationship between class status and cultural taste – one that is essentially aspirational'.[62]

This was manifested in much 'interest' content that assumed an aspirational tone as it enabled intimate access to glamour and luxurious spectacle for viewers. A 1936 *Pictorial* item, for instance, followed the female stars of the London Casino's Folies Parisienne Revue as they frolicked in chic fashions whilst enjoying affluent leisure pursuits such as golf at a high-end resort.[63] Items such as this were perhaps an escapist means to access culture and lifestyles outside of the everyday for cinemagoers. One of the main reasons that people went to the 'Dream Palace', after all, was the escapist entertainment that cinemas provided through feature

[57] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN 5/1/3.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] BUFVC, *News on Screen*, 'Around the Town'. Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/77).
[60] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN 5/1/5.
[61] Napper, 'Time and the Middlebrow', pp.72-74.
[62] *Ibid*, p.73.
[63] *New Sound Pictorials*, 'Dachet' (23 Jul 1936).

films.[64] It is likely that for some cinemagoers, especially working-class women, middlebrow 'interest' items allowed them to dream of consumer affluence and social mobility, which they seldom experienced in their daily lives.[65] Thus, the whole audience were entitled to share vicariously in the glamour of fashion and the refinement of theatre.

Moreover, individual cinemagazine issues situated 'uplift' and middlebrow content beside items featuring popular culture that would have been dismissed by intellectuals and more 'high-minded' media producers as 'lowbrow' fare. For example, music hall and middlebrow plays were often cheek by jowl in newsreels such as a 1928 Pathé issue which featured excerpts from the play, *Lady Mary*, starring George Grossmith before the comic duo Flotsam and Jetsam in a music hall sing-along item.[66] By the early 1930s, the advent of sound film made live performance properly viable as content for cinemagazines. As a result, music hall variety and dance bands quickly surpassed drama of the 'legitimate' stage and other middlebrow culture as Pathé's favoured cultural content. *Eve's Film Review* wound up in 1931 and *Pathetone Weekly* started in 1930 to serve as a supplement to the main *Pathé Pictorial*. *Pathetone* was quickly dubbed 'the screen's music hall' for the large amount of its content devoted to variety acts.[67]

The popularity of these music hall items is suggested by the fact that Pathé produced feature-length variety films from this content, with *Pathetone Parade 1934* appearing to be the earliest released in a series produced annually until the mid-1940s.[68] As the introduction to both the 1935 and 1936 *Pathetone Parade* declared, they were 'A scintillating Review of the "Stars" of Screen, Stage and Radio'. [69] They served as extended compilations of the variety and music acts featured across the year in the regular issues of *Pathetone*. That the Regal cinema in Barnstaple advertised the 1940 *Parade* as its second feature, listing which 'vaudeville acts' were included, implies filmed music hall was at least popular enough to be booked as a substitute for feature films.[70]

Moreover, as the title sequences to *Pathetone Parade* demonstrate, the music hall or radio provenance of performers was always vaunted when acts were introduced in cinemagazines.

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[64] For the feature film as a form of escapist entertainment, see Richards, *Dream Palace*, chapter one; Kuhn, *Everyday Magic*.
[65] For similar arguments about consumerism in this period, see Alexander, 'Becoming a woman'; Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: 2010), chapters two and three.
[66] BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'Lady Mary' and 'Words and Music No.2' (29 Mar 1928).
[67] *Kinematograph Weekly* (3 Sept 1931), p.48.
[68] *Hull Daily Mail* (7 Dec 1934), p.18; Pathé, 'Pathetone Parade of 1941 Reel 1' (1941).
[69] Pathé, 'Pathetone Parade of 1935 – Intro Only' (1935); Pathé, 'Pathetone Parade of 1936 – Intro Only' (1936).
[70] *The North Devon Journal* (18 Apr 1940), p.6.

Typical was musician Mantovani's introduction in a 1938 *Pathetone Weekly*, billed as the 'celebrated violinist of radio fame'.[71] Likewise, Robb Wilton was billed as 'the famous comedian in a characteristic song', suggesting that audiences were assumed to be familiar with his act from his prior career in music hall and radio.[72] Cinemagazines therefore emphasised film's cross-pollination with music hall and popular broadcasting. Music hall was a conventionally working-class form of entertainment, although many historians have posited that its commercialisation by the inter-war period rendered it less specifically working-class.[73] Even if not a 'pure' working-class entertainment, it remained an inclusive form of popular culture that a socially mixed audience enjoyed. For example, the two highest-paid British film stars of the 1930s were George Formby and Gracie Fields, who started as music hall performers and retained that style in their respective series of comedy films.[74] Thus, like much early British sound film, cinemagazines forged strong associations with music hall in the 1930s.

Cinemagazines also established links with radio broadcasting by the sound era. Dance bands and musicians from the BBC also often performed for Pathé. For instance, in 1936, 'wizard of the organ Reginald Foort, playing the celebrated BBC' Wurlitzer organ featured in an extended five-minute item that explained how the organ functioned as well as a light music performance.[75] Many of the most famous dance bands of the decade, including Jack Payne, Jack Hylton, Roy Fox, Mantovani, and the BBC's own dance band leader Henry Hall performed in *Pathetone* or *Pictorial* at least once.[76] Even American jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington featured briefly.[77] This again shows how cinemagazines established ties with and featured other forms of popular culture that, by the mid-1930s, had become accessible to all classes via widespread radio ownership and relatively cheap dance halls.[78]

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[71] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Mantovani' (21 Mar 1938).
[72] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Robb Wilton' (15 Feb 1932); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Robb Wilton' (23 Nov 1931).
[73] Peter Bailey, 'Fats Waller Meets Harry Champion: Americanization, National Identity and Sexual Politics in Inter-war British Music Hall', *Cultural and Social History* 4 No.4 (2007), pp.495-509. For the originally subversive working-class style of music-hall humour that was ostensibly lost to commercialisation see also Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning', pp.138-170.
[74] For the ways in which music hall style suffused British-made comedy films across the 1930s, see David Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy, 1929-39* (Exeter: 2000); Andy Medhurst, 'Music Hall and British Cinema' in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 years of British cinema* (1986), p.173.
[75] *New Sound Pictorials*, 'Reginald Foort – Organist' (10 Dec 1936).
[76] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Jack Payne and his Band' (14 Feb 1935); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'On the Air – In the Air! (With Jack Hylton and his Band)' (25 Dec 1933); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The BBC Dance Orchestra directed by Henry Hall' (25 Jul 1932); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The Gathering of the Bands' (26 Mar 1934).
[77] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Duke Ellington' (2 Jan 1933).
[78] See statistics on the steady growth of radio ownership across Britain: Briggs, *Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume Two,* pp.253-255; Cardiff and Scannell, *Social History of British Broadcasting*, pp.362-365. For the accessibility of dance halls to working-class communities, James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960* (2015), chapter one.

Moreover, the cinemagazines arguably catered more effectively for their audiences' varied tastes than the BBC did in the early 1930s. The BBC agonised across the period in its attempts to define what was appropriate dance music and what was deemed unsuitable or too 'lowbrow' for broadcasting.[79] Yet, as a highly commercialised genre angling for 'mass' appeal, Pathé's cinemagazine department was relatively unconcerned with what styles they screened. An early *Pathetone* issue is telling, as the title music for the issue was produced by Al Sitara and the Pathé Players .[80] These were 'hot' jazz musicians, which was considered Americanised and thus often castigated by conservative intellectuals and musicians in contrast to more anglicised 'sweet' jazz.[81] Indeed, the intertitles for the 1932 item of Ellington playing stated, 'All "hot-jazz" enthusiasts (and apparently there are many) know of New York's famous Cotton Club - for it is there that one of the Leaders of "hot jazz" plays - Duke Ellington'.[82] Thus, boasting its inclusion of 'hot' jazz on the ground that it has many 'enthusiasts', cinemagazines producers appeared to have no great qualms with screening Americanised culture if it was popular among cinemagoers.

Likewise, *Pathetone* often featured crooners, including the most famous of British crooners, Al Bowlly, who appeared twice across the 1930s.[83] Arising from technological innovations in the 1920s enabling clearer, more intimate recording, crooners were male singers specialising in sentimental ballads.[84] They provoked controversy for their supposedly unmanly style, and the BBC especially despised crooning. A 1936 internal report, one of many written between 1934 and 1943, castigated crooning as 'anaemic' and 'emasculated'.[85] Using terms connoting weak effeminacy implies that the chief objection to crooners was their supposed deviant masculinity. Such was their distain, the BBC banned crooning in 1942, the style condemned as unfit for raising the morale of masculine troops.[86] Cinemagazines, meanwhile, featured crooners without comment. When Al Bowlly appeared singing love songs, his sentimentality and attractiveness were played up. Items in 1932 and 1936 respectively featured Bowlly

[79] Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History of British Broadcasting,* pp.188-192.
[80] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The "Hoodoo" Man' (14 Feb 1930).
[81] James Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: 2002), chapter eight.
[82] *Pathetone*, 'Duke Ellington'.
[83] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Al Bowlly' (30 Jul 1934); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Al Bowly (AKA Al Bowlly)' (17 Sep 1936).
[84] Ted Gioia, *Love Songs the Hidden History* (Oxford: 2015), p.219.
[85] Emily Hoyler, 'Broadcasting Englishness: National music in interwar BBC periodicals' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northwestern University: 2016), p.223.
[86] Christina Baade, *Victory through harmony: the BBC and popular music in World War Two* (Oxford: 2012), p.134.

singing 'The Very Thought of You' and 'Melancholy Baby' to the camera.[87] Close-up shots which emphasised Bowlly's looks, framing him as if he was singing directly to members of the audience, implies that his sexual allure was the main attraction.[88] Crooner Robert Ashely was featured in 1937 crooning at his piano, interspliced with shots of pastoral scenes.[89] Ashely's sentimentality, accentuated by idyllic scenery and lovelorn emotionality, was emphatically on display. Unlike the BBC, then, cinemagazines capitalised upon the sexual and emotive allure of crooners to titillate female cinemagoers and saw no problem in exploiting this form of 'controversial' popular music. An array of popular music and variety therefore featured alongside more middlebrow theatre and fashion, often in the same issue, with few apparent tensions in the coexistence of divergent content.

Pathé's long-running series of items entitled 'Camera Interviews', wherein famous figures of the cultural world were presented to the audience, serves as a prime example of how middlebrow and popular culture blended in cinemagazines' coverage of the arts. First, a diverse range of public figures were invited to be interviewed. Stage performers were considered the 'star' subject and frequently filmed by cameramen. In three successive issues in 1921, Pathé interviewed Irish stage actress Peggy O'Neil, the Russian ballerina Madame Karsavina, and Russian-American stage actor Maurice Moscovitch.[90] When not pulling back the curtain on thespians' lives, 'Camera Interviews' were conducted with other distinguished artists such as conductor Sir Henry Wood, famous composer Fred Weatherly, Royal Academy painter Laura Knight, and middlebrow authors such as Sir Ryder Haggard or Somerset Maugham.[91] Yet, figures from popular culture were also included in this series, such as Hollywood film actor Noah Beery or 'Little Irene Price', a British Shirley Temple impersonator.[92] Moreover, a staple 'interview' subject was the music hall comedian, who often performed a comic skit in lieu of

[87] *Pathetone*, 'Al Bowlly'; *Sound Pictorial*, 'Al Bowly'.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Robert Ashley' (4 Mar 1937); see also *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Robert Ashley' (1 Sep 1938); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Robert Ashley' (13 Feb 1938).
[90] *Eve's Film Review*, 'The Stars as they are – Madame Karsavina' (4 Aug 1921); *Eve's Film Review*, 'The Stars as they are – Miss Peggy O'Neil' (28 Jul 1921), date of issue found on *News on Screen*; BUFVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'The Stars as they are' (11 Aug 1921). Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/330630)
[91] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Sir Henry J. Wood – The Famous Composer' (11 Oct 1926); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Mr. F. E. Weatherley K.C. the Famous Song Writer' (29 Oct 1928); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Camera Interviews – Mrs Laura Knight the Famous Artist' (29 Dec 1927); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Camera Interviews – Mr W. Somerset Maugham' (26 Sept 1929); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Sir Rider Haggard' (14 Aug 1923).
[92] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Camera Interviews No.1 Noah Beery' (22 Mar 1937); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Camera Interviews No.2 Little Irene Price' (29 Mar 1937).

an interview proper, such as Tommy Handley, Will Hay, or Clapham and Dwyer.[93] American stars and variety performers, or those inspired by them, were considered on a par with members of the British art and theatre world.

