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EXHIBITION IN THE BRITISH FILM BUSINESS 1939-1945

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This thesis concentrates on the exhibition sector of the cinema industry and argues that the cinema industry was very successful during the war, despite bombing, rising costs, and wartime shortage. The success of the cinema business is understood not only via the analysis of the financial statements of the companies, but also as a business phenomenon which relates to government manipulation, and cinema goers' expectations.

Given the important position played by the combines in the evolution of the cinema industry, and the lack of any available data about independently owned cinemas it concentrates on the financial performance of the combines, in order to demonstrate the success of the cinema industry. The evolution of the cinema industry during the war years is also demonstrated by the further development of industrial concentration. This happened through merger and added to the increase in the industry's profits and its further strengthening. It is argued that the success of the circuits was due to the prevailing conditions in cinema exhibition during the war: the barring system, rise of film hire, and conditional booking, due to the government's 'inertia', and most of all due to the state's policy and actions. These were directed towards the strengthening of the cinema industry, since the state used it as means of propaganda and for morale boosting purposes.

The unique role played by the cinema in wartime was its social function. The cinema emerged as the main focal point of the community's social life through the organisation of events which helped the community, from charity concerts to recruiting drives. A visit to the local cinema offered a much wider experience than film consumption; it gave a feeling of security, provided a cheery and friendly atmosphere, and a sense of solidarity. This is how its patrons experienced the cinema was experienced and this thesis demonstrates how publicity and marketing helped establish its central place in the community.
Preface

I would like to thank all these people have helped me in the hard task of making this thesis. Without their assistance this thesis would have not being completed. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Robert Colls whose help was invaluable. He has always been encouraging and supportive. Without his comments and criticism this thesis would have not taken its present form. Thanks are due to Dr Sally Horrocks for suggesting some useful bibliographical references on business history, to Dr James Chapman for his advice on primary sources, and Allen Eyles for suggesting ways to search for oral history material. I am also grateful to Alan Lawson, keeper of the archives of the BECTU History project at the British Film Institute, for introducing me to Sir Sydney Samuelson CBE, and to the latter for helping me to contact several veteran film projectionists. I would also like to thank Collin Sanders, chairman of the Mercia Cinema Society, who introduced me to retired film projectionist, David Taylor, and BBC Radio Humberside who helped me to trace retired film projectionist, John Davidson. I also wish to thank my friends, Elina Tsoumpri, Irene Antonaki, economists, and Katerina Theophanous, accountant, who introduced me to economic theories and provided me with useful material on merger and acquisition. Many thanks are due to the librarians of the British Film Institute and the University of Hull, for their efficient assistance and the Interlibrary office loans at the University of Hull, for their tenacity in hunting down books and pamphlets scarce or out of print. Finally, I would like to thank my family for supporting me and putting up with me in times of pressure.
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<td>Associated British Picture Corporation</td>
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<td>ABC</td>
<td>Associated British Cinemas Ltd.</td>
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<td>ATC</td>
<td>Air Training Corps</td>
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<td>CEA</td>
<td>Cinematograph Exhibitors Association</td>
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<td>GB</td>
<td>Gaumont British</td>
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<td>GCFC</td>
<td>General Cinema Finance Corporation</td>
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<td>GFD</td>
<td>General Film Distributors</td>
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<td>KRS</td>
<td>Kinematograph Renters Association</td>
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<td>MGM</td>
<td>Metro Goldwyn Meyer</td>
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<td>MoI</td>
<td>Ministry of Information</td>
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Introduction

The cinema industry is typical of the new industries which emerged in Britain’s second industrial revolution of the 20th century. ‘Traditional’ industries such as textiles, ship-building, mining and mechanical engineering reached their peak of importance in the British national economy just before the First World War, but technological innovations in the period resulted in the production of new materials, including cheap steel and organic chemicals. At the same time, a new form of mass produced energy – electricity – emerged, and that, along with new and connected industries such as chemicals, aircraft, electrical engineering, motor vehicles and certain kinds of powered consumer goods began to flourish. The production of radios and telephones, for instance, boomed during the inter-war years, but of all the consumer service industries it was the cinema industry which expanded most completely and most rapidly.¹

The cinema was the most influential development in the leisure industry during the first half of the 20th century. By the 1930s, together with radio, it occupied a central position in the national life.² Expenditure on entertainment increased during the inter-war years and through the 1940s. Despite these considerable achievements it is only recently that consumer service industries have begun to attract attention from business historians. Industries such as entertainment, including the cinema and advertising, have received far less attention than the supply of consumer durables, such as the car industry.³

It is in this neglected area of British business history that this thesis is focused. It examines the development of the British cinema industry during its most celebrated phase, the Second World War, and concentrates on its most under-researched sector, film exhibition. The growth of the cinema industry is seen in the context of the rise of

a corporate economy in Britain. Hannah has argued that the foundations of the corporate economy were laid by the merger activity of the inter-war years, which transformed the industrial structure by increasing concentration of ownership and the scale of operations.\textsuperscript{4} In this context, the corporate economy is synonymous with greater control, where ownership is highly concentrated and government has direct influence in dictating business strategy. Middlemass claims that the 'corporatist bias' which emerged in Britain during both world wars involved employer associations, trade unions and government, and that these three groups influenced the policy-making process right up to the 1970s.\textsuperscript{5} Other authorities have demonstrated how government intervention through its different departments of state reveal deep political interference in industrial affairs. According to Roberts, government officials adopted the method of what he calls 'industrial diplomacy' when negotiating directly with industrialists on the issues of business rationalisation and trade protectionism.\textsuperscript{6} After 1929 the Import Duties Advisory Committee was supportive in encouraging steel producers to merge and rationalise their activities.

A powerful example of this approach can be demonstrated in the creation and the history of another 'new industry', Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). What happened in chemicals can be compared with what happened in the cinema industry. War was the greatest boost to business for both the chemical industry, dominated by ICI,\textsuperscript{7} and the cinema industry, eventually dominated by Rank. The cinema, a consumer industry, performed much like a capital goods industry; Rank can be seen in a similar light to ICI. In order to have a clearer picture of this development we should look at the pre-war era.

ICI dominated a wide range of British production from finished goods to industrial supplies, commanding resources of general chemicals, explosives, alkali and metal groups. By supplying materials to other industries, the chemical industry was indispensable for British war production. Any branch of the chemical industry could

be converted to applications mostly required by a state at war: dyestuffs technology could be applied to explosives, war gases and pharmaceuticals; products such as chlorine and cyanide could become chemical weapons. The industry could also produce petrol by hydrogenation. The importance of ICI for the government also lay in the fact that it was the only company which could provide a combination of scientific expertise and the technical resources of heavy industry, especially in the development of weapons. The state had long conscious of the role the chemical industry might play in the event of war, and thus supported the initial development of ICI. Government intentions seem to have been to rival the standards of the Germans with regards to the application of science to industry. From 1935, right from the beginning of the British rearmament programme, ICI began to make preparations for the war.8

One of the main reasons why the chemical industry was so successful during the war, was the fact that ICI was one of the largest (unofficial) agents of the state. As part of the armaments industry, ICI undertook to build and manage twenty-five government ‘agency’ factories, including metals, explosives, fertilisers, chlorine, propellants, general chemicals and ammunition. These factories were funded by the government and worked under government regulation. They produced small arms, ammunition, petrol, poison gases for chemical defence, designed and produced special weapons, and were a general output indispensable for the conduct of war.9 At the same time ICI continued to be the only supplier of some of the most important materials in the country: alkalis, dyes, general chemicals, lime and paints.

The development of ICI owed much to government support; so did the cinema combines, Associated British Cinema Corporation and Gaumont British. As W.J. Reader has demonstrated, ‘it was part of the conscious design on the part of the government to bring the chemical industry up to the standards set by the Germans with regard to the application of science to industry’.10 The British Dyestuffs Corporation evolved from a government attempt to strengthen the dyestuffs industry,

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8 Ibid., pp. 252-254.
9 Ibid., pp. 272-279.
when it was discovered that British army uniforms were coloured with German dyes. The company received a measure of protection in 1921 by the Safeguarding Industries Act which protected other products regarded as strategic to British defence, such as aircraft engines and optical glass. The government was also indirectly involved in the merger between Nobel Industries, Brunner Mond, the United Alkali Corporation and the British Dyestuffs Corporation, in the formation of ICI in 1927.11

Merger activity within the cinema industry during the inter-war years was accelerated by the high business optimism created by the prospect of ‘quota legislation’ and the emergence of the two combines in 1927 Associated British Picture Corporation and Gaumont British was directly related to governmental policy regarding British film production with the introduction of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927. The Act was designed as a measure to protect British film production from American competition, and as an insurance for the future development of British film. It introduced a quota system. Cinema exhibitors were obliged to reserve a minimum, definite percentage (‘exhibitor’s quota’) of time for British films, thus guaranteeing a market for British film products. State protection therefore encouraged business optimism about film production and stimulated the formation of new production companies. The increased capital available to producers enabled investment in new equipment for conversion to sound, as well as encouraging the growth of exhibition and marketing. It also made an appeal to investors to invest more in film production and acquire additional control over distribution and exhibition.12

A considerable number of British firms in old and new industries merged during the inter-war years. In particular, large-scale vertically-integrated firms were created as the means of achieving greater competitiveness across a wider range of markets. This merger wave, dubbed ‘rationalisation’, seemed a panacea for a perceived loss of

competitiveness, and growth through mergers affected both the old and the new industries: textiles, metal manufacture, shipbuilding, chemicals, vehicles and electrical engineering, as well as cinema through merger acquisition and the creation of holding companies.\textsuperscript{13} During the late 1920s, the large rival combines Gaumont British Picture Corporation and Associated British Picture Corporation were formed as a result of merger and acquisition. They controlled not only cinema circuits, but also film distributing companies and film production facilities. The formation of these two rival combines marked the beginning of full vertical integration in the British film business. From 1927 onwards there were three categories of British cinema ownership: first, large circuits which were part of a cinema and film ‘vertical combine’; second, medium-sized independent circuits; and third, small independent exhibitors owning either small local circuits or large single cinemas.

Gaumont British Picture Corporation was registered as a public company in 1927 with a capital of £2.5 million. The company was backed by city financiers, Isidore, Maurice and Mark Ostrer. The new company amalgamated the interests of three companies: Gaumont, Ideal Films Ltd. and W\&F films. Gaumont was a leading film distributing company which was also involved in film production. The other two were important film distributing companies. Thus, in 1927 Gaumont British Picture Corporation became the largest distributor in the country. The company also had a share in film exhibition with the control of the ‘Biocolor’ circuit which, with 17 cinemas, was then the fifth largest in the country. In 1929 Gaumont British Picture Corporation became the largest cinema exhibitor, increasing its exhibiting interest to 287 houses and incorporating three new companies - Denman Picture Houses Ltd., Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd. and General Theatre Corporation Ltd. In the same year the corporation also expanded its production interests with the formation of Gainsborough Pictures Ltd., with Michael Balcon as managing director and Maurice Ostrer as a company director.

Gaumont’s rival, Associated British Picture Corporation, was controlled by John Maxwell, a Scottish solicitor, who entered the cinema business as an exhibitor in 1912. Subsequently he became chairman of the film distributing firm Wardour Films

Ltd. In 1927 he formed a film production company called British International Pictures Ltd. The company had absorbed Wardour Films Ltd., and Elstree studios, and controlled a cinema circuit, Associated British Cinemas Ltd. (ABC). When the Maxwell group was first formed it owned only 29 cinemas and showed immediate interest in increasing its holdings. In 1929, Scottish Cinema Variety Theatres Ltd., was brought under the group's control and as a result the group increased its holdings to 88 cinemas. John Maxwell's involvement in the cinema business was not limited to these companies. He was also chairman of a new and important distributing firm, Pathe Pictures Ltd. which was registered at the end of 1927. In 1933, Associated British Picture Corporation Ltd., was formed as a holding company which integrated a number of other companies, including British International Pictures, Wardour Films and Pathe Pictures, taking over their entire capital.14

During the 1930s these combines grew stronger as a result of further acquisitions of smaller circuits and independent cinemas. In 1933, Odeon Theatres Ltd. was formed by the industrialist Oscar Deutsch. Odeon was a chain of cinemas with a distinctive architectural identity. Deutsch, director of a firm of metal merchants, entered the cinema business through the distributing side in the early 1920s as chairman of the Midlands branch of W&F Film Services. He then became an exhibitor gaining ownership of the Crown Cinema at Coventry. In 1931 he formed Cinema Service Ltd. a small circuit of six cinemas. In 1933 Cinema Service was taken over by Odeon, to make it the eighth largest circuit in the country. By 1936 the Odeon circuit had become the fourth largest circuit in the country, and a major change took place in its shareholding: 50per cent of ordinary shares were sold to the American giant, United Artists. This deal secured for Odeon a flow of good quality American pictures. In 1937 Odeon acquired a controlling interest in Entertainments and General Investments Corporation, the company controlling the County Cinema, and with 250 cinemas it now became the third main British circuit.15

Between 1927 and 1933 the percentage of cinemas owned by circuits owning ten or more cinemas doubled. Associated British Cinemas increased its 88 cinemas in 1929

to 296 cinemas by 1936, whilst Gaumont British had 305 cinemas in that year. By 1935 the Associated British Picture Corporation and Gaumont British between them owned 17 per cent of the total cinema seats in the country. Yet plans for a merger of the two combines never materialised. In 1936 John Maxwell had intended to acquire full control of Gaumont British but the deal never took place, following objections by 20th Century/Fox, which held 40 per cent of Gaumont British ordinary shares. The control of Gaumont British remained unchanged until 1941 when it became part of the Rank Organisation. But it wasn’t just the big combines which were growing during these years. Medium-size circuits of ten or more cinemas were also growing stronger. Firms like A.B. King and the H.D. Moorehouse Film Service doubled in size between 1927-1935.16

In 1936 the General Cinema Finance Corporation (GCFC) was registered. GCFC was a full vertical combine controlling film production, distribution and exhibition. The Corporation’s board included Arthur Rank, a wealthy flour miller from Yorkshire. Rank was already a substantial shareholder in the British and Dominion Film Corporation which, since 1933, had held a distribution agreement with United Artists. Rank was also co-founder of Pinewood Studios, the most modern and technically advanced studio in Britain, even into the post-war years. By 1939 two more studios were added to GCFC studio space. In December 1938 a new company was formed to merge Pinewood and Denham Studios, D&P studios. Here lay the productive heart of this new big organisation.

Immediately after its formation, General Cinema Finance Corporation took over the film distributing company, General Film Distributors Ltd. (GFD). In 1936 GFD merged with the renting company of the American major Universal, of which Arthur Rank was also a substantial shareholder. As a result, GFD not only financed and distributed British films, it also released the majority of Universal films. This was the distribution side of GCFC. On the exhibition side, a small circuit was created in 1937. However, a direct link with a big circuit did not come for another year. At the end of

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15 For a survey of the early Odeon history and Deutsch’s part in it see Allen Eyles, ‘Oscar and Odeon’, Focus of Film, 22 1975, pp. 38-50.
1938 Odeon issued a second debenture\textsuperscript{17} to which General Cinema Finance Corporation subscribed, whilst J. Arthur Rank joined the board of Odeon at the beginning of 1939. As a result, GCFC was directly linked with a second American major, United Artists.

With the coming of the war the British economy underwent a transformation from a predominantly market-based economy, at least on the production side, into a predominantly centrally-managed economy. National expenditure was characterised by the expansion of the war production sector and the contraction of the domestic consumption sector. Governmental policy sought the reduction of the production of consumer goods for the purpose of releasing raw materials, labour, and capital, for basic stuffs, munitions and armaments. The contraction of the domestic sector was therefore matched by a massive expansion in the war sector. For the purpose of reducing consumption to a minimum the government introduced the system of rationing; by the end of the war about one third of all consumer goods and services were rationed. Another major restriction placed over British business involved a tightly regulated labour market. The Armed Forces expanded dramatically. Changes in employment were reflected in changes in production as the war boosted munitions and related industries and contracted just about everything else, particularly nonessential goods such as textiles and furniture.\textsuperscript{18}

After an uncertain start, the cinema industry not only survived the war, but flourished and enjoyed an unprecedented success. The whole thesis lays on the hypothesis that the success of the cinema industry should be examined, understood and analysed in those parameters, which created more or less a unique business environment in the war era. The success of the cinema business is understood not only via the analysis of the financial figures, results and profit tables of the companies, but as also as a business phenomenon which relates to government manipulation towards short term aims, to people’s aspirations and other contingent and non-contingent factors.

\textsuperscript{17} Debenture is a bond of a company acknowledging a debt and providing for payment of interest at fixed intervals.
Given the important position which the combines played in the evolution of the cinema industry, and the lack of any available data about independently owned cinemas, we set off by concentrating on the financial performance of the combines, in order to demonstrate the prosperity of the cinema industry within the constraints imposed by the war. The evolution of the cinema industry during the war years is also demonstrated by the further development of industrial concentration. The 'duopolistic' structure within the industry, which stayed intact until the late 1960s, was consolidated during the war years.

Chapter two examines the factors which affected the wartime performance of the circuits, showing that they constituted the most prominent sector of British cinema exhibition. It is argued that the circuit's success was due to the unique structure of the cinema exhibition business which gave them many advantages over independently owned cinemas. The next chapter seeks other reasons behind the circuit's success in the state's policy and actions. These were directed towards the strengthening of the cinema industry, since the state was using it as means of propaganda and morale boosting purposes.

The final chapter demonstrates one of the most important reasons that made the cinema industry a wartime success. It argues that the relationship between the cinema-goer and the cinema itself was complex; it was not merely exhausted in the consumption of the good, namely the film itself, but it was extended into something deeper. Cinema going was part of most people's life. It represented a community centre, a place where the patriotic feeling was nurtured and the relevant spirit was kept up. This is how the cinema was felt by the patrons and we shall see the way publicity and marketing helped establish its central place in the community.

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19 As Leslie Hannah has argued rationalisation 'was able to induce investment in innovating techniques of intra-firm organisation, and thus, motivated the cheapening of management within the firm relative to transactions in the market'. Leslie Hannah, The Rise of the Corporate Economy, op. cit. p. 38.

20 Associated British Picture Corporation was absorbed by EMI in 1969, which later became Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment. Sarah Street, British National Cinema, London 1997, p. 17.
CHAPTER 1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CINEMA EXHIBITION INDUSTRY

1. Constraints on the cinema business 1939-1940

At the outbreak of the war there were about 4,800 cinemas in Britain. According to The Economist in 1943 there were 4,700 cinemas in the UK and 21 per cent of them were owned by one or other of the three major circuits, Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), Gaumont British Picture Corporation and Odeon Theatres. The smaller circuits with ten or more cinemas controlled 15 per cent of the country's cinemas, whilst the remaining 64 per cent were independently owned, about 8 per cent of which were owned by eleven circuits which had more than twenty cinemas each. The largest of these was the A B. King circuit. Also in this category was the Granada circuit with 35 cinemas (in 1945). Consequently, 14 circuits with over twenty cinemas owned and controlled almost one third of the total, against one quarter in 1935.

The three major cinema groups owned significant capital. The issued capital of the Associated British Picture Corporation in 1941 was 5 per cent debentures, (£3,239,426), 6 per cent first cumulative preference shares (£2,000,000), and 5s ordinary shares (£2,000,000). Gaumont British finances had been significantly restructured during the pre-war years. By 1941 the bank's overdraft which stood at £1,149,785 in 1936 had been paid off and Gaumont British capitalisation was 4 ½ per cent debentures (£4,534,617) and 5 ½ per cent preference shares (£3,250,000). Odeon's capitalisation, in addition to loans and mortgages, was 5 per cent debentures (£1,729,623), 6 per cent debentures (£1,440,000), 6 per cent cumulative preference shares and 5s ordinary shares (£874,991). Gaumont British therefore, had a slightly bigger capital than ABPC and almost double that of Odeon.

21 Simon Rowson, Notes about the Film Industry. London 1941, p. 2.
22 The Economist, 3 July 1943, p. 5.
24 The holders of preference shares were the first ones to be paid when the company paid dividend. The dividend they got was a fixed percentage. This is why they were more expensive to buy than the ordinary shares, the holders of which got what was left after preference dividend was paid. Ordinary
The share prices of the three leading companies showed a dramatic rise during the war years. In fact ABPC’s shares traded at 6s 3d in July 1940, rose to 21 s 3d in July 1945, while Gaumont British’s shares rose from 2s 0d in July 1940, to 19s 9d in five years time. Odeon only went public in 1942. Its shares price rose from 9s 10 d in July 1942 to 40s 0 d in July 1945.25

The first year of the war had a diverse effect on the financial position of the three combines. The net profit of ABPC was reduced by £20,858. Odeon was most affected, and its profits declined by £61,000. As a result of bad business and due to the uncertainty about future developments in the industry, none of them gave any dividend to their shareholders in 1940. Instead, increased provisions were made as provisions for losses and deferred repairs.26 There were two main reasons behind this temporary crisis in cinema exhibition: the closing and reopening of cinemas under black-out regulations, and the bombing of London, resulted in the severe curtailment of cinema attendance, and diminution of cinemas’ receipts.

At the very outbreak of war, on the 3 September 1939, the Home Office gave instructions for the closure of cinemas. The reason behind this decision was fear of immediate enemy action and air raids. A lengthy closure of cinemas of course would have detrimental effects on the cinema business and would threaten its very existence. The reply of the trade against this closing order was immediate and put before the government and the press.27 Influential members of the aristocracy, the intelligentsia, and politicians, supported the view that the earliest possible opening of all places of entertainment was of major importance for the nation under the stressful war conditions.28 The owner of a London based independent circuit of 35 cinemas argued

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25 See The Times, 8 July 1940, 15 July 1942, 11 July 1945.
27 Exhibitors appealed against the cinema closure. The workers within the cinema trade also appealed against this decision through their trade union. National Association of Theatre and Kinematograph Engineers made urgent representation to the Home Office asking for the reopening of cinemas in London. The Times, 11 September 1939.
28 For the letters of Bernard Shaw and Lady Oxford, see The Times, 8 September 1939. See also House of Commons, 13 September 1939, col. 708-709.
in *The Times*, that the fact that the box-office of the Saturday before the enforcement of the closure of the cinemas was far in excess of that normally experienced on a hot September day, showed that the audiences were actuated in cinema going by desire to escape from 'the cares and worries of a world that was about to plunge over the precipice of war'.

On Saturday 9 September permission was given by the Home Office for the limited reopening of cinemas. They reopened with a curfew in their operating hours. Conditions of reopening varied around the country but everywhere cinemas closed earlier, at sunset. On 15 September London City Council gave permission for the reopening of cinemas in London. However, until the end of October, cinemas operated for fewer hours than before the war. At the West End the doors were opened at 2pm and the shows ended at 6pm while in the rest of the city the doors were opened at 4.30 and the cinemas closed at 10. After discussions between a deputation from the film trade and the Under Secretary of the Home Office, the opening hours of cinemas were revised. In the beginning of October permission was given for the 10 o'clock closing of West End cinemas. Under the scheme cinemas in the West End were divided in two groups. One group remained open for a week until 10 p.m. and the second group until 6 p.m. In the following week the opening times of the two groups were reversed and the times were alternate week by week. Things outside and inside the cinema looked much different compared to the pre-war days. Strict precautionary measures were taken against air raids: cinema buildings were blacked out, the brilliant neon electric signs outside were extinguished and windows were covered with dark curtains to prevent light being seen from the outside. The biggest windows were blocked with sand-bags. Watchers stood outside the cinema building to give instant warning of a raid and fire fighting and ARP squads stood by, ready for action. Cinema patrons were supposed to carry their gas masks with them. In many cinemas, patrons without gas-masks were reminded that it was better to be prepared; some places projected onto the screen a reminder for people not to forget to take their gas-masks away with them at the end of the performance, while elsewhere a lost gas-masks department was set up. Most London cinemas had their own air raid shelter although they were neither big enough, nor intended to accommodate, all patrons. In several

29 *The Times*, 8 September 1939.
30 Ibid., 16 September 1939, 7 October 1939.
cinemas notices on screen told people how best to get out of cinemas quickly and how to reach the shelters.31

Financial analysts estimated that during the first three months of the war average receipts at the box-office under the period of limited hours of cinema opening varied from between 15 per cent to 25 per cent of normal receipts. Cinemas which could not open until 10 p.m. were losing more than £1,000 a week, whilst normal running expenses were about £1,500 per week.32 On average exhibitors in the provinces were believed to have experienced at least a 10 per cent fall in their turnover.33

The reduction of cinema profits in certain areas was also due to evacuation. The areas most affected by evacuation were the east and south-east coasts. By June 1940 cinemas on the south and east coasts had lost over 70 per cent of their revenue.34 An independent exhibitor in the London area whose district was affected by evacuation said: 'Due to fewer people being resident in my district, the small profit I was making up to September has disappeared, and the knife edge balance between profit and loss will be definitely turned into a serious deficit by the many increased charges which are being imposed'.35

The general rise in the costs of living also affected cinema exhibitors. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association estimated that cinemas had an annual overhead of £2,250,000 in 1940. The estimate of the annual increase of costs had doubled compared to the pre-war years.36

31 Ibid., 11 September 1939, ibid., 16 September 1939, Interview with John Davidson, projectionist, Bridlington, 13 October 2000.
32 The Times, 22 September 1939.
33 The Economist, 30 December 1939, p. 5.
34 Motion Picture Herald, 29 June 1940, p. 68.
35 Kine Weekly, 8 February 1940, p. 32, and Interview with Sydney Samuelson CBE, London 20 August 2000. He started off his career as a rewind boy in his local, Luxor Lancing, at the end of 1939. Then he trained as projectionist of the ABC circuit and worked in various parts of the UK during the war.
36 Kine Weekly, 4 May 1940, p.57.
Table 1. **Annual percentage increase of cinema operating costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film transport</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbons</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting, heating, fuel (including coal, coke, electricity, oil, etc.)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical sundry supplies and repairs</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projector parts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery, paper and printing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torches and batteries</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General publicity</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre tickets</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs and maintenance (other than electrical)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats and seat parts, carpets, linoleum and draperies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active service payments and wage increases</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above estimates did not include Air Aid Precautions, and these requirements meant a minimum expenditure of £40 per cinema per annum.\(^{37}\) Exhibitors had been ordered by the Home Office to make these protective arrangements, to arrange alternative exits, and to ensure the provision of concrete overheads fortified by corridor sheeting and joists.\(^{38}\) With the Courts Amendment Act of 1940 the Home Office drew up safety measures for the protection of cinema audiences. Owners and managers were obliged to comply with these uniform requirements which were imposed across the country. The protective measures concerning lighting suggested that all external exit passageways should be indicated by white directional arrows,

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\(^{37}\) The expenditure of Granada circuit over ARP, for the period 1939-1945 was £8,569 for its 25 cinemas. Guy Morgan, *Red Roses Every Night*, London 1948, p. 83.

\(^{38}\) Kine Weekly, 11 April 1940, p. 9.
which during the evening should be illuminated so as to be visible to persons using the passageways. Secondary lighting should be retained for this purpose. The light displayed should be dimmed to the minimum required to show the direction and position of the arrow. It also suggested between others in case of sky lights, lantern lights and laylights either the replacement of the glazing by non splintering material, or the guarding of the underside with wire netting or expanded metal so arranged as to intercept broken glass. All large windows to foyer and vestibules and glass doors to the street should be protected. Shelter should also be provided for the staff. In the early days of the war inhabitants of various districts expressed fears that the prominence of cinema roofs might attract hostile aircraft. Several exhibitors bowed to the local opinion by camouflaging their buildings. The Ministry of Home Security also raised the subject in August 1940 and 'advised of this treatment for large roof surfaces'.

Exhibitors also had to spend more money on wages of their staff. The bill for wages, salaries and film hire were considered the two main costs of running the cinema. After lengthy negotiations between the National Association of Theatrical and Cinema Employees, a war bonus of 7.5 per cent was granted to cinema staff in June 1940.

1940 was a year without precedent in the trade’s history. Exhibitors’ income was severely affected, property was wholly or partly demolished, some patrons and staff lost their lives, and a large extent of the coastline had become, from the trade’s point of view, a severely depressed area. In the last months of 1940, during the period of the blitz since September 1940, film exhibition was affected even more. It was estimated that during the first year of the war the whole country witnessed a drop in attendance of at least 25 per cent over the previous year.

Many cinemas were damaged and several were closed down whilst attendance in certain areas dropped dramatically. According to the London Branch of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association, 170 cinemas closed in London and the Home Counties either through direct action or voluntarily due to the lack of patronage. After

41 Motion Picture Herald, 9 October 1940, p. 52.
the bombing, attendance was so reduced that Gaumont British closed a number of its cinemas in order to minimise its losses.\textsuperscript{42} The table below shows the number of cinemas which closed and reopened between 1939 and 1941.\textsuperscript{43} Half of the cinemas which closed in 1940 reopened within the year.

Table 2. Closure of cinemas\textsuperscript{44}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cinema closures</th>
<th>Cinema reopenings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of the closures of cinemas in 1940 was due to enemy action; 190 were estimated to be voluntary, due to depressed economic conditions.

It was estimated that during the blitz, at least 35 per cent of the country’s cinemas were affected. London, the midlands and the industrial north suffered most. In the Dockside areas of East London and in the working-class suburbs in the south-east and the south-west, thousands of homes were destroyed, rendering vast numbers of people homeless. Whole areas were evacuated because of the dangers of collapsing buildings and of delayed action bombs.

In London’s East-End the cinema trade was dead for most of October 1940. In the greater London area, cinema-going virtually ceased as an evening activity. With regular nightly bombing raids, the first consideration of cinema patrons was to get home before the sirens sounded, or to seek shelter before the first alarm. The place of the West-End cinema patron, who used to queue outside the Leicester Square and Piccadilly picture houses, was taken by evening queues of homeless East-Enders outside the underground shelters of Regent Street and Oxford Street. With trade so

\textsuperscript{42} The Fourteenth Annual General Meeting of Gaumont British Picture Corporation Ltd., published in The Times, 11 October 1940. The profits of General Theatre Corporation for instance, fell to an extremely low level in 1940, the reason being the loss of earnings of the London Palladium closed down in September 1940 and by the Holborn Empire being put out of business about the same time. The Fourteenth Annual General Meeting of General Theatre Corporation, ibid., 16 December 1942.

\textsuperscript{43} Kinematograph Yearbook 1942, p. 185.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
adversely affected it is not surprising that the West End cinemas considered closing at six and all the picture houses in the London area decided on a nine o’clock curfew. Even this was criticised by exhibitors who argued that those cinemas affected were taking no money after six o’clock.\textsuperscript{45} It was calculated that after a month of bombing in the districts affected, such as Central London, the south-east coast, Southampton and Portsmouth, evening trade was at best not more than 10 per cent of normal.\textsuperscript{46}

Cinema staff helped greatly in putting things back to normal and in some cases during the air raids even helped in saving the cinemas and property. Arthur Moss the General Manager of ABC cinemas described cases where all-night cinema staff put out incendiaries and oil-bombs, and cases where bombs burst all around cinema buildings whilst the staff cleared up debris, and restored order so that the next day the show might go on and the cinema was able to ‘open at normal times’. In cases where films had been destroyed, programmes carried on the following day with emergency films kept on hand for that purpose.\textsuperscript{47}

The cuts in late evening transport in the name of fuel economy also affected cinema attendance. All over Britain evening transport was cut in order to save on petrol and rubber. In most areas from London to the most northerly part of Scotland, buses which were considered to be the key to successful local showmanship were put forward an hour. The last buses were leaving Central London at 10.30. This did not affect West End houses, most of which closed at ten. However, the cut in late evening transportation had drastic effects in the suburbs and in country towns where patrons had to travel by bus in to the centre for their films. The earlier closing down of traffic meant a shorter operating day in these areas.

