

## THE NEWSREEL ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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This article is about the British newsreels' trade body the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Ireland (NRA). It is not a definitive study, but rather seeks to provide a taste of the treasures that are contained within the Association's bound minute books, now held in the British Film Institute's Special Collections department. The minutes are the best record that is left to posterity by an organisation now long gone. It was active as an industry watchdog, protector, promoter and occasional referee for over twenty years and there is much to be learned about the newsreels and the people who played an active role in the business of bringing newsfilm to the cinema screen. At some time between its creation and dissolution all of the correspondence files — that would probably have included many gems as well as the routine stuff of business — disappeared, probably consigned to the dustbin. There were plenty of opportunities for this to happen as the Minutes record several changes of address for the NRA secretariat. The minute books thus provide a record of the way the *industry* operated — rather than how the companies themselves functioned. An important point to bear in mind is that the minutes themselves only show the business items that reached the NRA council for decision. Other issues would have been decided without reference to it. In this respect the NRA was no different to any other business.

This study is not a review of historical events, but rather is about issues as the NRA minutes recorded them. It is, therefore, a one-sided account that deliberately does not seek elaborate confirmation of details from outside sources. What it does do, however, is indicate what sorts of issue concerned the NRA and how it worked. The Minutes were written by the Association's five successive Secretaries<sup>1</sup> and, as expected, demonstrate different approaches to recording decisions that range from the nearly bland to the almost detailed. The Minutes are numbered sequentially with Minute 1 dating from the first meeting (held on 1 November 1937) and Minute 5490 dating from the extraordinary meeting held on 15 June 1960, at which the NRA was wound up.

### **Creation of the NRA**

The News Reel Association of Great Britain and Ireland Limited was set up as the industry's trade association — a sort of employers' trade union. It provided the member companies with a forum in which to get together to resolve industry-wide problems and to promote and protect their collective interests. It was also established as a regulator, an arbitrator, and an information source and supplier. It was thus cast in the classic mould of the trade association and bears more than a passing resemblance to its present day counterparts.

Four of the five newsreel companies established the NRA on 21 October 1937, the date on which the organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association were signed by Sir Gordon Craig (General Manager of *British Movietone*), Jeffrey Bernerd (a director of *Gaumont-British*), W.J. Gell (Managing Director of *Pathe Gazette*) and S.F. Ditcham (*Universal News*).

The NRA's principle objective (and one offering a stab at a legal definition of a newsreel) was set out in paragraph 1 of its memorandum of incorporation:

To promote the interests, financial welfare and success of the trade or business of manufacturing, producing and distribution of cinematic films of

current events known as newsreels, and to devise means to promote co-operation amongst those engaged in the said trade or business ...

The Memorandum comprises a further 24 paragraphs which added flesh to the bones of paragraph 1. The Organisation's Articles of Association, dated the same day, comprised 68 paragraphs of operational matters. Chairmen, initially, appointed at the start of each meeting, were from July 1940, generally appointed for a three-month tour of duty on a rotational basis, although variations did occur as the need arose.<sup>2</sup> Thus the responsibility was shared: no one company dominated, but at the same time a measure of consistency was attained.

The NRA was a seriously thought through organisation that had a clear role and, over the next twenty-two years or so it exercised the powers with varying degrees of success. One thing that is remarkable is the fact that it was able to operate at all. An industry body that managed to function in spite of being led by diverse buccaneering free spirits as Castleton-Knight (*Gaumont-British*), G.T. (Tommy) Cummins (*British Paramount* and, from 1947, *Pathe*) and the duo from *Movietone* (Sir Gordon Craig and Gerald Sanger) was clearly one that all sides knew they needed.

By the time that the NRA was wound up on 15 June 1960 the age of the cinema newsreels had passed. By then three of the five companies had ceased production and the impact of television in the field of topical news presentation was overwhelming and undeniable.