Secondly, the style in which figures were interviewed also suggested a blurring of instruction and entertainment. Some effort was made to impart a rough sense of the artistic pursuit or profession of the figure being interviewed. Artists were filmed at work in their studios, or sets made to look like them. Laura Knight was shown painting various still life models, with before and after shots of the finished paintings.[94] Likewise, sculptor Phoebe Stabler was filmed climbing up scaffolding and chiselling at her latest creations, ending on a shot of her most famous work, the land speed record trophy.[95] Actors and actresses were also filmed in their dressing rooms putting on costumes and describing the role they were assuming.[96] Actor Lyn Harding, for instance, was filmed making up for his latest role as Julius Caesar whilst talking audiences through the reasoning behind costume choices and his interpretation of the role.[97] Henry Wood was shown conducting an orchestra, whilst authors and composers were often depicted scribbling away at their desks.[98] Thus, audiences were given vicarious access to the realm of the artist and an impressionistic understanding of what the occupation entailed.

On the other hand, as with most newsreel content which covered celebrities, the main entertainment was derived from filming the personal lives of public figures. The interview with Somerset Maugham in 1929 opened with the title card, 'here is Mr. Maugham himself, for Eve to see… (in his lovely Riviera home)', before a sequence of close ups showed him strolling around the gardens of his stylish home.[99] Indeed, most subjects from ballerina Anna Pavlova to music hall grandee Sir Harry Lauder were filmed in their own gardens at leisure with their family and friends.[100] Hobbies and pets also featured prominently, such as footage of 'famous boys' writer' Percy Westerman playing with his pack of dogs, intertitles which explained Henry Wood's love of amateur carpentry, or shots of motor racing champion Henry Seagrave playing

[93] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Tommy Handley the Famous Radio & Revue Star' (1 Oct 1928); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Clapham & Dwyer the Famous Radio Stars' (21 Jan 1929); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Camera Interviews – Will Hay' (22 Mar 1928).
[94] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Mrs Laura Knight'.
[95] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Camera Interviews – Mrs Phoebe Stabler' (13 Nov 1930).
[96] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Camera Interviews – Lyn Harding' (18 Apr 1932); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Miss Pamela Stanley' (30 Aug 1937).
[97] *Pathetone*, 'Lyn Harding'.
[98] *Pictorial*, 'Henry J. Wood'; *Pictorial*, 'F. E. Weatherley'.
[99] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Somerset Maugham'.
[100] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Camera Interviews – Madame Pavlova at Home' (29 Sep 1930); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Sir Harry Lauder' (1926).

with his model railway.[101] This was the visual equivalent of the gossip column, a form of entertainment which aimed to grant cinemagoers access to the homes and private lives of the famous, perhaps enabling aspirational daydreaming from seeing how the wealthy lived. In both subject and format, middlebrow 'uplift' and popular culture entertainment blended seamlessly within 'Camera Interviews'.

It is interesting to compare newsreels producers' approach to filming the arts with Christopher Hilliard's work on twopenny libraries in the 1930s. He suggests that many working-class readers picked up and read middlebrow novels alongside pulp fiction at these accessibly cheap book-lending services. This, he argues, meant a blurring of tastes, with working-class readers having a more diverse cultural diet than usually thought.[102] So too, newsreels enabled omnivorous access to culture for working-class cinemagoers in the same period. Producers took a 'broadbrow', relatively indiscriminate approach to the arts, filming whatever was thought to be sufficiently popular with an audience of mixed tastes. Cinemagoers were familiarised with almost every branch of contemporary culture to varying degrees, albeit in a fleeting and vicarious manner. More importantly, a 'broadbrow' ethos meant that even if the knowledge imparted about any particular art form was superficial, cinemagoers were considered to be legitimate participants in the arts through newsreel content. The miscellaneous 'interest' content of newsreels thereby served as a key vehicle for the democratisation of culture in Britain between the wars.

Section Three, Newsreel Informational Items Versus 'Uplifting' Media:

Science items were also prevalent in the weekly newsreel diet of cultural content. They typically packaged elementary factual knowledge within attractive visuals and light-hearted commentary. Pathé was eclectic in which sciences it featured, ranging from astronomy and physics to naturalism and geology. For instance, a 1939 item featured visual demonstrations of how crystals are formed and was packed with factoids such as the definition of 'isomorphic' and the technical names for various crystal formations. Knowledge and explanatory footage were couched in light-hearted prosaic allusions, such as a crystal mirror being used to reflect a dancing girl or one crystal commented on as 'a rather attractive ornament, don't you think?'.[103] Thus, technical information was consistently related via colloquial commentary to things that

[101] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Camera Interviews – Mr Percy Westerman' (20 Apr 1931); *Pictorial*, 'Henry J. Wood'; *Pathe Pictorial*, '(Camera Interviews – Major H.O.D. Seagrave)' (3 Dec 1928).
[102] Hilliard, 'The Twopenny Library', pp.219-220.
[103] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Crystals' (2 Mar 1939).

viewers would have been familiar with in their everyday lives. The speed at which the item moved, with some diagrams getting no more than a few seconds, further mitigated against anything but the most basic knowledge being imparted through the fleeting images and fast-paced descriptions.

Likewise, two other items in 1939 imparted elementary knowledge on the planets. A series of diagrams and images are used to explain the distance, physical features, and so forth of both Mars and the Sun respectively.[104] Again, this knowledge was situated in framing devices that were intended to entertain. The item on the sun repeatedly cut back to sunbathing women as a means to make numerous puns, even using a scantily clad woman as an assistant to demonstrate the size of the sun relative to the earth.[105] Similarly, the item on Mars utilized a dramatization of various historical scenes to discuss what previous astronomers and past societies thought about the planet before discussing the contemporary scientific facts, imbuing the item with the human interest of a fictional period drama.[106] Whether dramatisation or humour, science items were foremost divertissement with a soupcon of facts as opposed to an in-depth discussion such as was found in the extended broadcasts of the BBC talks department.

In many ways, cinemagazines took a similar approach to popular science magazines of the period. *Armchair Science* and *Conquest*, two of the more notable magazines of the inter-war period, had a similar editorial style in their concern to link science to the everyday lives of readers.[107] In 1933, *Pathé Pictorial* even collaborated with *Armchair Science* to produce an item which highlighted the most significant 'men of science' throughout history. The editor of *Armchair,* A. M. Low, provided the commentary over dramatisations of scientists from Archimedes to Marconi. The breezy commentary, leavened with jokes such as 'inventors, you know, are not all quite mad', focused on the applications of these scientists' inventions to the daily lives of viewers.[108]

Science content also tended to present 'modern' science as a progressive force for building a better future. Again, this was akin to the editorial policy of popular science magazines, which sought to show readers how advancements in science, when applied by inventors and industries, could tangibly improve the lives of Britons.[109] This was foremost evident in

[104] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Mars – Planet' (26 Sep 1939); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'The Sun' (13 Apr 1939)/
[105] *Pictorial*, 'The Sun'.
[106] *Pictorial*, 'Mars'.
[107] Bowler, Peter, 'Discovering Science from an Armchair: Popular Science in British Magazines of the Interwar Years', *Annals of Science*, 73 No.1 (2016), p.92.
[108] *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Men of Science' (14 Sep 1933).
[109] Bowler, 'Science from an Armchair', p.93.

cinemagazine items concerning new inventions or technologies. Topical interest was often conflated by newsreel producers with the new or novel. As a result, inventions were exhibited routinely in cinemagazines. As a 1927 review of cinemagazine *Gaumont Mirror* declared, 'the screen has an advantage over all other second-hand demonstrations of new inventions: it can present exactly what the inventor claimed and did'.[110] Often these inventions related directly to daily life. For example, an extended demonstration of various gadgets to be used in offices was preceded by the title card which stated it was 'demonstrating some novel machines from the recent Efficiency Exhibition, some of which may almost extinguish the usual office-boys duties'.[111] Similarly, another sequence of inventions being demonstrated in 1933 featured a parking garage for prams at a block of flats.[112] Thus, technology was presented as improving the lives of both mothers and office workers. Often, the inventions featured were chosen due to their bizarre nature and were treated as objects of fun. Twice the Inventions Exhibition was featured covering a range of small inventions to make everyday life easier. In both, an actor dressed as a mad scientist archetype 'Professor Crackpot' was included, using a 'death ray' laser to pop a balloon and a boot with a built-in radiator respectively.[113] Even if lightly mocking the cultural stereotype of the eccentric inventor, such items emphasised the extent to which science was imagined as encroaching upon everyday life for the better.

More serious treatment was afforded to industrial innovations. A lengthy item in a 1926 *Pathé Pictorial*, filmed at University College London, demonstrated the latest machines used for testing the breaking point of steel.[114] The opening titles stated, 'Probably the founders of the century-old University College of London would marvel at the mechanical plant now used in experimental research today'.[115] Not only did this item give in-depth footage and explanation of how the machines worked, it stressed the 'modern' progress of such industrial procedures. Transportation, both in the main newsreel and cinemagazines, was often presented as emblematic of 'modern' progress. This was often done by comparing old modes of transport to the latest inventions. A 1925 item on train travel entitled, 'A Century Of Progress - In Locomotion' contrasted the speed and power of the first train used in Victorian Britain to the 'L.N.E.R. latest Express Pacific type 150 ton engine capable of 78 miles per hour!', having the

[110] *Kinematograph Weekly* (24 Nov 1927), p.70.
[111] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Office Robots' (13 Apr 1931).
[112] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Here and There' (23 Oct 1933).
[113] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Clever Ideas at Inventions Exhibition' (20 Feb 1939); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Inventions' (12 Oct 1939).
[114] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'The Breaking Point – Stress Tests' (8 Aug 1926).
[115] *Ibid*.

two models sat beside one another in the footage to accentuate differences in size and design.[116] A 1938 item covering the Royal Aeronautical Society's garden party also depicted the first bi-planes, dubbed 'the ancients', flying with footage of the 'new empire flying boat'.[117] Thus, newsreels science content shared a similar style and purpose to other popular science media. These magazines, however, never managed to reach more than a few thousand readers.[118] Newsreels, by contrast, frequently reached an audience of millions.

Informational items on history also featured, though less frequently than science and technology. For example, an item provided basic knowledge of the ancient Egyptian Pyramids, replete with elementary facts of its size, original colours, and ceremonial purpose.[119] Akin to science items, visual aids and familiar cultural references were employed to convey information in an accessible manner. Images of landmarks closer to home, St Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament, were superimposed onto the pyramids to compare their heights and widths respectively.[120] As with science items, history was often dramatized to add human interest that would hook audiences. One item discussing Valentine's Day cards in the Regency era opened with a staged fiction of a young woman in an early nineteenth-century village receiving a lavish Valentine's card.[121] In the 1930s, a series of wildly popular period dramas, starting with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933, emphasised the human element and lavish costumes of the past for audiences.[122] Though on a far smaller scale, cinemagazines borrowed the trappings of these fictional films, with costumed actors and human-interest stories, to impart some factual knowledge of history. More generally, Billie Melman has revealed how the cycle of period dramas, through commodity tie-ins and marketing from cigarette cards and matchboxes to Tudor-style furniture and dress advertisements, embedded history in everyday life.[123] In a similar way, the weekly few minutes of information in cinemagazines served to bring accessible knowledge into the daily routines of those who attended the cinema regularly.

Likewise, in their collaborations cinemagazines were woven into a wider network of leisure which aimed to inform Britons. Pathé often secured access to museums to show off exhibits. The National Science Museum (sometimes called by its original name, the South Kensington

[116] *Pathe Gazette*, 'A Century of Progress – In Locomotion (Orange Tint)' (13 Apr 1925).
[117] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Royal Aeronautical Society's Garden Party' (12 Aug 1938).
[118] Bowler, 'Science from an Armchair', p.107.
[119] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Pyramids' (2 Feb 1939).
[120] *Ibid*.
[121] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Valentines' (9 Feb 1939).
[122] Harper, *Picturing the Past*; Billie Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800-1953* (Oxford: 2006), chapters six and seven.
[123] Melman, *Culture of History*, pp.194-197.

Science Museum) was a regular partner for science items, with items on the museum's crystals, thermometers, typewriters, and clocks collections.[124] Thus, the curators saw in newsreel companies a mutually beneficial partnership for publicising their exhibits to a far wider audience than what likely passed through the museum's doors each year. The National Library of Scotland also collaborated with *Pathé Pictorial* in 1939 to show off letters in the special collections penned by notable figures from Scottish history such as Robert Burns and Mary, Queen of Scots.[125] It was not always an Anglocentric national history, then, that was purveyed in cinemagazines.