The circuit most affected by the blitz was ABC. 250 of its 450 cinemas were damaged by air raids. Some were burnt out by incendiaries and others by high explosives. All but eight reopened after having being closed, in some cases for only a day whilst in others it was for up to three months.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 28 September 1940, p. 71.  
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 12 October 1940, p. 28.  
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 26 July 1941, p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 29 August 1941, p. 50.
2. The boom in cinema exhibition business 1941-45

A. Finance and profits of the major groups

By mid 1941 financial investment in the three combines was considered worthwhile again. A prominent firm of stockbrokers issued an instructive analysis of the financial structure of the British film industry and the opportunity it presented for the investor. The circular in question was mostly interested in the exhibition side of the business, declaring that film production could not be considered commercially very successful.49 The Economist also recommended investment in the ABPC and Gaumont British. ABPC though was most recommended for having paid ordinary shareholders more in the past.50

Gradually, after the cessation of the intensive air raids early in 1941, the cinema business steadily began to improve, as cinema-going revived again. Cinema Exhibitors Association spokesman, W.J. Speakman pointed out that as people became accustomed to air-raid conditions, cinema-going began to build-up again, until at the end of 1940 it had recovered to 65 per cent of its pre-war levels. By mid 1941 the cinemas which remained open enjoyed good business with audiences ignoring the air-raids and staying in to enjoy the film. ‘When the sirens go’ said manager James Dickinson ‘they just mutter, “Oh there they go again” and either stay there or maybe run out to satisfy their curiosity when the guns begin to bark. They never lose their heads’.51 The correspondent of the American trade magazine, Motion Picture Herald described his feelings while visiting the Queen’s Cinema. Queen’s was a small independent cinema situated in a working-class neighbourhood of bombed-out Portsmouth:

‘To walk through a blitzed and battered area like that in which the Queen’s is situated, to pass boarded windows and broken shops, clamber over hundreds of yards of debris and rubble where only a mangy cat or forsaken dog may be living, is naturally a shock to the

48 Ibid., p. 44.
49 Kine Weekly, 11 September 1941, p. 3.
50 Recovery of the cinema business and the government’s policy to treat tolerably the consumption industries for maintaining the public moral, were the main arguments behind the advice. The Economist, 1 November 1941.
51 Motion Picture Herald, 26 July 1941, p. 43.
traveller. To come across a 520-seater cinema with its loudspeakers going, and a British audience, besprinkled maybe with a few foreign sailors, enjoying Lone Wolf or Tom Tyler, is a shock of another and more invigorating kind.52

The cinema business had made a recovery from the effects of the air-raids and more than ever the public demanded recreation through cinema entertainment. In the following year the profits of Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) had doubled as a result of improved trading conditions. All three companies had a full share from this improvement of the business. Gaumont British and Odeon had also shown a substantial increase in turnover. Despite this, company directors were careful in the granting of dividends to shareholders. A dividend of 15 per cent was granted to the shareholders of ABPC, while Odeon gave a 10 per cent. However, the increase in turnover was not proportionate to the increase of the trading profit. Although the trading profits for Odeon, for instance, were two and a half times higher than the previous year due to fact that 55 million more patrons came to Odeon cinemas during the year, the rise in net profit was not the same.53 The reason was that the companies were operating at increased costs. As maintenance of cinemas was difficult because of the limitations on various supplies and restrictions on decoration, higher amounts were put in the reserve as provisions for amortisation and depreciation. ABPC provision for amortisation and depreciation in 1941 was £95,846 more than in 1940.54 Another adverse effect on company profits was the increase by 100 per cent of the Entertainment Tax and the Excess Profit Tax.

The rise in profits and the stabilisation of trade conditions had an effect on the improvement of the finances of Odeon and ABPC in the form of refinancing operations in 1941 and 1942 respectively. According to economic theory, all companies need liquidity, cash. This amount of cash is used in the productive process, in order for the company to make investments, expand, and eventually raise further their profits. Refinancing operations, if operated under a favourable conjuncture, can be proved vital for the company's survival and strengthening. The amount of cash can be raised through the stock-market, through loans from banks, or through the issue of

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52 Ibid.
debentures. Odeon and ABPC decided to issue debentures in order to increase their liquid assets. This means that they both had confidence in themselves, which derived from the rise in their profits and the prospects of the cinema business. They also hoped that the investing public would show the same confidence in them. Thus, the two companies after having considered the economic conjuncture, issued a new debenture with a lower return.

In 1941 Odeon carried out a refinancing operation by creating Odeon Properties Limited, a part subsidiary of Odeon Theatres. Odeon Properties was formed as a part of important arrangements for refinancing the group's indebtedness. As a result, the large short-term debt was converted into longer-term loans. Owing to the rapidity with which the group had grown, the provision of long-term finance had not always been possible. Theoretically, long term loans are usually advantageous over short term ones; the borrowed amount can be used for long term investments which are more profitable than short term ones; eventually the loan is repaid with the profits coming out from these investments. Many of the Odeon subsidiaries were carrying short-term mortgages, where, after heavy taxation, the terms of repayment were such that cash requirements accrued at a greater pace than the net cash resources in the group. The new Odeon Properties company acquired 110 properties from subsidiaries. To complete the refinancing of the group's short-term indebtedness, the board arranged for the replacement of the parent company's £1,440,000 of 6 per cent debenture stock redeemable on the 31 December 1943, by £1,512,000 of 5.5 per cent second debenture redeemable over 15 years and 288,000 Ordinary 5s shares.\(^5\)

A similar refinancing operation was carried out by ABPC in 1942. A debenture conversion was announced; the company's 5 per cent Debenture stock was replaced with a new 4 ½ per cent issue. The company's financial position was quite strong. On the basis of the figures disclosed in the accounts of the company for the previous year, the amount of the debenture stock was covered nearly three times over by net assets. Profits for the year 1942 (subject to taxation) were sufficient to cover the annual interest on the new stock nearly eight times. Holders were invited to convert First

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\(^{54}\) The Fifteenth Annual General meeting of ABPC Limited, London 3 September 1942, published in ibid., 4 September 1942.
Mortgage Stock into a new 4 ½ per cent issue at 101 per cent, instead of taking repayment in cash. The majority of the 5 per cent debenture holders decided to exchange it for the new issue. For those stockholders who accepted the offer, the Corporation waived its fee for 2s 6d per document on lodgement of grants of probate, death certificates, or powers of attorney. The conversion would effect an annual saving in interest charge of about £15,000 equal to 0.75 per cent on the Ordinary Capital. The fact that the investors preferred to exchange their bonds with new ones, resulted in both the retaining of the investors’ trust and in the reduction of possibilities of the companies’ lack of liquidity. The refinancing operations of both Odeon and ABPC were very successful because they resulted in a further flow of cash in the companies.

1942 was also a year of excellent business for all three companies, reflecting the recovery and growth in cinema attendances. The satisfactory outcome of Gaumont British (GB) operations were sufficient to justify a recommendation of a 6 per cent dividend after a lapse of six years. The form of the accounts changed to a more comprehensive survey of a whole group position, just after the acquisition of GB by the Rank Organisation in 1941. In 1942 the accountancy procedures of the corporation improved, conforming more closely to recognised modern practice (and to the procedures at Associated British Picture Corporation and Odeon). A consolidated statement of the net tangible assets of subsidiary undertakings was submitted, whilst the profit and loss account were drawn up to a more informative manner. The profit and loss account were designed to show the trading profit, the earnings of the group as a whole, after providing for charges such as Excess Profit Tax, National Defence Contributions and deferred repairs. This improved lay out of the company’s balance sheet provided a clear picture to the shareholder of the picture

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55 Odeon Property’s ordinary capital was £1,500,000 and Second Debentures were held by the parent company and its First Mortgage £3,500,000 was held by the bankers. Ibid., 12 October 1942.

56 The outstanding amount of the existing stock was about £3 million and arrangements were made to repay this at 103.5 per cent in accordance with the terms of the issue. After sanction of the Treasury having being obtained, The new stock would be repaid in January 1976 at 102 per cent by means of annual cumulative sinking fund of 1.5 per cent, beginning in 1945. The Corporation’s 5 per cent Mortgage debenture stock was repaid in cash at 103.5 per cent in June 1943. The Times, 19 February 1943.
of the financial position of the group. The accounts in their old form were useless as a
guide to the financial position of the group.\textsuperscript{57}

The accounts of Odeon Theatres for the financial year 1942 showed great profits as
well. The trading profits of Odeon showed an increase of £463,000 which allowed the
company to increase by 5 per cent its ordinary dividend.\textsuperscript{58} The trading profits of
ABPC were slightly lower than 1941 (but higher than the years before) after paying
Excess Profit Tax. This decrease was foreshadowed by the Chairman's review the
previous year.\textsuperscript{59}

In 1943 ABPC and Odeon showed a substantial increase in profits. The huge increase
in ABPC turnover is fictitious however, because the accounts of 1943 for the first
time gave the picture of the corporation as a whole. For the first time the assets and
liabilities of the subsidiary, Union Cinemas were considered in the accounts and as a
result, the consolidated figures are not comparable with those of the previous years.\textsuperscript{60}
The same applies for the accounts of Odeon Theatres, who were further consolidated
during the financial year 1943. They included for the first time the assets of the
Entertainments and General Investment Corporation Ltd.\textsuperscript{61} Consequently, the
consolidated profit and loss account showed that the trading profits of the group
increased by £652,243 compared to the previous year. This substantial increase was
also due to the fact that 25 million more patrons were admitted into Odeon cinemas in
1943-1944, making a total of 180 million. In spite of this large increase, net profits
only increased by £11,471 owing to the heavy taxation and for provision for future
War Damage Contribution instalments.\textsuperscript{62} The increase of ABPC patronage, which was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] The Fifteenth Annual General Meeting of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, London 19
\item[58] The Fifth Annual General Meeting of Odeon, op. cit.
\item[59] A. G. Allen had stated that substantial deficiencies for EPT purposes were available in 1941 and that
exceptional profit in that year could not be maintained in 1942 or in any subsequent year while EPT
remained at 100 per cent. The Times, 26 August 1942, 1 April 1943.
\item[60] The free hold and lease hold cinema properties stood at the impressive figure of £21,244,767,
practically the whole increase of £4,948,000 representing the value of properties of the Union
Cinemas. In addition there was an amount of £965,426 representing the corporation's studios,
properties and sites for post-war development. Ibid., 30 August 1944, The Seventeenth Annual
Ordinary Meeting of ABPC Limited, London 7 September 1944, published in ibid., 8 September
1944.
\item[61] The outcome was a rise in the consolidated balance sheet. The Sixth Annual General Meeting of
\item[62] About 50 per cent of the gross box office receipts had to be paid in direct taxation. Thus, the
liabilities of the group as a whole increased by £1,697,040 and stood at £5,446, 491. Trade accounts
\end{footnotes}
estimated at 162 million in 1943, was also behind the increase in the corporation’s profits. In spite of the difficulties in adequately staffing the cinemas, the restrictions on repairs and renewal of equipment, shortage of product, and enemy activity which affected cinema attendances in London and the south, both ABPC and Odeon had a record year of trading in 1943. The reason behind such dividend policy, (17.5 per cent by ABPC and 20 per cent by Odeon), which seems ‘conservative’ comparing to the companies’ profits, was the placement of large sums to a general reserve. The amounts available for deferred repairs were to be used for re-equipment and modernisation of properties.

Enemy action in and around London affected GB whose trading profits were £109,000 lower in 1943 than the previous year. Affected cinema takings resulted in a small decrease of £7,000 in net profit. This decrease was overcome the following year. In 1945 GB was stronger than ever; the reserve and profit and loss balances of the corporation, together with the undistributed profits of its subsidiary companies, showed an increase of £160,737 compared with the previous year. Debenture and loan indebtedness steadily decreased over the war years. They showed a further reduction of £256,000 in 1945 as a result of repayments. After this reduction of indebtedness on debenture and loan accounts the current assets showed an increase of nearly £100,000.

The financial position of ABPC and Odeon was also extended during the final year of the war. The Odeon profit was £28,093 more than the previous year. Although ABPC profit was £3,962 more than in 1943, regarding the difficult trading conditions of the year brought about by the V-weapon attacks during the greater part 1944, the results were considered to be very satisfactory. This rise in the companies’ profit permitted an increase in the dividend of all the three companies, which reflected confidence in the future.


The Times, 3 November 1944.


Table 3. Associated British Picture Corporation Profits 1939-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Trading Profit (£)</th>
<th>Net Profit (£)</th>
<th>Ordinary Dividend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>1,427,157</td>
<td>192,263</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>1,579,550</td>
<td>408,068</td>
<td>15 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>1,510,443</td>
<td>382,998</td>
<td>17.5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>2,106,460</td>
<td>490,501</td>
<td>17.5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>2,135,890</td>
<td>494,463</td>
<td>20 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td></td>
<td>650,289</td>
<td>25 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Gaumont British Profits 1939-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Trading Profit (£)</th>
<th>Net Profit (£)</th>
<th>Ordinary Dividend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td></td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>1,325,294</td>
<td>79,080</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>1,714,291</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>2,739,149</td>
<td>197,334</td>
<td>6 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>2,630,149</td>
<td>192,334</td>
<td>6 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td>2,514,212</td>
<td>257,946</td>
<td>7.5 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 5. Odeon Profits 1939-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Trading Profit (£)</th>
<th>Net Profit (£)</th>
<th>Ordinary Dividend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>473,481</td>
<td>348,618</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>643,287</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>1,700,000</td>
<td>256,985</td>
<td>10 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>2,163,687</td>
<td>320,249</td>
<td>15 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>2,815,930</td>
<td>331,710</td>
<td>20 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td>2,442,427</td>
<td>359,803</td>
<td>25 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A quick look at the tables demonstrates the excellent financial condition of the cinema industry’s major companies, Gaumont British, Odeon and ABPC during the war years: Since the beginning of the war trading profits doubled in some cases, net profits rose for more than 50 per cent, while all three gave generous dividends to ordinary shareholders. All three were strengthened during the war years through the increase of their profits and their refinancing operations. Their strengthening was definitely connected with the conjunction: rise in cinema admissions, better quality product and further integration in the industry.

B. British film production - film audience

According to the combines, their profits rose due to the boom in the exhibition sector. However, this would have not being possible if the cinemas were not supplied with attractive film products. American films dominated the British screen. However, British films discovered their own identity and were for the first time appreciated by British audiences. Indeed, British audiences began to show a preference for British

films over the American product. Despite wartime restrictions, the production industry managed to make an average of 60 films per year. Studio space was reduced from 22 studios to 9, sound stages and production floors were halved; and the rest was requisitioned by the government for war purposes, or for the making of official films. Besides studio rationalisation, a major problem faced by production companies was manpower shortage, due to the call-up of technical experts and actors into the services. Shortage of materials and film itself were an extra obstacle for production during the war. Rationed goods including clothing and furniture were scarce, as was technical equipment. Basic materials required for film production such as recorded apparatus, lamps cameras and ‘Technicolor’ were mainly imported.

The main factor behind the improvement of film production was the involvement of J. Arthur Rank. The most profitable and the best films in terms of artistic quality during the war were made by companies under his auspices at Gainsborough Studios, by Two Cities, and by Independent Producers Ltd.

The most prominent independent film production company during the war years was Ealing Studios which at the time belonged to Associated Talking Pictures Ltd. Ealing produced 58 films, 29 of which were feature length. Many of the feature films were considered by contemporary critics as high grade while the studio has been registered by film historians as committed to high quality filmic realism and essays in social responsibility. However, Ealing only managed very small net profits. Over a period of four years from June 1938 the company’s profits went to Excess Profit Tax (which was 100 per cent since 1940) leaving no balance available for reduction of

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70 Gainsborough doubled its trading profits in 1941 compared with the previous year. They earned £15,070 in 1941 compared with £8,426 in 1940. The net profit after allowing for depreciation and an amount written off film rights and stories, the net profit worked out at £6,432. Kine Weekly, 27 November 1942, p. 5. After that, the studio produced the most popular British pictures of the war years, the melodramas The Man in Grey (1943), Fanny by Gaslight (1944), Love Story (1944), Madonna of the Seven Moons (1944), The Wicked Lady (1945), and They Were Sisters (1945). On the characteristics that quality films shared in common see: John Ellis, ‘The quality film adventure’ in Andrew Higson (ed.), Dissolving Views, Key Writings on British Cinema, London 1996, pp. 66-93.
indebtedness, or operational purposes. Irrespective of this fact the company had decided to continue producing films and showed a net profit of £1,155 in 1943 and £500.986 in 1944.\textsuperscript{72} Ealing could not survive on its own and in 1944 signed an agreement for distribution of its films by Eagle Lion, a distribution company controlled by Rank.

The following table reveals the size of the increase in cinema attendance during the war. Basically, there was a 50 per cent increase in admissions between 1940 and 1943. The chief economic factors behind this were: full employment, a rise in real incomes, and the restrictions placed upon comparative and competitive forms of relaxation.

Table 6. Estimates of Cinema Admissions and Profits 1938-1945\textsuperscript{73}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Admissions (million)</th>
<th>Turnover (£ million)</th>
<th>Entertainment Duty (£ million)</th>
<th>Profit (£ million)</th>
<th>Average Admission Price (pence)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>1,541</td>
<td>103.5</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>111.8</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>114.2</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal expenditure on entertainment rose from £64 million in 1940 to £94 million in 1945. There was an initial drop of 4.3 per cent during the early war years compared


to 1938. Since then expenditure on entertainment rose by almost 30 per cent.\textsuperscript{74} The income of the British was increased during the war. The rise in rates of pay was slightly higher than the rise in the cost of living. Working-class people (who visited the cinemas more often than middle-class people) benefited most from this rise. According to Ministry of Labour statistics, the average weekly earnings in manufacturing and certain other industries for manual workers (including bonuses and overtime) rose by 80 per cent from 1938 to 1945, whilst the cost of living rose by 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, according to crude percentage estimates, the average cinema-goer could easily afford the increase in the average admission price of 41 per cent between 1939 and 1945. Restrictions placed upon expenditure on personal needs with food and clothing both rationed, and other goods in very short supply, meant that more money was spent on entertainment.

Working-class people chose to relieve the stress of the wartime life and labour by spending on their favourite form of entertainment – the cinema. Indeed, cinema was not only genuinely popular, it was the only form of popular entertainment readily available on roughly the same terms as before, especially for soldiers and war workers who were uprooted from their homes. Other popular forms of entertainment like football, and horse and dog racing were reduced to a minimum, or held at different times and in different ways from before the war. This public attitude towards cinema-going was confirmed by a survey made for government planning purposes. The survey, made from a cross-section of Scottish towns by 40 women research assistants, aimed to discover the public attitude of the average citizen to the various factors which influenced the actions and decisions of the nation. The cinema was proved to be the by far the most important leisure activity; with sport taking second place.\textsuperscript{76} Cinema in wartime, as a noted historian of the era Angus Calder has put it, became 'far and away the most popular entertainment'.\textsuperscript{77} Cinema-going had been established as an essential social habit since the 1930s.\textsuperscript{78} A wartime social survey made on behalf of the Ministry of Information entitled The Cinema Audience confirmed that the

\textsuperscript{74} Central Statistical Office, \textit{The Statistical Digest of the War}, London 1951, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., pp. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Kine Weekly}, 27 January 1944, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{78} A. J. P Taylor, \textit{English History 1914 - 1945}, London 1965, p. 313, The Social Survey of Merseyside published in 1934 estimated that 40per cent of the local population attended the cinema each week.
actual composition of the cinema-going audience remained substantially the same as it was during the 1930s.79 The survey concentrated more on the North, the North-West, the Midlands and Scotland than on the South-East, South-West and East Anglia. The survey was conducted during June and July - considered by the film trade as ‘quiet’ months, when it was expected that potential customers might prefer to be outside rather than indoors. Despite its obvious limitations, the survey isolated and analysed cinema-goers by economic group, by education, by occupation, and by location. Essentially, it was found that 70 per cent of all adults claimed to go to the cinema ‘sometimes’, and 32 per cent went at least once a week. Women went more often than men. Younger adults and children went more than older people. The lower economic groups, those classified as earning a wage of £5 or less per week, and with only an elementary education, went most often. High proportions of factory workers, clerical and distributive workers visited the cinema more than once a week, whereas managerial and professional workers went less than that. Town dwellers went more than people living in the country (but then, most cinemas were built in the cities).80

Children were also frequent cinema-goers. According to the findings of Dr Douglas McIntoch survey in Scotland in 1945, 80 per cent of children attended the cinema regularly every week. The cinema attracted most children in junior secondary education, from lower economic backgrounds, who lived in the cities. Comparing these findings with those of the Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry Committee in 1933, we can see that children cinema attendance rose by 10 per cent.81

British cinema-goers believed that what attracted them to the cinema was its ability to provide ‘escapism’. The replies to a Mass Observation questionnaire survey of cinema going in Bolton in the late 1930s clearly demonstrates that the appeal of the cinema lay in that it provided both high-quality entertainment and an opportunity for people to be taken out of themselves and to ‘forget their troubles’. Mrs Lillie Williams, aged

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78, who attended the Odeon once a week, spoke for many when she remarked: 'I go to the films to be entertained, amused, to forget everyday worries'. Bolton’s cinema-goers told how films could be uplifting, promoting a real sense of well-being, and providing a chance to laugh or cry and thus forget the anxieties of everyday life. During the war the cinema offered working-class audiences exciting, soothing, entertainment in comfortable surroundings as an escape from problems created by the war, insecurity, loss of loved ones and rationing. In JP Mayer’s ethnographic research on British cinema audience a respondent admitted: ‘I definitely go to the cinema to be taken out of myself, and to forget the cares of housework, rationing, and washing baby’s nappies. Carry me into the past with Laurence Olivier, Nelson Eddy, Greta Garbo, and others and I am happy’. Another dimension to the attraction of cinema-going was its consumption as a commodity of experience. Most importantly, it was the only one on offer at the time since eating out and taking a holiday on abroad came into play in the 1950s and 1960s. The patrons did not fill their stomachs or their shopping trays, but satisfied their mostly psychological and occasionally cultural needs for a few pence.

Simon Rowson considered the cinema as one of the sociological wonders of the modern world, in view of the luxurious amenities which could be enjoyed for an admission charge of usually less than a shilling. The same view was shared by Sydney Bernstein, owner of the Granada circuit:

'A social institution, the local cinema represents to a section of the population the peak of glamour. Warmth and colour are to be there; there are pleasurable distractions; there is comfort, richness, variety. The cinema is so often the poor man’s sole contact with luxury, the only place where he is made to feel a sense of self-importance. With his nine pence in his hand he is able to command something approximating the attention and service which is part of the pattern of the rich man’s every day of life. The West-End picture-goer and the film critic should bear in mind that his own appreciation of the cinema is not typical or general. Not only the film programme but the deep carpets, the

82 Aiming to promote research into the every day lives among the mass of industrial workers in Britain, Mass Observation conducted the most detailed study of cinema going as a central feature of local life in the inter war years. An account of this study appears in Jeffrey Richards & Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), Mass observation at the Movies. London 1987.
bright lights, the attention 'fit for a king', are the weekly delights of the majority of picture-goers.'

3. Industrial Concentration and the monopoly issue

At the end of 1939 there were three main cinema combines in Britain, Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), Gaumont British (GB), and Odeon. During the war they grew stronger by merging and further acquisitions. It is important to see in more detail how these mergers and acquisitions materialised, not only in order to provide some insights into the structure of the business, but also because merging added to the more efficient run of the combines. These operations added to the improvement of the companies' financial position and to their further strengthening.

The major financial development during the war years was the integration of the industry into a 'duopoly' - Associated British Picture Corporation and the Rank Organisation. This 'duopoly' was the result of the purchase of Gaumont British and Odeon by J. Arthur Rank and brought dramatic changes to the combines, changing the basic structure of the cinema industry. As a result of those transactions Rank became one of the key figures of the British cinema industry. What needs to be made clear though is that the situation in the cinema industry did not represent a true duopoly. Although GB and Odeon belonged both to Rank they were run separately since they were two different companies.

Reference has already been made to Rank's rise to power, but it may be as well to summarise the main events. Rank, a devout Methodist was a newcomer to the industry. He got involved with the film business in 1934 in order to make religious films. The following year he became together with Lady Yule, the financial backer of a small film production company, British National. The difficulties he had in arranging favourable booking terms for the exhibition of his company's films, were the reason behind his decision to buy a distributing and an exhibition company. Thus, he acquired an interest in C.M. Woolf's GFD in 1935. In 1936 he formed General Cinema Finance Corporation. In 1938 he became the financial backer of GFD and the

84 Quoted in Roger Manvell, Film, London 1944, p. 126.
chairman of its parent company GCFC. By 1939 he had investments in Odeon and in Denham studios; GCFC bought an interest in the circuit in 1938; in the following year Rank joined the Odeon board. However, his rise to power in the film world came rather suddenly. When John Maxwell of ABPC died in 1940, Gaumont British was left open to any determined bid. Maxwell had secured for his company a five-year option on the A shares in the Metropolis and Bradford Trust, which controlled GB. When the option expired in October 1941, Rank acquired the Metropolis and Bradford Trust A shares, through the General Cinemas Finance Corporation, of which Rank was chairman, although he held only a quarter of the capital. In the following year he increased his holding, and by 1943 he had the majority interest. By the end of 1941 Rank had become chairman of GB. About a month later, in December 1941, Oscar Deutsch the builder of the profitable chain of Odeon super cinemas died, and Rank bought his Odeon interests. Earlier that year Rank had increased his Odeon interest having provided cash at a time when Deutsch was in need of money in order to make payments. These events led Rank to the chairmanship of Odeon.

The control of ABPC on the other hand, was characterised by the prevalence of what we might term 'personal capitalism', with family representatives sitting on the board of directors. John Maxwell was the chairman of the company until his death in 1940 and then Philip Warter, his son-in-law joined the board. As we have seen, ABPC consisted of a parent company and about a dozen subsidiaries, including two circuits, Associated British Cinemas Ltd., (ABC) and Union Cinemas Ltd. ABPC also had production and distribution interests, which included a feature film production company and a newsreel production company, Pathe Gazette, a film distributor, Pathe Pictures Ltd., and a studio at Elstree and at Welwyn. ABPC had reinforced its lead within the exhibiting field by acquiring managerial control over Union Cinemas in 1937. By this date the size of the company had grown to over four times its size in the early 1930s. ABPC interest in Union was further extended in 1942 by the purchase of the whole of the ordinary shares of Union Cinemas.

The reasons behind the corporation’s decision to extend its interest in Union, was that the company needed urgent capital reconstruction and capital increase. Despite the

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remarkable good accounts of Union Cinemas, neither the controlling company nor the investing public benefited. In fact, the balance sheet of Union Cinemas showed a capital suspense account of £2,968,986. Share capital amounted to £3,265,026, whilst preference share dividends were in arrears from 1937. The board of ABPC, which held 70 per cent of the issued ordinary capital of Union, had wanted for some time to make a cash offer for all outstanding ordinary and preference shares of the company. In July 1942 they made an offer to the ordinary and preference shareholders for the purchase of their shares at 2s 6d each, an offer which was slightly above the market price. In a circular giving details of the offer, the Corporation pointed out that considerable time might elapse before the ordinary shareholders of Union Cinemas could hope to obtain any returns on their share-holdings. The offer was met with a positive response and the corporation received acceptances for more than 90 per cent of the ordinary shares of the ordinary capital. The benefit of this transaction given by the executives was the further reduction of the operating and administrating expenses of Union Cinemas Ltd.

The corporation expanded further in 1943 by acquiring the Mayfair circuit controlled by G. Elcock in a £700,000 deal. As a result of the acquisition, 19 halls were added to circuits under ABC control in their respective territories.

Like ABPC, Gaumont British was also controlled by its owners and not by professional managers and it demonstrated remarkably similar expansion patterns. Isidore Ostrer was the chairman and his brother Mark the managing director until 1941, when Arthur Rank acquired the company and became chairman. Gaumont British had its own circuit. It also held several subsidiaries in the exhibition field: the General Theatre Corporation Ltd. (which also operated music halls), Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd., and Albany Ward Theatres Ltd. Another subsidiary operating music halls was Moss Empires.

86 The Times, 16 July 1941.
87 Ibid., 2 July 1942.
In the film production field there was Gainsborough Pictures Ltd., which had its own studios at Islington. Gainsborough was acquired by Gaumont British in 1941. It was the only studio which managed to launch successfully British stars James Mason and Margaret Lockwood. The other production company was Gaumont British Distributors Ltd., responsible for the production of the Gaumont Sound Newsreel. Gaumont British Picture Corporation controlled the equipment section of the group. The productions of the two companies were distributed by General Film Distributors Ltd. GB subsidiaries outside the cinema business included: Bush Radio Ltd. a radio receiver manufacturer for domestic use whose activities during the war were restricted and diverted just as the rest of other companies of similar nature. British Acoustic Films Ltd. and its branches covered a variety of interests within the film industry: the manufacture and supply of apparatus for recording and reproducing sound on film, the production of films of cultural and educational nature, and the making of sub-standard films including apparatus for their projection and sundry accessories.

Gaumont was further strengthened by full acquisition of Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Ltd. and General Theatre Corporation Ltd. Gaumont purchased additional shares of Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Ltd. and General Theatre Corporation Ltd., both of which performed excellently during the war. Provincial operated a large and important circuit of cinemas. Its policy was to provide a high standard of entertainment by booking the best films for exhibition, including high-grade British feature films produced at the studios of the parent company GB. It also controlled two subsidiaries, the Associated Provincial Picture Household which in its turn owned 18 cinemas and several subsidiaries, and PCT Construction Company Ltd, a finance company dealing on the Stock Exchange. PCT profits rose steadily every year. The accounts of General Theatre, which were to be issued in December and were not

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91 Provincial Cinematograph Theatre' shareholders agreed to convert 2 million 7 ½ per cent cumulative participating ordinary shares into 10 per cent cumulative preference shares.

92 In 1941 net profit increased despite the rise in provision for taxation. Ordinary dividend of 15 per cent was granted to shareholders. The same dividend was maintained in 1942, a year of record trading profits. Net profit in 1943 was £192,269. In 1944 net profit increased by £14,723 as compared to 1943. See The Thirty Third Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd. London 6 July 1943, published in The Times, 7 July 1943. The Thirty Fourth Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd. London 6
disclosed in the information on offer to the shareholders, showed a strong financial position.93

During the same year Gaumont British expanded its control over the cinema exhibition equipment market. An important event in the structure of the subsidiaries was the amalgamation of Gaumont British and Kalee Ltd. They formed GB-Kalee Ltd. cinema equipment specialists in February 1942. This merging was driven by benefits from economy of scale and its anti-competitive effect. The amalgamation resulted in better services and price rises. Eighteen months after the new firm’s formation a reduction of 10 per cent was announced on the sales of various articles of equipment, including sound reproducers, projection equipment and seating draperies. These reductions appeared on invoices as '10 per cent special merger discount'. The company also announced its intention to extend this discount to other lines.94 The merging of the two companies was the first move by British specialists in cinema equipment towards the organisation of a post-war plan to cover manufacture, distribution and export.

As with the other two combines, Odeon controlled a big group of diverse but interconnected companies, but unlike them had no interests in film production.95

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93 The total consolidated assets were £23,013,487 of which £15,254,506 was represented by properties and £3,251,454 by intangibles. Reserves for depreciation and amortisation increased the greater part of the increase being due to the addition of £356,495, practically the same amount as the previous year, out of current earnings. The Sixteenth Annual General Meeting of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, London 28 September 1943, published in ibid., 29 September 1943. The shareholders, in the absence of up to date information about the company’s position were without essential material on which to base their judgement. For this reason the offer was strongly criticised and as a result the offer on behalf of GB remained open until seven days after the accounts of GTC were issued. C.W. Laidway pointed out in a letter to the Financial News this offer should be refused. Kine Weekly, 19 November 1942, p. 17. See also The Times, 7 November 1942. Even after the publication of the General Theatre Corporation accounts the offer was criticised. The argument behind this criticism was that the shareholders could not form a view on the accounts presented to them without the report of an investigating accountant. The chairman, W.H. Drown made a statement in which he suggested that in the absence of an investigating accountant’s reports he did not propose the acceptance of the offer ‘though of course each shareholder must use his own judgement with the scanty material in his disposal’. The Times, 11 December 1942.

94 Kine Weekly, 14 September 1944, p.21.

95 The Odeon Theatres Ltd. controlled:
1. Manorfield Investments Ltd. with a nominal capital of £100 in 100 ordinary shares of £1 each, incorporated in 1939. JA Rank was the major shareholder of Manorfield Investments.
2. Foy Investments Ltd., with a nominal capital of £100,000 in 50,000 A ordinary and 50,000 B ordinary shares of £1 each incorporated in 1940. Manorfield Investments was the major shareholder.
Odeon also acquired several cinemas during the war. In November 1939 Odeon bought the issued capital of the four Paramount companies operating key theatres in Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham and Tottenham Court Road in central west London. Apart from the material advances these acquisitions strengthened considerably the booking position of the Odeon group. The policy of the company concerning the acquisition of new cinemas was very favourable. The intention of the company's directors was to acquire additional properties from time to time, when they considered that such acquisitions were prudent in the long run. Additional theatres would only be acquired if necessary funds were available beforehand and at a price which would show favourable return of capital employed under normal conditions. In 1941 Odeon also purchased the freehold of one of its leasehold theatres taking advantage of the attractive terms it offered. After this purchase Odeon had to freehold any leasehold theatres which had been taken by a subsidiary company. In 1942 the company acquired 26 additional theatre properties and in 1943 three more super-cinemas. Rank intended for the company to maintain its position as one of the leading exhibitors with, if practicable, a modern theatre in every major city. He also had in mind the establishment of Odeon cinemas in several cities in Europe and Canada which would screen among others the quality British films which would be produced by production companies under his auspices. These expansion plans were realised immediately after the end of the war as investments were made in Ireland, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Cairo, Egypt and New Zealand.

As we have already seen, the boards of the two largest cinema owning companies ABPC and Gaumont British were reconstituted in a period of a few months during the war years. As a result of these transactions, Rank controlled the largest circuit of cinemas in the country either by number or by seating capacity and box-office receipts. He also gained control of over 60 per cent of the industry's productive

3. Group Holdings Ltd., with a nominal capital of £1,000 in £1 shares, incorporated in 1940. Foy Investments held the majority shares of Group Holdings.
4. Odeon Cinema Holdings Ltd. 50% of the ordinary shares were held by Group Holdings Ltd. and the rest by United Artists. Odeon Theatres Ltd. also held several subsidiaries, the main one being Odeon Properties Ltd.
96 The Times, 10 October 1942.
97 Ibid.
capacity, and the biggest film distributor General Film Distributors. GFD supplied the circuits belonging to Rank with the films it decided to finance and promoted the films which it had invested in. His domination of the British film industry was also by reason of the wide ramifications of his production interests, which offered a vigorous challenge to America by being closely associated with America. Rank, unlike most of the earliest film magnates, started off with a very considerable capital of his own, a sound business reputation, and good personal contacts in the banking world.