### **The NRA's Business**

What did the NRA do in the intervening period? What issues occupied its meetings? The first year — up to the end of 1938 — can be regarded as a settling-in period, a testing of the muscles and systems. An early issue of interest was making representations to the government on the *Films Bill*, in particular helping with the construction of a legal definition of a newsreel.<sup>3</sup> Another topic considered was the need to establish mechanisms for resolving differences between member companies. This included the agreement 'that all members should refrain from including in their issues anything in the nature of a "fake" or "hoax".<sup>4</sup> Two other matters of particular interest were discussed during this period. First it was considered 'desirable' to abolish the practice of issuing 'Flash' copies, other than in the West End of London. This revolved around film of the 1938 Derby. It was agreed that no film of the race should be issued until 2 June, although 'West End-only' copies could be released to cinemas on the day the race had been run (1 June).<sup>5</sup> The decision was subsequently rescinded when it was agreed that it should be left to the companies themselves to decide.<sup>6</sup> This was an early demonstration of the limits of the organisation's power. The second matter concerned 'official and political party films'. There had been an exchange of letters between Sir Joseph Ball, an associate of the arch political fixer of the period, Sir Horace Wilson, and Pathe about a speech by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Ball had filmed the meeting and was distributing it. Pathe felt films such as Ball's should have been made by a newsreel company.<sup>7</sup> While not all companies were completely sympathetic with this view, their 'readiness to assist Government and Public Departments on all suitable occasions' was conveyed to government, as was their declared motive: it was a question of prestige, not financial profit. This resulted in a sympathetic response from government, but with the rider that ministers' hands could not be bound. The only other major event of 1938, as told by the NRA minutes, was the protracted process of trying to persuade *British Paramount News* to join. While it remained the sole non-aligned newsreel it could upset plenty of apple carts without suffering the consequences. The process of persuasion took several months, the membership application only being received in October.<sup>8</sup>

1939 began relatively quietly for the organisation, although three council meetings were held in January. A matter to which it returned several times concerned the supply of regular news films to the British exhibition at the New York World's Fair.<sup>9</sup> During the course of the year the darkening shadows that were creeping across Europe and also affected the NRA. For instance it discussed whether key newsreel staff could be exempted from national service,<sup>10</sup> trying to obtain facilities to film the Royal Navy,<sup>11</sup> and had an informal meeting with Sir Samuel Hoare about the work of the new Ministry of Information (MOI).<sup>12</sup> The passing from peace into war is not recorded, although the meeting held on 13 September 1939 did discuss working arrangements during the hostilities. This recorded the five companies agreeing, initially until the end of the year (possibly it was expected to be all over by Christmas?), to suspend normal commercial sales competition in the national interest. Thus they stopped poaching one another's customers; provided the NRA with customer rental lists showing those that were due to mature on or after 18 September 1939; agreed to pay a fine for any transgression; and to provide details of any renters cancelling their contracts. The arrangement does not appear to have been formally renewed, but seems nevertheless to have survived until the end of 1945. One surprising point of interest, given the primeval jungle from which the companies had recently emerged, is that they agreed (and later reaffirmed) that, should one of their number fall on hard times as a result of enemy action, the others would help them out. This proved to be no idle promise, for exactly that happened when Universal's premises were bombed in February 1944.<sup>13</sup>

The war years demonstrated that the NRA had a definite role to play. For the first three years there were an enormous number of special meetings, after which it was resolved that the council should meet fortnightly.<sup>14</sup> On occasion meetings were held weekly or even twice weekly. The range of issues covered was wide. There were many instances where the NRA was establishing (or enforcing) accepted scales of charges for the supply of newsfilm to feature film production companies.<sup>15</sup> There are numerous references to the MOI about the supply of film to MOI, its contractors, and the armed services.<sup>16</sup> Some details emerge of its participation in the MOI Films Committee and, latterly, the News Film Sub Committee. There are a number of references to meetings with, and correspondence from, the likes of Jack Beddington, Director of the MOI's Films Division, Sir Kenneth Clark, Duff Cooper and Sir Edward Villiers. Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information from 1941, also makes a number of guest appearances as reports of meetings with him have been given to the assembled council members.<sup>17</sup> There were also discussions about the despatch of war correspondents,<sup>18</sup> the payment of danger money for cameramen flying over or otherwise engaged in battle zones,<sup>19</sup> insurance policies for both war correspondents and their equipment,<sup>20</sup> the need for additional camera equipment, plans for the dispersal of film processing laboratories,<sup>21</sup> censorship of commentaries,<sup>22</sup> and film stock shortages — the 1943 Film Stock Order.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the war years, and stretching into the late 1940s, the NRA supervised the system of liaison with government departments. Each newsreel company was allotted one or more Ministries with which they acted as the contact point, on behalf of all member companies. These duties were rotated every six-months. The list of departments covered is revealing because it gives a glimpse of the newsreels' news priorities. Interestingly, the Treasury was not covered.<sup>24</sup> There are also several examples of parsimony and small-mindedness.<sup>25</sup> As might be expected there were a few minor squabbles.<sup>26</sup> However, one major theme pervading the minutes from this period is the rota system. This was the pooling of camera(man) and other resources on the basis of mutually shared costs. Under this system one cameraman at a location shot his film for all five companies. It enabled expenditure to be conserved and scarce resources to be spread across all of the major war theatres and fronts. The NRA officers (the