Indeed, in filming subjects at local museums, cinemagazines proved wide-ranging geographically in their partnerships. If not overly informative, a museum in Keswick, Cumbria, allowed its collection of xylophones made from Cumbrian stone to be filmed in action.[126] Likewise, the director of the Albion Street Museum in Hull was interviewed to show off the museum's collection of antique Valentine's cards.[127] That this was reported on the front page of the local paper, including details of where and when the relevant issue of *Pathetone* would be screened, further hints at the appeal cinemagazines had when featuring items of local interest.[128] It was in the inter-war period, as Laura Carter has persuasively argued, that museums sloughed off Victorian paternalism in favour of 'a democratic appeal to educating the ordinary public'.[129] A key means of doing so, especially in regional or local museums outside London, was to focus on presenting the social and cultural history of everyday life to museumgoers, emphasising links between the past lives of 'ordinary' people and those of the contemporary audience.[130] As with the commonalities and links to popular science magazines, cinemagazines' repeated collaborations with museums show them to be part of a wider trend of leisure and media which aimed to impart knowledge in a democratised, accessible manner in this period.

One of the single largest categories of 'interest' was animal items, and it is this coverage which best highlights the tensions between instruction and divertissement within cinemagazine content. Some items were relatively informative about naturalism. In 1923, *Pathé Pictorial*

[124] *Pictorial*, 'Crystals'; *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Thermometers' (29 Jun 1939); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The Word Machine' (1 Nov 1937); *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Old Timers' (25 Jan 1934).
[125] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Manuscripts' (13 Apr 1939).
[126] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Xylophone Musical Stones' (31 Dec 1936).
[127] *Pictorial*, 'Valentines'.
[128] *Hull Daily Mail* (6 Apr 1939), p.1.
[129] Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life*, pp.128-131.
[130] *Ibid*.

featured an item entitled ‘Bird Brevities - A Nature Study’ which had intertitles written by an accredited naturalist alongside good shots of various birds in close-up.[131] Indeed, these items were sometimes designed as part of a scheduled block of related issues. In the month of April 1920, for example, each week’s issue of *Pictorial* featured a study of a different species of bird, some of which were filmed in Pathécolour.[132] Even if each item was brief, for habitual cinemagoers this themed month would have provided numerous interlinked ornithological facts.

Likewise, items filmed at Edinburgh Zoo included commentary by the zookeepers, who gave in-depth information about the particular animals being shown onscreen.[133] Much of this information about animals was intermingled with anthropomorphic humour, where the animals were humanised for comic effect. For instance, before the zookeeper descanted his knowledge of penguins, the intertitle stated, ‘Some comedians are born, not made, and the penguins are in this category’, framing the item as primarily comedic. Likewise, another item on the chimpanzees at Edinburgh Zoo in 1935 was almost entirely played for laughs. Beyond a passing reference to their diet, the commentary set up the footage as showing the chimp ‘Boo Boo…giving a party for her friends to meet her 6-month old daughter Jubilee’, with a comic musical backing track played throughout.[134] Comedy of chimps framed as human and the cuteness of baby animals was proffered in cinemagazines as pure entertainment bereft of instruction (see Figure 9).

Yet, Max Long has highlighted that anthropomorphising and domesticating animals was highly prevalent in inter-war culture, with BBC radio programmes, non-fiction nature films, and exhibitions at British zoos all resorting to this presentational style in their efforts to educate the public about the natural world.[135] Indeed, the educational non-fiction short film series *Secrets of Nature*, when presenting the life cycles of various plants and animals, ‘relied on a heavy dose of anthropomorphism, light humour, and drama’.[136] Luminary of the Documentary Film Movement in Britain and often self-appointed gatekeeper of what constituted worthy non-

[131] *Pathe Pictorial*, ‘Bird Brevities – A Nature Study’ (1923).
[132] BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, ‘A Nature Study of Birds’ (5 Apr 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, ‘A Peep into Birdland’ (12 Apr 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, ‘The Bird Photographer at Work’ (19 Apr 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, ‘Warblers’ (26 Apr 1920).
[133] *Pathetone Weekly*, ‘Edinburgh Zoo’ (20 Nov 1930); *Pathetone Weekly*, ‘Our Zoo’s Who’ (18 Aug 1930).
[134] *Pathetone Weekly*, ‘Just Boo Boo’s Baby’ (19 Aug 1935).
[135] Max Long, “Accustomed to Female Domination”: Women, Mass Media, and Animal Intimacy in Interwar Britain’, *Environmental History,* 27 No.1 (2022), pp.140-154.
[136] Long, ‘The Ciné-Biologists’, p.531.

fiction film, John Grierson, called *Secrets* some of 'the finest films in English production'.[137] Yet, much of what Pathé filmed for its nature studies, whether the anthropomorphised animals as shown above or slow-motion microscopic footage of plants growing, was almost identical to the supposed more serious-minded, 10-minute *Secrets of Nature* shorts.[138]

[Due to copyright, this image has been redacted from the digital copy of this thesis].

Figure 9: 'The novel, the amusing, or the strange' in an archetypal 'interest' item, 'Chimpanzee with a Film Camera', 1935 (*The Daily Herald Archive*, National Science and Media Museum, Science Museum Group Collections).

This comparison ought not to be overstated, however. Other clips in cinemagazines were more plainly filmed to showcase cute animals without any instructive qualities. For instance, an item entitled 'Sniffy the Rabbit' showed the daily life of a pet rabbit, 'the favourite member of the family', in a tenement house, with puns aplenty in the commentary.[139] It was even reported in 1921 that fast-motion footage of ducks running amok in a farmyard contained in an issue of

[137] *The Listener* (7 Mar 1934), p.xii.
[138] For Pathe's footage see *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Ferocious Plants' (13 Dec 1937); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Life Histories in Little' (15 Mar 1937); *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Micro Marvels' (27 Jul 1933). For Comparison, see British Instructional Film (hereafter BIF), *Secrets of Nature* examples located in the *Pathe News Archive*: BIF, 'Secrets of Nature – In All His Glory' (1931); BIF, 'Secrets of Nature – Plants of the Underworld' (1930); BIF, 'Secrets of Nature – Sundew' (1930).
[139] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Tame Rabbit' (9 Feb 1939).

Pathé Pictorial, 'was recently seen by the Duke of Connaught and the Crown Prince of Sweden. The distinguished spectators roared with laughter at the amusing pictures'.[140] Royalty was patently not educated on the finer points of ornithology by this clip, and nor was it intended to instruct audiences. Thus, animal clips were as often pure divertissement as they were instructive micro-documentaries.

Nevertheless, 'interest' miscellany does not necessarily need to have functioned as a consistently edifying genre for keen and serious autodidacts to have been significant as a form of democratic culture. Rather, its influence as a medium lies in it being a key means of providing unprecedented access to a little information on a lot of topics. For those who did not have the time or money for more formal education or self-improvement, cinemagazines were an integral vehicle for rendering culture in inter-war Britain more inclusive.

Section Four, Spectacles of Race and Disability for the Consumer-Citizenry:

Despite newsreel producers' claims to have pitched their product to a 'mass' audience, there were palpable if somewhat implicit limitations in who was a member of their imagined audience. The borderline between who was included and who was excluded in representations of the consumer-citizenry was perhaps more sharply defined through 'interest' items than any other staple category of newsreel content. As the previous chapters have shown, the bulk of newsreel content aimed to show audiences to themselves, trading on the proximity between public life onscreen and the lives of audiences sat in the cinema. By contrast, as Watts articulated Pathé's editorial policy for miscellany, anything 'novel' or 'strange' was considered ripe for cinemagazine items. 'Interest' was therefore sometimes conflated with difference from the assumed lives of typical cinemagoers. People who were filmed for cinemagazines, then, were often chosen because they were perceived as 'abnormal' subjects to exhibit, rather than because they were considered a part of the intended audience. Thus, interest items provide key insight into how newsreels reinscribed long-standing, preestablished divisions between who was considered a 'normal' member of the public and who were beyond the pale in the new construction of the consumer-citizenry. Hence, this section will examine the portrayal of race and disability in newsreels' miscellany.

Travelogue-style items were a major selling point of the cinemagazine miscellany for Pathé. Travelogues, typically featured as the last item in each issue of Pathé's cinemagazines

[140] *The Daily Mail* (26 Oct 1921), p.2.

throughout the 1920s, were also, alongside fashion, among the few items which were colourised. These were ordinarily colourised using the Pathécolour technique, though occasionally Polychromide was employed.[141] That the expensive process of adding colour to film was reserved for travel items suggests these were intended to function, like fashion, as showstopper stories in each issue of *Pathé Pictorial*. The choice of locale for travel footage was wide-ranging. Sometimes picaresque places in the Britain were chosen such as York or the Welsh Rheidol Valley in 1930 and 1929, respectively.[142] More usually it was international destinations chosen. For example, a series of items at the end of each *Pathé Pictorial* issue throughout 1920 focused on various rivers and mountain ranges in Europe such as the French Vienne River or the Swiss Alps.[143] In many ways, these lavish shots of scenery provided cinemagoers with a vicarious means of travel. Most viewers would have at most one holiday a year, which would typically be to one of the British seaside resorts such as Blackpool.[144] Thus, newsreels allowed Britons a glimpse at locales beyond their own shores. Indeed, the Leicestershire Co-operative Travel Bureau attempted to exploit the allure of newsreels' travelogue content in their advertising. In May 1935, an advertisement in the local Trocadero cinema's monthly brochure asked readers, 'After seeing the Pictures on the "News Reel" have you not often wished for an opportunity to visit some of the delightful spots shown?', before attesting that with the local travel bureau, 'it can be done! We can help you' alongside listings for various European excursions and 'cruising holidays'.[145] Newsreel travelogue items were therefore intended to serve as a brief transportive experience for cinemagoers who rarely travelled far themselves.

However, the brevity and standardised style of these items meant that, to convey a sense of each place filmed, the cinematography, intertitles, and later commentary lent heavily upon national stereotypes to function as a contextual shorthand. For example, a 1935 item on the Danish Faroe Island was titled 'Home of the Vikings', to highlight the Danish locale through

[141] Here is a rare example of polychromide colour from *Eve's Film Review*: Mike Trickett Cinepix Collection, 'Polychromide – Early color film process', uploaded to YouTube (4 Jun 2019). Available online at: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFI8aU30xCM).
[142] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Glimpses of York – In Pathecolor (sic)' (6 Jan 1930); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Down the Rheidol Valley – Nr. Aberystwyth' (23 Dec 1929). These items are also good examples of the Pathecolour tinting process.
[143] BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Through the gorges of the Allier' (31 May 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Along the Vienne River, France' (12 Jan 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, 'The Banks of the Creuses' (19 Jan 1920); BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, 'In the Shadow of the Bernese Alps (Switzerland)' (9 Feb 1920).
[144] Scott, Walker, and Miskell, 'British working-class household composition', p.666-667. See also John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: holidays and resorts in the twentieth century* (Manchester: 2000).
[145] Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, *Cinemas: Leicester: Trocadero*, REF Ephemera 791.43, 'Trocadero Programme' (May 1935).

one of the most familiar aspects of Scandinavian history.[146] Moreover, the commentator described, over shots of women in homespun shawls and skirts, that the people, 'though up-to-date in thought, were traditional in their clothes; the mass-produced article is unknown among these home-woven dresses'.[147] It also featured a panning shot of local men in the costumes they wore on 'fete days' performing festive dancing, while the commentator opined that 'strange to relate, dancing is a man's business in this dour land'.[148] It was a 'quaint' old Europe of rural idylls, national peasant costumes, and folk festivals that newsreels depicted. Even Wales was described in an Anglocentric stereotype as 'the country of long words and complicated spellings' over shots of countryside near Aberystwyth.[149] A stock shot list and breezy shorthand descriptions meant that travelogues tended to reinforce stereotypical images of life outside of England.