Without doubt he was the dominant personality not just in his companies but in the industry as a whole. The emergence of the Rank organisation as a major power was clearly the main factor behind fears of monopoly in the film industry. Although ABPC was outside the Rank Empire, the fact that half of it had been bought by an American interest, and that after the death of John Maxwell there was no strong personality in control, raised more concerns about the possible effects of Rank’s dominant position. Rank had publicly expressed his lack of desire to create any monopoly. He stated his belief that in order for the film industry to be built on a sound basis, some degree of ‘rationalisation’ was needed, he believed, which would provide sufficient strength to compete with the already established and infiltrating Americans. However, the anxieties over monopoly were not to be allayed.

The issue was not new in the film industry. The Times and The Economist had published articles in 1942 which commented on the general tendency towards concentration. The members of the industry most concerned about monopoly were mainly those with film producing interests. Their main representative was Michael Balcon, who took up the question of monopoly on the Films Council. Balcon was a highly respected producer who run Ealing Studios which produced mid-budget high quality popular and realistic films about contemporary English life.

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100 House of Commons, a letter by Rank to Dalton 30 June 1943, 13 July 1943 col. 1443.


with British National were the independent film production companies in Britain. They operated outside the Rank organisation and they had no permanent ties with any other distribution company or circuit. People like them, independent producers and exhibitors, felt threatened by the progressive concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands. But their concerns were concentrated around the distribution sector. The big distributors were subsidiaries of the major American companies and General Film Distributor, owned, as we have noted, by Rank. The amalgamation of interests which formed the Rank Organisation in 1941 had ties with Universal, United Artist and Twentieth Century/ Fox, whilst ABPC was linked with Warner Brothers.

Public concern about monopoly was expressed through articles in the press and in debates in the House of Commons, and was mainly over the issue of monopoly associated with Rank. Rank’s suggested restoration of trade balances by forcing upon the US a greater acceptance of British films gained some support in the press and in politics.\(^\text{103}\) In view of the shortage of studio space as a result of government requisition, the greater part of the press expressed concern about Ranks’ ability to impose conditions under which he was willing to let studio space to producers of his own choice, and about his ability to secure preferential treatment for his own films by exhibiting them in his cinemas though his own distribution company. Fears were expressed also about Rank’s possible intention to secure control of his only rival, ABPC. Although it was admitted that Rank’s large financial resources might heal British film production which had suffered during the 1930s as a result of chaotic financing, strong doubts were expressed about whether the interest of such a large and nationally important industry should be left to the good intentions of a single individual.\(^\text{104}\) A cultural argument against monopoly was expressed by Lord Strabolgi in a lengthy debate in the Commons about the film industry. He touched on the propaganda power of film and its influence on the minds of the public, especially the young, and argued that in the interests of democracy it was dangerous to see ‘this immense power… pass into the hands of a small group’\(^\text{105}\). Lord Grantley pressed for a small advisory committee with no trade members to sit on it.

\(^{103}\) See for instance, Reg Whitley’s article in *Daily Mirror*, 11 October 1945.
\(^{104}\) *The Economist*, 3 July 1943 pp. 5-6.
\(^{105}\) *House of Commons*, 26 February 1944, col. 1223-1224.
CHAPTER 2
RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES: THE EXHIBITORS, DISTRIBUTORS AND OTHERS

1. Circuits and independent exhibitors

The three major circuits, ABC, Gaumont British and Odeon, controlled in total 1,061 cinemas, of which 966 were open in 1944, while minor circuits (each controlling at least twenty halls) owned about 700 cinemas. Although the major circuits owned 20 per cent of the total number of cinemas in the UK, in terms of seating capacity, the three major circuits controlled about 1,500,000 seats, or one third of the aggregate seating capacity.¹⁰⁶

More important is the fact that the major circuits owned a dominant proportion of the larger cinemas in the country. The average capacity of the halls owned by the three major circuits was 1,481 seats, which on average was double that of the rest. In terms of number of cinemas and seating capacity in each of the three size groups, the proportion owned by the three major circuits and by other proprietors were in broad terms as follows:

Table 7. Proportion of the cinemas in size groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of cinema</th>
<th>Less than 500 seats</th>
<th>501-1,500 seats</th>
<th>More than 1500 seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of cinemas</td>
<td>1. Owned by the 3 major circuits</td>
<td>Under 2 per cent</td>
<td>Under 20 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Other owners</td>
<td>Over 98 per cent</td>
<td>Over 80 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table marks the concentration of the control of the larger cinemas in the hands of the three circuits; they owned about 70 per cent of all cinemas seating more than 1,500 people, and of the total seating capacity in cinemas of that size. Given that the larger the cinema the higher the price charged for admission, this concentration of circuit ownership of the larger halls meant that the average price of their seats was higher than that of the independent cinemas. In 1945 it was in fact nearly 3 d. higher than the average of other halls. The average overall price of admission was about 1s. 6½ d. including Entertainment Tax. At the same time the major circuits charged 1s. 8 ¾ d. which was a difference of 2 ¼ d. This in itself gave them an advantage in film booking whether from independent British or from foreign producers.

The producer and the distributor of a film were concerned to secure their share of revenue from exhibition and to recoup the production costs as quickly as possible. It paid distributors to supply available copies, first to the largest and best-equipped cinemas, where the profits were usually greater as admission prices were higher. During the war and early post-war years, new films were exhibited in less than half the cinemas in the country. It was only an exceptional film that was seen by as many as a half of the of the potential cinema patrons in the UK. Similarly, it was exceptional for a film to be shown in as many as half of all the cinemas in the country.

A film might be booked more than once. The number of separate bookings which a film received was an indication of its success. In general, distributors tended to regard a British feature film as exceptional if it secured more than 2,500 bookings, and above average if the bookings reached 2,000. The average film would be booked 1,500 times or more, and less than that would normally mean certain losses for a feature film made for the general market. Ignoring long initial runs in ‘pre-release’ West-End cinemas, a booking might be for six days or more, for two or three days, or for Sundays only. A good proportion of six day bookings in the most important cinemas might bring in more revenue than several times the number of two or three day bookings in smaller halls. Consequently, it was more profitable to the producer and renter of a film to secure bookings with cinemas belonging to the big circuits. The bargaining booking power of the circuits and especially of the three majors was much stronger than that of the independent exhibitors.

The major circuits also controlled the majority of the ‘first-run houses’ which were the most profitable cinemas in the country. The first-run houses earned more than 1/3 of all the money which a film earned at the box-office. The circuits held 2/3 of the 350 first-run houses in London, which was by far the best film market in the country, as more than a quarter of cinema turnover came from there. The first-run houses also got the best pictures. They would be first to show any picture in their district, and usually they would not show, at any time, a film, however meritorious, which had previously appeared in any other cinema within comparatively easy reach.

First-run cinemas offered to their patrons the qualities of luxury and comfort. They were lavish super-cinemas, built in the late 1920s and 1930s and were intended to provide an atmosphere of luxury and well being which hitherto the majority of those in the audience could barely imagine. As Jeffrey Richards has commented: ‘the buildings themselves became escapist fantasies, their decor and accoutrements – sweeping marble staircases, silvery fountains, uniformed staff and glittering chandeliers – providing a real life extension of the dream world of the screen’. Cinemas built in the form of Spanish haciendas provided exotic settings, while the

109 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
Odeons with their streamlined curves and Art Deco embellishments became a distinctive symbol of 1930s British architecture – along with department stores, virtually Britain’s only modernist buildings.

The rest of the cinemas were called ‘second-run’ or ‘late-run houses’ (third, fourth and so on), according to the order they habitually showed any particular film in their district. They showed films whose appeal was outmoded, and because of the ‘barring system’ many important films were never offered in their areas. These cinemas had to wait until the film they had booked was not being shown to the nearest first-run cinema before they could show it. In many cases the second-run cinemas could not even publicise a precise date for the showing of a film, since the distributor could never predict for how long a successful film would be screened in the nearest first-run. As a result, the independent second-run cinemas advertised the film which was already on show in a easily accessible first-run cinema, as – ‘coming shortly’.

The late-run cinemas were usually ill-equipped halls, and certainly not modernist. For this reason they were known as ‘flea pits’ or ‘bug huts’ and gave the impression of being dirty and dusty even if they were not. The projectors were usually old and standards of film projection were therefore inferior compared to the first-run cinemas.

As Sir Sydney Samuelson remembered from his work as projectionist during the war in the Imperial, Walsall (a ‘flea pit’), the projectors were so old that they had the mechanisms still attached for when ‘talkies’, or sound films, first came out when the sound was like a disk or record.112 Imperial’s projectionists, father and son, lived in a nearby town and always caught the last bus which left at 10pm., since during the war there were no night buses. When the film was longer than usual they used to turn up the speed of the projector so that the film finished earlier so that its projectionists could catch the last bus. Jim Schultz, who worked all his life as projectionist,

112 With the coming of talkies in 1929-30 there were two types of films, the sound on and the ones, in which the sound of the time was not on the edge of the film. It was a disc which arrived in the projection room with the reels of the film. In order for the projectors to be able to play both types of films there was a control button, which allowed the projector to run at different speeds, since the speed the projector had to run for sound on film was different to sound and disc.
described this procedure as standard for late-run cinemas.113 Such a thing would never happen in a first-run cinema.

Another example of the lower quality of the late-run lies in the vivid memories of Sir Sydney Samuelson:

'I remember that in another flea pit, ..., somewhere in the Midlands ...
When the sound had come in, they had to put two projectors in, that would play sound, and at the same time they had to rip out the old screen which was solid, and put a screen in that was with little holes in, millions of little holes, so that the large speaker which was behind the screen ... so the sound could get through the screen. At this cinema the screen that they put in, in say 1928, got very faded and tarnished, and so they had to paint it white. And of course when they paint it white it fills up the little holes, the millions of little holes. So one of the jobs every morning, was that the projectionists with a needle each used to have to go up to the screen and prick one thousand holes where the speakers actually were, we had to prick through the paint; and of course when it was finished because the area that had the holes had a different kind of shade to it you could see the perfect outline of the speakers behind the screen, because that's where the holes have been pricked... how awful it was!'

The floor was covered with linoleum, as compared with the thick carpets which covered the floor of the better-class cinemas. They offered lesser films and cheaper prices. The seats were usually uncomfortable. At Cleveland Picture House, Hull, which catered for the poorer members of the working-class, the tie-up seats were as hard as iron.114 However, many of the ‘flea pits’ provided double seats upstairs or in the back row, known as ‘courting seats’, where many couples would sit and cuddle up, something which was never seen in a first-run.115 The flea pits were usually built prior to 1914. Usually they were small halls. They did not have a foyer as most of the luxurious first-run houses and as a result patrons had to queue outside waiting to be seated, after having bought their ticket. Compared with the big cinemas, they lacked a stage or organ, so they could not promote stage shows. They were mostly situated

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113 Interview with Sir Sydney Samuelson, op. cit.
115 Chas Barnet in ibid., p. 32, and Interview with Sir Sydney Samuelson, op. cit.
away from city centres; their patrons were locals from just around the corner, as it were.\footnote{Ibid., See also Interview with Jim Schultz, Leeds, 19 November 2000. He started as film projectionist in 1941. He worked at Winter Gardens New Brighton, and Court Cinema Wallasey. Since mid-1944 he became a trainee projection engineer and worked at various ENSA cinemas around North Wales. He was part time projectionist in Granada Rugby during the same period.}

The dominant position of the circuits over the independent cinemas was also due to the hold which they had over the London release area. About two thirds of the first-run houses in the London were in the hands of the circuits. It was estimated that about 25 per cent of the gross taking of the circuits accrued from the London houses.\footnote{It was estimated roughly that London had about 300 to 360 first run houses 204 out of which belonged to the circuits: Palache Report, op cit., p. 21.} As a result, the gross receipts of a film booked at the London circuits was much higher to that obtainable from independent London cinemas. A film was booked for first-run in anything between 75 and 86 cinemas in the London release area depending on the circuit which handled it. The independent cinemas in the London area could not offer the film producer an adequate substitute for circuit booking. In other words, very simply, for a film to have any chance of success, it had to be booked by the circuits, preferably by the London circuits. A picture booked for the London houses of a circuit was at the same time booked to the same circuit for the whole of the country. The circuit was thus able to insist upon the first-run of a picture in particular areas throughout the country. Distributors and producers would accept circuit bookings which guaranteed a successful London release, even if there was a chance of inferior bookings for the same circuit in the rest of the country. If the production cost of a British film was to be recouped, the distributor would in most cases get it shown in a large proportion of the most important cinemas in the country. Since all the circuits were strong in the London area, they imposed this power in the booking arrangements of the films. The booking for the London release area to the circuit was conditional upon a nation-wide release.\footnote{Ibid., p. 22.}

In this situation, the booking of films cost less for the circuits than for the independent exhibitors. According to evidence given by a British producer to the Palache Committee (appointed by the Board of Trade to investigate monopolistic tendencies within the film industry) the best terms he was able to secure through his distributors
from the circuits for a medium-cost picture were in the region of 22.5 per cent of the net box-office receipts. At the same time, independent cinemas were willing to pay 40 per cent for the same film. This system disadvantaged both independent exhibitors and smaller circuits which might offer the right facilities and the right environment for the right films, but could not get the right films. Not only did the major circuits get the best pictures available in the market, but the independents were expected to pay a higher percentage than the circuits for lesser pictures. Some pictures had much greater appeal in one region than in others. However, most independent exhibitors only got the chance to show the picture on a second-run basis.

The advantages which film booking practices presented for the major circuits was described in a letter to The Guardian by an ‘independent’ exhibitor:

‘... in a small town in which there are say, five cinemas, each exhibitor hires his films knowing that in almost every case they will show only at his cinema, as experience has taught the other four exhibitors that it does not pay them to give a film a second showing. We thus arrive at the position of five exhibitors each competing for local patronage and at the same time competing even more keenly in their film buying, as each is out to secure as many big films as possible. Should one of these cinemas be taken over by a circuit, the circuit house takes at least half of the big films and the other four must be content to share the rest... What might happen in this town of five cinemas, is actually happening throughout the country. In some cases the independent exhibitor finds himself up against not one but two circuit houses...’

The major circuits could also afford to employ better trained staff. Not only did they always pay wage rates agreed with the National Association of Cinema and Theatre Employees, but also they often granted extra benefits too. Oscar Deutsch, director of the Odeon, decided to withdraw all the war bonuses already granted and to grant to all members of the Odeon staffs 17.5 per cent on their wages, without even advising or informing the Cinema Exhibitors Association. The reason behind his decision was that between circuits the transfer of employees from cinema to cinema, from bonus area to non-bonus area and vice-versa, resulted in confusion and dissatisfaction. The

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119 Ibid., p. 23.
120 The Guardian, 24 September 1943. The same views were expressed by several independent exhibitors in Kine Weekly; see for instance the article by Arthur Peel, ‘Worries of the small man’, Kine Weekly, 13 January 1944 p. 74.
121 Interview with George Clark, projectionist at Ritz and ABC cinema, Lincoln, 14 January 2001.
17.5 per cent war bonus was also granted in order to prevent the outflow of labour from the industry to other industries unconnected with entertainment. Influenced by the proposals of the Beveridge Report (1942) the circuits introduced a pension scheme for their staff. This included a pension for life on retirement, a life insurance on death whilst on company's service, and a refund to the women who leave after marriage.

In order to increase their booking power against the circuits, the independent exhibitors considered the introduction of a co-operative booking system. The subject was discussed in several branches of the CEA, in 1944 but discussions led nowhere. The advantages of co-operative booking of films by independent exhibitors lay in the better terms which the group would be able to insist upon as a result of collective bargaining. It also lay in the opportunity for the independent exhibitor to employ a skilled booker for the selection of programmes and direct negotiation with the renter. In this way a fourth strong circuit could also come into existence, in theory at least, by the amalgamation and absorption of smaller circuits comprising 6 or more cinemas into one or two large groups. Clearly, cinemas integrated in this way into a loose confederal circuit would be able to better secure pictures which they exhibited at a lower aggregate rental than if each of them booked the same picture independently. A body of independents, through a booking manager, could thus treat the distributors to reasonable terms. Such a system, by the creation of a fourth circuit, would mean a reduction of rentals by the levelling up of the bargaining power of the constituent cinemas. It could make it possible for the independents to stand up against the strength of the circuits and save them from being compelled to sell up. The development of a fourth circuit would be of importance for the independent film producers as well, to the extent that the convenience and certainty of booking secured by a single wholesale deal, could compensate for the sacrifice of revenue which it involved. It would also mean better distribution for films, since more of the market could see them.

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122 See letter by R.H. Dewes, manager of the Licensing Department of Odeon Theatres, to the CEA, 5 July 1941, published in Kine Weekly, 17 July 1941, p. 3.
The idea of co-operative booking for independent exhibitors was not new. An attempt to give independents stronger bargaining power was made by Thomas Ormiston in 1927. He suggested the formation of a co-operative booking agency which was seriously considered by the CEA. The halls of three classes A, B and C were to contribute capital in proportion to their classification on which they should get an interest of 10 per cent. All the other profits should be divided on a basis of dividends upon film hire. The group would be controlled by a board of directors. A small committee would negotiate bookings whilst film hire would be 25 per cent of the turnover. The project was stopped by the immediate negative reaction of the Kinematograph Renters Society (KRS). The KRS refused to supply films to any exhibitor joining the group. In fact, the KRS followed the same policy of boycott to all similar attempts made by exhibitors in the 1930s. This policy is reflected in the recommendation of the KRS still in force three decades later, quoted in the Monopolies Commission Report of 1966:

'... recommend to members that agreements for licensing the exhibition of films in any cinema should not be entered into or negotiated with any person already undertaking the booking of films for another cinema or cinemas unless all the cinemas concerned are under the same control or unless such person himself possesses the control of the first-mentioned cinema'.

The KRS was not the only trade body hostile to co-operative booking schemes. The circuits also opposed it for the simple reason that it would create another large circuit and in consequence it would rob them of the competitive advantages for which they had been formed. Circuits opposition affected negatively discussions within the CEA about a new co-operative booking scheme in the 1930s. C.P. Metcalfe, a leading exhibitor and member of the CEA suggested that such a scheme could be introduced, either by turning the CEA into a limited liability company, or by forming a subsidiary which would operate a booking scheme.

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Although the co-operative booking of pictures could have definitely saved many independent cinemas from extinction, the great majority of independent exhibitors were reluctant to take part in such co-operative ventures. For the independent exhibitor took great pride in his skill to book the right pictures for his own cinema. Since most of the independent cinemas could offer nothing of the luxurious environment of the circuits, and since most of them were either second-run cinemas, or showed mostly B-films, they believed they relied for their success on their personal choice of pictures. The independent exhibitors believed that they knew what their audience wanted. They doubted whether the booking of their programmes could be entrusted to a third party acting for a fourth circuit who knew nothing of the preferences of local clienteles and would sacrifice artistic individuality for the winning of a wholesale bargain. Other reasons behind the independents' indifference towards co-operative booking were according to Rachael Low, their '...fatal disinclination to combine, preferring to slog on or sell out'.

Co-operative booking was also opposed by independent exhibitors in 1944 because it would create a fourth circuit. The problems faced by independent exhibitors would not be solved as there would still be independents acting outside the circuit system.

On the other hand, the circuits also objected to co-operative booking which would create another rival, and attempts to form one would not come without a fight.

2. The system of 'bars'

The muscle of the circuits was enforced by what was known as the 'barring system'. 'Bars' were restraints imposed at the instance of an exhibitor booking a picture, in competitive areas, on simultaneous exhibition in other cinemas in the vicinity, and on subsequent exhibition within a specified period. In other words, the practice of 'barring' ensured for the owner of a first run cinema, that when hiring a film, no other cinema in the area was allowed to offer the same attraction at the same time or immediately afterwards. It ensured that no second-run, lower-priced, cinema in the

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130 Proceedings of Scottish branch meeting, Kine Weekly, 14 December 1944, p. 7.
area would be able to announce the film as 'coming shortly' until the prior first run had been completed. ‘Barring’, therefore, created the most favourable conditions for the already privileged circuits for keeping their halls full to capacity. Concurrent showings in more than one cinema in the same competitive area was unlikely, and could only happen where the cinemas involved belonged to the same circuit.\(^{132}\)

In a great many instances bars had their origin in the vaudeville business during the late nineteenth century. Originally, they were imposed largely to maintain the drawing-power of music hall turns who returned periodically, but rarely changed their programme and, as a result, the public could be quickly saturated. Because of the early association of vaudeville and cinema, these bars persisted in cinema despite very different conditions of public demand for feature films.\(^{133}\)

The elaborate system of bars developed in the 1920s. The barring terms on how long and over how wide an area, other exhibitors would be barred from showing a film, were written into a contract. These made model contracts which constituted a source of disputes between CEA and KRS in the 1920s. A Model Contract was first published by the KRS in February 1919. It regulated the methods of cross-overs, dates of dispatch and times and place bars. It also suggested a seven day bar. The Model Contract was not approved by the CEA, which decided to operate its own provisional contract for a year. New versions of the two contracts were produced during the following year, but were not approved by both bodies. Up to 1924 several model contracts existed side by side. In 1924 a New Standard Contract was formally adopted by the CEA and the KRS but its use was not universal. Since the second half of the 1920s it became clear that barring was the main reason for dissension over contracts.\(^{134}\)

In general the barring system as such did not eliminate competition between equals. On the contrary, circuit exhibitors endeavoured to counter each other’s attractions with equally popular features, though it should be borne in mind that their ability to

\(^{131}\) Ibid., see also Proceedings of Manchester branch meeting, ibid., 21 December 1944, p. 11, and Proceedings West Lancashire branch meeting, ibid., 7 December 1944.


\(^{134}\) Rachael Low, The History of the British Film, 1919-1929, op. cit., pp. 82 - 83.
do so was entirely dependent upon the number of good films available and that was part-dependent in turn upon their legal obligation to reserve a minimum proportion of screen time for British productions the supply of which may be scarce or uneven. However, it can be said that the practice of barring during the war years did prevent the wider showing of films, a pre-war situation which did not alter after it.135

The so-called competitive areas, within which one cinema barred another, were frequently far too extensive, particularly in county districts. In those areas bars might embrace several small towns, between which transport services were infrequent and so costly as to make a visit to see the film impracticable for many people. During the General Council meeting of the Cinema Exhibitors Association in March 1944 there was a case raised where Penrith was barred by Carlisle, 18 miles away. The barring period between consecutive runs was 14 days in theory. The limited number of copies made available to serve all the districts in each main region, resulted in a bar operating in practice for so long that the cinemas playing the subsequent runs in a district did not get a copy before public interest - aroused by press and notices and other local publicity - had begun to wane. As a result, the revenue of independent exhibitors was affected and some of the revenue of the British producer was in its turn lost.136 In the reports of regional meetings of the Cinema Exhibitors Association (CEA) by the trade journals innumerable cases were raised of the effect of bars in several situations. Owing to the extended runs, some of the first-run towns which were run by particular bookings found that they were pushed back about six months before they could have their first-runs. Bearing in mind that the great majority of first-run cinemas which could bar the subsequent run cinemas, were controlled by the major circuits, we can see how, one way or another, independent cinemas had severe restrictions on their business.

There can be no doubt that the barring system was to the major circuits’ advantage. When a circuit hired a film the barring process followed it all over the country, and independents usually failed to obtain new films. Sometimes, the big circuits often used their power in operating ‘under the counter’ bars. The regional CEA meetings raised this issue several times. The insidious development of the bars problem was

135 Kine Weekly, 16 March 1944, p. 23
discussed in the South and East Lancashire meeting in October 1944 in Manchester, where a number of complaints were seriously considered. One example of the 'under the counter' bar was given by cinema manager, John McCracken. He mentioned a large cathedral city with a population of 113,000 people, which attracted patrons from a wide surrounding area. In the city there was a large front-rank cinema, 'one of the finest in the north of England', with seating for nearly 2,000. For the previous twelve years it had barred a town five miles away, but when a major circuit acquired a cinema in that town, it was immediately stipulated that the cinema of the cathedral city should not play ahead of them. As this circuit booked films on concurrent dates with three other important towns, the independent exhibitor was unable to get booking dates until the circuit received their dates from the renter. That was tantamount to a bar.137

Even since the early war years several members of the trade expressed views for the relaxation of distance bars.138 In order to tackle the bar problem the trade introduced in 1944 a Joint Committee between the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association and Kinematograph Renters Society, which represented the exhibitors and distributors respectively. The KRS, dominated at the time by American distribution subsidiaries, was a small (it had about two dozens members) but very strong organisation.

The CEA was an effective lobby; it was a national organisation with a developed regional structure which could exert pressure both at local level as well as through its London Office. The CEA was established during the second decade of the 20th century, shortly after the emergence of the cinema industry. At the beginning its membership did not cover all exhibitors, but grew steadily. It had grown from 1,600 members in 1919 to 2,882 in 1928.139 During the war CEA membership covered almost every cinema in the country reaching 4,493 members in 1943.140 The officials, presidents and councils of the CEA gave active leadership in all the controversies affecting exhibitors over issues such as the quota, barring, percentage booking, entertainment tax, Sunday opening and labour problems. The CEA had strong contacts with politicians who often raised some of these issues in the Parliament. The

137 Kine Weekly, 5 October 1944, p. 12.
138 See in ibid., 13 June 1940, p. 5 for the views of the ex president of CEA Ken Nyman on the subject.
139 Rachel Low, The History of the British Film, 1906 - 1914, op. cit., p. 45.
main disadvantage of the CEA in comparison to the KRS was the divergence of interest between its members. The CEA tried to represent the interests of the small independents and the big circuits, and it did it effectively during the war in all cases where its members interests were not clashed. Its unity of action opposing the renters in the issues of Sunday booking and conditional booking brought satisfactory results in several cases during the war. Its persistent action in the negotiations with the government departments also brought satisfactory results to the trade’s problems. This success of the CEA, added more respectability to the cinema trade organisation and played an important role in the change of the big circuits policy during the war years. The big circuits had been rather indifferent towards the CEA affairs during the 1930s. They felt that they did not need the protection of the CEA because of their great bargaining power. But in the war years the big circuits showed more interest in the CEA affairs. We observe a much greater involvement of the representatives of the big circuits in the CEA councils. They realised that the CEA was an efficient body and they wanted to gain more power in the local councils. They sought to control the CEA, so that they could fight more effectively for their interests.

The Joint Committee did not intend to remove altogether the existing bars but instead wanted to take step-by-step action in order to diminish them. In a report submitted to the General Council of the CEA in July 1944, it was stressed that to approach the subject of barring on the basis of recasting the whole of the system would be a ‘Herculean task’, which would probably end in failure. The line of approach was to take the unfair bars first to see what progress could be made. The report asked that individual complaints sent to Head Office from branches should be accompanied by information based on local knowledge. Thereafter, it adopted procedures by which individual cases in which inequity was alleged might be submitted for adjudication. Separate arrangements were devised for investigating cases in which independently owned cinemas, independents and circuit cinemas, and circuit cinemas only were involved. In cases where no agreement could be reached, provision was made for a final ruling to be made. It is interesting to stress that very few cases came from the branches concerning independent and independent exhibitors.

140 Kine Weekly, 4 March 1943, p. 3.
141 Rachael Low, The History of the British Film, 1919-1929, op. cit., p. 3.
142 Kine Weekly, 13 July 1944, p. 5.
Notifications were made to the Kinematograph Renters Society (KRS) for implementation by an Appeal Committee consisting of a nominee of each party and an umpire to be naturally agreed or nominated from within the trade by the Joint Committee. This organisation settled many individual cases in the light of local conditions, arranging for additional concurrences, lifting particular bars, and occasionally shortening the barring period between successive showings in competitive areas. The formation of such joint machinery established by the exhibitors’ and distributors’ associations was an achievement. It was the first time in the history of the trade where the two organisations co-operated successfully in order to solve a problem.\(^{143}\)

Even so, the work of the Joint Committee of the CEA and KRS was criticised by exhibitors. There were also individual complaints by some CEA members that the Committee did not adequately represent the interests of independent exhibitors. Thus, Dennis Walls suggested that the committee should be disbanded and replaced by a new one, composed wholly of independent exhibitors, because the circuits with their power could tackle things for themselves. This motion was defeated in the General Council after lengthy debate.

The Joint Committee did an excellent work in adjudicating cases brought forward by individual exhibitors. During its early days it had dealt successfully with hundreds of cases. Thus, by the end of the 1940s very few cases needed to be dealt by the Committee.\(^{144}\) Less satisfactory though were the arrangements for appeals against its decisions. As a result of the work of the Joint Committee, barring restrictions became less acute for the exhibitors, but the main problem still remained. Several exhibitors suggested that the barring system was still too restrictive. The Committee was a trade organisation and was not authorised to take the initiative in making a determined effort to grapple with the fundamentally restrictive character of the barring system. No headway was made in resolving the main problem in order to widen and speed up exhibition. Thus, the issue would be raised again in the post-war period.

\(^{143}\) Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Cinematograph Films, op. cit., 1949, p. 42

3. Film booking practices

A. Rise in film rentals
The independent exhibitors were at a further disadvantage to the circuits during the war because of changes in film booking practices imposed on exhibitors by distributors: the rise of the cost of film rentals, and conditional bookings.

In order for a cinema to show any registered film (practically any film except newsreels) it had to obtain one from the distributor - the renter. The renting business in Britain was in the hands of very few companies. There were about a dozen firms dealing with 95 per cent of the distribution business. Seven of them were American, and were in fact subsidiaries of the major American companies, MGM, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, Warner Brothers, Columbia and RKO. These companies handled the American films – which were the majority of the most important films in box office and entertainment value. The other four were British. The British distributors were much smaller than their American counterparts and depended mainly on British films, which represented less than 20 per cent of the films shown on British screens. Sometimes, British distributors added outputs of cheaper American films produced by smaller companies which did not have their own representation in the country. The prime British film distribution company was General Film Distributors (GFD), the major shareholder of which since 1936 was J. Arthur Rank.

The services provided by a film distribution company, apart from film finance consisted of the maintenance of branches throughout the country and the employment of salesmen to book pictures to the circuits and the independent cinemas. In other words the representatives of every renting company visited cinemas frequently - once or twice every two months, since it was illegal to book films more than six months ahead. The three principle types of contract which was signed between the exhibitors and the distributors when a film was hired, were: 1) sharing terms, in which the renter received a definite percentage of the net box office receipts during the run of the film; 2) flat rates, and less often; 3) a sliding scale, in cases where a film was sold so as to

return to the renter a certain percentage of the net receipts up to a fixed amount, and an increased percentage of the receipts thereafter.\textsuperscript{146}

Nearly all cinemas started their programmes on a Monday or a Thursday. The cinema programme in most cases consisted of two long films which were more than 3,000 feet long, and ran for around seventy to ninety minutes, a newsreel, and one or more shorts, usually a five minute film of 600 to 700 feet. The long films did not consist of two equal films, but of a first, and then a second feature the quality of which was not adequate enough to run as the main attraction. The average length of their programme was about two and a half hours. The five minute films were official propaganda films, designed to publicise wartime measures bearing upon rationing, fuel consumption, health and home security. Issued through commercial distributors, they were exhibited by agreement with the CEA. A single deal might cover a main feature and a second feature, or it might embrace a series of pictures to be exhibited on different dates, or it might consist of a combination of both.\textsuperscript{147}

During the war, terms of film hire became more expensive to the exhibitors. Film rentals climbed from 10 per cent of cinema's box office receipts during the old silent days to 40 per cent before the war, and as high as 70 per cent in some cases during the war. Even second-run films were offered by distributors at this rate. This increase in film hire was so high that the same percentage charge on box office receipts, which hitherto covered a full programme comprising a main feature and a supporting programme, was estimated to be charged in 1944 for one feature alone; and in many cases a higher percentage than that was demanded. Taking into consideration that in America exhibitors paid about 35 per cent of their turnover for film hire, such terms were too high for the quality of films offered on the market at the time.\textsuperscript{148}

The rising costs of film hire mainly affected independent exhibitors. Independent cinemas could secure films only on subsequent runs and could not concede maximum terms for big attractions, as the bigger exhibitors were prepared to do, because this was out of proportion to their overheads. They were often unable to pay the minimum

\begin{itemize}
\item[146] Simon Rowson, \textit{Notes about the Film Industry}, London 1941, pp. 5-6.
\item[147] Ibid., p. 2.
\item[148] House of Lords, 23 February 1944, col. 927.
\end{itemize}
percentage rates demanded by the distributor and still cover their running expenses. For instance, many of the independents could not afford to book expensive films such as *Gone With the Wind* (1940). In 1942 Gaumont British had made a deal with Metro to pay 50 per cent of box office receipts, without increasing admission prices. Due to that deal, the terms for independent exhibitors were 50 per cent up to the highest figure of any Metro film, and 80 per cent for all above that. There was such an intense resentment against the Gaumont pricing policy that some members of the CEA made an unsuccessful formal effort to secure expulsion of Gaumont British from the Exhibitors Association.

