

Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain

Linda Kaye, Senior Researcher on the BUFVC's Arts Humanities and Research Council (AHRC) funded Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain explains why we should appreciate the value of cinemagazines and how this project will help raise the profile of these forgotten films.

Cinemagazines have been watched by millions of people in Britain and around the world on a regular basis since 1918, yet very few people today have any idea what they are. Of those, a handful might remember series such as LOOK AT LIFE or PATHE PICTORIAL or may have encountered them on the fringes of film history through the two books published on individual series, Raymond Fielding's *The March of Time* (1978) and Jenny Hammerton's *For Ladies Only? Eve's Film Review: Pathe Cinemagazine 1921-33* (2001). Yet there have been more than eighty cinemagazines produced in Britain, some such as MINING REVIEW lasting for decades. They were produced to entertain (AROUND THE TOWN) inform (THIS MODERN AGE), promote (THIS IS BRITAIN), advertise (INGOT PICTORIAL), and persuade (BRITAIN CAN MAKE IT). They were used by a wide variety of bodies, ranging from the British Government, through film com-

panies such as Rank and British Pathe, to small manufacturing companies such as David Brown Tractors. So, what were these films which were produced in such volumes, and why have so few of us heard of them?

Cinemagazines were generally short films of about ten minutes in duration made up of around five stories, although several series, such as THIS WEEK IN BRITAIN, consisted of just one story. They were released on a regular basis, and, depending on the cinemagazine, this might be weekly, fortnightly or monthly. With their 'topical' content and issue style format these series were closely related to the newsreels, and like them they regularly occupied the pre-feature slot in cinemas. However, 'news' as delivered by the cinemagazines consisted of the 'stories behind the headlines' and these were more likely to be orientated to lifestyle issues than politics. Such news was also related in a less

formal and even conversational way. Although cinemagazines differed from newsreels in what and how they conveyed the news, they shared the same historical prejudices that have assigned them to the academic margins. Their transient nature coupled with a populist style and content consigned them to the trivial and the periphery of people's minds. It was a desire to bring these films back into popular consciousness and as a subject for serious academic study which informed the BUFVC's successful Resource Enhancement application to the AHRC.

'Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain' is a three year project (2004-2007), funded through the Open University, that builds on the success of the British Universities Newsreel Database (BUND) <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/databases/newsreels>, the leading on-line resource for the study of British newsreels. The main aim is to create a comprehensive, contextualised research resource, that will



COI Communications/Film Images

LIVING TOMORROW, Issue 159, 1975



British Pathe

CHANGING PICADILLY, Pathe Pictorial, Issue 328, 1961

enable students and teachers from all disciplines to use cinemagazines in their work. The focus for this is 25,000 stories from at least 21 'core' cinemagazines that will be fully integrated into the BUND. Each of these stories will not only provide basic data, such as the title, release date, synopsis and keywords but also credits and technical information such as footage lengths, where available. The production history of each cinemagazine series will be published together with biographical information on the people and companies behind them. Where digitised examples exist, users will be able to link directly from the record to a streamed or downloadable version of the film. This can already be done with PATHE PICTORIAL through the BUND's direct link with British Pathe's digitised collection. In cases where the film is not available via the BUND, there will be information on where to find the cinemagazine and who currently holds permission to the rights.

Working closely with organisations such as the Central Office of Information (COI) Communications, Film Images, the British Film Institute (BFI) and The National Archives, the project team is locating all references to the production, distribution and reception of select series from a variety of disparate sources, including trade journals, production documents and index cards, bringing these together in a cohesive and standardised form. Each member of the project is specialising in an area of cinemagazine output. Emily Fuller, Researcher/Cataloguer is researching the commercial cinemagazines of the 1920s and early 1930s, such as IDEAL CINEMAGAZINE and GAUMONT MIRROR. In addition to producing individual production histories, she is producing short 'context' articles, focusing on themes such as cinemagazines and cele-

brity. She is also researching cinemagazines produced by both private and nationalised industrial concerns. These include the National Coal Board's MINING REVIEW and Shell's OIL REVIEW. Linda Kaye, Senior Researcher, is focusing on series produced by the British Government through the COI for distribution overseas. She is providing details for at least thirty COI cinemagazines produced between 1946 and the early 1980s, as well as articles on the history of the COI and government communications policy in the 1950s and 1960s. She is also compiling data on the commercial cinemagazine, LOOK AT LIFE and will study cinemagazines produced by the Colonial Film Unit (COLONIAL CINEMAGAZINE) and Central African

Film Unit, (RHODESIAN SPOTLIGHT and FEDERAL SPOTLIGHT). Luke McKernan, the grant award holder, is concentrating on the 'news' orientated cinemagazines, such as MARCH OF TIME, THIS MODERN AGE and BRITAIN CAN MAKE IT. As a result of creating a unified source of British cinemagazine data, the first history of the cinemagazine is starting to emerge, and with it the resurrection of a lost genre.