This proved particularly significant when newsreels filmed Africa and Asia for travelogue-style content, both of which were generally represented through well-worn racialised imagery and ideas that had been developed over the last century. People of colour from Africa were generally depicted through images of tribal culture. Several items featured ritual dances as a spectacle for British audiences. The titles often provided little context, describing it as a 'Native War Dance' without reference to which tribes were being filmed. Even when the Kamba people, those who lived predominantly in the southeast of Kenya, were named (mislabelled as the 'Wakemba tribe'), their 'marathon dancing' was purportedly for a nondescript 'native holiday'.[150] The zeal of dances was also foregrounded, as by the twice-used title, 'the bigger the noise – the bigger the welcome'.[151] Thus, an indistinct imagery of tribal spectacle became a frequent shorthand for African people of colour. Indeed, a 1924 item directly contrasted the clothing of 'dusky beauties from Africa…[and] Europe's modern maids', again juxtaposing a dynamic, white world of modern consumerist fashion with a primitive black Africa of 'traditional' garbs.[152]

For Asia, Orientalist tropes of ancient, religious, and decadent civilisations were resorted to by newsreel producers. For instance, a repeated item was of Hindu 'spiritual fervour' through the

[146] *Pathe Sound Pictorials*, 'Home of the Vikings' (22 Nov 1935).
[147] *Ibid*.
[148] *Ibid*.
[149] *Pictorial*, 'Down the Rheidol Valley'.
[150] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Marathon Dancing' (29 Oct 1925).
[151] *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Bigger the Noise – The Bigger the Welcome' (4 Apr 1929); *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Bigger the Noise…The Bigger the Welcome!' (13 Aug 1928).
[152] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Contrasts in Black and White at Wembley' (29 May 1924).

spectacle of firewalking.[153] A short 1926 item, which covered the inauguration of a new Hindu temple in Trinidad, simply had the title, 'all the glamour of the East'.[154] Presumably this shorthand was enough to invoke the well-established Orientalist tropes of lavish religious ceremony and civilisational decadence that audiences would have been well-versed in from other popular culture of the period.[155] A 1936 item on different currencies around the world succinctly summarised all the racialised shorthand and stereotypes which suffused newsreels' interest items. It opened with the commentator stating, 'now let's away to the strange countries on a treasure hunt for strange money'.[156] The item then jumped around the world, from Abyssinia to Sudan, with a white woman displaying different objects used as money borrowed from the British Museum collections. The commentary throughout was typically pun-laden and served to emphasise the supposed oddness of each example. It was also notable that Japan and China were included as historical examples for the origins of coinage, which reinforced notions of the Orient as ancient civilisations disconnected from the 'modern' progress that newsreels showcased elsewhere in science items.[157] Overall, people of colour, according to newsreels' travelogue-style content, were either primitive savages or decadent Orientals; both were filmed primarily as 'exotic' spectacle for British viewers.

Though it is worth noting that audiences, as with all newsreel content, had considerable freedom in how they interpreted these travelogue items. For example, the film columnist for the *Hull Daily Mail,* writing in July 1921 under the nom de plume 'Projector', stressed that newsreel footage proved that 'human nature is the same the whole world over'.[158] They went on to single out a *Pathé Pictorial* item which featured 'natives in sunny Africa' wherein 'the demure coloured damsels…[attempted] to look coy, whilst the men…[endeavoured] to treat the lens with complete nonchalance'.[159] Finally, they concluded that 'when pictures of London street crowds appear on the film the men and women can be seen behaving in a very similar fashion' to those filmed in Africa.[160] For 'Projector', travelogue or ethnographic-style items highlighted commonalities of gender across the world over marked distinctions of race. Thus,

[153] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Holy Firewalkers' (7 Jun 1928); *Pathe Gazette*, 'The Ordeal by Fire' (3 Jun 1929).
[154] *Pathe Gazette*, 'With all the Glamour of the East' (29 Nov 1926).
[155] See John Seed, 'Limehouse Blues: Looking for 'Chinatown' in the London Docks, 1900-40', *History workshop journal*, 62 No.1 (2006), pp.58–85; C. Yamini Krishna, 'Princely Films: The Silver Jubilee Film of 1937 and the Princely State of Hyderabad, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 41 No.2 (2021), pp.217-231.
[156] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'World Money' (3 Sep 1936).
[157] *Ibid*.
[158] *Hull Daily Mail* (20 Jul 1921), p.2.
[159] *Ibid*.
[160] *Ibid*.

travelogue items did not necessarily impart messages of racial discrimination, though even here, 'Projector' articulated their message of universal humanity within colonialist language derived from the ethnographic exhibition of 'natives' for white Britons to appraise. If audiences, assumed to be white and British, were entitled to participate in contemporary culture, they were also given the right to judge and assess cultures other than their own through newsreels' travelogue items.

What is striking is that this content was seldom explicitly imperialist, although some items occasionally peddled the British imperial mythos. For instance, one *Pictorial* item in 1939 purported to tell 'the greatest story of all' by recounting a potted history of the British Empire.[161] A series of animated maps and diagrams were intercut with dramatisations of historical figures to run through a triumphalist narrative of Empire from Alfred the Great to the contemporary 'commonwealth'.[162] It finished on brief shots of various colonies and dominions as the commentator declared, 'now the great cavalcade of empire makes a grand spectacle, so widespread is it…those early pioneers have left us a great inheritance of which we can be justly proud, for might and right go hand in hand in these great possessions across the seas'.[163] Newsreels were certainly not out to contradict imperialist ideals, and could give vent to full-blooded celebration of the British Empire on occasion. Indeed, in its portrayals of people of colour, newsreels implicitly buttressed the stereotypes and notions of racial hierarchy which legitimised the British imperial endeavour. Yet, when compared to the explicit ideological imperialism projected in the documentaries produced by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) and later Government Post Office Film Unit, the BBC Empire Service, or the wildly popular cycle of imperial feature films in the 1930s, newsreels were relatively muted by comparison.[164]

The closest newsreels came to imperialist propaganda was in coverage of the Empire Christmas pudding. This was a publicity campaign organised by the EMB, with a series of posters, booklets, ceremonies, and even a short film produced between 1926 and 1931 to advertise a recipe for Christmas pudding, designed by the chef to George V, which included ingredients from across the colonies and dominions of the Empire.[165] The pudding, and its attendant

[161] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'British Empire' (1939).
[162] *Ibid*.
[163] *Ibid*.
[164] Anthony Scott, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the birth of a progressive media profession* (Manchester: 2012), chapter two; Richards, ''Patriotism with Profit' in Curran and Porter, *British Cinema History*.
[165] National Archives, F. C. Harrison, 'The Recipe for the Empire Christmas Pudding', REF CO 956/63; Stephen Constantine, '"Bringing the Empire Alive": The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-1933' in John Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: 1986), pp.209-210.

marketing materials, were intended to symbolise the unity of the Empire under the paternalistic head of the British monarch. Two Pathé items, in December 1926 and 1927 respectively, covered the ceremonial making of an Empire pudding at Mansion House in London. Both opened with identical title cards which stated, 'Think And Eat---Imperially! Earl of Meath, Empire Movement Veteran, and representatives of Dominions, at mixing of the King's Empire Xmas pudding'.[166] Audiences were thereby exhorted to take heed of the campaign's core message. Moreover, the footage of the ceremony itself included shots of peoples in stereotypical costumes from various dominions carrying the ingredients, such as two black men ostensibly from Zanzibar carrying cloves, South Asian men in turbans carrying various ingredients from India and the British West Indies, and a stout John Bull-esque white man carrying a keg of 'English beer'. Gaumont British also covered the ceremony in 1927, along with a similar ceremony where a 'Giant Christmas pudding made from Empire-grown ingredients' was baked in the Albert Hall for the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals charity in 1931.[167] Again, this demonstrates that newsreel producers were not averse to collaborating in imperial propaganda if it was suitably spectacular or novel. Such explicit imperialism was, however, rare when compared to other films or print media of the period. Instead, newsreels' support for Empire was more implicit. Travelogue items frequently projected racialised stereotypes and reductive shorthand imagery of people of colour which reinscribed notions of racial difference and a general sense of white superiority.

Portrayals of race within Britain itself were also for the most part exclusionary. As a rule, newsreels effaced the racial diversity of immigrant communities that had long been a part of many British towns and cities by simply neglecting to film them with any regularity.[168] Indeed, in the few instances where British people of colour were filmed, they were pointed out as unusual or novel. For instance, a 1931 *Gaumont Graphic* item of 'Aintree Sunday' before the Grand National ended on a close up of the famous black British racing tipster and raconteur Peter MacKay, who went by the alias 'Prince' Ras Monolulu.[169] MacKay, originating from a Dutch colony in the Virgin Islands, claimed to be a chieftain's son from Abyssinia and largely

[166] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Think and Eat Imperially' (23 Dec 1926); *Pathe Gazette*, 'Think and Eat Imperially' (5 Dec 1927).
[167] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Representatives of the Empire help make the King's Christmas Pudding' (1927); *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Giant Christmas Pudding made from Empire-Grown Ingredients leaves the Albert Hall' (1931). For the 1931 event at the Albert Hall, see also Royal Albert Hall Archives, *The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals of the Poor (PDSA) Gigantic Christmas Market* (24-25 Nov 1931), REF RAHE/1/1931/81.
[168] Laura Tabili, *Global migrants, local culture: natives and newcomers in provincial England, 1841-1939* (Basingstoke: 2011).
[169] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Aintree Sunday, the Grand National Course' (1931).

invented a fantastical life story for himself.[170] His success as a tipster was largely derived from his performance of racial spectacle, creating the princely 'tribal' costume he was filmed wearing and sometimes using the cry 'Black man for luck' to entice punters.[171] Thus, Gaumont's footage of Mackay rendered black immigrants as exceptional spectacles. Likewise, in 1920 the West London 'wedding of Mr. Barbour-James and Miss Rita Goring', both black immigrants from the Gold Coast, was only filmed due to the attendance of 'King Oluwa of Lagos'.[172] Shots of the monarch wearing indigenous ceremonial clothes with his retinue comprised almost half the item.

Even a 1926 item which covered the breaking up of Wembley amusement park by labourers felt compelled to single out a black labourer for close up shots of him smiling to the camera and carrying debris.[173] The rest of the workforce, seemingly all white, were only shot in the middle distance as groups, as it was their labour that was considered cinematic as opposed to their skin colour. Thus, people of colour within Britain were filmed as exceptional individuals, newsworthy due to their supposed racial difference from the audience.

A 1936 *Pathetone* item of tenor Dennis Noble singing 'Limehouse' surprisingly provided one of the few glimpses of an immigrant community.[174] Interspersed with Noble singing in the studio were various shots of the London district of Limehouse and its non-white, mainly Asian, residents going about their daily lives. The song, however, opened with the line 'all the lousy Orient loafing by the quay' and the lyrics more generally described the area as mysterious yet dangerously decadent. It thereby invoked all the Orientalist tropes that Limehouse had become synonymous with by the 1920s through fictional portrayals in novels and films.[175] Newsreels again rendered the immigrant community of London a place set apart from the rest of the city and its white consumer-citizenry.

Aside from the intermittent appearance of people of colour in newsreels' 'interest' miscellany, among the most prominent coverage of race outside of travelogues was indirectly, through the pervasiveness of blackface in variety acts filmed by Pathé. Minstrel acts, where white performers would don black face paint and clothes to caricature African Americans from the Southern United States, were imported from America in the early nineteenth century and by

[170] Anita McConnell, 'MacKay, Peter Carl [called Ras Prince Monolulu] (1881-1965), racing tipster' in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2010).
[171] *Ibid*.
[172] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Wedding of Colour (AKA Colourful Wedding)' (25 Oct 1920).
[173] *Gaumont Graphic*, 'Breaking-up Wembley' (13 Jan 1926).
[174] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Dennis Noble' (8 Oct 1936).
[175] Seed, 'Limehouse Blues', pp.58-59.

the 1920s was a familiar type of music hall act.[176] Given the prevalence of variety performers in *Pathetone*, it is unsurprising that blackface minstrel acts were filmed. All-white acapella group The Four Musketeers performed archetypal minstrelsy for *Pathetone* in 1933. The title card for one of these established that the songs the group performed apparently derived from 'Music of human lives...sometimes of suffering, often of joy...the Negro Spirituals have been handed down from generation to generation, until the origin of many has been lost'.[177] Likewise, the Musketeers started the performance in white tie and tails before donning blackface to appear in a set mocked up to look like the 'Deep South' bayou of the United States.[178] The 'ordinary' attire and appearance of white singers was thereby juxtaposed with the blackface minstrel persona to heighten the performance of race. Similar was an item which featured the impressionist Afrique (presumably a pun on 'a freak') in 1936. After impressions of American comedian Eddie Cantor and a famous opera tenor, Afrique put on rudimentary blackface and costume of flat cap and scarf to perform as 'a couple of negro entertainers'.[179] The comedy of these impressions was from the use of stereotyped dialect, a sort of caricatured pidgin English often used in minstrel acts, alongside performing a song in the style of Al Jolson, among the most famous film stars of the period to perform blackface routines. Thus, blackface was a staple of Pathé's music hall items and served as another means by which stereotypes about people of colour were projected to British audiences.