As regards mediocre feature films the showman who could screen two films from different distributors was able to build a varied programme. But in cases where the distributor supplied two features in sharing terms, this was a high burden for the exhibitor because one of the two was of lower quality - what the exhibitors would call 'a lemon'. Independent exhibitors taking £75 to £150 a week were mostly concerned about the increase of film rental and the gradual diminution of flat rates. They were the first to be affected by the rise in film rentals. They feared that they would gradually be squeezed out of business and for this reason complained several times to local CEA meetings.

The main reason behind the increase in film rental was the decrease in supply of new films due to war conditions, in conjunction with the exceptionally heavy demand for films in an industry enjoying boom conditions. The distributors simply took advantage of this by increasing film rentals. Another reason for the rise in film rental lay in the intentions of the distributors to extract the highest possible revenue from their business.

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150 *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 March 1942, p. 53.
151 Ibid.
152 Letter to Kine Weekly, 25 March 1943, p. 44.
153 South and East Lancashire Branch meeting reported in ibid., 28 October 1943, p. 16.
The issue of high film rentals started to become a great concern for the British independent exhibitors from early 1940. The most striking example of an attack in the CEA as part of a vigorous campaign for reasonable film hire was the 'battle' against Metro Goldwyn Meyer's demands for *Gone With the Wind*, launched in April 1940.

The American major offered *Gone With the Wind* to cinema exhibitors on the condition that 70 per cent of the net theatre receipts was charged for the distribution of the film. In addition, MGM imposed the condition of a rise in admission price to 3s 6d in the afternoon and 4s 6d in the evening. In discussions of the problem in local branches of the CEA, the high rate charged for the picture was attacked. As the costs of overheads, rent of premises, wages and depreciation rose since the beginning of the war, it was impossible for the independent exhibitor to pay over 40 per cent for film hire. It was suggested that patrons in some areas of the north of England could not afford to pay such an admission price. Exhibitors also argued that audiences would react against increased admission prices and exhibitors would lose years of carefully built up patronage. The feeling among CEA members as expressed in several local meetings was that if immediate action was not taken against MGM, film renting charges would go up to an all round standard of 70 per cent in the future. This view was supported by Arthur Freeman chairman of the London branch of the CEA as well as by the president, H. P. Mears. In a speech in his own branch he emphasised that the storm over the MGM film was a matter of principle, aiming at the protection of the exhibitor. 'Results' said Mears 'will go much further than the immediate question of that particular film... If they gave way now it would mean films were going to be made in the future for people who could pay big prices for them without any consideration for the others... If the system proposed for *Gone With the Wind* were to come generally into being, it would mean when a big film was produced the biggest house in each district and the one that could afford to charge big prices would get an unlimited run and the rest of the houses would only pick up the crumbs of what the smaller producers could find for them'.

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154 Exhibitors complained that American films such as *Another Thin Man, The Women, Broadway Melody of 1940, Hunchback of Notre Dame*, were not worth the 50 per cent asked by the distributors. Circular issued by CEA, *Kine Weekly*, 16 May 1940, p. 56.

155 Ibid., 2 May 1940, p. 3.

156 *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 June 1940, p. 41.
However, these heavy hiring terms had been accepted by the ABC circuit who, regardless of the uproar, booked the picture and simply passed on the higher costs in higher admission prices. Gaumont British and Odeon, which did not enjoy ABPC's strong financial position in 1940, could not afford the booking of the film and followed the CEA line. A public appeal was staged so that the public would be informed about the issue. Both the president of the CEA and the experienced CEA councillor, H. P. Mears travelled north. With them went one of the trade's most experienced journalists, Frank Tilley, director of publicity for Radio Pictures. He introduced them to the local press and the story of the battle between CEA and Metro found its way to the major newspapers of every daily, every evening and every Sunday newspaper in the Lancashire area. Five hundred sixteen posters were put in the Manchester area asking the public not to pay more than their normal prices to see any film in the district. Three hundred trailers told local people from the screens of every local cinema, except the ABPC ones of course, that if they waited a little while they would be able to see *Gone With the Wind* at normal prices.\(^{157}\) The CEA was so concerned about the issue that it managed to have it raised in the House of Commons. A spokesman for the Board of Trade admitted that although the state had no power to regulate film rentals, he gave promises that the situation would be considered by the government.\(^{158}\)

The CEA General Council of May 1940 approved a recommendation for a maximum rental for the film of 50 per cent. It was also unanimously agreed that the General Council advised its members not to increase their prices of admission on patriotic grounds. An appeal was also made through a cable which was sent directly by the president of the CEA to H. P. Mayer, the president of MGM. The appeal asked for Mayer's goodwill to "a nation fighting for its existence" to 'put *Gone With the Wind* out as a normal release at normal prices and normal rental to exhibitors'.\(^{159}\)

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\(^{157}\) Ibid., 15 June 1940, p. 56.

\(^{158}\) Sir Jocelyn Lucas, asked the President of the Board of Trade to limit the percentage paid to American distributors in order to 'conserve foreign exchange and enable exhibitors to pay a decent way to the employees'. *House of Commons*, 30 April 1940 col. 515-516, ibid., 7 May 1940, col. 1044.

\(^{159}\) *Kine Weekly*, 16 May 1940, p. 11.
The vigorous resistance which the CEA put to MGM terms, together with its consistent and united action resulted in a compromise between the two bodies concerned. The demand for the minimum admission prices was eventually waived later in the year; the film renting charges though were 70 per cent, a fee no higher than the one charged American exhibitors for the same film.\textsuperscript{160} The film was first shown for extended runs in the big cities, often at independent cinemas. It had its first general release in 1942. Although Gaumont British arranged to show the film on the entire circuit for a two-week minimum period during the summer, it went finally to the ABC circuit. It ran for the whole 1943 and became one of the biggest film attractions of the war years.\textsuperscript{161}

The practice of raising film rental to the highest that market could bear was not only to do with American distributors. The box-office success of quality British films was the reason behind the rental terms imposed by Eagle Lion.\textsuperscript{162} The company had great expectations for those British films which it distributed, and asked exhibitors for 50 per cent on all of them with the promise that if a film did not do well the case could be discussed with the company’s director, E. T. Carr. This method of film hire was a new idea and had never been used in the past by any American distributor. Eagle Lion was criticised by the CEA for coming forward with a policy of everything British apart from British terms. In a period when it was difficult enough for exhibitors to meet the quota regulations because of a shortage of British films, 50 per cent seemed exorbitant. Before the war there were plenty of other films available and when asked for 50 per cent, exhibitors could do without. The extra objection arose from the fact that Eagle Lion insisted on exhibitors taking all their films and all of them at 50 per cent. Many of Eagle Lion’s films were worth 50 per cent, but others were not and nor could they stand up to extended runs.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{160} House of Commons, 30 April 1940 col. 515-516, Aubrey Flanagan, ‘Howl over “Wind” in Britain’, Motion Picture Herald, 4 May 1940, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{162} Eagle Lion was formed by Rank in 1944 mainly in order to arrange distribution of the films made by the Organisation in the US. See Geoffrey Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry, London 1993, pp. 78-79 and Robert Murphy, Realism and Tinsel, London 1992, pp. 74-75.
\textsuperscript{163} Kine Weekly, 21 December 1944, p. 10
Part of the distributor's intention to force a rise in film rentals, was their determined effort to abolish Sunday bookings. The Kinematograph Renters Society attitude towards increasing rentals for Sunday shows had become obvious since 1941. The distributors, having realised the rise in cinema admissions, asked for higher percentages on Sunday cinema admissions. Since the pre-war years, exhibitors and distributors had agreed to negotiate a flat-rate basis for old film products offered on Sundays. A fixed sum was agreed to be paid for the run of a film at a specific cinema, and most exhibitors preferred to trade through that method. From 1941 some distributors decided to change the terms of the deal, much to the exhibitors' discontent.\(^{164}\)

Early in 1942, the KRS decided to introduce a new policy of renting new films for Sunday shows. They wanted to cut the separate programme for Sunday evenings and force exhibitors to show new releases on that day. They argued that Sunday programmes comprised of old, outdated films which were poor entertainment for the public. They argued also that the abolition of the old one day Sunday programme would result in considerable economies in transport and manpower.\(^{165}\) This type of entertainment was paid for at a rental infinitely below that paid for six-day programmes. In view of the entertainment boom, the distributors were determined to change this.

Exhibitors realised that distributors' efforts would effectively stop flat-rate booking and secure a percentage policy for Sunday shows. They were worried, and rightly so, that such a policy would squeeze film rentals even higher.\(^{166}\) They also believed, in direct opposition to the distributors, that the films they showed on Sundays combined quality with box-office values. An independent exhibitor summarised the exhibitors' argument against the recent distributors' policy in an anonymous letter to *Kine Weekly*:

> 'As a booker, I have always given infinite care and study to the booking of all programmes, whether weekday or Sunday, and on looking back over my Sundays for years past I find that in every case the chief film has been one which, perhaps, twelve or eighteen months

\(^{164}\) Simon Rowson, 1941, op. cit., p. 4, and Letter from R. E. Dockerty, manager of the Forum cinema in Derby, in *Kine Weekly*, 8 January 1942, p. 44.

\(^{165}\) Report of KRS Meeting, ibid., 2 July 1942, p. 3.

\(^{166}\) Proceedings of Sussex CEA Branch Meeting at Brighton, in ibid., 23 July 1942, p. 15.
earlier, when I showed it on original release, was regarded then by the particular renter as superlatively good. I was asked to pay probably 40 or 50 per cent for it. Why it should become 'junk' and an insult to the public I cannot see...The only trouble is that being a well used copy at a much lesser price, a great deal more work is required in the making up of the programme to ensure a good presentation. Then it is being suggested that the public is being exploited by offering them inferior films at the same prices of admission as for new releases. My answer to that is my public, at least greatly appreciates the opportunity of seeing some of the older films, and although such films would not stand up to a three day run, they do bring people to the kinema. Not because happens to be a Sunday, but because they look forward to seeing again something which they enjoyed before'.

In August 1942, a meeting of KRS distributors declared their intention to discourage the practice of booking films for Sundays only, and expressed the hope that other members of the society might ultimately adopt a similar policy.

The company which dared to put a ban on Sunday bookings was Twentieth Century/Fox. In September 1942 local managers of Twentieth Century/Fox informed exhibitors that in the future no films would be booked at a flat-rate for Sunday showing only. The managing director of the company, Francis Harley, issued a statement declaring the new Fox policy to sell each film individually, and to sell certain films only on sharing terms.

The CEA response was strong and immediate. Its policy was set forth in a pamphlet. The number one measure was withdrawal of bookings of the newsreel, March of Time, the distribution of which was undertaken by Fox. Several branches also promised support for the cancellation of Movietone News contracts. Both newsreels were boycotted not only by independent exhibitors but also by the three major circuits who declared their full support for the CEA and gave instructions to their booking departments at the beginning of October 1942 to cancel the booking of the newsreels. The presence of J.A. Rank and of Max Milder and A.G. Allen of ABPC

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167 Ibid., 9 July 1942, p. 5.
169 See for instance the Proceedings of Birmingham and Midland Branch, where the issue was raised by T. McDermott, in ibid., 10 September 1942, p. 7.
170 Statement of 20th Century Fox policy, printed in ibid., 17 September 1942, p. 5.
171 The 20th Century Fox Pamphlet, printed in ibid., 24 September 1942.
on the CEA committee provided the necessary power and unity to achieve a rapid settlement with Fox. The involvement of the circuits in CEA matters was a major gain for the CEA. When local authorities were approached they always asked with whom they were speaking, and if they knew that the circuits were included a proper hearing was granted. It had taken years for the London branch of the CEA to get the circuits to assist.\textsuperscript{173}

The KRS, after being rebuffed by the CEA on the matter of Sunday bookings, made a special appeal to the circuits in order to achieve this goal and was turned down flat. It was the first time in the history of the trade that the circuits got together on a common basis, on a matter of common trade interest, which was actually in the interests of the independents. Twentieth Century/Fox was then obliged to negotiate with the CEA. After intensive and prolonged negotiations an agreement was reached concerning the trading policy of Fox. Fox issued a statement describing its future policy concerning film booking: the company agreed to continue to supply its customers with one day Sunday bookings insofar as it was practicable to do so. Still, it was made clear that the policy of Fox was to sell films individually. Fox would continue to supply two pictures on one programme by an all-in percentage, or the first picture on percentage with an allowance which is the cost of the second feature. Fox had the right to sell certain films on percentage. In cases where certain exhibitors did not book Fox percentage films, Fox would sell its flat-rate rental pictures on flat rate rentals, except in those situations where it was impractical to do so. Fox would sell its pictures on flat rate to ‘small cinemas’ to whom they had sold in the past in this manner. A ‘small cinema’ was considered to be one whose takings in peace-time did not exceed £50 weekly. If any issue arose, both parties agreed to refer the matter to arbitration.

The agreement finally reached did not express an emphatic unanimous agreement between the two bodies; it included elastic clauses such as ‘where it is inequitable for Fox to do so’ and ‘insofar as is found practicable to do so’. The Fox reservation of a right to sell certain films on percentage was in fact a ‘grading’ of films, a process to which the CEA members had always strongly objected. Their acceptance of this clause was a dangerous concession. Also, the final clause which established the

\textsuperscript{173} Kine Weekly, 20 July 1944, p. 7.
principle of arbitration did not stipulate who would be the arbitrators, and under
which system it would operate. Within a few days of the announcement of the
settlement and the publication of terms, exhibitors started complaining about the
settlement. They interpreted it as a compromise and a concession to the distributors.
Marked dissatisfaction was expressed by the Portsmouth and Devon and Cornwall
members of the CEA.174

3. Conditional booking

Films had been originally hired for exhibition on a basis of an agreed rental known as
‘flat rental’. In 1938 distributors endeavoured to make more general the percentage
method of booking, making initial attempts to grade the films into quality categories.
Exhibitors objected and the attempt was abandoned by the distributors. During the
war the distributors re-introduced the grading system, dividing films arbitrarily into
categories A and B. A films were those which were classified by the distributors as
‘supers’, and B films were what remained. In 1943 the distributors made an edict that
A films should be booked on percentage only, and B on flat-rate.

This new grading system ignored the fact that a film which was a success in London
might be a flop in Lancashire and vice-versa. Yet London and Lancashire were asked
to pay the same for the picture. The grading system affected principally the
independent cinema owners and circuits. In the London area it affected 30
independent circuits representing 400 cinemas. Grading meant increased rental
charges for film hire everywhere and the gradual elimination of the flat-rate. The main
reason behind the gradual elimination of flat-rates was the law of supply and demand.
The renters wanted to cash in on rise of the exhibitor’s turnover and demanded this
way a greater share out of it. Given the smaller numbers of films available in the
British market and the increase in cinema going, renters earned more by percentage
booking, or payment by result as it was called at first. In cases of popular films it was
much profitable for the renter to book the films on percentage rather than flat-rate.

174 Proceedings of the meeting of the Portsmouth branch, and Proceedings of the Devon and Cornwall
branch, Kine Weekly, 3 December 1942.
Even if during the war increased film rental hire came out of excess profits, exhibitors thought they would not be able to meet such arrangement after the war when a slump in cinema-going was expected.\textsuperscript{175} Independent exhibitors taking a moderate £75-150 a week were most concerned about the gradual diminution of flat rates. They were the first affected by the rise in film rentals. They feared that they would gradually be squeezed out of business and for this reason complained several times during local CEA meetings.\textsuperscript{176} The CEA then sent a letter to the Board of Trade complaining about the growth of the percentage booking policy and the effect of grading.\textsuperscript{177}

When exhibitors were arranging film bookings with the renter they were offered special inducements to book more than one picture at a time. The distributors required that a percentage of the pictures graded A should be booked as a condition of booking grade B films. In other words, the independent exhibitors, in order to be permitted to book modest productions, which often proved popular, should take A films at exorbitant percentage terms. Such practice, known as ‘conditional booking’, was objected to by both the exhibitors and the producers. Conditional booking was an arbitrary restriction on the freedom of choice of the exhibitor. The American distributors were not allowed to practice conditional booking in the US, but the practice was applied in Britain.\textsuperscript{178} It was resented by exhibitors and especially by independent exhibitors who took pride in their skill of building their programmes in accordance with the special predilections of their audiences.

Another instance of conditional booking was the so called ‘S’ list. In 1943 the KRS adopted a formula under which the major renting companies agreed that they would not supply films designed by the distributors as in category ‘B’ on flat-rate terms to a given list of cinemas, unless these exhibitors also booked on percentage other films which the distributors designated the ‘AA’ of ‘A’ films.\textsuperscript{179} The distributors, therefore, were making it a condition of booking flat-rates, which were usually B films, that the exhibitors should take a number of films on percentage. As a result, the ‘S’ list deprived exhibitors of what they considered to be their basic market right: to book

\textsuperscript{175} The issue was discussed in the \textit{CEA London and Home Counties Branch Meeting of the CEA}, reported in ibid., 22 July 1943, p. 3. See also \textit{House of Commons}, 10 December 1943, col. 1256.

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{South and East Lancashire Branch Meeting of the CEA}, reported in ibid., 28 October 1943, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Kine Weekly}, 22 July 1943, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{House of Lords}, 23 February 1944, col. 927-928.
films on flat-rates whether they booked on percentages or not. They were also denied the opportunity to book cheap films which they believed, as experienced local entrepreneurs, to be attractive to the public, unless they took other alleged big films, many of which they considered unattractive to their audiences.

In other words, all along the distributors were determined to have a bigger share of the exhibitors' turnover by restrictive means or no. They argued that film hire terms were unfair for the renters, because in some cases exhibitors managed to book films for 5 per cent and 10 per cent. The shortage of feature films raised the market value of the second features and the distributors wanted to profit from it. The 'S' list drawn up by the KRS, embraced 64 members of the CEA, representing 300 halls, and about 5 per cent of exhibitors. Such a film booking practice did not affect the major circuits. It affected smaller circuits and independent exhibitors whose cinemas were situated in working-class areas, which had lower admission prices than the more central ones, and thus relied on the showing of cheaper films.

A characteristic example of exhibitors' objections to the imposition of conditional selling by the distributors was the case of Granada, a medium-sized circuit. This objection was expressed by Granada's demand to be removed from the KRS 'S' list. Sydney Bernstein, owner of the Granada circuit explained why the circuit wanted to be removed from the KRS 'protective list'. All the theatres which were placed in the 'protective list' were situated in highly competitive areas with circuit opposition. Thus, no first- or second-run films were offered to Granada until the requirements of the major circuits were satisfied and in some cases after the renters' regular independent customers made their bookings. Therefore, Granada's selection of films had to be made from a very limited market.180

The practice of conditional booking was also objected to by British independent film producers. Independent producers of main feature films regarded such conditions as a drag on their bookings - second feature producers maintain that the renting of main features in conjunction with a stipulated supporting programme reduced their own access to the screen. All these restrictive conditions in film exhibition and renting

179 Palache Report, op cit., p. 18.
greatly concerned the trade bodies through the war and in the post-war years. The Board of Trade saw these restrictive conditions in film renting as a standard condition not worthy of any further investigation in 1943. However, these restrictive practices were seriously considered by the Palache Report.

Consequently, the structure of the particular practices of the cinema industry itself consisted an important parameter of the circuits’ further strengthening during the war. The circuits owned the largest, the newest and the best equipped cinemas in the country. They owned the majority of the first run cinemas. Being the most luxurious ones, they charged higher admission prices and had higher profits than most of the independently owned cinemas. The circuits power was reinforced by the ‘barring’ system which allowed them to show first the most popular films. Despite consistent action by the CEA for the purpose of reducing distance and time bars, the problem remained. The effect of this system was the lowering of the bargaining power of the small independent and the perpetuation of the differences between the first run and prosperous cinemas, and the less successful ones. This division into good class halls and flea pits was further reinforced during the war, to the advantage of the first, due to the rise in film rental and conditional booking.

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181 House of Commons, 4 November 1943, col. 883.
CHAPTER 3. CINEMA AND THE STATE

1. The concentration of the power of the combines and the government: the Palache Report

It is impossible to discuss the role of the state regarding cinema exhibition ignoring the Palache Report. The Report was mostly concerned with film production and this is what it has been more widely known for. It also refers though to film exhibition and to the prevailing conditions in the film exhibition business which were somehow connected to, and affected British film production.

This Report emerged out of the debate about the alleged monopoly in the film business. The appearance of J. A. Rank seems to have been considered as a rather healthy development in the film industry by the Board of Trade. So, the President of the Board of Trade, Hugh Dalton after having followed the ministry officials advice, decided to withdraw his previous proposal of 1942 to set up an independent authority in order to study the film industry’s problems.182 However, the Films Council (an advisory body of the Board of Trade Film Department established in 1938) disagreed. And it was Michael Balcon who played a great role behind this decision. Balcon who was highly respectable as an independent producer, had worked hard as on the Films Council and was able to exert considerable influence in the Council’s recommendations. His view that a dangerous monopoly was developing in the film industry was adopted by the other members of the Films Council. This is how Balcon and his associate, Major Baker took up the question of monopoly on the Films Council, according to Balcon’s memoirs: ‘Baker and I were both pretty vocal on the tendencies towards monopoly, which became increasingly apparent. Although Associated British were also concerned, it must be admitted that our fire was mainly concentrated on Rank... At the Films Council, aided and abetted by Miss Thelma Gazalet, MP ... we conducted a campaign against Rank’s activities...’183

The Films Council's annual report warned about the concentration of power in the British cinema industry and development of a dangerous monopoly in the film industry. The Film’s Council was not satisfied by the personal undertakings which Dalton received from Rank and the head of ABPC that they would not acquire more cinemas without prior consent of the Board of Trade. They advised the president, Hugh Dalton for the appointment of a committee to study the problem of the monopoly. As a consequence, a Sub-Committee was set within the Films Council. The Committee consisted of four independent members of the Films Council, with Dr Albert Palache, a partner in a city firm as chairman: Sir Walter Citrine, Professor Arnold Plant, and Philip Guedalla (who resigned shortly afterwards, due to illness).

The survey was broad and accurate. The Committee interviewed about forty people from several government departments and from the cinema trade, who expressed the dissenting views within the cinema trade. The interests of the combines, of the independent produces and exhibitors as well as that of the renters were equally represented. Oral evidence was received by the representatives of the combines (J.A. Rank and John Davis from Rank Organisation, and Sir Philip Warter the director of ABPC); exhibitors were represented by W.R. Fuller, general secretary of the CEA and E.J. Hinge, who submitted apart from the oral, written evidence as well, and by the independent exhibitor, W. G. Elcock. The five witnesses from the KRS included Sam Eckam, director of MGM and the director of Eagle Lion, E.T. Carr. The film producers who gave oral evidence were Alexander Korda of London Films Ltd., Filippo Del Giudice, of Two Cities, George Parish of British National, R.P. Baker of Ealing studios and Spencer Reis of British Film Producers Association. Michael Balcon was also interviewed, together with two other trade members of the Films Council. The survey did not ignore the voice of the people employed in the industry; witnesses included the active presidents of the National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees and of the Association of Cine-Technicians, Tom O’ Brien and G.H. Elvin. The interest of government departments was represented by ten officials including Simon Rowson of Board of Trade, Jack Beddington of the Films Division of Ministry of Information. Officials of the British Council H.M. Treasury, were also interviewed. This investigation resulted in the publication of a report titled Tendencies
to Monopoly in the Cinematograph Film Industry which was submitted to the Films Council and to the President of the Board of Trade in July 1944.

The Palache Report addressed the rapid growth of the vertically integrated combines and raised the monopoly issue. The Report’s major concern was to safeguard British films. The British film industry was regarded as a special business which needed the special concern of the state for its conduct and its future development.

'A cinematograph film represents something more than a mere commodity to be bartered against others. Already the screen has great influence both politically and culturally over the minds of people. Its potentialities are vast as a vehicle for expression of national life, ideals, tradition, as a dramatic and artistic medium and as an instrument of propaganda'.

Such views about the powerful role of cinema in national life were not new. They were first expressed at the Imperial Conference in 1926 and were quoted in the Report of the Moyne Committee in 1936 as a view which guided their approach:

'...the cinema is not merely a form of entertainment, but, in addition, a powerful instrument of education in the widest sense of the term... Its potential in shaping the ideas of the very large numbers to whom it appeals are almost unlimited. The propaganda value of film cannot be overemphasised. It is rivalled only by that of broadcasting and the press'.

For this reason if for no other the report was greatly concerned for the building of a healthy British film industry. The Palache Committee considered that such an industry could be built only under conditions of independent film production. They held the view that a healthy and viable British film industry could only be built upon properly safeguarded independent film producers. Independence was defined as freedom from foreign domination, and freedom from indigenous monopolistic tendencies, namely the Rank Organisation and ABPC.

The Report defined the tendency towards monopoly in terms of the rapid growth of the vertically integrated combines, of the control they were able to exercise, and of the introduction and extension of restrictive practices of the trade which 'militated against

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185 Report of a Committee appointed by the Board of Trade, Command 5320, (Moyne Committee) London 1936, p. 2.
the healthy development of British production'. The development of monopolies within the film industry was regarded as a threat to the independent and 'unfettered film industry'.

To be fully independent it was considered that the industry should enjoy reasonable access both to means of production of films, and to screen time, and be free from restrictive practices in distribution.

The Report stated clearly the reasons for its concerns. Film production was dependent on the films being booked by the major circuits which were controlled by two interests; Rank and ABPC. The denial of access of the independent producer to the circuit could mean failure of the film and the ruin of the producer. Since the circuits were linked with American interests, their primary concern was to book American film product than films made by independent film producers. It was stated that independent film production could only be sustained by independent exhibitors. As a result the Report supported the view that the position of independent exhibitors should be secured in order to support independent film production. Independent film production was associated with what was considered to be the typical, quality British film: realistic, well made, low budget, targeting the domestic market and, crucially, in the confines of a specifically British cultural context. On the other side, big budget films made by the Rank organisation and designed as an export commodity to appeal to the foreign market were seen by the Palache Committee as a thoroughly unsatisfactory outcome of years of state encouragement of British film production.

In order to safeguard the position of the independents in relation to the combines the Report made a number of recommendations. Its perspective was that of an independent exhibitor and producer. Their attitude towards ‘independence’ was influenced by critical, cultural judgements. Independence was perceived as the ultimate goal for the British film industry, and an indispensable factor for its continued existence. Independence was linked with integrity, imagination, creativity, and Britishness. On the other hand, monopoly – and behind this, the Rank organisation – was seen by ‘quality’ critics as part of the Americanisation of the Britain.

The Report recommended strict control over changes in ownership of cinemas, and confirmation by legislation of the existing undertaking between the President of the Board of Trade, and the controllers of the circuits, in order to prevent the expansion of those circuits. It also suggested the introduction of a trustee system of ownership in the combines similar to that of The Times and The Economist so that their control would remain in the British interest. It suggested the introduction of legislation for the prevention of the further expansion of the circuits by vertically integrated combines, though with the prior consent of the Board of Trade.

Although the Report was mostly concerned with film production, it threw new light on other phases of the film trade, including distribution and exhibition. It also tackled the possible rise of the booking power of independent exhibitors, which in turn could bring greater access for the British film to the screen. It drew attention to the restrictive practices in the trade: 'barring', conditional booking, and the 'S' list which 'militated against the healthy development of British production'.

Conditional booking of films and the discriminating restriction of the 'S' list were strongly criticised as 'an objectionable and discriminatory restriction upon the access of the exhibitors concerned to the pictures designated as category B'. The Report suggested prohibition by law of conditional booking, declaring that every picture should be available for exhibition. 'The legislation should be so framed as to make illegal such discriminatory restrictions as were imposed by the adoption of the so called S list'. It also suggested an introduction of a tribunal to adjudicate on allegedly unfair booking arrangements.

Palache proposed measures similar to the ones taken in the US under the terms of the Consent Decree of November 1940, according to which licences should apply only to theatres in one exchange district (regional bookings) and should be subject to no conditions requiring licences in other districts. The adoption of the same principle in Britain, they believed, would give more freedom to the independent producer, or to the renter in terms of film hire. A film could thus be booked for the London release area alone to the circuit offering the best return. There would be freedom for

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187 Ibid., p. 35.
188 Ibid., pp. 17, 37.
negotiation for film booking for the rest of the regions of the UK. A film could be booked on the best terms offered, as there would be freedom for negotiation with circuits, or independent exhibitors, according to local circumstances. The report insisted that the renter for independent British films would secure more advantageous exhibition arrangements this way if bookings to the circuits were made separately for each of the ten or eleven regions into which the UK was normally divided for negotiation of film hire. It proposed that the circuits should be invited to experiment voluntarily for a time with separate bookings for each of the regions. In case of failure, the Board of Trade should consider legislation to enforce regional booking practices.

'Bars' were sharply criticised as 'archaic, unduly restrictive and completely out-of-line with the competitive needs of the time' The Palache Committee estimated that the limitations over available film stock would eventually lessen with the decline in consumption for services training and the cost of copies was small enough to enable their more extensive distribution. It recommended that urgent consideration should be given by the Board of Trade to the desirability of empowering by legislation a tribunal, in order to arbitrate on complaints lodged by firms in the section of the trade against the imposition of bars. The Board of Trade should endeavour to secure for independent exhibitors a reasonable proportion of the feature pictures which they would handle, under the provisions of Article X of the American Consent Decree of November 1940, by agreement with the integrated producers and distributors. Failing agreement, the introduction of suitable legislation empowering the tribunal to investigate complaints and arbitrate as necessary should be considered.

The Palache Report was also against high film rentals. Comparing the services provided by renting organisations to any ordinary commission agents who took no risk on the merchandise they handled, such as house agents and brokers, it was suggested that the renting business charged 'inordinately' high rates against the rates normally charged for comparative services. It also suggested that the desirability of bringing film rentals under control should be investigated by the Board of Trade. Charges made to the exhibitors should be controlled to ensure that a more reasonable

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189 Ibid., p. 27.
190 Ibid., p. 16.
share of these payments was passed to the producers. A new system of charging for film hire was suggested, under which the percentage paid to the renter rose with the amount of the box-office takings, the minimum being so calculated that on the lowest takings the exhibitor avoided any loss. This function should be undertaken by a tribunal. Legislation would empower the tribunal to arbitrate on questions referred to it by any firm in any section of the industry alleging that the terms of film hire were unduly onerous. The tribunal should also use its influence to secure the more general adoption of a standard form of contract on these lines, as between renters and producers on the one hand, and between exhibitors and renters on the other. Such a contract would ensure a reasonable share of box-office receipts for the independent producer whilst safeguarding the exhibitor.191

The report was also against the formation of any new circuit, co-operative or not, but it did not suggest that existing circuits should be dissolved. The introduction of legislation was recommended, compelling distributors to treat co-operative independent booking organisations on the same terms as they would accord to a circuit of privately-owned cinema chains. The tribunal should also arbitrate as necessary in the event of disagreement over the terms of film hire.192

Further recommendations were made which were intended to help the development of independent production. These included: the production of a larger number of medium-cost feature films rather than a smaller number of more costly productions;193 the improvement of technical education by the introduction of facilities for training skilled technicians; a fair allocation of studio space between independent and integrated productions; the retention by the government of one or more studios to be available for independent production; a government-sponsored film finance corporation which would include a renting department; contracts securing a reasonable share of box office receipts to the independent producer while safeguarding the exhibitor; and an increase of quota requirements as soon as production facilities permitted.

191 Ibid., pp. 27, 37.
192 Ibid., p. 37.
The Palache Report diagnosed the illness and prescribed the cure. All its recommendations were indeed a suggestion of a more specific state protection than was afforded by the Quota Act. The future life of the film industry was seen through the spectrum of government intervention and control of commercial practices. Legislation and regulation were the order of the day. Although no immediate effect was given to the Palache Report, it gave official expression to a new concept of the government’s concern with the film industry, and provided the basis of a campaign for state intervention during the term of the first post-war Labour government.\textsuperscript{194}

The Films Council unanimously accepted these broad conclusions which had been first received by the President of the Board of Trade, Hugh Dalton. Before taking any action Dalton invited observations from various sections of the industry. The Cinema Exhibitor’s Association appointed a special committee to discuss the report and make appropriate recommendations on it.

During the voting procedure on the individual sections of the Palache Report, both within the General Council of the CEA and in the meetings of the CEA branches, two main dissenting positions emerged. They expressed the two main conflicting interests within the film exhibition trade: the circuits and the independents. The independents, as one might expect, were in substantial agreement with the Palache Report. They welcomed some kind of protective legislation, and the creation of a tribunal. Although some independents were weary of governmental involvement in their trade, they held the view that government interference would be to their advantage and would give them more power against the circuits. They felt that the powerful circuits threatened their very existence and preferred state control over monopolistic or oligopolistic circuit, or renter, control.\textsuperscript{195}

Independent exhibitors had long realised their inferior position against the circuits in terms of their bargaining power and the facilities they could offer to their patrons.

\textsuperscript{193} This was clearly against Rank, whose film production policy was the making of lavish productions exportable to the American market.

\textsuperscript{194} For the policy of the post-war Labour government see Sarah Street, British National Cinema, op. cit., pp. 13-15.

\textsuperscript{195} See the views of Ad. Wright and Capt. Clement expressed in the Hants and Dorset Special CEA meeting, Kine Weekly, 7 December 1944, p. 12; see also Charles Metcalfe in ibid., 2 November
They felt that the boom in cinema-going during the war was only temporary and that at the end of the war they might not be able to refurbish and renovate and compete. In letters to the Kine Weekly, many expressed the view that soon they would disappear from the cinema trade altogether.