Why was the Cinemagazine so successful?

One of the fascinating aspects of the cinemagazine is the degree to which its distinctive format has been appropriated by a range of different companies and institutions since it emerged in 1918, and to trace the reason for its longevity. The same company that produced the newsreel PATHE GAZETTE established the first cinemagazine, PATHE PICTORIAL. Drawing inspiration from the print magazine and the new newspaper colour supplements, Pathe melded the issue format of the newsreel with the 'pictorial' style and content of the magazine. PATHE PICTORIAL was less concerned with the politics and policies of post-war Britain than the personalities behind them. It reflected a growing popular interest and identification with 'prominent' members of society, which now included people from the world of sport, theatre and cinema as well as those drawn from the higher echelons of society. More importantly, it featured 'ordinary' people and their everyday activities in the same programme. As Douglas Warth, editor of the PATHE PICTORIAL, observed (in *Film and Television Technician*, July/August 1965), "Pictorial's prime function is to link up audiences more intimately with the glamorous remote thing-the cinema screen, either by putting members of these audiences into Technicolor along with the stars or by taking them behind the scenes of life as they themselves



British Pathe

MODEL SCHOOL, Pathe Pictorial, Issue 30, July 1955



British Pathe

MODERN PLAYGROUND, Pathe Pictorial, Issue 706, July 1968

could live it." This was not only PATHE PICTORIAL'S raison d'être, it was a key element to every cinemagazine.

It was not merely the inclusion of people that contributed to the success of that cinemagazine, the fact that their activities and interests drove the content greatly contributed to its popularity. It is this close identification with the audience, either through direct inclusion, or the representative voice of a presenter or commentator, which was fundamental to its prolonged success. This silver thread, entwined with the short series format, can be traced with increasing clarity through time and across the many uses to which the cinemagazine was put. It is visible in the proliferation of commercial cinemagazines that entertained audiences for over half a century. It is woven into series produced by the Ministry of Information, Shell, the National Coal Board and London Transport Films. The cinemagazine continued to mirror closely the concerns and interests of its audience and this, together with its flexible format, enabled it to do something the newsreels failed to achieve, namely a successful transition into television. Many of the programmes produced by the British Government for transmission overseas, were interview magazines on film or simply film magazines. These programmes, such as CALENDAR and THIS WEEK IN BRITAIN, were made by film companies using the cinemagazine format; they were just distributed on a different medium. By the mid 1960s the omniscient commentator had been supplemented by an on-screen presenter or

even, in the case of THE PACEMAKERS, by the subject of the programmes themselves.

The Projection of Britain and Cinemagazines

The success of the cinemagazine form is reflected in the dramatic increase of series produced by the COI in the late 1950s and 1960s, as the British Government identified news as an important means of carrying out its policy of 'projecting Britain'. Although this idea, first articulated by Stephen Tallents in 1932, had informed aspects of department practice for some time, it was only from the mid 1950s that it formed a fundamental part of overseas communication policy. The opinion of the world, particularly post-Suez, now mattered and mass communications were seen as the primary means of influencing it. The form that suited this subtle assault via national television stations and cinemas of the world was the cinemagazine. The research aim of 'Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain' has been informed by this phrase, consistently invoked in government circles to explain why films are being produced for overseas distribution. The project is examining the images of British cinemagazine production and the values instilled within them to gauge what kind of Britain was being projected both at home and overseas. This approach raises key questions regarding the formulation of a British identity through moving images, and the changing nature of this during the twentieth century, for example during the transition from Empire to Commonwealth.

The first results of 'Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain' will start to appear over the next few months on a new re-designed BUND. They will culminate in the publication of 25,000 individual cinemagazine stories, complete with production, distribution and reception details. This will represent the first history of the British cinemagazine, and, through an examination of the images projected by these films, both at home and abroad, inform and revise perceptions of how we saw ourselves as a nation.

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List of known British Cinemagazines

ACE CINEMAGAZINE	(1937-1938)
AROUND THE TOWN	(1919-1923)
BRITAIN CAN MAKE IT	(1945-1947)
CALENDAR	(1959-1969)
CINE GAZETTE	(1947-1957)
COLONIAL CINEMAGAZINE	(1945-1949)
FEDERAL SPOTLIGHT	(1959-1963)
GAUMONT MIRROR	(1926-1932)
IDEAL CINEMAGAZINE	(1926-1932)
INGOT PICTORIAL	(1949-1958)
LOOK AT LIFE	(1959-1969)
THE MARCH OF TIME [BRITISH EDITION]	(1935-1951)
MINING REVIEW	(1947-1982)
OIL REVIEW	(1950-1952)
RHODESIAN SPOTLIGHT	(1955-1959)
THIS WEEK IN BRITAIN	(1959-1979)
THIS MODERN AGE	(1946-1950)