Yet, Christine Grandy has argued persuasively that for most Britons, minstrel acts were not seen as 'about race'. Rather, these performances of blackface were perceived as an 'authentic' part of British music hall tradition, essentially an expression of national popular culture.[180] Following from this argument, it is striking the degree to which many minstrel acts and blackface in newsreels made little reference to race. Nosmo King was among the most prolific blackface comedians to appear in issues of *Pathetone* across the 1930s. His act, always in typical minstrel blackface, bowler hat and round spectacles, and wearing an ostentatious military costume, was otherwise indistinguishable from other variety comedians, jokes generally being about drunkenness, martial strife, and wordplay.[181] Though he played a

[176] Christine Grandy, '"The Show Is Not about Race"': Custom, Screen Culture, and the Black and White Minstrel Show', *The Journal of British studies*, 59 No.4 (2020), pp.863-869.
[177] *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'The Four Musketeers' (7 Dec 1933); *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Four Musketeers' (28 Sep 1933). For a similar variety act, see also *Pathetone Weekly*, 'The Three Eddies' (11 May 1931).
[178] *Pictorial*, 'The Four Musketeers'.
[179] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Afrique' (20 Aug 1936).
[180] Grandy, 'The Show Is Not About Race', pp.883-884.
[181] *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Nosmo King' (28 Jun 1934); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Nosmo King' (15 Oct 1936); *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Nosmo King' (18 Apr 1937).

bumbling and dim-witted persona, perhaps implicitly linked to the minstrel guise, the only mention to race in the three items he appeared in was the commentator introducing his act in 1934 as 'a dash of dark'.[182] Thus, blackface was not always presented as a racialised performance.

Indeed, a bizarre 1936 item featured a toffee apple vendor selling his sweets to children at the beach whilst dressed in blackface and a barrel.[183] The only reference to his costume was the commentator attributing the vendor's success to his 'showmanship'. This implies that blackface was perceived as part of fancy dress or entertainment rather than a racialised performance. Newsreel producers, then, shared in the assumptions that Grandy highlights and were likely blind to the racial implications of blackface. Overall, people of colour were represented as stereotyped 'others' in newsreels, an 'exotic' spectacle or remarkable novelty, which not only reinforced white superiority but also effaced the actual racial diversity of the British public.

It was not just people's race which demarked them as beyond the pale of the imagined public. In the miscellany of 'interest' items, the conventions of the 'freak show' lingered on. The nineteenth century was the peak of popularity for freak shows in a range of venues across Europe and America, where disabled people were displayed or performed for paying attendees.[184] As Esme Cleall argues, such shows 'contributed to how disability came to be objectified as something 'other' and something beyond, if not antithetical to, the self….the freak show was a critical site in the representation of bodily difference and thus in the construction of normality'.[185] If the freak show itself was in decline by the 1920s, newsreels preserved its conventions when it filmed certain disabled people, who were presented as spectacle for audiences' amusement. The 'Tallest' and 'Shortest' people were frequently filmed for cinemagazine content. That such items were novelty is suggested through sequencing. In an April 1935 *Pictorial* issue, the 'Peeps Through the Window of the World' roundup segment situated American Margaret Ann Robinson, labelled the 'smallest lady on earth' between a Welsh postman on horseback and an Italian pudding festival.[186] With only around 30 seconds for each item, each were seemingly filmed as a flash of novelty. Such items also frequently objectified disabled people as a spectacle through filming them as though they were exhibits.

[182] *Pictorial*, 'Nosmo King'.
[183] *New Sound Pictorial*, 'Toffee Apples' (18 Jun 1936).
[184] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Freakery: cultural spectacles of the extraordinary body* (New York: 1996); Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: impairment and otherness across Britain and its empire, c.1800-1914* (Cambridge: 2022), chapter three
[185] Cleall, *Colonising Disability*, p.94, p.97.
[186] *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'Peeps Through the Window of the World (No.28)' (4 Apr 1935).

A 1936 item entitled 'the world's youngest giant' featured American Robert Wadlow who was 17 years old and over eight feet tall. The item proceeded to measure Wadlow meticulously, starting with his feet before comparing him to a woman of average height as the commentator relayed statistics about Wadlow to viewers.[187] In the conventional style of freak shows, Wadlow's body was filmed provide a visual spectacle for cinemagoers to gawk at. Similar were several items that traded on contrasting a little person with people over eight feet, the only novelty seemingly derived from the stock image of the two people stood beside one another.[188] Disabled bodies were therefore exhibited in newsreel interest items in a similar manner to actual freak shows.

Moreover, another convention of 'freakery' that was carried over into newsreels was a tendency to frame everyday acts as novel or strange when performed by disabled people. In 1928, an item entitled 'Quite a Miniature Affair' covered the wedding of two little people circus performers in Blackpool.[189] The shots were mostly of the procession of the bridegroom and their fellow circus performers to and from the church. In a similar vein to how the marriage of the Barbour-James' was only filmed due to their race, this Blackpool wedding was only newsworthy due to the height of the bridegroom and many of the guests. Indeed, the wedding of two little people, George Stobbart and Evelyn Crane, at York Minster was filmed in 1932. The opening title card, after the title of 'A Tiny Town Romance', stated the heights of the bride and groom after their names.[190] The footage was otherwise the stock shots of any wedding filmed by newsreel companies. Thus, weddings were turned into another means of displaying disabled people as freaks, the everyday turned into a remarkable spectacle by the disability of those being filmed.

Furthermore, as many of the distasteful titles above have suggested, interest items of disabled people were almost always given comedic intertitles or commentary. For instance, across the 1930s newsreel producers were fixated with filming 'fat babies'. These items featured large infants who were considered to have grown to sizes considered atypical for their age. They were filmed primarily as a means for commentators to wring a series of cheap puns out of the subject matter. One 1935 item entitled 'A Ten Stone Baby' had the commentator jibe, 'we don't really know whether he's solid or hollow' over footage of the child playing in a sort of

[187] *Pathe Sound Pictorial*, 'The World's Youngest Giant!' (6 Feb 1936).
[188] *Pathe Pictorial*, 'The Long and Short of It' (4 Mar 1929); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Looking Up!' (10 Feb 1930).
[189] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Quite a Miniature Affair' (11 Jun 1928).
[190] *Pathe Gazette*, 'A Tiny Town Romance' (11 Apr 1932).

enclosure.[191] Another in 1939 opened with the commentary, 'fat babies are in the news again, and here's a fine specimen', followed by a string of jokes about the infant's weight.[192] Not just treated as object of display, these infants were played for laughs. Disabled bodies, in interest items at least, were portrayed as amusing spectacles, assumed to be a newsworthy novelty by producers who imagined their target audience was wholly able-bodied. The conventions of objectified exhibition and dehumanising display that characterised the early twentieth-century freak show persisted in filmic representations of disabled people in newsreels' miscellany.

It was not exclusively in interest items where disability was projected in newsreels. After the First World War, one of the most common experiences with disability in daily life, and among the most culturally prominent and politically charged images of disability, were those of disabled ex-servicemen who had lost limbs or were otherwise irreparably wounded in combat during the war.[193] Newsreels commonly featured disabled veterans as part of Armistice Day coverage. Again, disabled people were set apart from the general public in these items. For example, a 1937 Armistice retrospective by Gaumont-British commented over shots of disabled veterans in a hospital, that 'there still exists these living cenotaphs'.[194] The pointed comparison of disabled veterans to empty tombs, both visually in juxtaposing shots of the Cenotaph with the hospital and in commentary, exploited disability as a symbol of national tragedy. Though it can only be briefly touched upon here, such coverage demonstrates that disabled people, whether as part of a freak show or reminders of the Great War, were demarcated as different from the 'ordinary' public who were imagined to be sat in the cinema.

In many respects, the newsreel camera marked the division between inclusion and exclusion when it came to 'interest' items. Those who were filmed were often put before the camera as exotic spectacle or amusing novelty, considered newsworthy due to the implied difference of their race or body. They were implicitly situated on the other side of the cinema screen from the audience in the halls, who were, again implicitly, assumed by producers to be wholly white and able-bodied. Adopting the well-worn assumptions and conventions of older media such as freak shows or ethnographic exhibitions, newsreels' interest miscellany reinscribed

[191] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'A Ten Stone Baby!' (22 Jul 1935).
[192] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Cinetopicalities in Brief (No.70)' (31 Jul 1939).
[193] The landmark studies of British ex-servicemen's disability are those by Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the male: men's bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: 1996) and Julie Anderson *War, disability and rehabilitation in Britain: soul of a nation* (Manchester: 2011).
[194] *Gaumont-British News*, 'King George VI Commemorates Armistice Day In 1937' (11 Sep 1937).

conventional borderlines of exclusion in terms of race and disability when representing the new consumer-citizenry.

Section Five, Were Cinemagoers Interested in 'Interest' Miscellany?

Aside from royalty laughing at ducks or film critics praising travelogues, did the miscellany of newsreels actually 'interest' cinemagoers? Newsreel producers certainly designed much of this content to directly engage audiences. Two types of 'interest' items, competitions and instructional content, were envisaged to enter into a dialogue with viewers and make them feel included as participants in what was being shown onscreen.

In the early 1920s in particular, competitions were frequently devised to hook viewers. For instance, there was a weekly Screen Memory Competition that ran to at least eight items in 1920.[195] Likewise, *Eve's Film Review* ran a competition in its first issue, offering £50 to the female viewer who suggested the best new title.[196] Although the apparent lack of new name suggests no winner was forthcoming, it shows how *Eve's Film Review* attempted to cultivate a dedicated female fan base by such incentives. One gimmick in 1933 explicitly drew parallels to newspaper competitions. In a short skit entitled 'Are you a Lip Reader', which had a comedian telling a joke silently and then with sound the intertitles stated, 'Papers today are fond of testing your knowledge. Here's something they haven't tried yet - lip-reading!'.[197] Similar was *Pathetone*'s 'Guess the Sound' game in 1937, where noises played without images and viewers were invited to guess before the accompanying image was revealed.[198]

Using competitions and gimmicks to increase readership was developed in the late nineteenth century by the popular press. Indeed, the 1890s periodical *Tit-Bits* ran an immensely popular competition with a suburban villa as the prize, alongside several other competitions to boost readership and garner publicity.[199] Likewise, the popular press was awash with gimmicks which intended to hook readers, such as the *Daily Mail* Rose competition in 1912 or the same

[195] BUFVC, *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Untitled Record, Item No.5' (27 Dec 1920). Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/347247).
[196] BUVC, *Eve's Film Review*, 'Title Competition' (9 Jun 1921). Available online at: (http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/story/330617).
[197] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Are You a Lip-Reader?' (26 Oct 1933).
[198] *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Guess the Sound' (1 Feb 1937). See also the repeated series of similar sound guessing games entitled 'Can You Believe Your Ears'. For example, *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Can You Believe Your Ears' (23 Apr 1934); *Pathe Sound Pictorials*, 'Can Your Believe Your Ears' (23 May 1935); *Pathetone Weekly*, 'Can You Believe Your Ears No.2' (15 Feb 1937).
[199] Jackson, *George Newnes,* p.72. For a general discussion of how such techniques were employed to build up participatory fan bases, see Ann K. McClellan, 'Tit-Bits, New Journalism, and Early Sherlock Holmes Fandom', *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 23 (2017).

newspaper producing several short films as publicity across the 1910s and early 1920s.[200] Michael Cowan has shown how such competitions were widespread in cinemagazines across inter-war Europe, and he argues that they helped to foster a loyal group of film fans.[201] In aping the marketing tactics of print culture, newsreels' miscellany was designed as a means to actively engage cinemagoers and thereby build up brand loyalty. It also shows how cinemagazines were majorly inspired by print periodicals like *Tit-Bits*, aiming for the same inclusion of the audience as legitimate participants.[202]

British cinemagazines also included instructional content that viewers could do themselves after heading home from the cinema. *Eve's Film Review* featured several items with either Santos Casani and Jose Lennard or Dina Harris and Ted Trevor demonstrating new couples' dances. For instance, a 1925 item offered 'hints' with accompanying visual demonstration of correct posture for dancing as a couple.[203] Many of the clips went into considerable detail, with an exhibition of the Sugar Step even showing footage from below via a glass floor so viewers could follow each step carefully.[204] The instructional nature of such clips is apparent from the titles, 'Dance - Do's And Don'ts' and 'The Finer Points Of Dancing'.[205] Indeed, the former of those two items ended with the intertitle, 'If you desire the printed details of the "Kinkajou", (with Ballroom hints) send Postcard to Editor, Pathé's Eve's Film Review, 103 Wardour Street, London W1. They will be sent free of charge'.[206] Here, Pathé offered a dialogue with its viewers, engaging with them to proffer self-improvement advice beyond the basics provided in the short cinemagazine items. Producers evidently intended content to intertwine with the everyday pastimes and lives of viewers beyond the cinema venue. In particular, dancing as a regular leisure pursuit was generally limited to young men and women.[207] Dance lessons were also prevalent in both the press and radio broadcasts between the wars.[208] In this way, Pathé's dance instructions were part of a wider permeation of dancing into mass media, and can again

[200] Robert Piggott, 'The Daily Mail Rose: Advertising, Gardening and Suburban Aspirations in the Edwardian Period and After', *Media History* 28 No.4 (2022), pp.482-493; Tom Rice, 'Early Edition: The Daily Mail, British Newspapers, and the Moving Image, 1896–1922', *Film History* 33 No.3 (2021), pp.66–93.
[201] Michael Cowan, 'Learning to Love the Movies: Puzzles, Participation, and Cinephilia in Interwar European Film Magazines', *Film History* 27 No.4 (2015), pp.1-45.
[202] Jackson, *George Newnes*, pp.84-85.
[203] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Madame Will You Dance?' (1925).
[204] *Eve's Film Review*, '(The Sugar Step Made Easy)' (3 Jun 1928).
[205] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Dance – Do's and Don'ts' (1928); *Pathe Pictorial*, '(The Finer Points of Dancing)' (8 Dec 1931).
[206] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Dance'.
[207] James Nott, *Going to the Palais: a social and cultural history of dancing and dance halls in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford: 2015), p.39; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, pp.163-165.
[208] Nott, *Going to the Palais*, pp.104-106.

be seen as a way knowledge of the latest dance crazes was opened up to a wider audience than those who could afford to attend dance lessons.