The independents were also against the production of high cost British films which mainly targeted overseas markets. They preferred to be able to choose from a larger number of mid-cost pictures. Many of them depended on the lower budget films for filling their bookings and feared that a change in film production policy would bring them back to the quota ‘quickie’ days when, just in order to fill their quota regulations, they screened very low quality British films that nobody wanted to see.

In the other camp, the circuits strongly opposed the idea of any government interference in the industry. They either opposed altogether the idea of introducing a tribunal, or expressed the view that it should be set and staffed by insiders - people within the industry. The circuits saw themselves as strong and progressive organisations. They believed that the very nature of the industry should rely on themselves for its healthy development. In fact J. A. Rank never saw himself as a monopolist. He believed that in order for the British film industry to be build on a sound basis ‘some degree of rationalisation’ was required.

'I am not dictator and I don’t believe in monopolies. I am a believer in competition. It’s certainly not my intention to obtain a stranglehold on the British film industry. Bookings on the Gaumont British circuit can be made for any good independent film.'

The circuits also opposed the creation of any co-operative booking organisation by the independents acting in their own interests. They were against arbitration (of barring)

1944, p. 11. See also Proceedings of West Lancashire branch meeting in ibid., 7 December 1944, p. 16, and Proceedings of Bristol branch meeting, in ibid., 4 January 1945, p. 12.


Proceedings of the CEA West Lancashire branch meeting, Kine Weekly, 7 December 1944, p. 16, Proceedings of the CEA Manchester branch meeting, ibid., 21 December 1944, p. 11.

Seventeenth Ordinary General Meeting of ABPC, published in The Times, 8 September 1944.

Letter to Hugh Dalton, President of the Board of Trade, 30 June 1943, published in Kine Weekly, 15 July 1943, p. 12A.

and maintained that the problem could best be solved within the industry. They were for the making of luxury films like Alexander Korda's *Perfect Strangers* (1945) and Gabriel Pascal's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945).

During the special CEA meetings organised for the purpose of voting for the final CEA recommendations concerning the Palache Report, the representation of the circuits was stronger than ever. In many CEA branch meetings attendance reached record numbers. Nominees of the major circuits used their voting power to assert their viewpoint on the recommendations of the Palache Report. Consequently, the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association adopted the circuits' views and rejected the Monopoly Report and state intervention within the cinema industry's affairs. The Palache Report's proposals were also opposed by the Kinematograph Renters Association.

The Palache Report was also, seemingly and perhaps surprisingly, out of tune with the government's thinking which intended to maintain a healthy nucleus within the film industry which, they believed, could only be sustained by the combines. As Lord Grantley (he was also Richard Norton who run Pinewood Studios for Rank) stated, good pictures could only be made by building up writers, directors and stars and keeping them in the country. This could only be done with money, and J Arthur Rank was the only man who had attempted to do so. If the government had decided to boost the independents it would mean that it would have to intervene in commercial and financial matters, which was against its policy as indeed it had always been against the broad policy intentions of British governments. On the other hand, the government was indeed concerned with the issue of monopoly in the film industry. The President of the Board of Trade, Hugh Dalton, categorically stated the government's policy affirming that it was against any form of film trade monopoly.

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202 Representatives of the circuits packed Devon branch meeting, ibid., 7 December 1944, p. 12, the Birmingham branch meeting, ibid., 14 December 1944, p. 7, Portsmouth branch meeting, ibid., p. 8, Manchester branch meeting, ibid., 21 December 1944, p. 11 and West Lancashire branch meeting, ibid., 7 December 1944, p. 16.
203 House of Commons, 23 February 1944, col. 569.
205 House of Commons, 13 July 1943, col. 877.
However, the only action taken by Dalton in order to pursue this policy was a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’. He informally informed Rank about this policy and secured assurances by him that he would not acquire any additional cinemas or studios without the prior consent of the Board of Trade. Dalton also received a similar undertaking from the chief shareholders in the ABPC that they would not dispose of their shares without consulting first the President of the Board of Trade.

The government’s view was expressed by Lord Selborne, the Minister of Economic Warfare in 1944:

‘This country owed a debt of gratitude to Mr Rank for his services. It would be wrong to think the President of the Board of Trade or the government were in any way antagonistic to Mr Rank. On the contrary the government would like to see several more Ranks, they were the type of men the industry required... He had brought into industry integrity and experience.’

As a result of this policy the instigator of the debate over the monopoly issue, independent producer, Michael Balcon, was not re-appointed to his post as advisor to the Board of Trade Films Council. Independent producers were vital for a healthy film industry as the example of Ealing Studios indicates. But independent production suffered from the problem of raising finance, a problem which the government was not prepared to solve by intervening and providing the required resources to independent producers. On the other hand, independent producers’ only chance for survival, was to arrange the release of their films through distributors which belonged to the combines.

The combines, given their revenue from film exhibition had the needed resources to invest in film production; the produced film output could then easily be distributed through their own distributing organisation in the best cinemas of the country. Rank in fact played a key role in the revitalisation of the British film industry. The most interesting and successful films both critically, and at the box office, during the war years were made by companies which belonged to the Rank Organisation. Space and money was provided for the most talented film-makers and directors, including David Lean, Carol Reed, Powell and Pressburger, Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliat to work and create some of the most interesting and most appreciated films of the period. The
existence of strong combines seemed to provide a safeguard for British film production and exhibition by acting as a bolster against American domination. This is why the duopoly of Rank and ABPC was tolerated by the government.

2. Government departments and cinema exhibition

For all the Palache Report's talk of the need for independence, the state determined that the cinemas remained open and the cinema industry survived the war. The main reasons behind the government's reason to promote film exhibition and production during the war, were the cinema's potential as contributor to the war propaganda effort, as a booster of morale and as promoter of British national character both at home and abroad.

The importance of film as a medium of propaganda had been appreciated by various political bodies since the Moyne Committee. Both the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office believed that feature film could strike subconscious chords and reinforce or modify prejudices or opinions already held by audiences. They recognised the cultural role of cinema as a projection of Britain. The Films Council remarked in their first wartime report: 'The only favourable factor contributed by the war was the enhanced value of film as a medium for conveying information and strengthening morale'. The propaganda value of cinema together with its ability to alleviate depression, caused in the evening by the blackout, was recognised by the Ministry of Information. The Board of Trade recognised that a major reason for maintaining the film industry was that it could greatly contribute to people's recreational activities. The Ministry of Information (MoI), before the outbreak of the war, had also recognised cinema's potential to provide access to a mass audience.

206 House of Commons, 23 February 1944, col. 564.
208 For the image of Britain the British which the Council's documentaries sought to project see D.W. Ellwood, 'Showing the world what it owed to Britain: Foreign and cultural propaganda 1935-1945' in N. Pronay & DW Spring (eds.), Propaganda Politics and Film, London 1982.
210 PRO INF 1/252.
211 Simon Rowson, Internal Memorandum, BT 64 70, 10 July 1941.
The Ministry of Information used the British screen as a means of promoting its own propaganda policy immediately after the outbreak of war. During the first few months, the president of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information, Kenneth Clark, sought the co-operation of the production side of the industry for the spreading of its propaganda policy through the medium of feature films. The main propaganda themes concentrated on the demonstration of what Britain was fighting for, how the country fought, and the need for sacrifices if the fight was to be won.\(^{213}\) The film industry responded to this call and sought official advice for new film subjects. As a result, most of the films in production by the major film producing companies during the early 1940s (Contraband Convoy, Freedom Radio, and Pastor Hall) were of a semi-propaganda character, in accordance with MoI policy.\(^{214}\)

For the purpose of further promoting this policy the MoI actually financed a feature film - 49th Parallel (1941).\(^{215}\) Although the film was very successful with audiences, the financial risk involved in feature film production, the length of time required for its making, and the probability of an outdated message by the time the film reached the screen, rendered future feature film-making non advisable for the Ministry of Information.

At the end of 1941 the Kenneth Clark’s successor, Jack Beddington, created an Ideas Committee for the purpose of constituting a link between the Ministry and the film industry. It consisted of leading members of the industry who met regularly with civil servants in order to informally discuss film projects. They also became aware of the propaganda subjects that the Ministry wanted to see. The most influential and talented British producers, directors, and script writers, were members of this committee.\(^{216}\) Film historians have argued that the ideology of much of British feature film production during the war stemmed from discussions between the members of the

\(^{213}\) PRO INF 1/867.
\(^{214}\) PRO INF 1/867, 1 April 1940.
\(^{216}\) Michael Powell, Anthony Asquith, Sydney Gilliat, Leslie Howard, Michael Balcon and Charles Frend were among others members of the committee.
Ideas Committee. While attending several meetings of the British Film Producers Association, Jack Beddington tried and succeeded in persuading film producers to follow the Ministry's policy. Since 1942 this policy promoted the making of 'quality' realistic films about every day life which emphasised the positive virtues of the British national character. The propaganda theme most encouraged was the ideology of a 'people's war'. The role of the Ministry of Information was not only advisory. In fact the Ministry assisted in the production of the films which fell into its propaganda criteria. This help consisted mainly of the provision of cheap service facilities, in the release of actors from the services, and in the securing of raw stock and travel priorities.

British cinemas were not only used as a means for projecting official propaganda messages through the screening of feature films. The Films Division of the Ministry, which specialised in the making of documentaries, used the cinemas for the distribution of its films all over the country. The weekly audience for these films was estimated at about 30 million. In 1941 the Ministry of Information made an arrangement with the Cinema Exhibitors Association, so that all members of the trade organisation would show a different five minute propaganda film each week, once every programme. All cinemas were graded according to their seating capacity and each film played for a week first in the grade A cinemas, moving on until all the cinemas had received a print for exhibition. For the four years to the end of the war, 550 government propaganda films were shown on a mass scale to captive commercial audiences.

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218 Del Giudice, the producer of the most critically acclaimed films of the war years by film historians, assured Beddington for his intentions to get the Ministry's approval for his film productions. See Aldgate & Richards, op. cit., p. 198.
219 See Robert Murphy, 'British film production 1939-1945' in Geoff Hurd (ed.), op. cit. p. 15. More than a dozen films received some official help or at least some official advice for their making including The Foreman Went to France (1942), We Dive at Dawn (1943), The Gentle Sex (1943), The Demi Paradise (1943), In Which we Serve (1943) San Demetrio London (1943) and Henry V (1945). See for instance, Sue Harper, 'The years of total war: propaganda and entertainment', in Christine Gledhill & Gillian Swanson (eds.), Nationalising Femininity: Culture and Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War, Manchester, 1996.
During this period several cinemas were requisitioned by the government for the screening of army navy and air force instructional films. In 1942, after an arrangement made between the Cinema Exhibitors Association and the War Office and Civil Defence, the cinemas were used for the screening of instructional films for the forces when they were not open to the public.\(^{221}\)

The government departments made several attempts and succeeded in facilitating the work of cinema exhibitors within the restrictive framework created by war conditions. The Ministry of Home Security allowed cinemas to stay open for longer periods, which meant a rise in their box office receipts. The first measure towards this direction was the decision in 1941 for the closing of cinemas at 10 p.m.\(^{222}\) 7pm was suggested as a universal closing hour. This early curfew, raised on the behest of transport authorities, was envisaged for the purpose of easing the running of buses, trams and trains during the blacked-out months of the year. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association protested vigorously, appealing to the authorities not to impose closures earlier than 10pm and emphasising the recreational value of entertainment for war workers, and the men and women in the services. It also pointed out that early closing during 1940 served no purpose but affected efficiency of production, loss of revenue by way of entertainment and income tax, and restricted the playing time of propaganda films. These arguments proved effective.\(^{223}\)

As the war progressed and the public demonstrated the importance they attached to cinema-going by filling up the cinemas even during the blitz, the government realised in practice the value of cinema entertainment in sustaining morale among the troops. Despite opposition from parts of society who considered cinema-going on Sundays a sin,\(^{224}\) in 1942 the procedure for a grant of a Sunday opening licence for cinemas was simplified. It was recognised that members of the forces, as well as war workers, whose only day of recreation was Sunday, needed more opportunities for recreation during that day. By Defence Regulation 42B local authorities were empowered to adopt a simplified procedure for authorising Sunday opening of cinemas in areas

\(^{221}\) In 1942 for instance, 2,000 shows were given in cinemas outside the cinema opening hours. Ibid.,

\(^{222}\) House of Commons. 14 March 1941, col. 1430.

\(^{223}\) For the exact letter sent to the Ministry of Information and the Prime Minister see ‘Protest against arbitrary closing proposals’, Kine Weekly. 9 October 1941, p. 3.
where there were large number of troops, or in districts where industrial work was carried out.\textsuperscript{225}

The Ministry of Fuel and Power was tolerant in its application of fuel economies in cinemas. A voluntary campaign for fuel saving in cinemas was agreed between the Ministry of Fuel and the Cinema Exhibitors Association, in order to synchronise with the national fuel economy campaign. Instead of the imposition of official regulations, a voluntary code of rules was set up by the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association. Under this code all proscenium and attendant lighting was abolished. Full lighting of the auditorium was decreased, while total wattage used was cut to 50 per cent of pre-war levels. Vacuum cleaner power were also economised. These restrictions, even when made compulsory by the Control of Fuel Order, had no effect on wartime audiences who were more easily pleased regarding the entertainment and the circumstances in which it was presented than before the war.\textsuperscript{226}

The recognition of the national role of cinema for the maintenance of morale was behind another concession concerning consumption of fuel. In September 1941 the Ministry of Fuel requested a 25 per cent reduction of the consumption of fuel in cinemas. The CEA discussed the allocation of oil to cinemas with the Board of Trade Petroleum Board. This involved the problem of oil for the running the plenum plant in cinemas, by which the atmosphere was continually cleansed. This system was designed for a fixed standard of ventilation to produce certain results. Therefore a cut in supplies would result in the malfunction of the apparatus. The understanding of the Ministry of Fuel for this problem was demonstrated by the announcement of the relaxation of regulations in respect of users of plenum plant in October.\textsuperscript{227}

After the issue by the Ministry of Fuel of an Order prohibiting the use of fuel in central heating and hot water plants during September 1942, the CEA made an appeal for the exemption of cinemas from the prohibition. The grounds of this appeal were

\textsuperscript{224} Several religious organisations protested over Sunday opening of cinemas arguing that Sunday afternoon cinemas interfered with Sunday school attendance.

\textsuperscript{225} House of Commons, 20 February 1941, col. 369, 17 March 1942, col. 1690.

\textsuperscript{226} Kinematograph Yearbook 1943, p. 182, See also Interview with Sir Sydney Samuelson, op. cit., and Interview with Jim Schultz, op. cit.  

\textsuperscript{227} 'Fuel for the kinema CEA report to Board of Trade', Kine Weekly, 3 September 1942, p. 5, 'Fuel economies at rock bottom, problem of the plenum plant', ibid., 10 September 1942, p.20.
that lower temperatures would mean inevitably smaller audiences. With cinemas being mainly a working-class entertainment, many patrons found the picture houses warmer on a winter night than sitting at home. Although the Ministry of Fuel did not grant an exemption, it agreed that the use of central heating plants during October would be governed by meteorological conditions.228

The Ministry of Labour did not directly assert the industry’s value and role in assisting the war effort by grading it as an essential industry, as did other government departments, namely the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Information in regard to the cinema industry. However, it supported it by opposing the complete drainage of its staff to other occupations.229

With the new schedule of ‘reserved occupations’ which began to operate from April 1941, the industries were divided into two categories: ‘protected’ and ‘unprotected’. The entertainment industry was in the latter category. As a result of these regulations, men who were not called up and still worked in the ‘unprotected’ industries henceforth would be concentrated in protected work. This meant that cinema projectionists who were reserved at that time at the age of 25 years would now be reserved at 35 and over. Even projectionists over the age of 40 were to be summoned for industrial registration. According to statistical evidence given at a Sheffield CEA Meeting, 83.3 per cent of operators employed in a local group of cinemas were under 35 and therefore likely to be called up. It was thus alleged that about 2,000 cinemas would be compelled to close.230 The projectionist was an obviously indispensable member of cinema staff, and the prospect of his imminent conscription alarmed cinema exhibitors because it could result in a mass closure of cinemas.

The CEA made urgent appeals to Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, and asked for the grading of the industry as ‘protected’. Claims were based upon a number of factors: the contribution of the cinema industry to national morale, offering recreation to

228 Full report of the conversations between the CEA and the Ministry of Fuel were given at the CEA Council General Meeting, ibid., 22 October 1942, p. 12.
229 For the recognition of the government’s assistance on the issue of staff problems, see also CEA Annual Report 1941, where homage is paid to the ‘reasonableness’ of the Ministry of Labour, reproduced in ibid., 10 April 1941 and The Fifteenth Annual Meeting of ABPC, published in The Times, 4 September 1942.
people suffering from the stresses of the war; the propaganda value of the screen in relation to Ministry of Information films; the entertainment offered to troops at low prices. Following a visit by CEA representatives on the 6 June 1941, the Ministry of Labour issued a guarantee that there would be no further calls for projectionists for military service pending further investigation of the whole matter and a final decision. In the first week of July the Board of Trade, which was involved in discussions between the Ministry of Labour and National Service with regard to the cinema industry, issued a questionnaire form to exhibitors to ascertain the particulars of projectionists employed.

After examining the data collected, the Ministry of Labour decided to continue to reserve first projectionists. The second projectionists were now called up. There were exceptions made in 313 cinemas which claimed difficulty of operation until alternative staff were trained and made efficient. Thus, the total number of projectionists affected by this de-registration was approximately 800.

With regards to women employees (usherettes, cashiers etc.) the Ministry of Labour decided that they should not be reserved. The policy was to call up young women for interview and invite them to join either women’s services, or undertake direct war work of some kind. It promised that each case would be considered on its individual merits and that the guiding principle would be whether a girl applying for exemption, a young mobile woman, aged 19 to 30 years say, could be replaced by an older woman, possibly an ‘immobile’ woman. A new procedure was adopted. However, usherettes trained full-time as operators were reserved.

The need for repairs of cinemas damaged by enemy action was recognised by the government. Bomb damage repairs were allowed to be carried out without a licence.

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232 Board of Trade Questionnaire, reproduced, Kine Weekly, 19 July 1941, p. 3.
233 Aubrey Flanagan ‘British exhibitors face crisis on labour shortage under draft’, Motion Picture Herald, 13 September 1941, p. 45.
234 Ibid., See also W. R. Fuller (General CEA Secretary), Memorandum, Registration of Kinema Usherettes, reproduced in Kine Weekly, 4 September 1941, p. 3, and Registration for Employment Order 1941, ibid., 28 August 1941, p. 7.
up to the sum of £100 per year. The attitude of the Ministry was that they recognised first the need for dwelling houses to be repaired, then for food shops, and thirdly for places of entertainment, owing to their necessity in the maintenance of morale.235

As the government was first to benefit from the increased turnover in cinema receipts, the Chancellor of the Exchequer collaborated with the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association for the first time during the war, to discuss modification of the Entertainment Tax, so that the exhibitors' revenue would not be much affected. The Entertainment Tax was conceived as a short-term wartime tax, first imposed in 1916 but continued after 1945. The Entertainment Tax in 1945 was about six times greater than it had been in 1938. As A.P. Herbert has shown, the general attitude in parliament was that people seeking entertainment, and in particular visiting the cinema 'at a time like this ought to be made to contribute to the war'.236

The Entertainment Tax could only be met by increases in the admission scale. When the revised scale of the tax was introduced in 1940, these new scale duties were more elastic to exhibitors. Three months notice was given to exhibitors to adjust admissions to help them to meet the swollen overheads of the wartime era. For the first time cinemas could adjust their seating according to their patrons and the best box-office advantage. In the past exhibitors were compelled to increase the medium-priced 6d seats, which were the 'bread and butter' seats, to 8d, out of which exhibitors got only ½ d, the rest was tax. This time the increase was lower and the exhibitor had almost the same profit. On top of that the higher increase was put on the most expensive seats.237 Since the doubling of the Entertainment Tax in 1942, the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked the advice of the CEA concerning modifications of the tax. The view of the CEA that the lower-priced seats should not be taxed so that cinema attendance would not be affected, was endorsed. After discussions with the CEA the Chancellor decided to exempt from taxation all seats priced at a shilling or under.238

The governmental department mainly concerned with the cinema industry was the Board of Trade, which was responsible for its economic welfare. During the war it

235 Proceedings of Portsmouth CEA Branch, 28 May 1941, ibid., 12 June 1941, p. 5.
237 See Motion Picture Herald, 10 August 1940, p. 47, 17 August 1940, p. 38, 9 October 1940, p. 41.
showed a commendable determination to provide reasonable solutions for most of the cinema exhibitors’ problems. However, its policy was mainly directed by concern about film imports from the USA.\textsuperscript{239}

The reason behind the government’s worry about the scale of film imports lay in the fact that the war put a strain on currency reserves and in the long-term, of course, wrecked the country’s entire balance of trade. During the war and the immediate post-war years it was necessary to reduce non essential imports. The Treasury regarded films as luxury items and singled them out for cuts. However, in order for British cinemas to fulfil their role as morale boosters they had to be stocked with sufficient supplies of films. A solution to the problem would have been to increase the production of British films, which was impossible given the curtailment of British film production by wartime conditions. The government encouraged American investment in British film production by the introduction of the ‘monetary quota’.\textsuperscript{240} American companies which used ‘blocked earnings’ to make films in Britain had reduced quota obligations. Blocked earnings were the amount of money which was earned by American companies in Britain which, because of exchange control restrictions, could not be transferred back to America. The revision in quota legislation was also designed as a means of satisfying exhibitors’ needs for the supply of an adequate numbers of British films.

The Quota Act was first introduced in 1927 as a measure to increase the quantity and proportion of British films and to establish a substantial film production industry in Britain. It came out of debates on the role of film as industrial commodity and propaganda.\textsuperscript{241} Under the Act, for the showing of British films exhibitors were obliged to reserve a minimum definite percentage (exhibitor’s quota) of the time during which films were shown to the public. Distributors should also register the total footage of British films (renter’s quota). The Cinematograph Films Act of 1938

\textsuperscript{238} The Kinematograph Year Book, 1944, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{239} For the relations between the government departments and USA concerning film production policy, see Margaret Dickinson & Sarah Street, Cinema and the State, op. cit., pp. 120-125.
\textsuperscript{240} In 1941 the distributors had to produce one a film of at least 7,000 feet in length, whilst the labour costs for the making of this film would be no less than £3 per foot. They were also obliged to produce one or more British films, the labour cost of which would equal £1 per foot. Cinematograph Films Act 1938.
amended the 1927 Act. The quotas started from 5 per cent in 1927 and rose to 20 per cent.

However, it proved impossible for British exhibitors to comply with these regulations. The greatest problem was the shortage in the supply of films available for exhibition in Britain. Sydney Bernstein, chairman of the Granada circuit, estimated in a memorandum published in November 1939 that the necessary number of films needed for cinemas to operate successfully was about 600 a year.\textsuperscript{242} This estimate was confirmed by a memorandum by Simon Rowson, specialist advisor to the Board’s of Trade Film Department, published in September 1939. The decline in film production in Britain had started before the beginning of the war.\textsuperscript{243} In 1939 the drop was even more severe: 125 fewer British and 113 fewer foreign films were registered. The following table shows the number of films registered during the war years.\textsuperscript{244}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year ending 31 March} & \textbf{British} & \textbf{Foreign} & \textbf{Total} \\
\hline
1939 & 103 & 501 & 604 \\
1940 & 108 & 368 & 476 \\
1941 & 65 & 393 & 458 \\
1942 & 46 & 455 & 501 \\
1943 & 62 & 453 & 515 \\
1944 & 70 & 374 & 444 \\
1945 & 67 & 377 & 444 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Number of Feature Films Registered in Britain}
\end{table}

Although the quality of British films was raised, their quantity fell for reasons of shortage of studio space and production delays arising from inadequate manpower. In 1941 the Films Council as well as the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association agreed that the only solution to the problem was the production of more British films. Film production financed by the government was suggested to the Board of Trade by a subcommittee of the Films Council, as well as by the film technician’s trades union,

\textsuperscript{242} Sydney Bernstein, \textit{A Memorandum on the Scarcity of the Film Supply together with a Scheme to Assist Film Production}, London 1939.

\textsuperscript{243} For an analysis of the slump in British film producing industry see Margaret Dickinson & Sarah Street, \textit{Cinema and the State}, op. cit., pp. 76-89.

\textsuperscript{244} \textit{The Board of Trade Journal}, 9 June 1945.
the Association of Cine and Allied Film Technicians, but these bodies were rejected. In 1941 the Board of Trade accepted the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association proposal for modification of the Quota Act which stood at 17.5 per cent at the time. The Second Act of 1941 stabilised exhibitor quotas to 15 per cent for long films and 12.5 per cent for short films over the next three years. This decision was mainly directed by the large increase (1,402) in exhibitors’ defaults in 1941.

Even the amendment of the Quota Act was not enough to solve the exhibitors’ problems. Exhibitors complained that they had to face a 15 per cent quota with a 9 per cent film supply. They protested to the Board of Trade suggesting that short films (the bulk of which were supplied by the Ministry of Information) should be accountable against foreign footage. The Board of Trade did not accept the suggestion but reassured exhibitors that no prosecution would be recommended in any of the cases of any quota default. As we can see from the table, the weakening of quota arrangements meant there was a reduction in the exhibitors’ defaults until the last year of the war, when defaults again increased. The reason for this increase in quota defaults was the Quota Amendment Order of 1944 which raised again the exhibitors quota by 2.5 per cent, to 17.5 per cent. The Board of Trade expected, not unreasonably, a rise in film production in the post-war period with the increase in studio space and personnel.

Table 9. Exhibitors Quota Defaults and Prosecutions 1939-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Defaults</th>
<th>Prosecutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,402</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

246 The Cinematograph Films (Quota Amendment) Order, 1941, Board of Trade Journal, 16 December 1944.
249 House of Commons, 16 November 1945, col. 2558.
As we can see from the table above, the Board of Trade showed a very relaxed attitude towards prosecution of the exhibitors who defaulted. In order to tackle the film shortage problem the Board of Trade suggested the general adoption of a 6 day run policy. This suggestion was against the traditional trade practice of changing film programmes twice a week, particularly in areas where there were not sufficient people to guarantee a full house 6 nights of the week. Even when this policy was tried by the Gaumont British and Associate British Picture Corporation, it was found unsuccessful. The CEA protested vigorously against it in regional branch meetings and the issue was also raised in parliament.

The Board of Trade introduced the reissue of old films. British films up to four years old were accepted in the quota count. Despite exhibitors’ worries about the box office value of these films they proved very successful and helped the maintenance of a healthy film supply to cinemas. Their rental charges were about half that of new ones. Some of them, released during the first year of the war when there was a slump in cinema-going, grossed surprising amounts when reissued. Another welcome concession was the decision by Order No. 1377, 24 September 1943, to permit certain exceptional documentaries such as Desert Victory and Battle of Britain to count in the long film quota. In this way the widest possible distribution was granted to propaganda films and the exhibitor was able to balance more closely his quota requirements.

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250 Letter from Hugh Dalton to the General Secretary of the CEA, 8 August 1942, reproduced in Kine Weekly, 1 October 1942, p. 3.
251 Aubrey Flanagan ‘Exhibitors in Britain beset by war problems’, Motion Picture Herald, 15 August 1942, p. 63.
252 House of Commons, 16 December 1941, col. 1911.
CHAPTER 4. MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION

1. Exhibitors’ and audience’s attitude to marketing

Showmanship had been an integral part of cinema since its fairground booth days but in the 1920s and 1930s it became increasingly elaborate. During the war though, because of the restrictions applied to the industry, in terms of lighting, paper and materials, the role of traditional advertising mediums was either reduced or abolished. Cinema managers improvised. They promoted their products by using ever more elaborate and sophisticated methods; they became ever more inventive in the use of marketing practices and in attempts to economise and recycle available materials. As a result, under difficult circumstances and short supply, the cinema’s ties with its patrons became stronger, not weaker, and its social role was enhanced. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that the cinema emerged from the war as the main focal point of British working-class community.

The limited literature on cinema exhibition in Britain has failed to examine the day-to-day business operations of the trade, focusing more on the architectural splendours of the ‘picture palaces’. Although the industry devoted considerable energy and resources to promotional activities, the marketing and promotion of film has been barely touched by British film scholars, with the exception of two articles: ‘Fantasy worlds: British cinema between the wars’ by Robert Murphy and ‘Promotional activities and showmanship in British film exhibition’ by Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall. The first refers to the most popular showmanship campaigns organised by the exhibitors during the 1930s. The latter, has provided a sketch of some of the components of the promotional work in film exhibition for the 1950s and 1960s.

Two main sources are available for the historian in order to construct the discourses and practices associated with cinema advertising: the trade magazine, *Kine Weekly*

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which provides invaluable information on publicity and promotion, and oral testimony from former cinema workers.

*Kine Weekly* devoted a section in every issue called ‘Showmanship in Wartime’, putatively written by ‘Showman’, where local cinema managers had the opportunity to describe the successful promotional activities they used for the publicising of films. An annual award was offered to managers who had proved themselves ‘live showmen’, by having at least six mentions in the Showmanship pages of the *Kine Weekly*. One condition was that members should be subscribers to the magazine either personally or through their halls. We should note that at the time *Kine Weekly* was the most popular trade magazine; most cinemas in the country would get a copy each week.²⁵⁷

The key idea promoted by the Showmanship section of the magazine was that cinemas should not lose their glamour; they ought to have as rich a decoration as possible. The mentality was that, in a period when paper restriction necessitated the use of smaller and fewer and duller posters, attention should reasonably be given to other forms of announcement. The message was: ‘Don’t relax energy on any picture... Exploit everything... Your kinema no less than your product needs to be a lot in the public eye... Whether you are a small picture house or a huge Regal or Ritz you cannot afford to let any portion of the potential public forget you.’²⁵⁸ In his column, Showman often criticised the inadequately maintained cinema. As an instance of what should not be happening he cited a circuit cinema which he passed nearly every day. ‘The canopy, an old one, certainly carries its message in interchangeable letters of such indescribable shabbiness that they are a real eyesore. Broken glass squares, chipped and dulled letters, give an impression of dilapidated poverty which even the manager in his white shirt and dress jacket fails to redeem.’²⁵⁹ Similarly he criticised as signs of neglect and evidence of faulty management the

²⁵⁷ Interview with John Davidson, 14 October 2000, Bridlington. He first worked at Carlton, Hull as a doorman at the age of fifteen in 1939. During the war he worked as a supply projectionist in Birmingham in 1940; since 1941 he worked as chief operator at Regal Bridlington until the cinema’s closure in the 1960s.


²⁵⁹ Ibid., 13 June 1940, p. 39.
common practice in some cinemas of leaving posters on exit doors announcing already shown films.260

'Showmanship in Wartime' was a source of inspiration to several managers. They made a practice of keeping back issues of the Kine Weekly, and particularly the 'Showmanship' pages, to help them with their work. They looked at the file of old copies when they sought something special to put over a programme. One manager compiled a neat and painstaking 'cuttings book' in which he pasted those illustrations and stunts from the Showmanship section which appealed to him and was likely to be of most use in the future.261

The cinema industry first had become interested in marketing research in the 1920s. Sydney Bernstein conducted surveys in his Granada group of cinemas (1927, 1928, 1932, 1934, 1937 and 1946-47), the first instances of audience research. Their intention was to document the incidence of cinema-going from the perspective of audience preference. The surveys asked questions about favourite film stars (both male and female); directors; favourite genres; whether people listened to BBC film critics; opinions on particular films; and suggestions for improvements in cinema entertainment.262

During the war cinema exhibitors continued to be interested in using the findings of market research for the marketing of film entertainment. The Emery Circuit, a circuit of 30 cinemas in the Birmingham area, had planned a scheme for market research within the circuit immediately prior to the outbreak of war. As it was impossible to obtain an accurate survey of trading possibilities under war conditions, the project was shelved until the ending of hostilities.263

During the blitz when cinema attendance fell substantially, statistical records were compiled in each cinema of the circuit on the following points: when is the best time

260 Ibid., 9 September 1943, p. 31.
261 Kine Weekly, 2 September 1943, p. 60.
262 The Bernstein Questionnaires, British Film Institute Library, London. For the 1946-47 survey 120,000 questionnaires forms were issued; 2,000 distributed to 'prominent people', some of whom were personal friends of Bernstein, and the rest to the customers of the Granada cinemas. C. Moorehead, Sidney Bernstein, A Biography, London 1984, p. 185.
for audiences to visit the cinema? What are their hours of employment? Do the cinemas open when the public can attend? What are the new peak hours under war conditions? How have alterations in industrial and shop hours as a result of the blackout affected the flow and peaks of patronage? Data was then entered on specially designed census forms to show, amongst other things, the numbers of patrons admitted to the theatre every quarter hour, opening and closing times of the cinema, the closing times of local factories, industries, shops and offices, and the last available transport services. These forms indicated falling patronage after an ‘alert’ had been sounded. For the purpose of bringing back audiences to the cinema, certain experiments were made, such as alterations to programme times. Although the findings did not prove as satisfactory as had been hoped, for the small effort expended, they proved worthwhile.264

Promotional activities were conducted on two levels, both of which were considered equally important: advertisement: of the cinema itself, and of the particular product offered to the public, the film.