chairman and the secretary) were the principal regulators, but all of the companies acted responsibly. Collective decisions were taken about the location of rota cameramen, their insurance, sending sound units to cover the war, and meeting the cost of lost equipment.<sup>27</sup>

One final thing about the Second World War also relates to the immediate post-war period. It concerns two stories that were controversial — both from 1945. The first was discussed only once and the second at several separate meetings, but they reveal a curious contradiction. The first story was about showing film of the concentration camps. Government had made noises about the importance of the film and of the need for it to be given a wide showing. Under the item title, *Atrocity Stories*, the NRA asked the Chairman (at the time, Clifford Jeapes of *Universal News*) to suggest to the MOI that film of the 'irreverent' handling of corpses should not be shown. This presumably concerned images of bulldozers being used by British troops at Belsen to speed up the burial.<sup>28</sup> The other comes a few months later and concerns the Belsen War Crimes trial. This topic was discussed on several occasions. The NRA was initially intent on securing equal treatment with the US and other newsreel camera teams to record the event. However, on 25 October 1945 it asked the chairman (by this time Castleton Knight of *Gaumont-British News*) to suggest to the MOI that the NRA should be given the opportunity to shoot film of the passing of the sentences at the Belsen trial and, 'if possible, the execution scenes'.<sup>29</sup> The NRA's disappointment at not being granted these facilities was recorded at the following meeting.<sup>30</sup>

The period after the end of the Second World War was one of change, for the country as well as for the newsreels. Normal competition was restored although there was never a return to the bad old days of the newsreel war. Difficulties with the trades unions — principally the ACT — began to emerge, as did the threat of television, which was discussed on many occasions under various headings during the latter years of the 1940s. The cold war did not really happen, at least according to the NRA minutes, since there are few references to the dangers confronting the post-war world. However, the 1948 Olympic Games and the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Philip Mountbatten did; and these occupied a number of meetings. It was also at this time that the NRA welcomed a new member into the fold: Metro Goldwyn Mayer's Metro News. It was 'elected' on 23 January 1947 (Minute 2305 records this) and by early 1948 it had stopped attending meetings. It is not known for sure when its membership lapsed because that is not recorded in the minutes. 1946-8 witnessed a dark cloud descending over the Secretary (E.L. Maddox) and he resigned. Details are only hinted at in a particularly oblique, but sinister minute.<sup>31</sup> February 1947 witnessed the recruitment of a typist, Mrs Burns Shearer, who within months progressed to become the Association's Secretary, a post she was to hold until the organisation was dissolved.

The NRA opened the 1950s with preparations for the impending general election. It planned to film interviews with the three party leaders and to use standardised titles and make the film available worldwide. This, of course, was at the end of an era when the world hung on British politicians' every word. During this decade the NRA negotiated with the cinema industry trades unions, with government about coverage of the 1953 Coronation, film stock restrictions, the film levy and restrictive practices. The NRA was an established and credible force within the industry, although its limits continued to be recorded in the minutes, where individual member companies' interests often seemed to outweigh the need to act in unison. It was consulted — formally and informally — by government. It represented the employers in negotiations with the cinematic trades unions, it negotiated with government about things such as the 1953 Coronation coverage, film stock orders, the film levy and, lastly but not least, restrictive practices.