Eve's Film Review also often featured content with instructional advice for women. Some of this was domestic tips for housework. For example, a series of items entitled 'Eve Home Hint' provided practical advice such as how to keep butter cool without a refrigerator or an easy method for cleaning silverware.[209] Two items featured methods for folding napkins into interesting shapes for dinner parties.[210] The earliest serviette item in 1927, like the dancing demonstration, ended with the message, 'should any Patrons like a specimen serviette to copy, send postcard to: - Editor…marked "Boat", "Water-lily" or "Butterfly" and they will be sent a specimen'.[211] Thus, content which at first appears to be largely aimed at suburban housewives was, at least in principle, inclusive of a wider social demographic by the offer of further information to any audience member who wrote to Pathé periodicals department.

When not directly addressing housework, arts and crafts were a staple instructional item. An array of arts and crafts were demonstrated for audiences to copy at home, like making decorations out of seashells, tie-dying fabrics, and making wax crystal trees.[212] In many of these items the simplicity and cheapness of the craft was emphasised. Tie-dying was dubbed 'an economical art' and a 1933 item which demonstrated how to make fancy dress from paper assured viewers that 'styles are unlimited (and none should cost five shillings to make)'.[213] Self-improvement on a budget suggests that these items were aspirational in tone, aimed at the lifestyle of middle-class suburbia but offering it on the cheap to less affluent women in the audience. As Claire Langhamer has rightly argued, the division of work and leisure for women was ambiguous, as often leisure would blend into housework.[214] Indeed, pastimes such as knitting or baking also doubled as productive labour, but many still found great enjoyment in these tasks.[215] Thus, *Eve's Film Review* attempted to engage women by providing ways to make their fragmentary leisure time, when not at the cinema, more enjoyable. Much of this advice and instruction is akin to that found in the burgeoning array of inter-war women's magazines

[209] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Eve's Home Hint (A Silver Cleaning Tip)' (1 Sep 1921); *Eve's Film Review*, 'A Simple Butter-Cooler' (4 May 1933).
[210] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Serviettes – As Aids to Table Decoration' (1927); *Eve's Film Review*, 'White and Shapley – But Only Serviettes' (20 Jul 1933).
[211] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Serviettes'.
[212] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Crystal Trees' (8 Jun 1933); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Shells – and Shells – and Shells' (14 Dec 1933); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Shell Flowers "from the sea shore"' (10 Nov 1932); *Eve's Film Review*, 'Tied Dyeing – a New Art for the Home' (9 Feb 1933).
[213] *Eve's Film Review*, 'Tied Dyeing'; *Eve's Film Review*, 'Carnival Costumes in Paper' (23 Mar 1933).
[214] Langhamer, *Women's Leisure*, pp.32-33.
[215] *Ibid*, pp.41-42.

such as *Good Housekeeping* or *Home Journal*.[216] Here, as elsewhere, cinemagazines quickly adapted the instructional techniques and subject matter of print culture to film. Cinemagazines therefore employed an array of items and techniques to try and cultivate an engaged audience who felt entitled to participate in the culture being presented onscreen.

There is evidence to suggest that producers were to some extent successful in holding cinemagoers' interest. Exhibitors certainly saw them as a malleable piece of content that helped to round out a full cinema programme. Harry Sanders booked *Eve's Film Review* almost every week across the 1920s for his Welsh cinemas, despite only booking mainstream newsreels *Topical Budget* and *Pathé Gazette* intermittently.[217] This is interesting to note as *Eve's Film Review* cost £1 to book as compared with the cheaper prices for newsreels, usually priced between 12s and 14s in the silent period.[218] This suggests that *Eve's Film Review* was worth the extra cost due to its popularity, and that Sanders was willing to drop the newsreel before the cinemagazine. By contrast, the manager of the Tudor Picture House in Leicester, despite experimenting with trial bookings of *Eve's Film Review* and *Pathé Pictorial* across January 1925, only booked a mainstream newsreel (first *Topical Budget* before this was replaced with *Pathé Gazette* in 1925) regularly each week.[219] The Tudor Picture House was one of the cheaper halls in Leicester, situated in a prosperous working-class neighbourhood.[220] Thus, cinemagazines were not always perceived as worthwhile investments by cinema managers. However, a staple booking at the Tudor was the American-produced *Fox Review*, a compilation short film of variety acts which cost 15s.[221] This suggests that content similar to that provided in cinemagazines such as *Pathetone Weekly*, that is, films showing music hall-style performances, was profitable booking for a working-class Leicester audience. Thus, the range of 'interest' short films available in this period rendered it easy for managers to find one that worked for their halls. This suggests that the miscellaneous format meant that at least one type of interest item would resonate with the tastes of a particular cinema's audience.

Cinema advertising further suggests cinemagazines were a useful shorthand for managers to flag the status and character of their venue. As seen, Waverley Picture House's management

[216] Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street: A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain* (Oxford: 2014), chapter 4.
[217] *Harry Sanders Archive*, SAN/2/1/1, SAN2/1/3.
[218] Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Leicester Pictures Ltd. [Tudor Cinema, Vaughan Street] Collection, *Record Book* (1924-1929), REF DE1412/1.
[219] *Ibid*.
[220] Barefoot, ''Always a Good Programme Here', p.29.
[221] *Record Book* (1924-1929).

utilised *Around the Town* to elevate itself as a place of respectable entertainment. In the small East Midlands market town of Retford, adverts in the local press for The Picture House likewise vaunted the inclusion of *Eve's Film Review* as showing 'Latest Fashions' and *Pathé Pictorial* as 'Educational'.[222] Each cinemagazine appears to have brought a specific selling point to cinema programmes that managers utilised in their appeals to various demographics. These records suggest that the cinemagazine, eclectic in content and with a range of variant productions, was a malleable short film that managers could use to sell a particular style and 'class' of programme, whether that was music hall mirth for the upper working-class of Leicester, or the middlebrow Bon Ton of London being brought to Glasgow's suburbs.

Whether it was the more educational content that made cinemagazines a profitable bet for cinemas is also debatable. Both *Eve's Film Review* and *Pathé Pictorial* typically included a short cartoon, such as Jerry the Troublesome Tyke, Felix the Cat, or Pongo the Pup.[223] A wealth of merchandise was produced for Felix, from vases and pin badges to stuffed toys.[224] The vase had *Eve and Everybody's Film Review* printed on it, to reinforce the brand association. This material culture suggests that Felix was popular enough to generate a market for toys and themed decorations. Likewise, a minor court battle ensued in 1924 between Pathé and a Mr. Studdy over the similarities between the latter's Bonzo the dog and Pathé's Pongo the Pup. Studdy argued that not only was this copyright infringement, but that 'it was very possible that the public would confuse Pongo and Bonzo' and that he would thereby lose custom to Pathé's cartoons.[225] That Studdy was willing to bring a lawsuit against Pathé, which he subsequently lost, suggests there was considerable money in these cartoons as a result of their popularity. The seemingly substantial enthusiasm for the cartoon could suggest that cinemagazines were primarily enjoyed for this aspect, with the rest of the content passed over by cinemagoers, or at least of secondary importance to the rest of the film programme.

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[222] *Retford and Worksop Herald and North Notts Advertiser* (27 Sept 1927), p.2.
[223] For example, see *Eve's Film Review*, 'Felix the Cat Gets Revenge' (1927); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'Jerry the Troublesome Tyke (First Episode)' (27 Jul 1925); *Pathe Pictorial*, 'The Adventures of "Pongo the Pup" – Pongo Arrives' (1925).
[224] For example, see a vase with Felix printed and Pathé branding from the 1920s. 'Felix the Cat Ceramic Eve and Everybody's Film Review', *Worthpoint*. Accessible online at: (https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/felix-cat-ceramic-eve-everybody-film-1891806790). For a pin badge of Felix the cat see Young Victoria and Albert Collection, 'Felix the Cat [Brooch]' (1930-1939), Accession Number B.866-1993. Accessible online at: (http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O38141/felix-the-cat-childs-felix-the/). See also items covering the manufacture and promotion of Felix the Cat toys: *Pathe Gazette*, 'Everyone Loves Felix' (28 Feb 1924); *Pathe Gazette*, 'And Felix Goes Too' (16 Jun 1924).
[225] *The Times* (18 Oct 1924), p.4.

Nevertheless, a remarkable surviving box file of correspondence to the Pathé's Periodicals Department suggests that cinemagoers engaged with the interest content of the cinemagazine. If this box is indicative, Fred Watts received a good amount of correspondence from viewers each month. In November 1928, Miss L. Renaham from Walsingham wrote to Pathé requesting an 'instruction leaflet on How to Make Crystalised Flowers' and, in a reply with said leaflet enclosed, was informed 'we regret we have no leaflet to send you regarding Feather Buttonholes. Your kind remarks regarding our EVE'S FILM REVIEW [sic] are greatly appreciated'.[226] Thus, some women did engage with the instructional content as producers intended by writing in for further information and liked *Eve's Film Review* enough to inform Watts. Others felt fully entitled to write to Pathé with ideas for what they considered to be interesting content. For instance, the manager of the Brighton Grand Hotel Company Ltd., wrote to suggest that a talking parrot they knew would be perfect for a cinemagazine cameraman to film.[227] Meanwhile, Phyllis Chambers from Cheltenham wrote to suggest that tips for walking on a muddy day without getting filthy, being a 'dirty walker' as she described it, 'could be very useful to my sister "Eves"'.[228] This implies people actively watched the content and engaged with it enough to think up their own ideas for similar content. A young boy, clearly inspired by watching newsreels, wrote to Watts to see if it were possible to get an apprenticeship to be a cameraman for Pathé, or to offer advice on how to break into the occupation.[229] These letters collectively convey a sense of consumer sovereignty at play, that cinemagoers felt fully entitled to vocalise their tastes and participate in the culture being shown each week. For some, the 'interest' miscellany of newsreels enabled them, mostly vicariously though sometimes directly, to feel themselves legitimate participants in contemporary culture.

Conclusion:

In asking, to paraphrase the question posed in the introduction, 'can the newsreel educate?', most inter-war intellectuals and many subsequent historians have answered negatively. To their mind, the medium was too ephemeral and ultimately trivial to provide anything more than puerile divertissement. Yet, to measure the newsreel by its ability to formally educate in the same manner as books or documentaries is to miss its real significance. It was in providing access to the gamut of arts and sciences and familiarising cinemagoers with an unprecedented range of subjects that newsreels had greatest impact as a cultural medium. I argue here that it

[226] *Eve's Film Review and Pathé Pictorial Correspondence* in Crosby and Kaye (eds.)*, Projecting Britain,* p.123.
[227] *Ibid*.
[228] *Ibid*, p.121.
[229] *Ibid*, p.123.

was precisely their somewhat superficial miscellany which rendered newsreels a vehicle of cultural democratisation. Taking a 'broadbrow' holistic approach, newsreels familiarised cinemagoers with both the arts and the sciences in a relatively accessible manner. Indeed, many working-class patrons would have had few other means of accessing much of the niche or elite culture found in newsreels. True, it was a patchy, fleeting, and often shallow education provided in each week's issue and newsreel producers certainly treated any educational 'uplift' their product possessed as secondary to its main role as light entertainment.