For many people, cinema-going was a habitual activity. According to the findings of the research project ‘Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain’, which lasted from 1994 to 1996, nearly one third of all respondents admitted to going to the cinema to see whatever film was playing. Nearly all the respondents had a favourite cinema, the name of which they were able to recall after sixty years or more.265 Many preferred to visit their favourite cinema no matter what film was on show. For the question concerning what they liked about their favourite cinema, 91.2 per cent of respondents used words suggesting qualities such as comfort, luxury, space and modernity. For a substantial number (45.4 per cent), however, their favourite cinema embodied more

264 Ibid.
265 The project involved conducting interviews with and collecting questionnaires from people who were cinema goers in the 1930s and who responded to publicity about the project. 186 questionnaires were returned in all, responses coming from all over the UK. The fieldwork stage of the project consisted of interviewing approximately eighty people. Published work relying on the project includes A Kuhn, ‘That day did last all my life: cinema memory and enduring fandom’ in R. Malby and M. Stokes (eds.), Identifying Hollywood Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies. London 1999, Annette Kuhn, ‘Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey’, Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television, vol. 19, no 4, 1999 and A Kuhn and Sarah Street, ‘Audience and reception’, Journal of Popular British Cinema, no 2., 1999.
'homely' qualities: convenience, value for money, friendliness, a genuine sense of belonging – in other words, a ‘local’. The qualities of luxury and comfort could be enjoyed in the lavish super cinemas built in the late 1920s and 1930s. These cinemas were intended to provide a plutocratic ‘American’ atmosphere which the majority of those in the audience had hitherto barely imagined.

The advertising of films was the result of a belief on the part of producers, distributors and exhibitors that audiences exercised considerable choice in their consumption of film product, and that such choice was influenced by promotional activities and stunts. This notion is confirmed by findings of the research project ‘Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain’ and of the 1945 Kine Weekly Survey on public taste in film entertainment. In fact 53 per cent of the respondents to the Survey questionnaire, remembered that their choice of film was influenced by posters, advertisements outside cinemas, and similar publicity. 73 per cent of all respondents to the Kine Weekly Survey admitted that advertising influenced their selection of film. Only 5 per cent claimed that advertisement had no effect upon them. Around half of them welcomed advertising in the cinemas.

2. Advertising the cinema

Reinforcement of current buyers, brand name – the safety issue

There was much more to the cinema-going experience than watching a film. Exhibitors knew this and every component and pleasure of the whole experience was promoted in some way. The cinema was advertised as a place of entertainment where patrons could feel secure, looked after, and relaxed; they could enjoy themselves and,

266 Annette Kuhn, ‘Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s’, op. cit., p. 526.
267 See for instance, The Annual General Meeting of the British Film Producer’s Association. 25 June 1942. The president, C.M. Woolf expressed the view that war films were unpopular with the British public. The public he said was tired of war and propaganda films and was asking for films which took their minds off the tragedy of the war. For the tendency of producers to concentrate on the making on war or propaganda films he blamed the Ministry of Information. He deprecated the Ministry of Information policy concerning the release from the services of artists, as it arranged artists releases only if they were to play in a war propaganda film.
268 Annette Kuhn, Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s, op. cit., pp. 534-535.
269 The Kine Weekly Survey. The survey which intended to provide some insides of the feeling among cinema goers, included questions of direct interests to the cinema business. Kine Weekly. 20 December 1945, pp. 71-72.
apart from the films, there was live entertainment and music, cheap ‘take away’ meals and sweets, and they could do their bit for the war effort; and come out feeling proud to be British. This total experience in entertainment was simply offered just for nine pence.

In order to attract more customers and re-establish their reputations, big circuit managers tried to use their brand name as a connotation of quality and standard of service which was to be carried with it. Charles Wright, manager of the Odeon Camberwell, knew that his rivals in the Camberwell district would advertise the film _The Great Dictator_ on its merits alone, and so he decided to be different from them by advertising the merits of his house as well. Outside the cinema the patron would notice a poster which emphasised the advantages of the Odeon’s technical efficiency and comfort. In advertising another film, the cinema hoarding outside the entrance read: ‘Hedy Lamar in _Lady of the Tropics_. Come inside for a visit to the tropics and forget the freeze up’.

It was common practice for cinema managers to use the logo of the circuit, the ABC triangle for instance, or the O sign of the Odeon, in displays which advertised particular films. The logo often appeared in the decoration of the foyer, vestibule, café or restaurant, or even on the outside of the cinema. Paper frames printed in the circuit colours red and green and in the shape of the familiar Odeon cut-cornered O sign, were used at the Finsbury Park Astoria, to decorate pilasters between the outside doors. Inside these were bills carrying the following message: ‘Odeon is the world, Astoria is the place, for best entertainment’. The O sign was used at the Edgware Odeon to announce the use of a second pay box. A board shaped in the familiar Odeon O and coloured with red and green lettering over a black background notified the patron that there was ‘Odeon Service from the opposite pay box’.

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270 _Kine Weekly_, 1 May 1941, p. 28.
271 E. Shaw, State Barkingside, ibid., 8 February 1940, p. 40.
273 Chris Wood, Finsbury Park Astoria, ibid., 1 June 1944, p. 43.
274 The manager used this small idea to help build up the reputation of a house for services. In theatres equipped with two pay boxes it was customary to use only one outside the rush periods and at such times someone put up a bold notice saying ‘Other pay box’. Eric C. Chisman, Edgware Odeon, _Kine Weekly_, 13 June 1944.
The circuit's name and logo was also adopted on signs to promote the quality of the film programme of the cinema. A 50 by 40 inches sign was erected at the Oldham Odeon with a heading 'Whilst Britain is Doing Great Things These Days, the Odeon Oldham are Still Showing Great Films'. In the centre of this wording the large O was drawn. Through the O burst a large arrow with the wording: 'Follow the arrow through the O to see the outstanding forthcoming productions'. On the flights which came from the end of the arrow were the titles of several films.\(^{275}\) The Granada circuit adopted a similar stunt for the promotion of their programme. A small-scale balloon barrage composed of dozens of toy balloons, hung from the ceiling of the foyer. Cards attached to a number of the balloons carried the announcement 'The Granada programme defies any barrage'.\(^{276}\)

In certain Odeon houses, the circuit's logo and colours were used to promote facilities in the lounge. The wall behind the confectionery counter in the lounge was painted in Odeon red and green and incorporated the familiar O.\(^{277}\)

R.V. Maclver, manager of the County, Fleet always publicised the cinema as an Odeon house even when trying to build up personal relationships with his clients. In September 1941 a large number of troops from Manchester were stationed in the district. One evening a party stood outside the theatre discussing whether or not they would see the show. Their decision was made as a result of the following remark made by the manager: 'See lads. It's an Odeon - it's sure to be all right' Maclver reported that the same conversation happened three more times in the same month. He believed that whilst the name meant nothing to the overseas troops in the district, an experience of the show and the service it offered would lead those patrons to look for the Odeon sign in every district to which they might subsequently be transferred.\(^{278}\)

The policy of introducing up-to-date advertising of the cinema itself was particularly pursued by managers of independent houses. The manager of the Regal Barkingside, used four lively colours on posters with yellow and larger white spaces to draw attention to the theatre's name, its restaurant, car parks, and air raid shelters.\(^{279}\)

\(^{275}\) R. F. Hart, Odeon Oldham, ibid., 9 October 1941, p. 37.
\(^{276}\) H. Turton, ibid., 18 January 1940, p. 22.
\(^{277}\) Ibid., 24 February 1944, p. 46.
\(^{278}\) R. V. Mac Iver, ibid., 18 September 1941, p. 22.
\(^{279}\) Ewan Shaw, ibid., 18 January 1940, p. 22.
During the first two years of the war the issue of safety was used as indirect advertising for the cinema, by small and big circuits in order to reassure those who feared that they might be bombed while seeking amusement. In the Shepherds Bush Pavilion, in a large frame on one wall, was a photograph of the roof girders being put in position, while the building was still little more than a vast steel framework. Around this picture it was written that the cinema was awarded a gold medal for good construction together with the slogan ‘You can feel safe in the Pavilion’. Some Odeon houses also adopted the use of a slogan to publicise safety. At Odeon Herne Bay publicity carried the outline of a merchant ship to emphasise the phrase: ‘The Safest Way to Enjoyment - Let Odeon Convoy Your Entertainment’. The whole slogan was employed on a banner stretching across the entry. Upon it was a list of forthcoming attractions, each printed against the outline of a cargo vessel whilst in the background were the convoying destroyers.

In 1940 the Emery Circuit in Birmingham launched a campaign in order to counteract the effects of bombing and reports of damage to its halls. A series of six leaflets, one a week, were distributed to people living nearby which had suffered loss of patronage. The reasons why they should visit the cinemas were stated as usual. Enlargements were displayed near the entrances and the foyers in conjunction with the use of slides and screen publicity. Managers were instructed to ‘talk confidence’ and to encourage the interest of patrons in the theatre and in its function. The campaign did not bring sensational results, but in several cases there were reported increases in attendance.

In order to tackle the problem of reduced cinema attendance and attract more patrons to the cinema in 1940, managers would offer free seats. When a new battalion of soldiers was posted to Bridlington, the officers, N.C.Os and men were invited to an evening’s free entertainment at the Regal. The organist played popular tunes which

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280 Ibid., 9 October 1941, p. 27.
282 These are some examples given by Dennis Walls, the general manager: Situation A: Very frequent and sometimes exceptionally heavy air raids. Managerial co-operation excellent. During the six weeks of the campaign box office receipts were 43 per cent better than in the previous six weeks. Situation B: Frequent raid warnings, occasional bombing raids. Fairly good collaboration. Average increase 20 per cent. Situation E: Occasional raid warnings. Very slight bombing. Excellent co-operation form all concerned. Dennis Walls, ‘Patronage held despite raids’ op. cit.
were the servicemen sung along to. Appreciation of the gesture was expressed in a letter from the commanding officers.283

Food consumption
Going to the cinema was often combined with eating and drinking.284 Most super-cinemas, the majority of which belonged to the combines, had a café, used mainly for luncheon and tea, whilst quite a few also had adjoining restaurants. Many married women involved in war work were working up to thirty hour’s a week.285 As they no longer cared to start cooking a midday meal after working from 9am to midday there was a great demand for value-for-money lunches in the cinemas. Nine of the Granada cinemas served on average 1.5 million meals a year during the war, compared to the 250,000 served prior the war.286

Taking into consideration the restricted kitchen facilities, shortage of staff and equipment and the rationing restrictions, the main quality which the catering manager should demonstrate in order to be able to feed a million and a half people a year, was ingenuity and foresight. The Granada circuit catering manager for instance, received the needed food supplies from Scotland. His philosophy was to accept literally whatever they could send, assuring Granada restaurants of an invaluable if sometimes original food supply. 'Real Scots vension was followed on Granada menus by such items as rooks, haggis, gull’s eggs, grouse, vension sausages, salmon, fresh lobsters and crabs, and on one occasion “Roast Eagle and Veg”.'287

Roast eagle, sardines, saucers and serviettes may seem nowadays strangely remote from Bing Crosby and Betty Grable, but were considered treats under the prevailing rationing conditions. In order to satisfy the growing number of customers buffets were built in all restaurants, proving immensely popular and becoming in effect a shop window for cold dishes. At the super cinemas the consumption of sweets was also closely related to the cinema-going experience. When the selling of ice cream was

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283 George Carlton, ibid., 15 February 1940, p. 27.
284 Lower middle class adolescent, then, Sir Sydney Samuelson, recalled the delightful experience when he visited with his smaller brother the Odeon Worthing and afterwards to the Woolworth’s café for sausage and toast. Interview with Sir Sydney Samuelson, op. cit.
286 Guy Morgan, Red Roses Every Night, London 1948, p. 84.
prohibited in September 1942, the Granada circuit made experiments with ‘cold sweets’. A travelling cold sweet chef made his appearance in the group and soon Granada’s jellied sweets became popular.\textsuperscript{288}

To cover this recently created need for proper food, cinemas for the first time started to advertise their facilities. Odeon Worthing restaurant advertised an ‘economy lunch’ at one setting. A two-course meal was offered at a value-for-money price, which solved the problems of getting a cheap meal prior to seeing the show and in so doing pulled in an entirely fresh patronage.\textsuperscript{289} As the patron approached the Rialto, Upper Norwood, apart from the name of the hall, the only other indication to be seen was the brief comment ‘Café Lounge inside’. On the front of the building there was another large board, also boosting the refreshment department and yet more notices and menus were inside the foyer as part of the campaign to popularise the café on the first floor.\textsuperscript{290}

The cinema organ

One of the side attractions of the cinema was the cinema organ. Normally the instrument served the dual purpose of providing a welcome break to the visual entertainment, and also its appearance contributed to the general decorative aesthetic of the cinema. Due to wartime lighting restrictions, much of the former glory of the floodlit illuminated console had gone. Its functions in the cinema, both as a solo instrument and as an accompaniment of staged concerts for the forces and other stage shows, had never been in greater demand. Even cinema managers who had never exploited its entertainment facilities during the pre war years, admitted that in wartime it proved an excellent investment and became an integral part of a well-balanced programme.\textsuperscript{291}

Misreading of the public taste by the major circuits led to the dismissal of a number of organists at the start of the war, a decision which seems to have been actuated by motives of economy. They ignored the popularity of music during times of stress. It

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., p. 85.
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., p. 87.
\textsuperscript{289} Gerald Masters, Odeon Worthing, Kine Weekly, 24 April 1941, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{290} Maurice Elsemore, Rialto Upper Norwood, Kine Weekly, 17 September 1942, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{291} ‘The kinema organ’, Kinematograph Yearbook 1942, p. 211.
was the independent exhibitor who took the leading part in the popularisation of the musical interlude and in re establishing organ music as a prominent feature of cinema entertainment. Subsequent events proved that community singing was warmly appreciated by war-time audiences. Since 1940 the circuits showed a change in their policy, one-by-one returning the consoles to the circuits. Even Gaumont British which had stopped offering organ interludes to the patrons before the war reopened the silent organs and invited applications from returning organists. According to *Kinematograph Yearbook 1944* estimations, about 500 organs were brought into service in 1943. The public demand for musical interludes led to the introduction of a page titled ‘Presentation’ in the Showmanship section of *Kine Weekly*, with advice on songs to be used for successful organ interludes. Successful programmes of musical interludes from other cinemas were also listed.

Organ interludes varied in their presentation. The traditional form consisted of a recital of a variety of songs and melodies, sometimes accompanied by a singer. In many cinemas the organ was played by the cinema manager. Organ interludes could be used as part of a film’s promotion, the organist playing tunes from the film. They also took the form of a community singing interlude: a succession of well-known songs were played whilst the words were projected onto the screen on slides for the audience to join in. Some Gaumont British cinemas organised special community singing events once a month. The Holloway Gaumont invited its patrons who served in the forces to ask for a chosen melody to be played by the organist when their relations were in the cinema. A steady series of requests came for such favourites as ‘Yours’, ‘Till The Lights Go Up Again’, ‘Smiling Through’ and ‘Melancholy Baby’. The Granada circuit toured its professional organists around the country. Their interludes attracted huge audiences and were consistently advertised in the foyer and by posters on the external walls. The increased

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293 A large number of first rate organists (about 85 per cent) were absorbed by the forces. Ibid.
294 Selections from Handel’s work were played by the organist to exploit the showing of *The Great Mr Handel* (1942), Astoria, *Kine Weekly*, 3 December 1942, p. 40, G.W. Davies, Carlton Norwich, ibid., 28 January 1943, p. 47. Special organ interlude comprising French national airs was arranged as advance publicity for *Tomorrow we Live* (1943), in Townsend, Ritz Barnsley, ibid., 3 June 1943, p. 41.
297 L.W. Forrest, Granada West Ham, ibid., 11 February 1943, p. 45.
attraction of guest organists is demonstrated by the reports of their reception by the public.298

Stage shows
Increased use was made of the organist for the accompaniment of variety and other performances which provided a welcome addition to the film show, particularly in areas where troops were located. They were organised both by independent houses and circuits, were well attended and constituted the centre of conversation the following day.299 The most successful innovation was ‘service nights’, originating from the Odeon and later adopted by many cinemas throughout the country. They consisted of a full stage show put on by talented members of the services, sometimes with a stage orchestra and otherwise with organ accompaniment. They were usually held on Wednesday or Friday nights.300 Normally the interlude lasted 45 minutes and consisted of about six assorted turns picked from the many applicants who rolled up to compete for cash prizes. One of the most popular items of the interlude was a competition in which patrons were invited to give correct titles to the tunes played on the piano.301

A characteristic example of an amateur talent night which demonstrates the patriotic and uplifting mood of these shows was organised by the manager of the Troxy, to celebrate his first year as general manager in November 1942. The programme called ‘London Spirit in Song’ was designed as an expression of, and tribute to, the spirit of the Metropolitan civil defence services. The show opened with a spot of community singing whilst popular songs including ‘Marching Along Together’ and the East-End favourite, ‘Knees Up Mother Brown’ were played at the organ. Then the show went into a series of individual variety turns. The finale was introduced by a female vocalist singing ‘London Pride’ concluding with ‘Songs of Liberty’ whilst members of the civil and fighting services appeared on stage.302 At Gaumont British cinemas where stage shows were introduced during the war and lasted until the end of it,
professional singers were invited. The manager of Empire (Gaumont British) Wakefield, used to book a local singer when there was a special film on. On one side of the stage a trench was put with a soldier in, while on the other side the singer was singing to him. In other occasions of special films on show, an orchestra of eight musicians was booked from Leeds.\textsuperscript{303}

Stage show interludes provided relaxation for soldiers and war workers alike. Organ interludes and stage shows strengthened the audiences' feelings of solidarity. As Andy Medhurst has pointed out variety artists performed the important wartime ideological function of 'reaffirming a notion of community'.\textsuperscript{304} Audiences sat together in the cinema auditorium, listened together to the same uplifting songs, sang along together, laughed together at the comedy items, and because they were entertained, together they were together. This function of morale boosting during the war was also performed by British film comedies which reproduced the music hall tradition.\textsuperscript{305}

**Public Relations**

A traditional sales' approach, a personal relationship with the customers, was adapted by the managers from old practices, and reinforced during the war years. Personal contact with the patrons was considered by several managers one of the fundamental objectives of management. According to the words of an old cinema manager,

\textit{\textquote{a manager's first job is to learn how to approach and handle his public. He needs to know how to make friends. It's no good treating customers as if they were a nuisance... Anything we do to gain their confidence and respect will help along the business. The method of approach makes the difference. If done properly it can convert a shy, suspicious or aggrieved customer into a staunch supporter...}}\textsuperscript{306}

ABC manager Anthony Higgins who had worked for 31 years in first-run circuits reported that personal contact with the public was widely popular

\textsuperscript{302} A. Fryer, Roxy East End, ibid., 12 November 1942, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{303} Interview with David Taylor, 7 December 2000. Mr Taylor entered the trade in 1922. He was reserved as first projectionist during the war. He worked for the Gaumont British circuit in Wakefield and worked as a supply projectionist for Gaumont British cinemas in other towns in the North.
\textsuperscript{306} Interview by the Showman, Kine Weekly, 4 November 1943, p. 55.
right across the circuits.\textsuperscript{307} What many managers did when they moved into a new hall, in order to make personal contact with their patrons, was to go on stage and introduce themselves to the public in a short speech.\textsuperscript{308} This method was also used by several managers to welcome services patrons recently posted in the area.\textsuperscript{309}

Part of the attempt to create a closer relationship between the cinema manager and patrons was the display of news-boards inside the foyer. News-boards, as part of its week-by-week publicity, was widely employed by the Granada circuit. They were meant to be cheery and interesting to the patron. They usually included a weekly letter from the manager, and an amusing array of quips from the current comic press, or jokes which were neatly pinned around the letter. Some dealt with the films to be shown. The news board of the Willesden Granada, for example, was a blue panel divided vertically into three sections, the first headed ‘coming next Sunday’, the second ‘Today’ and the third ‘Next week’. Under each heading was pasted a well-chosen assortment of clippings showing star portraits and film titles and a full list of each production. The weekly message of the manager of Willesden Granada quoted at length, and with touches of humour, extracts from a letter by a Warner Brothers’ make-up artist, on the correct and most effective way of treating the female eye.\textsuperscript{310}

Several cases were reported where wives of men in the services saw their husbands depicted in newsreels. The managers were very keen in obtaining the cutting of the newsreel from the renter when it was out-of-date. The prints were then enlarged and developed and presented to the customer as a gift.\textsuperscript{311} Anniversary greetings were sent by A/B Thomas Hunt serving in the Navy in the Mediterranean to his wife, at Regal Walham Green, on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of December 1943. This was arranged by manager D.M. Edenborough who had received his letter a couple of months in advance. In order to make certain of her appearance, the manager sent two complimentary free tickets to her. Just after the organ interlude he read part of the letter sent to him by the sailor and then the organist played a song devoted to all those who had loved ones on the

\textsuperscript{308} ‘Our Roaming Representative Says’, ibid., 13 July 1944, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{309} See George M. Carlton, Regal Bridlington, ibid., 15 February 1940, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{310} Hugh McGettigan, Willesden Granada, ibid., 8 May 1941, 13 July 1943 p. 40.
front line, 'I'll See You Again'. The manager of The Majestic, in co-operation with a local clergyman sent postal orders for 5s as a Christmas present to all members of HM Forces who had been regular patrons before the war.

This notion of friendliness in manager's relationships with cinema patrons which intended to make them 'regulars', was extended to open demonstrations of public spiritedness. The offering of free seats to deprived members of the local community, the wounded, evacuees and pensioners, made many friends for the cinema, and served as a form of indirect advertising. Such gestures were further publicised by the involvement of the civic authorities. A party of wounded servicemen were entertained by a show and tea at the cinema's restaurant at National Kinema (GB) Chatham. A further party of wounded from the Navy and the Marines were invited to see Millions Like us (1943) in the presence of the Mayor and the Rector of Chatham. The manager of The Regal, Rayleigh, made an offer to admit pensioners for free – on presentation of their pension books – before 3pm, on weekdays. The local Council showed its appreciation by passing a resolution publicly thanking the manager.

The publicity scheme of free invitations consisted mainly of the organisation of free cinema shows for children. 100 hundred bombed-out children, both local and evacuees, were entertained at a special show on a Friday afternoon when the Shirley Temple film Young People was the main attraction. The arrangements had been made by the organiser of the Mayor's Distress Fund for Air-Raid Victims. The performance was honoured by the attendance of the Mayor and his wife. At the end of the programme the children received presents from the Mayoress herself. The Majestic Theatre (Odeon) Sevenoaks organised a free matinee performance for over 500 forces children and prisoners-of-war. The Mayor of London's approval for this special 'gesture' was shown by the distribution of dozens of toys to lucky members of the

312 D. M. Edenborough, Regal Walham Green, ibid., 7 January 1943, p. 41.
313 Will Sykes, ibid., 10 December 1942, p. 31.
314 A. Terenzy, National Kinema (GB), Chatham, ibid., 24 February 1944, p. 40.
The manager of Picture House Rickmansworth, arranged for 700 children to be entertained by a free Christmas film show. This effort was aided by a £28 donation from the Conservative Club, so that each child could be given a present after seeing the film. American GIs provided a special treat in the form of ice-cream.

Cinema as a community centre

A. Charity

Another demonstration of the adoption of the wartime discourse of solidarity for cinema publicity purposes was the use of foyers as collection points for charities. The most common collections for the forces at the beginning of the war at any rate were for woollens and cigarettes. Several cinemas both independent and circuit’s managed regular collections from their patrons. In some cases a series of whist drives was organised; they took part on certain days in the foyer. In other cases a uniformed cinema attendant stood beside the pay-box with a collection tin into which patrons dropped their surplus cash. Gaumont British organised a ‘Woollies for the Navy’ campaign. As part of this campaign a ‘white elephant’ week was organised in The Ambassador, Hendon, where the public produced a varied assortment of junk items which were disposed of in an empty shop opposite the cinema, raising £213 for the fund. Wool was purchased with the money and enthusiastic knitters made jumpers for the forces.

In 1941 some cinemas showed originality in appealing for the donation of reading material, an appeal which became very popular. By 1943 the ‘Woollies for Troops’ service, which had been a prominent feature in many cinemas, had been substituted by collections for books, magazines and newspapers. This usually took the form of a collection box in the foyer which was often draped with a Union Jack. Publicity of this cause also took the form of a front of house display. Some Gaumont British

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318 L. W. Walsow, Picture house, Rickmansworth, ibid., 25 January 1945, p. 35.
320 H. T. Brown, Capitol Sheffield, ibid., 28 March 1940, p. 34.
321 E. Chisletta, Finsbury Park, Rink, ibid., 14 October 1943, p. 31.
322 J. Hutchison, Ambassador, Hedon, ibid., 16 May 1940, p. 12.
323 J.C. Thurburn, Finsbury Park Astoria, ibid., 13 February 1941, p. 29.
cinemas put a large tea chest at the front of some of their cinemas to encourage patron contributions.

The Granada circuit adopted a special gadget for the collection of unwanted books to be despatched to the forces. This consisted of a simple book-marker bearing the message: 'Here's something to read' indicating from which cinema the book had come. Fighting men who obtained pleasure from one of these books would respond with thanks to the Granada cinemas concerned.324 The appeal for unwanted books and magazines for troops soon took an unusual turn. A gang of young local volunteers undertook the work of bringing in the volumes and visited almost every road in their district once a week on their bicycles, bringing back their collections to the appropriate quarters. Their reward was the offer of an occasional free pass to the cinema.325

As the war progressed, collections for troops became better organised by charitable organisations or societies, such as the Prisoners-of-War Fund, the RAF Benevolent Fund and the Services War Injuries Plastic Surgery Fund. Many foyers became collection points for these charities, with Red Cross and St. Johns officers joining cinema staff in the handling of collection boxes.326

B. National War Campaigns

Cinema managers linked their advertising campaign for a film with National War Campaigns. It was extremely easy to obtain posters, speakers of civic distinction, and parades of personnel. Such campaigns had the advantage of selling not only the particular film, but also the cinema under the guise of a true community centre.327 These campaigns lasted for a week and were reported to result in 'House Full' notices outside the cinemas. The Wings for Victory Week campaign and the Prisoners-of-War Fund Week usually took the form of a series of demonstrations onstage by the local Air Training Corps (ATC) of their activities at work and play. They intended to give the public a sample of what their contributions to the national effort would help to

324 Ibid., 4 February 1943, p. 36.
325 Jack Snackier, Harlesden Odeon, ibid., 27 November 1941, p. 44.
provide. They usually opened with a fanfare from a drum and bugle band, and continued with a sample of Morse reception and transmission. Messages from the audience were tapped out on a buzzer, decoded and read back by the officer-in-charge. In many cases there followed a gymnastic display on stage. Afterwards the speaker of the day made an appeal (throughout the week there was a whole succession of speakers including the Mayor, the local War Savings Wing Commander, a Fight Officer from a local squadron or even a member of the local aristocracy). The performance ended with a march by cadets from the rear of the auditorium to the stage whilst a patriotic song such as 'Land of Hope and Glory' was played through the non-synch. The stage was specially decorated for the occasion with flags, whilst the foyer was dressed to create the relevant patriotic atmosphere with flags and bunting, model aircraft and photo enlargements of war aircraft lent by the Ministry of Information.

National War Campaigns were sometimes connected with competitions. A determined drive-in connection with fuel saving was carried out at the Odeon Redhill. The committee which undertook the work used competitions among schoolchildren and tradesmen to highlight their campaign. The children's campaign took the form of a poster competition with each poster emphasising ingenious ways in which the viewing public might help to save fuel. Tradesmen were urged to carry out window displays. The winning posters were displayed in the cinema lounge. The prizes, usually Savings Certificates, were distributed from the stage by an actress, often supported by the Mayor.

C. Special events

During the war the cinema enlisted the support of local organisations of various kinds for the planning and organisation of events unrelated to the screening of individual films. This promotional activity served as indirect publicity for the cinema and added to its role as a community centre. The war time use of the cinema for causes unrelated

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327 See also Kinematograph Yearbook, 1943, p. 209.
328 The Duchess of Norfolk appealed for the Prisoners of War Fund, during the week, John Slatter Odeon, Bognor Regis, Kine Weekly, 8 April 1943, p. 36.
to the film business promoted it into a more respectable institution in the eyes of the church and civic authorities.

Characteristic of this is the example of co-operation between cinemas and councils in East London. Its purpose was for the benefit of public entertainment. The Mayor of Leyton and seven local exhibitors got together in supporting a scheme for the amusement of the local residents. They organised a local amateur singing contest. The contest ran for seven weeks and was held at a succession of local cinemas. The council provided the prizes, so there was no cost to the trade. The contest was widely advertised in the locality and the names of the participating halls were shown on all bills.331

A Home Guard Church parade was held at Odeon Hendon. Arranged by the local company of the Home Guard and associated units, including departments of London Transport and Post Office, it began with a march to the hall to music provided by the battalion band. The salute was taken by the local zone commander, and the service was conducted by the Rural Dean of Hendon with clergy from all other denominations assisting. Much space was devoted to the parade in the local press and acknowledgements were made to the Odeon Theatres. Since religious feeling in the district was antagonistic towards the film business, this parade, with all religious bodies associated, greatly pleased the Odeon manager.332

The cinema stage of the Walthamstow Granada hosted a ‘Sportsman Night’ for the local amateur football team. The five trophies won by the team were on show in the foyer (drawing crowds). The club was congratulated from the stage by a local MP, a famous footballer, and other notables. The team had their own dance band on the stage and the show concluded with everyone linking arms and singing ‘Arm in Arm Together’.333

By 1943 special Sunday shows organised in independent and circuits cinemas for the purpose of collecting money for service charities were already an established trend.

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331 Ibid., 10 September 1942, p. 23.
332 Mark Freeman, Hendon Odeon, ibid., 27 November 1941, p. 44.
All were reported to take place to packed houses. They were highly respected as well as highly respectable, securing the presence of notable members of the local society such as representatives from the civic authorities, from the church, and from the army. The show was a concert in which a band played. In a concert organised at The Regal, Darlington, for the aid of the Darlington Division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the star turn was a band of a training regiment of the Royal Armoured Corps. A special show to appeal for the local AFS Benevolent fund was inaugurated by The Roxy (Emery circuit) Birkenhead, featuring a local accordion band, complete with drum, and guitars. The manager opened the appeal with a £2 10s donation and as a result £6 was collected.

Greater amounts of money were collected by the organisation of more ambitious and elaborate shows by the larger cinemas in more middle-class areas. The Swiss Cottage Odeon organised a 'mammoth' all-star variety show on the eve of a bank holiday to raise funds for the Welfare Fund of the Hampstead ATC. An impressive list of fifteen artists were invited to perform, whilst the gallery was filled with notables, including the Mayor and the Vicar. The commander attending on behalf of the Air Ministry, spoke from the stage. The concert concluded on a patriotic note; the ‘Hymn to Airmen’ was recited against a background of cadets drawn up in a V (for victory) formation. Such was the crowd outside the cinema before the start of the concert, that a diversion of traffic was necessary. According to the manager’s reports, this effort raised about £400. Other bumper concerts were organised by cinemas with similar success. Variations of this type of show included orchestral performances and guest artists, such as cabaret entertainers, comedians, and accordionists. In some cases the cinema projectionist devised special lighting effects adding to the visual side of the entertainment. During a Hackney Road Odeon concert, a number of articles provided by supporters were auctioned, including bottles of sherry, boxes of cigars, cigarettes, chocolates, and a pile of gramophone records.

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334 G. H. Barker, Regal Cinema Darlington, ibid., 27 November 1941, p. 44, Interview with George Clark, op. cit.
335 C. Hardy Morgan, Roxy Birkenhead, Kine Weekly, 26 June 1941. The ABC Sunday charity matinees were helped by the circuit’s resident manager, L.W. Tolliday, Ritz (ABC), ibid., 22 October 1942, p. 28.
336 Mark Freeman, The Swiss Cottage Odeon, ibid., 3 September 1942, p. 3.
337 Although the prices of the seats raising from 7s 6d to 3s 6d, were considered high for the district, the house was sold out and the gross proceeds amounted to £352. Leonard Poole, Hackney Road Odeon, ibid., 29 April 1943, p. 20.
Through hundreds of recruiting drives, the cinemas were placed at the service of the authorities. 6,000 cadets were enrolled through the Odeon circuit which inaugurated a campaign on behalf of the Air Training Corps (ATC). It was estimated that 15,000 other cadets had volunteered as a result of efforts by the circuit.338 When the formation of the ATC was first mooted in February 1941, Oscar Deutsch proposed to place the whole circuit behind the drive for recruits. In order to test the reactions of patrons, an experimental campaign was initiated in one area of the circuit. The screens were employed for recruiting appeals; in the vestibule of many cinemas recruiting offices were opened, others were appointed to committees and the services of others were accepted as officers and instructors. The success of the scheme was such that in one southern town alone three squadrons were reported to have been raised directly in one cinema.339

Recruitment campaigns, mainly on behalf of the local ATC and ATS, were arranged as part of film advertisement. They were usually used in connection with war films or essentially British films, and took the form of stage and foyer displays, decoration and speeches.340 They were made possible by collaboration between exhibitors and the various authorities responsible for national and local services and further enhanced the role of the cinema as a community centre. However, they were not without financial benefit to the cinema concerned. Recruiting campaigns were so popular with the public, that all managers who applied this method reported capacity business on each night of the week reported. Recruiting campaigns were related to war films including *Flight Command* (1941)341 but mainly to British films. Recruiting campaigns was the *standard* method for the exploitation of the film *First of the Few* (1942),342 as, or so it was reported, it had been for *Target for Tonight* (1941).343 These campaigns took a similar form to the National War Campaigns: stage displays by ATC cadets; speeches on the purpose and training of the ATC by the Mayor or

338 Squadron Leader H.W. Woollett, London Area Controller of the Air Training Corps paid tribute to the work of Oscar Deutsch at the Leicester Square Odeon, on the occasion of a recruiting drive. ‘Odeon Drive for ATC’, ibid., 10 July 1941, p. 3.
339 Ibid.
340 See A. V. Hancock, Regal ABC, ibid., 14 October 1943, p. 32, James Evans, Ritz Romford, ibid., 29 July 1943, p. 42.
341 David Ashton, Empire West Houghton, ibid., 27 November 1941, p. 27.
342 Derek Norris, Paddington Odeon, ibid., 8 October 1942, p. 39, F.S. Wheeler, Peckham Odeon, ibid.,
Mayoress, Air Marshals, and Squadron Leaders. The recruiting was either performed by officers in the vestibule, with a makeshift office in the chocolate kiosk, or by a recruiting van stationed outside.