The NRA had assumed responsibility for operating the Royal Rota from its creation. From June 1944 the system was formalised: a cameraman was seconded to the NRA from a member company who was then placed on permanent attachment to the royal household. The first cameraman used in this way was Graham Thompson of *British Movietone*. He was appointed on 8 June 1944. After two or three years there seem to have been rumblings that all was not well. There are several minutes that refer to the NRA asking Buckingham Palace officials if they were content with the way the system was working. However a cat was allowed out of a bag in October 1948: it appeared that rather than Buckingham Palace being dissatisfied it was the newsreels. Howard Thomas, the general manager of Pathe expressed unhappiness with Thompson's coverage: he was suspected of metamorphosing from cameraman into palace official and appears to have used medium shots in preference to close-ups.<sup>32</sup> The King seemed to prefer this. In June 1950 it was announced that Thompson had 'left Buckingham Palace to join the BBC's television staff'.<sup>33</sup> The Minutes of 7 June 1950 record that by the King's command 'cameraman Turner be accredited to the Palace' with the same facilities granted to Thompson.<sup>34</sup> There then followed a protracted process where the employment arrangements — including pension — were settled. This took over two years.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the royal rota, the NRA operated a peacetime equivalent of the ordinary rota through its wholly owned subsidiary company, Newsreel Technical Services Ltd. Under this banner it negotiated royalty payments with sports promoters for the big events — the FA Cup Final, the major horse races, test matches and athletic events. The NRA also set charges for the use of library film supplied to compilation and other filmmakers and, increasingly, to television. It also was the manager of the UK's contract with the Soviet Union for the supply of news film of Soviet events (supplied by Sovexportfilm), and supplied this to, among others, the BBC.<sup>36</sup>

A glance at some of the issues with which the NRA grappled during the years of decline show the diverse and complex range of its business. Picture Post magazine was charged 1,000 guineas (£1,050) for rights to the film of the Royal world tour of 1953 (by the new Queen Elizabeth II).<sup>37</sup> The NRA became a member of the Television Technical Sub-Committee, which had been set up by four trade associations to prepare a report for the Television Advisory Committee.<sup>38</sup> Movietone was *permitted* to accept business from the Central Office of Information to compile a film of the Coronation, providing 'the film is not shown in the British Commonwealth'.<sup>39</sup> The Minutes record the shares of the bill paid to the Ministry of Works for the cost of services rendered at the Coronation, including lighting.<sup>40</sup> The NRA was also concerned that it was being disadvantaged: it was exercised about the need to receive government news releases at the same time as the TV Newsreel received them, rather than some time later. This was one of those occasions when the newsreel companies could not agree amongst themselves and demonstrates quite neatly the limits of the NRA's authority.<sup>41</sup> The NRA also considered longer-running business items. Among these was concern that the BBC had negotiated a six-day working deal with a Film laboratory.<sup>42</sup> There was also detailed planning for the filming of the 1958 state opening of Parliament. This was different from the previous occasions as Black Rod's ceremony was to be filmed for the first time.<sup>43</sup>

Several sporting issues were discussed during this period. The points of interest lay as much in the differences between fees paid for rota coverage as in the occasional differences of opinion resulting from company self interest. Here are a few examples. In 1953 the MCC was offered £100 by Movietone, on behalf of the NRA, for rights to the 1954 England v Pakistan cricket test series;<sup>44</sup> in 1954 £75 was offered to Cambridge University Boat Club for a camera position in one of the launches to aid coverage of the Boat Race;<sup>45</sup> in January 1957 the NRA

agreed to pay the organisers of the Grand National £5,000 for the rights;<sup>46</sup> and in 1958 the NRA was unceremoniously elbowed from the space that it had hitherto shared with the BBC at the White City Stadium.<sup>47</sup>

In 1954 a row broke out because Paramount and Pathe had both purchased film of Roger Bannister's 4-minute mile from the BBC as they had not filmed the event themselves and could not find an alternative picture source.<sup>48</sup> In 1955 the NRA sought to improve relations with 10 Downing Street.<sup>49</sup> In 1958 Movietone and Gaumont were discovered to be paying £10 per football match (instead of the NRA's stipulated facilities fee of £5). This prompted Pathe's Tommy Cummins to say that in future he would pay what he liked, thus further breaking down the consensus.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Rota**