More significantly, there were clear limits to who were included in the public that newsreel producers intended to instruct and entertain. Anyone considered 'abnormal', foremost due to their race or disability, were thrust before the camera as a spectacle of otherness and thereby set apart from the consumer-citizenry of the imagined cinema audience. Notwithstanding such limitations, newsreels should not be discounted due to their often-trivial style. Indeed, it is striking that ostensibly uplifting media such as BBC programmes and documentary shorts adopted similar stylistic techniques to render their own content more digestible. In this sense, newsreels, through interest miscellany, were filmic pioneers of the style and format that cultural democratisation took in twentieth-century media. Between the wars, then, the miscellany of newsreels allowed the cinemagoing public, as the tagline for one cinemagazine put it, to 'learn a little, [and] laugh a lot'.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to overturn three shibboleths that suffused contemporary thinking on newsreels and heavily informed subsequent historiography on the medium. It has done so primarily to reconceptualise newsreels as an influential civic medium in many Britons' everyday lives between the wars.

First, newsreels were not a force for homogenisation in terms of either social cohesion or the formation of a national identity. True, newsreels were distributed internationally, and each issue contained at least some identical items of national news. 'Interest' content, broadly the same in every newsreel and cinemagazine issue, helped to democratise culture throughout the nation and beyond as cinemagoers felt entitled to access the arts and sciences irrespective of where they hailed from. When viewed from the side of production and distribution, newsreels were indisputably a global 'mass' medium.

However, to look at how newsreels were exhibited by cinema proprietors and received by audiences reveals that they were inextricable from a localised viewing context. As has been demonstrated, cinemas were prime venues for civic culture and watching a local edition of a newsreel or attending a special screening were often integral to participating in this culture. The primary political function of newsreels was as a projection of, and means of participating in, civic culture on the scale of the town, city, or occasionally region. By contrast, uniform statements of nationalism or imperialist pride, whilst not uncommon, were seldom as resonant with audiences. The nation or Empire were often filtered through a civic lens, either by how items were edited or how they were screened. Localised production, exhibition, and reception were what distinguished newsreels from the other two 'mass' media of the period, radio and national newspapers, both of which struggled before the mid-1930s to fulfil consumers' desire to see themselves and their own communities in the news.

Secondly, while newsreels were often an insubstantial news source compared to the press and artistically lacklustre when compared to documentaries of the period, the medium ought not be dismissed as uninfluential. An ephemeral medium, each issue was designed to be disposed of, and ultimately forgotten, after a two-week run. In fan magazines, cinemagoers characterised newsreels as a tedious experience, watched with only casual attention, and, as recorded memories attest, one that did not linger long in patrons' minds after they exited the cinema. No single item in any given issue, then, held much meaning for audiences nor prompted effusive responses. Instead, newsreels must be studied cumulatively, for the staple topics, stock shots,

and mainstay tropes that cinemagoers saw repeatedly as part of their weekly cinema visit. Audiences, if somewhat inattentive, still watched newsreels actively and many engaged with them in a prosaic manner. It is this 'everydayness' of newsreels, the way they became baked into daily routines as an integral part of the primary commercial leisure pursuit in inter-war Britain, where their influence can be appreciated.

Thirdly, newsreels were not 'propaganda for things as they are'. On a basic level, audience members were not passive receptacles for the ideological messages that newsreel producers may have hoped to project. Cinemagoers were discriminating viewers who to a significant degree made what they wanted of the newsreels they watched. It is also doubtful whether newsreel editors had a consistent ideology which informed the creation of their product in the same way that the BBC was guided by its Reithian mission statement. As other scholars have argued and has been shown at various points throughout this thesis, newsreel companies toed the establishment line in political coverage. They were never anti-imperialist and seldom criticised the British government; producers shared much sympathy with Conservative politics. Yet, newsreels were foremost a business enterprise guided by the commercial imperative to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. If there was any overarching ethos which informed newsreel production, it was that of consumer sovereignty: 'nothing must be included which the average man does not like'.[1]

Moreover, formal party-politics, major political events, and international relations, those items where conservative political ideals and social mores were most likely to be projected, comprised only a relatively small part of newsreel content. The miscellany format of newsreels meant that ostensibly 'apolitical' topics such as royal ceremonies, town carnivals, sports, variety acts, and 'interest' subjects formed the bulk of items included in each bi-weekly issue. Moreover, the majority of this staple content, likely unintentionally, expressed a civic ethos. In an attempt to engage viewers, newsreel content encouraged active participation in a way that often enmeshed the roles of consumer and citizen. Ever cautious to not alienate potential viewers with 'controversial' items, content also generally stressed a non-partisan inclusion of all citizens irrespective of their political beliefs, gender, or social class. Thus, the core values of a civic participatory democracy pervaded stock newsreel items throughout the period. In revising these three shibboleths, this thesis posits that newsreels were a more progressive medium than previously thought, one that, precisely because of its banal 'everydayness' in

[1] G.T. Cummins, 'Telling the world with pictures' *Kinematograph Weekly* (1934) in James Ballantyne (ed.), *Researcher's Guide to British Newsreels* Vol.1 (London: 1983), p.20.

cinemagoers' lives, was fundamental to the processes of cultural and political democratisation in early-to-mid twentieth century Britain.

This thesis also has wider implications for historians' understanding of inter-war public life. Newsreels were not a neutral mirror that simply reflected the public back to itself. The medium was central to the (re)construction of the body politic as a public of consumer citizens in the two decades after the First World War. This element of the cinema programme effected a cumulative twofold transformation of both cultural representations of the public and the social practices of habitual cinemagoers.

Onscreen, items repeatedly validated newly enfranchised men and women as legitimate members of the public. For the first time, cinemagoers routinely saw, and later heard, people much like themselves in each issue. Their tastes and pastimes were well-represented, often portrayed in newsreels as the popular culture of the 'mass' British public. Moreover, through coverage of civic culture and celebrities, hometowns and municipal pride were lauded as newsworthy. The subject matter of newsreels was often tied to the vicinity of the cinema in which it was seen. The local public that newsreels projected was, in terms of class and gender, an inclusive one. More generally, a democratic sense of entitlement to participate suffused newsreel content. 'Interest' content presented the arts and sciences as realms that cinemagoers were encouraged to enter and engage with. Cinemagoers were invited to participate across the boundary of the silver screen as instructional content and competitions attempted to establish a direct relationship between newsreel companies and their audiences. The consumer who sat in the cinema was represented, however superficially, as sovereign arbiter of what newsreel cameramen filmed, and editors then included in the twice-weekly issue. Meanwhile, the role of civic celebrity valorised in countless newsreel items helped to democratise who could serve as a representative of various political communities. Those who wore the royal crown and the beauty contest tiara were equally newsworthy and apt to be celebrated in newsreels. Young, working-class women and thoroughbred royalty were consequently both considered legitimate representatives in civic culture. Thus, newsreels projected a notion of consumer sovereignty, the cinemagoer as entitled to see their tastes and desire for representation onscreen, alongside a more implicit (likely unintentional) civic ethos, the cinemagoer as an active, non-partisan participant in local public life.

This should be tempered by stressing the fact that newsreels were as much about exclusion from the public sphere as they were about greater inclusion. The cinema audience, and by

extension the public, were envisaged as wholly white and able-bodied by newsreel producers. Accordingly, people of colour or those with disabilities were either presented as exotic spectacles for audiences to gawk at, or otherwise erased from the composite image of the British public. Immigrant diasporas or ethnic minorities within Britain were seldom filmed, and many disabled people were set apart as objects of either novelty or pity. The consumer-citizenry constructed by newsreels aided the exclusion of people considered different, reinscribing long-established stratifications of race and disability and sustaining them into the twentieth century.

Offscreen, the routine act of watching a newsreel enmeshed commercial leisure with civic citizenship. Most of the British public at one point or another would have vocalised their opinions on the news, whether through an offhand comment or applause, whilst sat in the cinema; the medium engaged its audience, sporadically and casually. Thus, the consumer sovereignty presented in the newsreels was enacted in cinemas across Britain as discriminating viewers felt entitled to articulate their tastes and make their opinions heard. Moreover, watching newsreels was often connected to wider political culture in localities across the country. Cinema managers and newsreel producers worked in tandem to ensure that the exhibition of local items was frequently tied into civic ceremonies, municipal philanthropy, or marketed as a community event in its own right. The watching of newsreels was, then, a key part of everyday civic culture throughout Britain. It provided a rare means to participate in public life for many who had neither the time nor resources to join a voluntary organisation or work in municipal politics. Newsreels were not just integrated into civic culture but helped to democratise it in this period. It was among the salient daily social practices wherein consumption and civic duty intertwined. At this nexus of commercial leisure and local political cultures, consumer-citizenship played out in Britons' everyday routines. The combined ethos of social idealism and mass consumerism projected onscreen was put into practice inside the inter-war cinema, primarily because of the newsreel.

The local body politic, then, was changed fundamentally by watching newsreels. In many respects, they were the cultural complement to the political and social change heralded by the twin advent of mass enfranchisement and mass production across the early twentieth century. Moreover, inclusion and exclusion from the public was predicated as much by envisioned markets as by political ideologies or formal party-politics. To be considered a viable or lucrative market by media producers frequently begot representation as part of the mass public of consumer-citizens. The boundaries of who was a member of the public in a political or civic

sense were to some degree demarcated by assumed purchasing power. Thus, social idealism could not have pervaded inter-war British culture nor informed social practices quite so effectively without commercial leisure and media. It was in the cinema, and specifically in watching the twice-weekly newsreel, that a civic ethos became a part of everyday life. Historians of inter-war Britain cannot adequately understand urban public life in this period without appreciating the intimate proximity, and mutually reinforcing aspects, of civic and consumer cultures. So too, everyday acts of consumption like cinemagoing to a significant degree determined the very character and shape of Britain's participatory democracy, as citizenship and consumerism became increasingly inextricable and indistinct in so many aspects of daily life across the twentieth century.

The findings of this thesis also nuance the favoured chronology of British consumer-citizenship. Many historians, such as Frank Trentmann and Lawrence Black, have argued that the consumer-citizen only became a central paradigm for British politics and society in the affluence of the 1950s.[2] Qualifying this, they often denote the nineteenth-century or inter-war precursors of this concept, such as the initial academic theorisations of consumer sovereignty and the advent of market research companies in the mid-1930s.[3] Nevertheless, as Allistair Kefford reiterated in his recent article on consumer-citizenship and post-war government housing policies, 'the 1950s marked a moment in which patterns of consumer-driven social change which had their origins in the interwar period intensified to the extent that they fundamentally reshaped the bases of post-war politics and governance'.[4] According to this view, consumer-citizenship only really became politically and culturally resonant in the decades following the Second World War.

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[2] Frank Trentmann, 'Knowing Consumers – Histories, Identities, Practices: An Introduction' in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: 2006), pp.1-27; Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-1970* (Basingstoke: 2010), see especially chapter two; Peter Gurney, 'The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 77 No.4 (2005), pp.956-987; Matthew Hilton, 'The Fable of the Sheep, or, Private Virtues, Public Vices: The Consumer Revolution of the Twentieth Century', *Past and Present* 176 (2002), pp.222-256; See also the preponderance of essays focused on the postwar period in Kerstin Bruckweh (ed.), *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer: A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere* (Oxford: 2011).

[3] Trentmann, 'Knowing Consumers' in Trentmann, *Making of the Consumer*, p.7; Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'The Consumer as "Voter," "Judge," and "Jury": Historical Origins and Political Consequences of a Marketing Myth', *Journal of Macromarketing*, 31 No.1 (2011), p.11; Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: 2003); Moran, 'Mass-Observation, Market Research', pp.829-830; Beers, 'Whose Opinion', p.182.

[4] Alistair Kefford, 'Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-war Britain: The Parker Morris Report, Affluence and the Even Briefer Life of Social Democracy', *Twentieth Century British History* 29 No.2 (2018), p.257.

Yet, Jon Lawrence, in his critique of scholarly uses of the term affluence, has argued persuasively that much of the social change attributed to the term, the widespread participation of the working classes in home ownership and consumerism, had already occurred by the late 1930s.[5] He contends that, 'working people, in their great diversity, remade their lives consciously from the bottom up across the middle decades of the twentieth century'.[6] Thus, there is grounds to question whether the political shift to consumer-citizenry as a salient model of the body politic, typically presented as a byproduct of post-war affluence, was not also an earlier phenomenon. Richard Hornsey's work on mass production is richly suggestive here. He argues that the marketing of mass-produced goods between the wars characterised consumerism as a form of 'social empowerment' as purchasing these products was framed as a 'gesture toward greater material parity and wider social inclusion'.[7] Complementing the rise of working-class consumerism, then, was a prevalent discourse that connected consumer sovereignty to notions of participatory democracy.