D. Children's Clubs

A novelty in British showmanship during the war was the creation of Cinema Clubs by Odeon and Gaumont British. They fulfilled another aspect of the cinema as a community centre and as a helper in the war effort. These clubs raised the standard of children's film exhibition by the careful selection of films. (Traditionally children matinees were on every Saturday afternoon. They consisted of very old copies of a cartoon, or comedy, and a serial followed by a cowboy-film). They also encouraged in children and adults a spirit of goodwill and hospitality, and a positive and active attitude to life in general. In October 1941 the Odeon Services Club was formed with the aim to create in every Odeon cinema a hospitality exchange. Homely contact was established between members of the forces and local families. Trailers shown in all Odeon cinemas explained the operation of the scheme. Patrons who were interested were invited to give their name and address to the manager, offering the comforts of their home to one or more servicemen or women for one evening a week. Members of the forces were then invited to participate in this service by joining the Odeon Service Club. It was the largest private scheme of its kind. About 6,000 service men were reported to have been entertained in the homes of 3,000 Odeon cinema-goers. The popularity of the scheme earned official recognition from the War Office, who expressed their pleasure at its success.

A Salvage Club was also formed: For the purpose of helping the salvage campaign, and with the co-operation of the local salvage officer who publicised the event, 1,200 children were admitted in exchange for an item of salvage. They contributed nearly 5 tonnes of paper and about 1 tonne of rubber. The potential of increasing and facilitating further the collection of salvage was the reason behind the formation of a Salvage Club. An entry form for membership was placed in the local press and within a few weeks there were hundreds of applicants. Special matinees were given from

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344 See, A. V. Hancock, Regal ABC, ibid., 14 October 1943, p. 32, James Evans, Ritz Romford, ibid., 29 July 1943, p. 42.
345 Letter by Jim Schultz, op. cit.
time to time. As a further incentive, a cup was presented each month to the group which collected the most salvage based on collection per head.\textsuperscript{347}

Music and model clubs were established by some Odeon houses.\textsuperscript{348} However, the most highly developed were the children's clubs which flourished during the post-war period. Although the traditional children's matinees outnumbered the children's clubs, the latter offered better quality shows. The films shown in the children's matinees were either, if they were lucky, 'U' films that had been exhibited in the ordinary cinema during the week, or an old cheap films of the same category. The admission price was reduced and the audience consisted mainly, but not exclusively, of kids.

The children's cinema clubs were first introduced by the Odeon circuit in 1937. The policy of the Odeon cinema clubs was to encourage safety teaching, charitable activities, and civic responsibility which were considered beneficial to children.\textsuperscript{349}

The children's clubs during the war were held by circuits only and were characterised by at least one of the following features: the enrolment of children as members of the cinema club. This involved registration of birthdays, the issue of club gadgets, and possibly the use of club songs or club promises; the establishment of a special section at the circuits headquarters to select films suitable for the children and to encourage the development of club activities. These included orchestras, choirs,\textsuperscript{350} concert parties, football, cricket and netball teams organised with the assistance of local education and civic authorities,\textsuperscript{351} dramatic groups, spelling bees and quizzes; the provision of a mixed programme including not only the showing of films but also community singing, dances, talks on useful subjects such as safety and hygiene;\textsuperscript{352} competitions often linked with the instructional film of the week, and often to assist some special local or national drive (such as the salvage competitions and collections

\textsuperscript{346} 'Odeon Services Club, home entertainment of the forces', \textit{Kine Weekly}, March, 1941, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{347} A.M. Tolfree, ibid., 16 March 1944 p. 47.
\textsuperscript{348} F. Hart, Oldham Odeon, ibid., 26 November 1942, p. 48, John Slatter, Odeon Bognor Regis, ibid., 13 September 1941, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{349} Jeffrey Richards, \textit{The Age of the Dream Palace}, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
\textsuperscript{350} For the club choir at New Victoria, Bradford, see 'Wide activities for Gaumont British Junior Clubs', ibid., 28 September 1944, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{351} The Hanley Gaumont British Junior Club formed a cricket team; their first was played against Hanley Odeon Club. 'Gaumont Junior Clubs', ibid., 14 September 1944, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{352} A scheme for teaching road safety was introduced throughout the Odeon Club movement under the title Odeon Safety Forces with the co-operation of the local chief constables and education
for the children hospitals), parties for evacuees, and young friends from Allied Countries were entertained; the appointment of children as club monitors or as members of the club committee; the appointment of a local committee to advise on the organisation of the club; and the exclusion of the adult public from the audience.\(^{353}\)

The Odeon Children’s Club was created in 1943. By the end of the year about 150 of these clubs operated in Odeon cinemas and membership was well over 120,000. In 1944, Gaumont British launched a non-profit children’s club policy. Membership approached 100,000 in the first six months of its existence. The admission price was 6d and the money was used for the making of children’s films in Gaumont British studios to be shown exclusively to clubs through the country.\(^{354}\) These were for entertainment (not instruction) and were supervised by the Advisory Council representing the Government departments responsible for children, together with those organisations representing children, parents and educational authorities. Before production was undertaken on a large scale, eight experimental films were made and tested in clubs across the UK. These included a film about a boy and a bicycle, a story of school life, a film on evacuees and one about children on a canal barge.\(^{355}\)

3. Advertising the films

A. Out of the cinema

The promotional stunt was widely-used to attract the attention of potential cinema-goers. Front of house displays, foyer attractions, street stunts and gimmicks had been an established form of film publicity during the inter-war years.\(^{356}\) Its exuberant


\(^{354}\) ‘Gaumont British Junior Club the first in Scotland’, Kine Weekly, 10 February 1944, p. 8, Aubrey Flanagan, ‘British turning to screen as educational device’, Motion Picture Herald, 9 October 1943, p. 41.


\(^{356}\) For GB foyer displays see the illustration of the transformation of the foyer of the Regent, Brighton for the screening of Ghost Train (1931), Allen Eyles, Gaumont British Cinemas, Burgess Hill 1996, p. 111.
outdoor tone can be traced back to the carnival origins of cinema, though it was often perceived by journalists as vulgar demonstrations perpetuated by charlatans. During the war, the cinema showman had to operate on a much smaller and less illuminated stage.

Lighting was practically abolished as an adjunct to showmanship by black-out regulations and by the Advertising Lighting Restriction Order of 1942. The Paper Control Order of 1940 prevented big poster displays and limited throwaways and programmes, but still left the exhibitor with a minimum of material upon which he could exercise a flair for publicity. However, the Control Paper Order of 1942 imposed further restrictions. Throwaways and free programmes were prohibited outright and show display cards were limited. The Cinematograph Film Industry Order of 1942 prohibited the use of stills. Since 'adaptability' was the key word for managers' promotional activities during the war years, they used promotional stunts as often as circumstances allowed.

The circuits continued to organise film exploitation campaigns and competitions in connection with particular films. These campaigns were also promoted by American distributors, whose managers judged the campaigns. There were two reasons behind this policy: first, to boost advertising, and consequently the intake from the receipts of certain Hollywood films which were expected to have big box-office value; and second to provide stimulus for further showmanship efforts from regional managers. ABC and Odeon offered prizes to managers for showing enterprise and originality. Apart from circuit managers, Gaumont British competitions offered prizes to divisional publicity managers, who organised film exploitation campaigns for all Gaumont cinemas which played the same film in any given area. The first prize for an exploitation competition of Gaumont British was £50, the second was £30 and the

357 For the fairground origins of the film exhibition, see Vanessa Toulmin, 'Telling a tale: The story of the fairground bioscope shows and the showmen who operated them', Film History, vol. 6, no. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 219-237.
358 Robert Hering dismissed publicity as 'a bad habit grown up out of exuberance of a class whose means are beyond their need'. 'Publicity', Close Up, 6 June 1928, p. 38.
360 The exploitation campaigns put on by ABC managers in Greater London area brought Yankee Doodle Dundee the highest aggregate receipts on record for any picture that had played the circuit North and South of the Thames. Kine Weekly, 13 May 1943, p. 47.
third was £20. The campaigns organised by the ABC circuit gave only a first prize for those entering the £60 pound contest.\footnote{361}

Films on show, as well as forthcoming attractions, were advertised for the obvious purpose of letting patrons know what type of product was offered at one cinema rather than another. Promotional stunts within the actual cinema building were intended to make the cinema interior look more colourful and attractive to patrons, and create a positive atmosphere. Most of the displays were made so that people would be interested, intrigued and even surprised, and would talk about them after their visit. Since promotional film stunts intended not only to inform the patron but also to amuse, this added to the overall cinematic experience.

**Throwaways**

The most popular stunts used by both, independents and circuits were the 'throwaway', the street stunt and the shop window display. The throwaway was a standardised item of film publicity. It was a leaflet which consisted of up to four pages. Designed with the intention to be as attractive as possible it was illustrated. The first page was the most eye-catching. The interior of the folder usually dealt with the high spots of the film on show and included the relevant information about a competition related to the particular film. The throwaway was used for advertising *The Great Dictator* (1940) by three Eskay circuit cinemas, the and provides an example of an intriguing and arresting throwaway title page. It carried an invitation in pidgin German.\footnote{362} On the inside of a throwaway, details were given about the advertised film; the fourth page was devoted to the whole list of the circuit's halls and carried advanced publicity for the circuit's competition for the film *Do You Remember* (1940). An example of this type of throwaway was designed by C.J. Newton, manager of the Emery House in Peterborough. In order to publicise *6,000 Enemies* (1941) by MGM, he organised a competition in which recipients of the handbill were invited to contribute a 60 word essay on any type of person or

\footnote{361 For description of the prize-winning examples of 'pre-war' standard showmanship of the Gaumont British exploitation campaign for *Something to Talk About*, see ibid., 24 February 1944, pp. 41-42.}
\footnote{362 H. B. Harris, Tudor West Bridgford, Nottingham, ibid., 27 March 1941, p. 23.}
behaviour which they regarded as personally objectionable - in effect a private selection of their own '6,000' enemies.363

Throwaways were usually distributed by members of staff, dressed-up men, and sometimes even by the manager, in residential areas near the cinema, one or two weeks prior to the films' screening. They were distributed door to door as well as through the medium of local shops and newsagents. Sometimes the throwaways were distributed in the newspapers. In some cases over 12,000 throwaways were given out.364

New to throwaway advertising during the war years was the introduction of the patriotic angle. The throwaways for The Lion has Wings (1939) campaign at The Regal in Camberley were laid out in a patriotic design, the letters emphasised with Empire flags.365 Another characteristic example was the throwaway at The Tudor, Nottingham, for For Freedom (1940), which exploited the wartime spirit of togetherness and collective sentiment.366 The manager adopted a 'family' angle: a composite block of men and women in service uniform were pictured alongside elderly and younger members of the family and featured the caption: 'If you are British and belong to this splendid family, see within'.367 Another topical angle adopted in throwaway advertising was rationing. In a novel throwaway for the film French Leave (1940), humorous methods of overcoming rationing difficulties led to the promise of 'unrationed laughter in a film depicting the funny side of the war'.368

Folded cards were also used to publicise film attractions, at least until the Paper Order of 1941. Once again patriotism was often exploited. Characteristic of this is the small folded card distributed as part of the publicity campaign for the Spy in Black (1939). On the outside of the card was written: ‘Careless talk may be the cause of valuable

363 C.J. Newton, Emery House Peterborough, ibid., 22 February 1940, p. 23. For another example of a competition publicised in throwaways see H. Harris, ibid., 17 March 1941, p. 23.
364 See for instance, S. J. Channing, the Regal Camberley, ibid., 18 January 1940, p. 22, where he describes the publicity scheme for The Lion Has Wings (1939) in the villages surrounding Surrey.
365 Ibid.
367 Harry, Harris, Tudor Nottingham, ibid., 16 May 1940, p. 30.
368 H. Walls, New Palace Nuneaton Warwickshire, ibid., 8 February 1940, p. 40. For use of the rationing angle in throwaways see also A.W. Birkin, Ritz (ABC) Clapton, ibid.
information reaching the enemy'. Inside the folder was the continuation 'Particularly if it reaches the ears of The Spy in Black at The Roxy cinema...'. The cards were distributed by a man who paraded the streets at night-time, with an advertising card on his back, the wording of which was printed in luminous paint. At frequent intervals he called out: 'Be aware no streets are safe'. When asked by the passers by who he was he replied: 'The Spy in Black' and handed in the advertising card. Card folders were used as part of the publicity campaign of the film *The Women* (1940) played at New Oxford and Market Street cinemas of the Emery circuit, in Manchester. The high spot of the campaign was a tie-up with the hairdressing department of a local department store, Lewis ltd. Between 400 and 500 folder cards were placed on the tables at Lewis café carrying the announcement: 'The film is here - at the Oxford and Market Street kinemas - Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford and Rosalind Russell in “The Women”. Lewis hair dressing saloon will dress your hair in any of the styles shown in this all star cast'.

A shortage of paper was the reason behind the use of smaller programme folders by several cinemas of the Odeon circuit in 1940. Odeon introduced the use of vest pocket folding cards showing the screening times of current films. These cards were distributed through local newsagents and from the cinema foyer. In a similar fashion, cinemas issued pocket sized booklets with monthly programmes. The ABC put out the smallest programme folders since the beginning of the war, measuring only 2 by 3.5 inches. They were painted in the familiar red and blue of the circuit and featured the triple triangle trademark and name of the hall on the front. Inside they gave the bookings for the month and on the rear featured the Sunday programmes. The folder was designed to fit into a waistcoat pocket or a handbag, and was a singularly convenient means of reference to what was on. Leamington Spa and Warwick Cinemas innovated in issuing a neatly compiled waistcoat pocket sized booklet for its seven cinemas which also included an entertainment guide for the

371 J.S. Sackier, Harlesden Hall, ibid., 11 April 1940, p. 42.
372 Ibid., 14 August 1941, p. 29.
whole district, so that it was bound to be retained as a reference for the month ahead. A personal touch was added with the inclusion of a letter on the opening page.373

The distribution of monthly film programmes was restricted by paper regulations by the end of 1941. However, they continued to be issued by several cinemas until the end of the war, but now patrons had to pay a penny for them.374 Many managers contributed money earned through their sale to charitable purposes. F.W. Clark, the manager of an independent cinema, started selling monthly programmes in February 1943. It cost him about £2 for 2,000 and he used to contribute £10-14 a month to Totton and District Red Cross. A notice board in the vestibule informed the public how their efforts benefited charities.375

Street stunts

Street stunts were a further exploitation of themes represented in foyer displays. They involved people who walked up and down the central streets of the town centre, dressed up as the film’s characters. When showing *Come on George* (1940) at the Odeon, the manager dressed a man as a jockey and sent him to parade through central Bristol.376 A street stunt for *The Tower of London* (1940) screened at Odeon Exeter, consisted of people dressed as characters as they were depicted in the film and in the foyer display.377 In a street stunt for *The Real Glory* (1940) which described Gulliver’s travels, four men dressed as Gulliver, Sneak, Snoop and Snitch paraded the streets a week before the film was screened.378

The stunt as a person dressed in relation to the theme of the film would attract attention. A rider and a horse were used for the advertisement of the western *Valley of the Sun* (1942) played at the Globe Coventry. The rider wore Red Indian and cowboy costumes, riding on alternate days through the town at peak periods.379 Appreciating that the title *My Friend Flicka* (1944) might convey little to his patrons, the manager of the Odeon Crewe arranged for a horse and a young rider to parade through the

373 E. Wilmot Carlton, supervisor of Leamington Spa and Warwick Cinemas, ibid., 20 November 1941, p. 43.
374 A. J. Brown, Rex Bedminster, ibid., 8 October 1943, p. 40.
375 F. W. Clark, Savoy Totton Southampton, ibid., 28 October 1943, p. 50.
376 A. N. Beadle, ibid., 21 March 1940, p. 35.
377 Odeon Exeter, ibid., 16 May 1940, p. 30.
378 Reynolds Roberts, Ritz Wallsend, ibid., 13 June 1940, p. 39.

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town. The horse was almost an exact replica of the one in the film and wore a white horse-cloth bearing the title of the film and the name of the cinema. The effectiveness of the stunt was enhanced by the fact that the rider was apparently a handsome boy evacuee from Guernsey. A street stunt in Exeter for *Laugh it Off* (1940), with Tommy Trinder, consisted of a gigantic papier-mache head of a smiling man carrying a board on which was written ‘Laugh It Off, today Odeon’. The topical angle was related to the film’s theme for the publication of Korda’s epic, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1941). The screening of the film at Odeon, Newton Abbot coincided with the British occupation of Iraq. The theatre’s page-boy, attired in Eastern costume, distributed 2,000 throwaways in the streets and market. A pensioner dressed as a woman wheeling an old pram with two large, dressed dolls paraded the streets of Peterborough to publicise *Babes on Broadway* (1942) for the independent, Princess Peterborough. Big campaigns sometimes included the organisation of street parades. For *The Real Glory* (1940) screened at the independent, Ritz Wallsend, a parade was arranged in which a three tonne lorry took four men dressed as the films’ main characters, together with a crowd of small boys. A 15ft dummy of Gulliver was bound down with ropes on the lorry. The dummy was pasted down with quad crowns and cut out characters from the film. The theme of the Formby comedy, *Come on George* (1940), in which George Formby’s ice-cream salesman becomes a jockey, was introduced by the manager of the Empire Nottingham in a parade comprising a mounted jockey escorted by over 50 ice-cream tricycles.

Co-operative advertising

One of the most widely-practised promotional strategies during the war was co-operative advertising, sought through a tie-in with a popular product or a reputable business not necessarily connected to the film industry. Tie-ins were valued by both parties because their product reached more possible future customers at no extra cost.

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379 Peter Sykes, Globe Coventry, ibid., 17 September 1943, p. 32.
380 Peter Sykes, Odeon Crewe, ibid., 24 February 1944, p. 40.
381 For the actual photograph, sent by Harry Clare, Odeon, ibid., 14 March 1940 p. XVI.
382 G. M. S. Dennyss, Odeon, Newton Abbot, ibid., 26 June 1941, p. 38.
384 Reynolds Roberts, Ritz Wallsend, ibid., 13 June 1940, p. 39.
385 P. Tussaud Birt, Empire Nottingham, ibid., 23 May 1940, p. 49.
to either. Tie-ins were particularly welcomed by retailers during the war years. They appreciated the value of star endorsements of their products and all manner of shops co-operated with cinemas in their campaigns.

For films aimed at women, feminine tie-ins were arranged with women’s fashion and beauty shops. Women’s fashion shops advertised in their shop windows those films featuring Hollywood stars such as Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck and Rosalind Russell, which would appeal to women. An attractive fashion display in the main windows of the biggest store in Middlesbrough was used to exploit MGM musical, Ziegfeld Girl (1941) screened at Elite Middlesbrough. A portrait of the film’s stars – Judy Garland – was put in each of the store’s windows, surrounded by a display of fashionable clothes. In return the cinema carried out displays of beauty preparations. British costume dramas which celebrated female sexuality, were also advertised with Hollywood-style glamour. The publicity campaign for Fanny by Gaslight (1944) at Trocadero Liverpool included a tie-in arranged with the manager of a hair and beauty salon. Competitors were required to show photographs of themselves to the store manager. Those whose hairstyles most closely resembled that of Phylis Calvert in the film were entitled to free beauty treatment in the shop.388

Tie-ins with home appliance stores which were popular before the war were restricted for obvious reasons. However, it interesting to see such a display which married wartime consumerism with patriotism. A big shop window show was obtained during the week preceding the screening of 49th Parallel (1941) by the Exeter Gaslight Company in order to demonstrate a connection between the title of the film and the cooker advertised by the shop. Its central feature was a semi-circle on which a map of North America was drawn, bisected by a thick red line representing the 49th parallel. Beneath, was the outline of a Nazi submarine. Two notice boards flanked it, one setting out the prologue to the film, and the other giving the names of the cast. Above and below were Empire and Union flags and underneath was a card making a neat allusion to the geographical New World and the merits of domestic apparatus for ‘unparalleled’ service. On the other side stood the latest ‘New World’ cooker. In the

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386 Reynolds Roberts, Elite Middlesbrough, ibid., 20 November 1941, p. 42.
388 N. G. Graig, Trocadero Liverpool, ibid., 3 August 1944, p. 36.
central foreground another card was set up calling attention to the fact that the 49th Parallel was screened at the Odeon.389

The businesses most involved in the co-operative advertising of films were music stores and dance halls. Music store windows were given over to displays of record and sheet music for a film with printed notices of the place and times of screening. In the foyer, a sales stall was arranged where records supplied by the music store might be purchased on the spot.390 Tie-ins with dance halls involved dance competitions related to a particular film which held for a week prior to the screening of the film. The cinema in turn gave prominence to this fact in the foyer. The prizes were presented on stage as part of a stage show. A characteristic example of such a tie-in was the competition for a tango trophy, organised as part of the publicity for *Down the Argentine Way* (1941) screened at Regal Manchester.391 A more elaborate campaign was organised by Odeon Theatres in co-operation with Danceland magazine. A competition, 'Search for the British counterpart of Frank Sinatra', was used to advertise the Sinatra film *Higher and Higher* (1941). The competition took place in dance halls, outside of which were large display boards with a huge portrait of Sinatra and showing times of the film at local theatres.392

A novel tie-in related with war propaganda was the exhibition of a film with a campaign. Three window displays were secured for the advertisement of *The Commandos*, combining the film’s appeal with one for the Red Cross Prisoners-of-War Parcel Fund. In the window of a Co-operative Store, two model nurses were backed by a large Union Jack, at either side of which were the renter’s quads and stills.393 The wartime spirit of unity for the common cause was demonstrated by window tie-ins such as the one arranged for *San Demetrio* (1943) with the local gas company. The display took the form of a link-up between the story of hardship and the hazardous journeys of the fuel carriers, as depicted in the film, and the Ministry of Fuel’s efforts to save fuel. The full width of the company window was covered by a

389 H.R. Clark, Odeon Exeter, ibid., 20 November 1941, p. 43.
390 For *Road to Morocco*, see the joint tie up by the Odeon and Carlton Norwich, ibid., 11 March 1943, p. 51; for *We’ll Smile Again*, R.W. Johnson, Alhambra Barnsley, ibid., 4 March 1943, p. 36, for MGM, *Strike up the Band* Reynolds Roberts, Elite Middlesbrough, ibid., 20 March 1941, p. 27, for *You Will Remember* (1941), Charles Smith, Odeon Southsea, ibid., 3 April 1941, p. 25.
391 John Bennett, Regal Manchester, ibid., 19 June 1941, p. 29.
392 'RKO Radio co-operate in search of the British Frank Sinatra', ibid., 27 April 1944, p. 36.
banner bearing the question: 'Are you fighting in the battle for fuel?'. In the background were the particulars of the film.\^\^394

During the war cinema illumination was abolished and front of house displays became less frequent. But in order to overcome restrictions and paper difficulties, managers used larger front of house display boards. They were considered an invaluable medium of advertising because they were cheap, easy to make, and a large enough size to attract attention. An example of a typical display was that of The Spy in Black (1940): a large board was erected bearing across the top the words: 'The menace of submarine activities.' Underneath were various newspaper cuttings referring to submarine activity. These reports were interspersed with cuttings from the synopsis of the film, provided by the distributor.\^\^395

**Front house displays**

What could usually be seen by the public outside the cinema was a poster. This, included the name of the film and the stars featuring in it, the name of the cinema and often a catch-phrase. During the war posters adopted a topical angle in order to attract attention to a particular film. Rationing inspired several slogans for posters erected outside the cinemas. The announcement of the rationing of clothes in the newspaper immediately motivated the manager of The Elite in Middlesbrough to prepare a poster in vivid red and black colours to 'plug' a film. It read: 'Still Obtainable Without Coupons' 'Unrationed Laughter in the *Marx Brothers Go West*' was followed by screening times and a list of newly-rationed goods.\^\^396 The poster exhibited outside The Regent, Bradford, to advertise the film *Somewhere in England* (1941) stated: 'You can't visit your soldiers stationed Somewhere in England so we have brought *Somewhere in England* here to show you what life is like in the Army for Harry Korris and Frank Randle'.\^\^397

\^\^393 L.H. Stevens, National Chatham, ibid., 16 September 1943, p. 39.
\^\^394 F.A. Garrett, Savoy Luton, ibid., 24 February 1944, p. 40.
\^\^395 G. V. Ray, ibid., 18 January 1940 p. 22
\^\^396 Reynolds Roberts, ibid., 19 June 1941, p. 29.
\^\^397 E.V. Walls, ibid., 20 February 1941, p. 50.
B. In the cinema

Stage stunts
Cinema audiences were often surprised by promotional stage stunts shown to an audience who had already taken their seats. Apart from the advertising angle, stage stunts were intended to be entertaining, to be an audio-visual pleasure, or to arouse laughter. They consisted of either an act on the stage, performed by a member of staff, or by a display, usually a large board. Sometimes, the stunt was not associated with the picture showing but featured in the film advertising campaign because it was expected to arouse general interest. An example of this approach was the presence of a beautifully groomed pit pony which had entered the Royal Show the previous year, on the cinema stage for the publicity of The Stars Look Down (1939) at Regal Rotherham.\(^{398}\)

Another example of a simple stage stunt was that employed for Come on George (1940) at Friars in Canterbury. This involved mounting a small page-boy dressed as a jockey on a toy mule which was then dragged across the stage on a cord.\(^{399}\) Patrons of the Odeon Llanelly, were thrilled by the prologue for One of Our Aircraft is Missing (1941), which won loud applause. They were intrigued to see a bomber winging its way through the darkened auditorium, whilst a search light detachment (usherettes with electric torches) probed the ‘sky’ to locate the intruder. Suitable sound effects were used to give the impression that an air-raid was in progress over their very heads.\(^{400}\) R.C. Overs, manager of the Odeon Exeter, devised the following stage stunt for the exploitation of The Stars Look Down (1939). During the week preceding the screening a short break was added to the evening programme. A large illustration was erected to one side of the stage. A pit head in full working order was illustrated, complete with winding gear, trolley ways, truck and belching chimneys. In front of this, attired in miner’s kit and carrying a regulations safety lamp, stood a vocalist who sang verses of the ‘ever popular’ miner’s song ‘Don’t go down the Mine’. The audience joined in for the chorus.\(^{401}\) The lurid and glamorous atmosphere of Hollywood musical Rio was the focus of the Odeon Portsmouth stage show. A huge hand-painted cut-out of Carmen Miranda was used. It depicted the exact

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\(^{398}\) F. V. Morris, Regal Rotherham, ibid., 16 May 1940, p. 30.
\(^{399}\) R. C. Overs, ibid., 29 February 1940, p. 40.
\(^{400}\) W.G. Thomas, Odeon Llanelli, ibid., 3 September 1942, p. 30.
costume worn by the star, the silver brocade of her skirt illustrated by silver tinsel. In a completely darkened stage the cut-out was slowly lowered onto the stage by specially erected offstage gear. During the procedure a series of multi-coloured lights played out the entire display, making the tinsel sparkle, and giving the appearance that the figure was performing a twisting and turning movement.\textsuperscript{402}

\textbf{Competitions}

Another effective and popular method of film exploitation was the organisation of competitions. It was cheap for the exhibitor; it could attract many patrons as it was often advertised in the local press and other publicity mediums; and it often resulted in a stage stunt which could itself be part of a patriotic campaign which in its turn promoted the cinema as a community centre. According to the film shown, there were many types of competitions adopted: gas mask competitions invited children onstage to demonstrate the correct method of fitting and wearing gas masks. Finalists were awarded Savings Certificates, the value of which helped to swell the record result of the War Weapons Week.\textsuperscript{403} A cartoon competition for the advertisement of \textit{My Learned Friend} (1943) was organised for the collection of money for the Prisoners-of-War Fund.\textsuperscript{404}

The film \textit{Men Against the Sky} was given a boost by an aeroplane building contest which was publicised in talks by the manager from the stage and by articles in the local press. Prizes were presented by a local Lieutenant Commander and were then displayed in the publicity windows of the cinema.\textsuperscript{405} A Best Woman Worker competition was arranged for the exploitation of \textit{Millions Like Us} (1943) by Gaumont Chester manager and the North West publicity manager of Gaumont British.\textsuperscript{406} There was a canine competition for dogs resembling Lassie in \textit{Lassie Come Home} (1944). The prize was complimentary tickets to the Streatham Regal (ABC) cinema.\textsuperscript{407} For \textit{The Band Wagon} (1940) entrants to a competition were required to make as many words as they could from letters contained in Arthur Askey’s catch-phrase ‘I Thank

\textsuperscript{401} Harry Clarks, ibid., 29 February 1940, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{402} Pat Reed, Odeon Portsmouth, ibid., 16 October 1941, p. 31
\textsuperscript{403} H. Mills, Palladium, Hartlepool, ibid., 19 June 1941, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{404} E.P. Foster, Forum Ealing, ibid., 4 November 1943, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{405} J. Strachan, Rio Kirkeldy, ibid., 21 August 1941, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{406} R. Padgett, Gaumont Chester, ibid., 27 January 1944, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{407} R. Sparrow, Streatham Regal (ABC), ibid., 18 May 1944, p. 43.
You'. The competition, which was run by Regent Bristol in co-operation with the Bristol Evening Post, received 4,000 entries.\textsuperscript{408}

Essay writing was a popular type of competition between exhibitors. It was definitely the most common type of children's competition, but was also employed to arouse adults' interest in particular films. What was mainly intended was the boosting of national pride. An example of such a competition which was addressed to adult patrons, was organised by National Chatham (Gaumont British), in co-operation with the local press for \textit{The Man in Grey} (1943). It was reported to create tremendous interest for the film. Patrons were invited to write why \textit{The Man in Grey} was an outstanding British film and what was, in their opinion, British producers' best policy in terms of stars, stories and presentations for the post-war period. The prize was a trip to London and a visit to Gaumont British studios where the film was made.\textsuperscript{409} An essay competition, 'Why I am proud to belong to the British Empire', was linked with the patriotic \textit{The Sun Never Sets} (1940) at Regal Sheffield,\textsuperscript{410} whilst 'The war and why I must save' was a feature of War Weapons Week at Regal Littleport.\textsuperscript{411} 'The history of Clive of India' publicised the film \textit{Clive of India} (1943) at the Holloway Gaumont.\textsuperscript{412}

Beauty contest competitions were also widely adopted.\textsuperscript{413} Wings of Victory Week was promoted by a beauty contest at Walthamstow Granada which was organised in co-operation with the Walthamstow city council. Some time before the critical week a large display in the foyer was erected consisting of a black cloth with white letters spelling out the message: 'Wings for Victory Week beauty queen contest'. The 'queen' was crowned by the Mayor on the stage of the crowded house.\textsuperscript{414} A larger scale campaign was arranged around a beauty contest competition by New Victoria Cinema Preston for the exploitation of \textit{Cover Girl} (1944) with the co-operation of the

\textsuperscript{408} G.A. Foster, Regent Bristol, ibid., 11 April 1940, p. 42. See for a similar competition for \textit{Freedom Radio}, E. Raphael, Dominion, ibid., 6 February 1941, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{409} L. Stevens, ibid., 7 October 1942, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{410} Cyril Pennington, Regal Sheffield, ibid., 11 April 1940, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{411} John Lake, Regal Littleport, ibid., 6 February 1941, p. 29. For a similar competition see also John Lake, Empire Leicester, ibid., 3 April 1941, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{412} F.W. Foster, Holloway Gaumont, ibid., 23 September 1943, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{413} For examples of beauty contest competitions see: arranged for \textit{Glamour Girl} (1940), C.J. Newton, Princess Peterborough, ibid., 13 June 1940, p. 39, arranged for \textit{Cover Girl} (1944), Frank Bradley, Regent Sheffield, ibid., 24 November 1944, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{414} S.W. Hewlett, Walthamstow Granada, ibid., 25 March 1943, p. 43.
publicity department of Gaumont British and Columbia. Six weeks before the opening date a preview was held to which came the press, the Mayor of Preston, the Town Clerk, the Chief Constable, representatives of youth organisations, officers of the ATS and other women services, and delegates from local factories. Following the screening of the film the manager announced that this meeting was to launch a drive to appoint ‘Lancashire Cover Girl’. The finalists would attend a ‘Cover Girl’ ball the proceeds of which were donated to the Red Cross. The winner would be crowned on the stage of the New Victoria Cinema by the Mayoress on the opening night of the film. For the ensuing year the chosen ‘Cover Girl’ would make appearances and appeal on behalf of the Red Cross. The campaign was well-promoted: the press published editorials describing the stunt and printed pictures of Rita Hayworth for weeks before the opening night; all the factories and organisations there that day held their own elections to select a nominee for the title; factories displayed posters in their canteens; the women’s services displayed stills and posters in their restrooms; most shop windows in Preston carried publicity of the film; and the Red Cross publicised the film and the stunt in their monthly bulletin.415

Screen advertising
With the screen being one of the biggest drawing powers of the cinema, its use as an advertising medium was widely adopted. Apart from trailers for future attractions provided by distributors, slides were used to publicise the following week’s programmes. Coloured slides could be obtained from the distributors for the cost of 1s,416 but in order to cut cost, the slides were usually created by the projectionist. The typical announcement was ‘Coming shortly to this cinema’ and the title of the film, ‘Don’t Miss…’, or ‘See this, the year’s greatest glamour musical’. There was also use made of a slogan or catch phrase: ‘Work For Freedom Now! See For Freedom May 23’.417

Slides could consist of some highlights from the film. For the film Rio (1941) featuring the glamorous Carmen Miranda, for instance, slide illustrations depicting her in some of her dance numbers were exhibited to the accompaniment of her songs

415 Leonard H. Chant, New Victoria Cinema Preston, ibid., 26 October 1944, p. 64.
416 Donald Shave, Forum ABC, ibid., 4 March 1943, p. 37.
417 Harry B. Harris, Tudor, 6 June 1940, ibid., p. 27.
at Odeon Portsmouth. Caricature slides depicting George Formby in various amusing situations were projected onscreen two weeks prior to the play-date at Friars Canterbury. These were projected during suitable intervals whilst Formby records were played over the sound equipment.