The Rota was under some pressure in 1956. There was a discussion about some event organisers restricting the facilities offered for newsreel coverage due to insufficient space being available for more cameras and then being able to discover 'room for television cameras...'<sup>51</sup> Movietone got into hot water with the NRA in 1957 when it was discovered to have supplied rota lavenders to its UPMT customers (without having told the NRA) and its penalty was to make an extra financial contribution toward the cost of the rota system. The rota provided the companies (and event organisers) with many benefits (including clarity and simplicity of operation) but was eventually to bring the NRA into dispute with the government. The issue revolved around restrictive practices.

### **Restrictive practices**

Conservative governments of the mid-1950s took action against what they saw as some of the factors inhibiting the growth of British industry. One of these areas was that of restrictive trade practices. They established a Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission to identify and tackle the problem at source. Movietone's Sir Gordon Craig was responsible for drafting the NRA's case for submission to government.<sup>52</sup> The NRA was vulnerable in three areas. First, the *Library Material Agreement*, which set a scale of charges for providing library footage to be applied by all member companies. This meant that purchasers could not negotiate rates with individual newsreel companies.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, Newsreel Technical Services Ltd, which operated the Royal Rota and the Rota for major sporting and other events, limited competition. Finally, the NRA was responsible for determining the eligibility for membership and negotiating with, among others, cinema owners on behalf of member companies. Thus the industry was able to operate as a closed shop.<sup>54</sup> The Newsreel industry was also under pressure by the government's Film Levy and the Film Quota (one was a fiscal burden placed on the film industry and the other was a requirement to ensure that a certain proportion of films exhibited in cinemas were British). The NRA sought exemption from the Levy and inclusion in the definition of British film under the Quota.<sup>55</sup>

### **Television and trades unions**

Feathers continued to be ruffled by various requests for film, mainly from television. For instance, at the meeting on 21 November 1957 Movietone (possibly after some pressure from the chairman) owned up to the fact that it had supplied material to BBC and ITN for 'recognised rates'.<sup>56</sup> There was a discussion about the TV film *MAN OF THE CENTURY* — a celebration of Sir Winston Churchill's life: Gaumont's Castleton Knight (in the chair) alleged that Pathe and Movietone had supplied film for inclusion but, interestingly, only Movietone denied the charge. There is no evidence of any penalty having been imposed and it is likely that the discussion arose from the chairman's well-known mischievous disposition.<sup>57</sup>

The NRA was responsible for negotiating rates with the industry's trade unions. There is evidence of the protracted nature of some of the negotiations. However, there is also an indication of pique. For instance, Howard Thomas of Pathe had reportedly spoken to Geoffrey Cox (the Editor of ITN) about the NRA's agreement with the ACTT union and suggested that he (Cox) should seek the NRA's advice before concluding an agreement. In the nature of things it is likely that this revolved around two related issues: not upsetting current arrangements and preventing the poaching of staff through the payment of higher wages.<sup>58</sup>

### **The End**

The newsreel industry and the NRA were in decline, even though Tommy Cummins had made a robust statement about the newsreels' future in an article published in the *Financial Times* in September 1957.<sup>59</sup> 1957 saw the departure of *British Paramount News*, the closure of which had been announced at the end of 1956. It resigned from the NRA on 9 February 1957. The usual homilies were recorded in the minutes to mark this event.<sup>60</sup> However, old friends quickly fell out and, as with all such matters, the financial entrails outlived the corpse. By April the NRA had agreed to pay, pro rata, an amount due to Paramount for its work in connection with the COI's *British News*.<sup>61</sup> By the end of May 1957 Paramount had sent a bill to the NRA about film shipments from Suez during the 1956 Anglo-French invasion (£233 9s 9d).<sup>62</sup> Wrangles ensued during which the NRA told its accountant not to pay, since in its view Paramount had not 'adopted the normal procedure'.<sup>63</sup> Further wrangles involved the date to which Paramount's share of the income from British News (made for the Central Office of Information) should be calculated. By October Paramount and the NRA were still arguing and, at one stage the NRA voted to retain £45 7s 3d and to give that sum to charity.<sup>64</sup> There was also the matter of what rota material Paramount had retained. The Secretary was still checking Paramount's holding of Royal Rota material as late as March 1958.<sup>65</sup>