As Kefford rightly posits, due to 'the absence of more detailed empirical study into how ideas of the citizen-subject came to be transformed by consuming practices, we know relatively little of the historical processes through which models of the citizen and consumer were elided, [and] how (or where) such a recasting of the individual subject took place'.[8] Cinemagoing and watching newsreels provides an 'empirical study' where social practice and cultural representation met. I argue that the cinema was a prime site wherein citizenship was remodelled, and that these processes by which consumption transformed the citizen-subject were widespread and already apace in the 1920s. I would further suggest that by 1939, consumerism, democratic entitlement, and civic participation were firmly linked in minds of cinemagoers, even if it was seldom articulated explicitly. The consumer-citizen model may have been inchoate and not yet codified, but it was practiced widely. Consumer-citizenship therefore existed as a set of banal practices and everyday cultural images at least three decades before it was recognised and then reified by post-war scholars, politicians, pollsters, and market researchers.

There is also a general tendency for historians to focus on voluntary organisations or government institutions when studying consumer-citizenship. Organisations such as the Co-

[5] Jon Lawrence, 'Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c.1930–64', *Cultural and Social History* 10 No.2 (2013), p.276.
[6] *Ibid*, p.289.
[7] Hornsey, 'The Penguins Are Coming', pp.817-818.
[8] Kefford, 'Housing the Citizen-Consumer', p.230.

operative Movement or the Consumers' Association are given much consideration.[9] As a result of this, the organised consumer becomes the protagonist of how consumer-citizenship developed in the twentieth century. Other scholars have instead turned to the archives of government departments, policymakers, or market research companies to study how various elites conceptualised and understood consumer-citizenship as a political discourse.[10] Taking heed of Lawrence's view that working people had considerable agency in the social change of this period, it is striking that the consumer who was not a volunteer, who was member of no organised society or group, and who rarely dabbled in formal politics beyond the ballot box remains a neglected figure in studies of consumer-citizenship.

The work of Matt Houlbrook is instructive here, as he reveals how queer men's inclusion and exclusion from the public sphere was performed in everyday acts at London's restaurants, bars, bath houses, and dances halls between the wars.[11] For the wider populace throughout Britain, the cinema became another key venue where the unorganised, unaffiliated consumer participated in political culture. Likewise, cinema managers and newsreel producers baked acts of civic citizenship into the consumption of a newsreel. Moreover, the evidence presented throughout this thesis suggests that many cinemagoers, whether writing to fan magazines, surveyed by managers, competing in a beauty contest, or simply articulating their opinion about the newsreel inside the cinema, took their role as a consumer-citizen to heart even if they phrased it differently. It is in the unorganised, the uncodified, the spontaneous banal acts that gradually, cumulatively became familiar weekly habits where consumer-citizenship first took root and transformed how Britons related to the body politic.

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[9] Peter Gurney, *Co-operative culture and the politics of consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester: 1996); Peter Gurney, 'Co-operation and the 'new consumerism' in interwar England', *Business History*, 54 No.6 (2012), pp.905-924; Peter Gurney, 'Redefining 'the woman with the basket': The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Politics of Consumption in Britain during the Second World War', *Gender and History*, 32 No.1 (2020), pp.189-207; Hilton, *Consumerism*; Black, *Redefining British Politics*; Frank Trentmann, 'Bread, Milk and Democracy: Consumption and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Britain' in Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton (eds.), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and* America (Oxford: 2001), pp.131-132.

[10] Kefford, 'Housing the Consumer-Citizen', p.228; Schwarzkopf, 'The Consumer', pp.1-18; Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'A Radical Past? The Politics of Market Research in Britain, 1900-1950' in Kerstin Bruckweh (ed.), *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer: A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere* (Oxford: 2011), pp.29-50; Frank Mort, 'Competing Domains: Democratic Subjects and Consuming Subjects in Britain and the United States since 1945' in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: 2006), pp.225-248; Lawrence Black, 'Crosland's Consumer Politics' in Kerstin Bruckweh (ed.), *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer: A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere* (Oxford: 2011), pp.117-138.

[11] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, chapter three.

Finally, is also worth considering the role of newsreels in British society after the Second World War. At first glance, it appears inauspicious that newsreels remained an influential civic medium for long. True, the industry continued to function as an effective oligopoly of the 'Big Five' until the mid-1950s and cooperation between companies through the Newsreel Association actually increased as a result of wartime exigencies. For example, a rota system was established for filming the British royal family, with one company's cameraman attached to Buckingham Palace to film royal engagements for all the companies.[12] The Association also often coordinated the filming and release dates for issues covering major events such as the 1948 Olympic Games.[13]

Despite the seeming strength of the newsreel industry, cinema attendance peaked in 1946-47 at 1.6 billion tickets sold, before it entered decades of steady decline. By 1965, annual attendance was just 327 million.[14] As Manning summarises, 'the cinema was still popular, but increases in television ownership and the rise of youth culture meant that it was no longer *the* ubiquitous leisure activity in the United Kingdom [emphasis in original]'.[15] Even as newsreels continued to be produced, there were significantly fewer people who watched them with any regularity.

Indeed, many contemporaries, and subsequent scholars, have positioned television as the medium which usurped newsreels' role as a visual news source. The minutes of the Newsreel Association immediately after the war reflect the tense and largely competitive relationship between the two mediums. On the one hand, there were repeated attempts to obstruct or otherwise head off any potential competition from television by preventing the BBC from obtaining newsreel footage. For example, the BBC made overtures to the Association in early 1948 for possible collaboration when filming royal events where only one cameraman would be permitted by the palace. The Association chairmen was endorsed by unanimous vote to respond that the newsreel industry 'were fundamentally opposed to any co-operation with the BBC'.[16] Yet the previous year, a deal had been struck for the BBC to purchase newsreel footage of 'Princess Elizabeth receiving the Freedom of The City of London on June 11 [sic]'.[17] This came with several stringent caveats, however. The footage could be televised for one week

[12] McKernan, 'The Finest Cinema Performers', p.69; British Film Institute Special Collections, *Minutes of the Council of the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Book Two* (ITM-7304).
[13] British Film Institute, *Minutes Book Two*.
[14] Manning, *Cinemas and Cinema-going*, p.51.
[15] *Ibid*, pp.88-89.
[16] British Film Institute, *Minutes Book Two*.
[17] *Ibid*.

only, had to be returned promptly to the relevant company and not stored as library stock footage, and the footage would not be given to the BBC before Monday 16 June.[18] These stipulations were likely put in place to preclude television's competitive advantage over newsreels companies' own release schedule. When newsreels did occasionally do business with television, it was a strained exception to the rule of trenchant hostility. By the 1950s, then, newsreels seemed to be in an embattled position in the media landscape.

Yet, if this was a period of obsolescence for newsreels, it was a decidedly protracted one. Though Universal, British Paramount, and Gaumont-British all finished production between 1955 and 1959, Pathé and British Movietone continued to be produced and screened until 1970 and 1979, respectively. Newsreels persisted longer in Britain than America and many European countries by a decade. So too, cinemas were not necessarily in terminal decline and still served as an important site for youth leisure. As Peter Scott argues, 'contrary to the dire predictions of the late 1950s, Britain's cinema and film industries did not "die", but instead reached a new competitive equilibrium in the 1960s'.[19] Moreover, suggestive evidence from cinemas in Sheffield, Grantham, and Birmingham point to the fact that cinemas endured as sites of civic culture until at least the end of the 1960s.[20] Newsreels were not exactly moribund nor wholly eclipsed by television, especially for younger demographics. Likewise, the civic context for newsreels' exhibition did not dissipate immediately in the postwar decades. Newsreels therefore likely retained some influence and salience in everyday life, even after television's proliferation as a news medium from the mid-1950s.

Furthermore, if television eventually superseded newsreels as the source of visual news for most of the postwar population, the style and format of televised programming was not produced *ex nihilo*. Though certainly informed by the BBC's experience of radio broadcasting, it also seems plausible that television was heavily influenced by newsreels. For instance, until the mid-1950s, when live news broadcasting started, the BBC produced its own Television Newsreel, almost identical to those produced for cinema exhibition. Moreover, from the repeated overtures made to the Newsreel Association, it is evident that television producers were keen to utilise footage shot by newsreel cameramen for the corporation's programmes.

[18] *Ibid*.
[19] Peter Scott, 'Not Going Out: television's impacts on Britain's commercial entertainment industries and popular leisure during the 1950s', *Social History* 48 No.4 (2023), p.500.
[20] *Harry Murray Press Cuttings*; *Harry Sanders Archives,* SAN/4/1; Cohen, *Scrapbook*.

The miscellaneous format of newsreels was further echoed in the staples of television; sports, 'interest' (later termed infotainment), and variety acts eventually formed the bulk of television listings each week.[21] Meanwhile, the notion that 'ordinary' people should be represented, were newsworthy in their own right and should have their opinions recorded, long preceded the rise of the vox populi interview and the valorisation of 'ordinary' citizens in postwar media.[22] Through the newsreel, the public were quite used to their hometowns and people like them being filmed on a somewhat regular basis. In 1926, Virginia Woolf wrote that, 'while all other arts were born naked…[cinema] has been born fully clothed', suggesting that fiction films adapted the narrative style and often content of other, older arts forms such as novels and plays.[23] To paraphrase this slightly, historians should recognise that early television came in many respects 'fully clothed' in the trappings of its filmic precursor, the newsreel. Much of television's style, format, staple content, and even political function as a means of representation all iterated upon precedents established by the newsreel in the early twentieth century.

In 1931, film critic C.A. Lejeune wrote that, at the cinema, '[w]e want, as well as travelling in foreign countries, to see ourselves: we want to see on the screen the reflection, although not quite the humdrum reflection, of our homes and our lives, our sports and our pleasures'.[24] Alongside the escapist fantasies often put forward as the chief pleasure of cinemagoing, audience members also had an innate desire, as Lejeune shrewdly sensed, to see themselves onscreen and the community in which they lived. Beside the power to vicariously transport the cinemagoer anywhere on earth, films had the equally potent ability to serve as an animated mirror which projected an image of life that was much closer to home.

More than any other element of the cinema programme, newsreels sated this desire amply. Items which featured schoolgirls in fancy dress creasing up with laughter during Empire Day celebrations or transport workers being interviewed about the fondness they felt for their vehicles were not exceptional items or accidentally captured by cameramen.[25] Putting local

[21] For an excellent history of the development of television as a miscellaneous medium, see Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* (London: 2013).
[22] *Ibid*, p.76; Joe Moran, 'Vox Populi? The Recorded Voice and Twentieth-Century British History', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 No.3 (2014), pp.461-483; Claire Langhamer, ''Who the Hell are Ordinary People?" Ordinariness as a Category of Historical Analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (2018), pp.175-195.
[23] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *The Nation and Athanaeum* 39 No.13 (1926), p.383.
[24] LeJeune, *Cinema*, p.213.
[25] *Pathe Gazette*, 'Empire Day' (1919); *Gaumont-British News*, 'Drivers Are Asked About Their Vehicles' (22 Oct 1936).

public life onscreen, showing communities to themselves, was a core editorial value of newsreel production, which meant producers privileged any excuse to present the news through both the local and personal lens.

Moreover, producers and cinema managers worked in tandem to ensure it was not just an undifferentiated public life projected in newsreels. Nor were 'ordinary' individuals always represented through the caricatured everyman or everywoman prevalent in media of this period, boiled down to national or regional stereotypes such as the cheeky cockney, the dour Scot, the unpronounceable Welsh name, or the hearty Northerner with a generic accent. Localised editing, specially commissioned filming, and clever marketing were all employed to screen the civic culture of a specific community in the cinemas within the locality itself. Wherever possible, the local interest of news items was accentuated to entice customers into the cinema. Audience members therefore became used to seeing the streets and squares of their own town or city, often spotting their friends, relatives, even themselves in the crowds onscreen. Newsreels thereby became one of the few mass media, certainly the earliest among the main news media, to familiarise the public with seeing, and later hearing, people much like themselves onscreen.

LeJeune went on to elaborate that it was not just a faithful reflection that audiences longed to see projected onscreen but a modest apotheosis: 'We want to see ourselves as we hope we look, as we think we might look, if our ships came home; ourselves in 'ideal' homes and 'ideal' costumes'.[26] Newsreels also met this requirement, and projected an idealised, often quietly celebratory image of the British public as a body of consumer-citizens. The admixture of consumerism and social idealism, compounded by the cinema industry's connections to civic culture, meant that newsreels projected an ethos of democratic entitlement, non-partisan participation, communal belonging, and local pride. Many cinemagoers took this to heart and performed it themselves through their routine consumption of newsreels. The medium did not merely mimic what the public was but helped it to imagine what it 'might look' like through a period of political and social change. In fulfilling this desire for idealised representation, newsreels served as *the* civic medium in Britain between the wars.

[26] LeJeune, *Cinema*, p.213.

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