A more elaborate example of slide advertisement was used for the exploitation of feature length documentary Target for Tonight (1941) at the Empire Alfreton. It produced an audio-visual sensation and an atmosphere of a battle.

"For about 30 seconds before the projection of the actual slide, a short loop of film ran with the soundtrack muted, ran on the projection with lots of loud, exploding machine gun bullets. A large circular stand was erected on the stage with 'Coming Shortly, Target for Tonight' in vivid lettering. At the same time the boys in the spot perches played their lamps on the board and around the house and stage as if they were search lights. Every now and then a slide appeared with a bomber dropping bombs on target of buildings. The patriotic dimension was enhanced by songs including 'England Our Island Home' and 'Lord of the Air', played on the non sync'.

Foyer displays
The bulk of film advertising was arranged in the cinema foyer. A stunt used for the exploitation of films with high box-office potential was the vestibule transformation. This cliché presentation was practised often during the first years of the war. After 1940, and until the end of the war, there were few instances of this form of stunt. On a large-scale this would have proved expensive and difficult to produce due to the restrictions on materials. Vestibules were reported to have been transformed into the bridge of a ship for Contraband (1940), collieries for The Stars Look Down (1939), railway stations for The Ghost Train (1940), and castles for The Tower of London at independent and circuit cinemas. A picture of an entire transformation of the

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418 Pat Reed, Odeon Portsmouth, ibid., 16 October 1941, p. 31.
420 Gordon Smith, The Empire Alfreton, ibid., 16 October 1941, p. 31. Non sync, meant any music transcribed in the projection room other than which was on the film. Letter by Jim Schultz, op. cit.
421 For detailed descriptions of the vestibule transformations see Harry Clare, Odeon Exeter, with a picture of the vestibule dressed up as a ship bridge, Kine Weekly, 4 July 1940, p. 40, ibid., H. Clifton, Regal Margate, ibid., 25 April 1940 p. 38, ibid., 4 July 1940, p. 28.
vestibule of the Odeon Exeter into a realistic representation of the Tower of London for the eponymous film was clearly illustrated in Kine Weekly. The cash box was enveloped in period stone-work which was extended to cover two supporting pillars. A miniature of the Tower, complete with trellised gate and slotted embrasures, was placed in the centre. This served as the service sales kiosk. To one side stood a masked, black-attired attendant. Across one shoulder he held an axe, whilst on the floor in front of him was a beheading block. Opposite him stood a man in traditional Beefeater costume.422

The most common publicity item found in the foyer was the foyer display. Wartime paper restrictions were responsible for the reduction in number of foyer displays which nevertheless, continued to be employed successfully until the 1960s.423 Hundreds of foyer displays were described by cinema managers and hundreds of pictures sent by them were illustrated in Kine Weekly, throughout the war years. These displays consisted either of settings or painted displays drawn on a back-cloth. A typical wartime foyer display consisted of material provided by the distributor – mainly star stills and posters. Given the limitation of poster facilities, the active showman had to advertise by other means. The practice of using illustrations from the trade papers was the main avenue where pictorial display could be used by 1942, while the shortage of materials led to the reuse of old cut-outs. Previously they had been used in conjunction with distributors’ posters but with the withdrawal of posters local artwork was utilised.424

Paper restrictions led circuit managers to more inventive ways to announce future attractions. A new method of vestibule publicity was the use of painted announcements on the foyer mirror. The idea behind this unusual type of publicity was that everyone tends to look at a mirror, so the result of the artists’ work was noticed by most patrons. Sign-writers were used to paint announcements about film programmes in bold and colourful lettering.425

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422 Ibid., 16 May 1940, p. 30.
423 Ibid., Alan Burton and Steve Chinball, 'Promotional activities', op. cit. p. 93.
425 Billy Johns, Odeon Weston super Mare, Kine Weekly, 9 October 1941, p. 37.
A further novelty in the foyer display were those items difficult to obtain for the exploitation of a film title which could be somehow related to them. Such displays of scarce commodities, including exotic fruit and spirits (usually on loan) attracted the attention of patrons. Unusual crowds were reported to be attracted to the cinema’s main entrances by managers of circuits and independent cinemas. A display for the supernatural feature, *The Uninvited* (1944) was a scheme embodying a clever play on words, which consisted merely of an array of bottles which contained largely unobtainable spirits. These were capped with the title ‘Spirits of the Past’. In the centre stood a bottle of milk which was almost rationed at the time, from the neck of which emerged a slip bearing the title of the film. This device conceived by the manager of Odeon Marlborough, was collected and displayed all in one day. Certain themes and genres lent themselves more easily than others to interpretation and representation.

The most popular trend in foyer advertising during the war were foyer displays which created a topical war atmosphere and consisted of model aeroplanes or ships according to the relevance of the film theme; actual war weapons; photographic material borrowed from the Ministry of Information or the Air Ministry. This latter type of display cost nothing for the exhibitor and proved very attractive to passers-by who were potential customers. They had the opportunity to see and touch real weapons which they believed would bring victory for the Allies.

Models and actual weapons in foyer displays were reportedly successful in increasing patronage. They were arranged for the exploitation of British productions, of a number of American films and even newsreels. Model ships, naval objects, flags

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426 All the goods unobtainable at the time, among which bananas, milk chocolate, roast chicken, grape fruit, melons, were put on a table to make a foyer display for the film *Things to Come*, S. Springfield, Electra Oxford, ibid., 6 March 1943, p. 46. Three scarce commodities, bananas, beer and onion formed a display for the exploitation of *Bitter Sweet*, Reynolds Roberts, Elite Middlesbrough, ibid., 2 October 1941, p. 43. Real oranges and lemons were used in a display advertising *Tunisian Victory*, K.B. Hann, Marlborough Theatre, Holloway, ibid., 18 May 1944, p. 43.

427 Picture of the display arranged by Keith S. Hann, Marlborough -Odeon, Kent, ibid., 1 June 1944, p. 42.

428 For the reproduction of a picture of an eye catching foyer display for Tarzan, see W. J. Ray Ritz, Gateshead, ibid., 15 July 1943, p. 44.

429 For a window display of model replicas of tanks and aeroplanes to exploit the Gaumont British Newsreel dealing with the advance of the 8th Army in Egypt, see Kings Cinema Camborne, ibid., 26 November 1942, p. 48.
and banners were used for vestibule display for the exploitation of films including: Convoy (1940), Ships with Wings (1941), In Which we Serve (1942), We Dive at Dawn (1941), and San Demetrio London (1943). Actual bombs were displayed for the advertisement of Target for Tonight (1941), and One of Our Aircraft is Missing (1941). Special exhibitions of fire appliances were used for the exploitation of The Bells Go Down (1943).

Foyer displays for The First of the Few (1942) were characteristic of the exploitation of films about the war in the air, including The Lion has Wings (1939), and Air Force (1943). They consisted of flags, photo enlargements of aerial scenes, miniature model aircraft, fighter and bomber displays, equipment for the rescue side of air warfare borrowed from the RAF publicity department, and war plane apparatus. In many cases these miniatures were part of a bigger display. At Friars in Canterbury, a parchment was hung in the alcove at the side of the pay box giving, in tabulated form, details of the winners of the Schneider Trophy race (reference to which is made in the film) over a number of years. At the base of this a miniature RAF station was built complete with hangars and planes. The background in perspective was supported by a pictorial poster in a neat frame giving details of the film. At the Paddington Odeon there were tables in the vestibule bearing items which attracted the interest of the patrons such as an aero-camera, signalling lamp, Browning and Lewis automatic weapons. Nearby was a bomber dinghy with accessories; model aircraft hang from the ceiling. RAF and ATC engines backed the display and cadets, as usual, were in attendance.

The stress of the patriotic dimension and the connection of the vestibule display with the actual war were widely and extensively adopted for the exploitation of all types of films. Portraits of national heroes as well as caricatures of the enemy were common features in foyer displays. This Happy Breed (1944), a film about the domestic life of

430 This type of display was also advised by the renter. See Ships with Wings Press-book, In Which we Serve Press-book. They were also used for Cargo of Innocents E. Foster, Forum (ABC), Kine Weekly, 2 September 1943, p. 62.
432 R. C. Overs, ibid.
433 Derek Norris, ibid., 8 October 1942, p. 39.
a lower-middle class family during the war, was publicised by the manager of Odeon Lowestoft by the inclusion of portraits of the Air Chief Marshall, Lord Admiral, Admiral of the Fleet, the Air Chief, General Montgomery and General Harris. National solidarity themes together with the notion of a 'people's war' were referred to on the display cards above the portraits: 'Whatever their caste or creed, they all belong to This Happy Breed'. The same ideology was demonstrated at the display for the advertisement of the American Big Boss (1942). Above the usual references to the film, provided by the renter, posted on a background formed by a Union Jack, there was a portrait of Churchill, underneath which was written: 'The Big Boss of today, Winston Churchill'.

The enemy was ridiculed in a number of foyer displays. A massive prehistoric beast, made by salvage paper, called Adolphus, was arranged for The Man and His Mate (1944) at The Majestic in Staines. For the exploitation of Squadron Leader X (1943) a large caricature of Hitler and Mussolini was displayed at the Elite Middlesbrough, captioned by 'The Maniaxis must be beaten'. In the foreground a coffin made from pieces of old plywood was placed. It bore a swastika on a white background. On the front was painted in large letters: 'Drive a nail in Hitler's coffin before or after seeing Squadron Leader X'. The stunt created great interest. Those who wanted to knock nails into the coffin had to buy a Saving's Stamp for the local hospital.

Personal appearance on stage

The same patriotic tone used in the exploitation of British films in foyer displays was stressed in the stunts which were arranged for further exploitation on the stage. A form of stage stunt in connection to a particular film was the appearance onstage of an actor or actress starring in the film. It was organised either by the individual cinema or the circuit, or by the film distributor. Although the film star has a significant element in films, as a product of the making of a mass commodity culture, the 'star' has been used as an industrial marketing device which carries cultural meanings and

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434 W.B. Under, Odeon Lowestoft, ibid., 30 November 1944, p. 43.
435 This display won the second prize, by E.W. Cross, in a competition organised by Columbia Pictures for the exploitation of its films. 'Columbia Exploitation Competition', ibid., 27 August 1942, p. 28.
436 'Results of the Odeon exploitation campaign for Man and His Mate', ibid., 20 July 1944, p. 32.
437 Picture reproduced, Reynolds Roberts, Elite Middlesbrough, ibid., 13 May 1943, p. 45.
ideological values. As Dyer and Stacey have shown in their analysis of Hollywood stars, a film star can signify images of a cultural identity. As the British film industry was formed in the shadow of Hollywood, British stars were invested with a patriotic imperative as bearers of the British national identity.

This sense of national identity was enhanced by major or minor stars personal appearances and by the way they were locally promoted. The provincial tours organised for the actresses Carla Lehmann by the Odeon circuit, and Rosamund John and Jean Kent by General Film Distributors were almost identical in their programme, despite differences between the images of the stars in the films. Carla Lehmann promoted the spy thriller, Secret Mission (1942), Rosamund John starred in the quasi-official project about women's conscription, The Gentle Sex (1943), and Jean Kent in the costume melodrama, Fanny by Gaslight (1944). The film persona of Rosamund John was very different from that of Kent. Her role as the wife of Spitfire designer R.J. Mitchell in Leslie Howard's The First of the Few (1942) created the image of discreet womanhood. In The Lamp Still Burns (1943) her role offered an image of more active womanhood as a hard-working nurse devoted to duty and self-discipline. Jean Kent's role in costume dramas expressed the more sexual aspect of her femininity. What was common in the star personas of the three protagonists was the image of an independent, active woman.

This image of British womanhood was promoted during the stars provincial tours. These well-dressed film beauties made personal appearances at the cinemas where they were presented by the manager to a packed house which included several civic officials. There they also took part in special stage stunts connected with a National

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440 The persona of Gracie Fields, working class, resilient and cheerful, has been interpreted as a symbol of the nation in the 1930s. See Jeffrey Richards, 1984, op. cit., and Andrew Higson Waving the Flag, Constructing a National Cinema in Britain, Oxford 1995, pp. 164-167. Sarah Street has also shown that Anna Neagle's persona was also associated with a sense of Britishness, class unity and national identity. Sarah Street, British National Cinema, London 1997, pp. 124-134.
Savings campaign, and presented cheques for a Benevolent Fund to the Mayor. When Greta Gynt was introduced to the stage for the promotion of *Tomorrow We Live* (1943), she was congratulated by Sir Albert Atkey not only for her work in the film but also for helping to promote the understanding in Britain of the work of the fighting continental allies.\(^4^4^2\) The stars also made special appearances at special Sunday charity shows, where they auctioned goods. During the day they attended special luncheons given in their honour by the Lord Mayor, which were also attended by the Chief Constable and other civic personalities and press representatives. They also made tours to various hospitals and to blitzed areas.\(^4^4^3\)

A novel stage stunt in connection with the screening of British films was introduced in the early months of 1940: the appearance on the screen of a real person related to the event described in the film. The production of films which were directly connected with real life and actual war incidents provided excellent opportunities for the managers to find people who had taken part in the incidents described on film. During the first months of the war, when the public had not yet come into any contact with the enemy, any testimony from a witness of the German menace would be enough to arouse the interest of the public and attract patrons to the cinema. The idea behind such a stunt was that even if the public were not much interested in the film itself, they would be responsive to a personal witness. The production of realistic films which elaborated on the documentary tradition in their narratives were partly responsible for the introduction of this stunt, which in its turn boosted national commitment.\(^4^4^4\)

In connection to the screening of *For Freedom* (1940), a film dealing with the Graf Spee episode, the third engineer of the Doric Star was invited to The Regal, Margate. He spoke through a microphone about his experiences of the capture of the Doric Star by the Germans and his imprisonment on the prison ship, Altmark. After his account public patriotic sentiment was further aroused by the showing of a huge portrait of

\(^4^4^2^\)Greta Gynts' personals' *Kine Weekly* 3 June 1943, p. 41. See also Anna Neagle's appeal for the Red Cross in a matinee organised by Mark Freeman Odeon, Hendon, ibid., 9 October 1941, p. 37.

Another hero himself took part in a stage appeal on behalf of the British Sailors Society on the opening night of San Demetrio London (1943) at the independent cinema, Plaza in Port Talbot. The film was about the San Demetrio, a London oil tanker, which after being set ablaze by a German battleship in 1940, was brought back to port with its precious cargo practically intact. The chief engineer of the ship, Charles Pollard, was awarded a tremendous reception when he appeared on stage where he related some of his experiences during the voyage. The film had an added interest for the audience as Pollard was a local boy.

Gaumont British divisional publicity department organised for the technical adviser of the film 2,000 Women (1944), Nicky Nilson, to appear on stage at the Trocadero in Liverpool and entertain the audience by her personal narrative on escape from an internment camp in Vittel, France. This was closely related to the film which chronicled a women's community in an internment camp in occupied France. She had also been in the stage stunt for Tomorrow we Live (1943), a film about the French resistance, which included the introduction on stage of members of the Fighting French Navy, and a 19-year old French boy who managed to escape after being deported to Germany. Audiences showed interest even for personal appearances on stage of people who were filmed in newsreels. Corporal Derek Glover was shot by the Fox Movietone Newsreel painting a portrait of his army chief, General Edmund Ironside. He was filmed in his Surrey home before leaving for the War Office where he met the General. He accepted an invitation by the manager of The Embassy, at Gillingham in Kent during the four days of the screening of the newsreel. He was introduced and subsequently interviewed on stage.

The introduction of real heroes onstage, before watching a film about them, reinforced the ideology of 'people's war' which was also promoted by the British films of the time. This notion was part of the myth and the reality of the British experience and

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446 W. A. Richards, Plaza Cinema, ibid., 1 June 1944, p. 43.
447 'Big campaign for 2000 Women' ibid., 21 December 1944, p. 41.
448 Carlton Nottingham, Ritz Leeds, ibid., 3 June 1943, p. 41.
449 J. Longbottom, ibid., 15 February 1940, p. 27.
shaped the rhetoric of official and unofficial propaganda.\textsuperscript{450} It encapsulated the idea that all classes were working together in unity for the common cause, the meaning of which was defined differently by the different political parties. Churchill’s populist appeal in his BBC broadcasts appealed for national unity, for a war effort made for the King, country and the Empire; the aim of the war was victory and national security. For the Labour Party the idea of a Peoples War was perceived as a powerful image representing a step towards the classless society.\textsuperscript{451}

British films offered deliberate representations of the common folk elaborating the ideology of ‘people’s war’. They represented ordinary people collectively to contribute to various phases of the war effort. The Ealing films \textit{Foreman Went to France} (1942), \textit{The Bells Go Down} (1943) and \textit{San Demetrio London} (1943), had probably the first working class heroes in British official culture, and paid tribute to the ordinary East-Ender and the ordinary merchant seaman. The ‘Best of British’ character was instilled in the lower-class protagonists who became central figures to the film’s narrative for the first time in British film history: humour and decency, humanity and tolerance and, above all, restraint.\textsuperscript{452}

They also attempted to remove the existence of an evident class structure and befit the motif of democratic co-operation between people without being patronised by upper-class figures. This notion of cross class co-operation on the way to a classless society is dealt with in the adventure \textit{They Dive at Dawn} (1943), which features a southern upper middle class sub-commander officer, played by John Mills, as the hero. In \textit{Millions Like Us} (1943), \textit{The Gentle Sex} (1943), and \textit{Two Thousand Women} (1944) a bunch of diverse individuals from different class and regional backgrounds are brought together to invite the spectator to identify them as part of the collective national community.\textsuperscript{453} The populist cinematic tendency of emphasising the working/lower-class experience was also used in the context of family. \textit{This Happy

\textsuperscript{450} Angus Calder has suggested that although the concept of ‘People’s War’ was never of course universally accepted, its influence over the press, the films and the radio was enormous. Angus Calder, The People’s War, op. cit., p. 137.


*Breed* (1944) and *Waterloo Road* (1944) focused on the lives of the lower-middle-class and the working-class family respectively, presenting them both as the backbone of the British nation. Just like the other films about democratic communities of people, they created a sense of a unified, consensual society.

### Patriotic Prologues

Audiences were enthusiastic about stage stunts which aroused their patriotism and feeling of national identity. Thus, managers did not miss any opportunity to organise spectacular patriotic prologues for the presentation of any film which could be connected somehow with it. Local squadrons, members of the flying and auxiliary services, and the Red Cross usually carrying flags, appeared or paraded on a stage which was patriotically dressed. In many cases the stage ceremony was preceded by a parade of servicemen outside the cinema lined up to form a guard of honour for the principle guest, a different local personality for each occasion. Despite being put over as aids for American war films they were a standard part for the exploitation of the great majority of British films. These stunts usually included the involvement of the civic authorities. Mayors as well as army officers gave speeches from the stage. Parades and performances of the servicemen from the stage also served as a projection of the notion of 'people's war'. The audience was offered a view of the boys in the services, or of the men and women in Civil Defence and part of what they achieved. They played a part in the spirit which was also seen in the films, the projection of British people at war. In other words reality was mixed with art.

Members of the ATS, AFS, WRNS and the Red Cross appeared onstage in a scene which visualised the theme of *This England* (1941) at the Paramount Birmingham. House lights were dimmed whilst the manager announced that the singer, A.C. Robert Ashley would appear in the prologue. Ashley sung the verse and two choruses of 'My Island English Home' at the end of which the audience joined in with the chorus of 'There'll always be an England'. Meanwhile members of the fighting and auxiliary services were posed around a figure of Britannia and a background of Union Jack

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454 Stage presentations of ATC were put over between others for Air Force, V. S. Coombe, Elephant and Castle (ABC), *Kine Weekly*, 29 July 1943, p. 42. Manger A. Taylor, Savoy (ABC) Walsall, arranged RAF displays in connection with flying films. For *Flying Fortress* (1942) see ibid., 19 November 1942, p. 44.
flags, in a specially-lit presentation. Local squadron flying officers from the Blackburn Recruiting Centre paraded on the stage of the Dawren Olympia during the feature-length documentary, *Target for Tonight* (1941). A patriotic background including scenery picturing a tank, a Spitfire flanked by a 35ft high Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, added to the enhancement of patriotic feeling. It was a customary practice in most cinemas, either independent or circuit, where the naval cavalcade, *In Which We Serve* (1942) was shown, for local Sea Cadets to appear on stage. At the close of the screening of the film in the Queens Picturehouse at Whitehaven the cadets provided a fitting climax as they stood and saluted as Rule Britannia was played.

Stage presentation added to audience reception of these films. Though films were very different in terms of genre, visual style and perspective, all shared the element of propaganda. *This England* (1941), an historical propaganda film, offers a view of England as a class-ridden rural society which somehow manages to stand united when threatened by foreign invaders; the country gentry and rural working-class rallying together in periods of crises. *Target for Tonight* (1941) pays tribute to the fighting men. All the wartime feature-length documentaries excited the public by dramatising actuality with restraint. *In Which We Serve* (1942) in its conservative populism epitomises the notion of fighting together under the orders of a generous leader. The audience after having clapped together for the uplifting marching of the forces, and having sang together patriotic songs, were in the right mood to enter the world of the film and (though they wouldn’t have used the word) deconstruct its meaning.

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455 Reproduction of a picture, and Leslie Holderness, Paramount Birmingham, ibid., 15 May 1941, p. 27.
456 Albert Butterworth, Dawren Olympia, ibid., 6 November 1941, p. 31.
458 A.S. Baker, ibid., 17 June 1943, p. 32
The viewing of such promotional stunts consisted of the appearance on the stage of personal witnesses, members of the services, and important members of the local society, creating for the audience a sense of self-importance, solidarity and democratic consensus. This sense of solidarity, both national and international, against 'Nazi Germany' was projected in most British films of the period. Images of people in unity were celebrated in naval adventures: *Convoy* (1940) and *In Which we Serve* (1942). Both were highly appreciated by the audience by proving the most popular British film in the years of their release. Officers and men were united under the leadership of their captain in order to successfully confront the enemy – essentially a conservative representation of the war effort as a fight to maintain the status quo.

4. Film consumption and national identity
The consumption of British films encouraged a high point in the consciousness of British national identity. Cinema managers attempted to exploit what they perceived to be their customers' sense of national identity through promotional stunts for British films, and the invitation onstage of stars, eyewitnesses, and members of the forces. This awareness was also stressed by patriotic foyer displays accompanied by the Union Jack. Distributors encouraged pride in the consumption of British national identity in film advertising. This can be demonstrated by the use of the names of British stars in the advertising campaigns. It can also be demonstrated by the tag-lines suggested for the exploitation of British films: 'A tribute to the glorious womanhood of Britain' for *The Gentle Sex*, or 'The best film ever made in this country' for *In Which We Serve*. This attitude was related to the fact that British films enjoyed unprecedented popularity and both critics and the trade acknowledged a great improvement in quality. In fact, by 1945, 82 per cent of the cinema-goers said they wanted to see more British pictures in the future.

The method employed by managers in order to maintain consumer awareness of the quality of the British product and instil some pride in buying it, was the organisation of advance previews for explicitly British films. At the beginning of the war, when the audience did not hold British films in high esteem, the circuits arranged film previews

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462 See *The Gentle Sex* Pressbook, *In Which We Serve* Pressbook, British Film Institute Library.
463 *Kine Weekly Survey*, op. cit.
as an advance publicity policy trying to use word-of-mouth as advance publicity of
the film.

Oscar Deutsch gave four special morning previews at the Home County Odeon for the
benefit of troops in the area free of charge. The film was 49th Parallel (1941) and
would be played in the area in a few weeks time. Each morning a house full of
servicemen received the film with enthusiasm. Their written appreciation was
displayed on the bulletin notice board in the foyer which gave a considerable boost to
the film. Many expressed their intention to see the film again.464 The same policy was
adopted by the North and South London halls of the Granada circuit as a publicity
scheme for British films during a period of low cinema attendance in the early months
of 1940.465 For the purpose of stirring public interest in the film The Stars Look Down
(1939), a number of ‘leading’ traders in the districts concerned were taken to a special
preview of the picture in the renter’s theatre. Afterwards they were invited to express
their opinions of the production for publication locally. This scheme was based on the
notion that films were better advertised by word-of-mouth, and that the public
accepted the views of representative persons ‘like them’, a change from the normal
reports by the Press professional critics.466

Since 1942 advance preview of quality British films became standard procedure in
film advertising campaigns. Exhibitors intended to create an event of special interest
around the screening of the film by arranging a distinguished gathering of civic
dignitaries. The house was lavishly decorated whilst a stage presentation by members
of the forces added to the film’s reception. The big opening night was well publicised
in the local press. In this way the film was afforded special status. The films which
were promoted in this way were: Target for Tonight, The First of the Few (1942),467
In Which we Serve, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp,468 The Great Mr Handel,469
Canterbury Tale470 and The Way Ahead.

464 J. Alexander, Odeon Home County, Kine Weekly, 6 November 1941, p. 31.
465 Sidney Bernstein was a patriotic exhibitor. He was firmly behind the cause of British cinema and
participated in debates about the future of the film industry on a regular basis. Moorehead, op. cit.,
pp. 51, 103.
466 Ibid., 22 February 1943, p. 23.
467 Patrick Reed, Odeon Portsmouth, ibid., 10 September 1942, p. 23.
468 ‘Stage and musical prologue to Colonel Blimp at Odeon Finsbury Park’, ibid., 29 July 1943, p. 43.
469 Cliff Gwilliam, Odeon Exeter, ibid., 4 February 1943, p. 36.
470 E.V. Glenister, Regent Gaumont Bournemouth, ibid., 26 October 1944, p. 64.
According to cinema historian Douglas Gomery, ‘... at least in the US there have been few instances when films stood alone as the economic draw. During the history of the commercial cinema in the US feature films rarely have been able to stand alone as a source of profit. Thus we need to allocate further study to the changing nature of the entertainment package offered by exhibitors’.\footnote{Douglas Gomery, ‘The popularity of the film going in the US 1930-1950’, C. McCabe (ed.), High Theory and Low Culture, Manchester 1986, p. 78.} This chapter is focused on the changing nature of the entertainment package, offered to the British public by exhibitors during the war. Despite wartime restrictions exhibitors continued many of the standard promotional activities already established by the 1930s. They innovated by successfully installing the issue of patriotism and the notion of national identity in film advertising and cinema promotion. The patriotic angle was introduced in the making of the throwaway, in competitions, in foyer displays, even in tie ins with other local businesses. Stage appearances of members of the fighting and auxiliary forces, recruitment campaigns, the organisation of War Weapons Weeks, collections for the troops, the reopening of the organ, introduction of variety stage shows, and the encouragement for consumption of British films proved to be very popular with cinema-goers and enhanced patriotism and national pride. These promotional activities in conjunction to the managers’ public relations consisted of an important factor for the cinema’s success in wartime. Cinema was promoted and managed to become the only place out of home, which could offer a sense of friendliness and security, of cheerfulness and unity: a true community centre.
CONCLUSION

The thesis concentrating mainly on the exhibition sector of the cinema industry has argued that the cinema industry was very successful during the war, despite bombing, rising costs, and wartime shortage. Despite the fact that personal capitalism prevailed, nonetheless productivity was high, as it is demonstrated by the raise in sales. Additionally, as far as new techniques and methods are concerned, cinema exhibition invented new techniques in marketing practices. The choice of merger and acquisition as a business practised by the combines resulted in low cost operation. Thus, the main groups which dominated cinema exhibition ABPC, Gaumont British and Odeon raised their profits and consolidated their financial structure by full acquisition of subsidiaries and refinancing schemes, with favourable terms. The result of their expanding operations was the emergence of a ‘monopoly’ in the name of the Rank Organisation, as two of the leading companies in film exhibition, Gaumont British and Odeon, were acquired. Those two companies were run separately, consequently there was never created a duopoly in the cinema industry. In fact in the intervention of the Methodist magnate, J. Arthur Rank in the industry was responsible for the creation of the most important fully fledged combine in British film history in terms of the quality of films produced, and their distribution in the finest cinemas of the country.

The state welcomed the emergence of the Rank Organisation. It created favourable conditions for the further strengthening of the circuits during the war by refusing to adopt any of the measures suggested by the Palache Report. The circuits advantageous position against independent exhibitors laid on their wholesale bargain ability, on their holding of the most profitable cinemas in the country, the majority of London cinemas and of the first run ones. The prevailing conditions in cinema exhibition during the war: the barring system, rise of film hire, and conditional booking added to the consolidation of the circuits power. The circuits were also advantaged by government’s wartime favourable policy towards film exhibition. British screens were used as means for spreading government propaganda and for moral boosting purposes. Thus, several government departments including the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Fuel and Power and the Ministry of Home Security facilitated the running of cinemas during the war.
The thesis has argued that the most important aspect of the cinema business success, was the emergence of the cinema as a community centre and as people’s cinema, just as the war was in Angus Calder’s words a ‘people’s war’. This is actually how it was promoted by cinema exhibitors in their promotional and advertising activities. Business historians have shown that consumer advertising was adversely affected by the prevailing conditions during the Second World War and that marketing enjoyed low priority as a result of government control apparatus on most consumer goods. Major advertisers endeavoured just to keep their names before the public even though their goods might not be available. This thesis has showed that despite the fact that the cinema was a major consumer industry, it continued to advertise and promote its products and services with considerable zeal, given wartime restrictions, since advertising was considered to be an important factor of its success. The low cost application and efficiency of some major publicity methods was tested during wartime restrictions. Stunts such as street stunts, foyer displays, gimmicks, competitions as well as co-operative advertising survived the war and were widely practised during the consumerist 1950s. Cinema exhibition was the forerunner of some of the major wisdoms of post-war marketing: the consistency of the product, the cinema in itself in this case, and the simple logo that stands for it; the improvement of the service, the treatment of the customer as a guest. What was special about wartime promotional strategies was their connection with war time propaganda. They promoted the notion of people’s war, inherent in several films narrative, and boosted patriotic feeling and national pride.

Consumerism in the 50s was characterised by the industries’ effort to invent psychological and advertising tricks and modes which would impose on the people the idea that their individuality is not only important, but is also desirable and could be satisfied and projected by particular types of consumption. If the key factor for the booming of the global economy in the 1950s was the emergence of the individual - who was turned inwards to him/herself only- as a new type of consumer, in the 1940s consumerism went hand by hand with the war effort, the common purpose and destiny, the collective responsibility and the individual’s sense of belonging to a

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nation at war. The cinema industry was the flagship of the later type of consumerism which was more than successful, as shown in the thesis.

Moreover, the unique role played by the cinema in wartime was also explained by its social function which was approved by the government, the local authorities and in several occasions even by the clergy. The cinema emerged as the main focal point of the community’s social life through the organisation of events which helped the community, from charity concerts to recruiting drives. A visit to the local cinema offered a much wider experience than film consumption; it gave a feeling of security, provided a cheery and friendly atmosphere, and a sense of solidarity, which in a way explains the unexpected success of this ‘product’. By offering a service conceived by the potential customers as something more than a service, namely as something connected and related to people, the British cinema industry succeeded during the Second World War.

\[473\] See Allan Burton and Steve Chibnall, ‘Promotional activities and showmanship’ op. cit., pp. 86-91.
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