The next shrinkage took place at the end of 1958 when the Rank organisation announced that it would be closing down both the *Universal* and *Gaumont British* newsreels at the end of January 1959. Initially, the Rank Organisation wished to remain a member of the NRA and to pay two subscriptions. This was agreed on a trial basis.<sup>66</sup> But matters soon began to get complicated. Again it was over money. The NRA was asked to consider distributing the income from British News to member companies on the basis of the amount of footage supplied, since *British Movietone* was by then supplying 54 percent of the total, rather than pro rata as had previously been the case.<sup>67</sup> A decision was deferred, but the matter resurfaced at the meeting held in March, when it was argued that as the Rank Organisation had ceased to produce newsreels it should leave the NRA. Rank countered saying that it wished to remain in membership as it assembled newsreels for the COI. The Chairman (G. Grafton Greene of Rank) said that all benefits accruing should be distributed to member companies pro rata. *British Movietone* said it was no longer prepared to supply such material to the Rank Organisation and Rank was asked to resign from the NRA. Rank finally announced its departure on 18 March.<sup>68</sup> Then, paradoxically, it was asked to become an *honorary member* as the NRA had by then recognised that it needed the company. Among other things, Rank was asked to continue to make its preview theatre available for twice-weekly newsreel previews. The same meeting agreed that Pathe should store the royal Rota equipment and that Pathe and Movietone should take Gaumont's sporting events. Pathe and Movietone also became jointly responsible for assembling the COI's British News in rotation. Rank was still demonstrating its commitment to the NRA in May 1959, when it sent two representatives to a meeting. That meeting heard that British Newsreel Association Services Ltd had been put into liquidation, but that the NRA would continue in operation. However, that is where the record of meetings comes to an end.

It is clear that the end was swift in coming, since the last minute in the bound volume dates from the final meeting held on 15 June 1960. That resolved to cease all operations.<sup>69</sup> The last Annual General Meeting followed immediately on the same day and dealt with such matters as the sale of the curtains at the Association's Nascreno House offices, on which a loss of £120 0s 4d is recorded, and it was agreed to sell the remaining items of furniture to British Movietone for £25. It was a rather ignominious end for an organisation that had helped steer the newsreel companies into maturity and had proven so useful during the Second World War. In a flash – like so many of the newsreel review stories themselves – it was over. History does not record whether the organisation was sadly missed, but an inexplicable listing in the 1968 *British Film and Television Yearbook* records the organisation still operating, this time from offices at 71 Baker Street, London W1.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps like old soldiers it just faded away ...

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<sup>1</sup> The Secretaries of the Association were as follows: Neville Kearney (October 1937- December 1939); Ernest Reed (December 1939 – December 1941); Ernest Long Maddox (December 1941 – January 1948) [resigned]; Doris Burns Shearer [Acting] (January 1948-October 1948); W.J. Hewitt (October 1948 – December 1948 or May 1949); and Doris Burns Shearer (January 1949 – May 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Minute 474 (25 July 1940).

<sup>3</sup> Minutes: 16 (17 January 1938), 30 (22 February 1938) and 36 (15 March 1938).

<sup>4</sup> Minute 25 (22 February 1938).

<sup>5</sup> Minute 47 (19 May 1938). The West End cinema area was defined as: Regent Street, Oxford Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road, Tottenham Court Road, Leicester Square, Coventry Street, Haymarket, Piccadilly Circus, Mayfair, Kingsway, Victoria and Baker Street.

<sup>6</sup> Minute 56 (13 June 1938)

<sup>7</sup> Minutes 48 (19 May 1938) and 50 (13 June 1938), 126 (9 January 1939) and 139 (10 February 1939).

<sup>8</sup> Minutes 39 (15 March 1938), 34 (19 May 1938), 51(13 June 1938), 62 (11 July) and 75 (20 October 1938).

<sup>9</sup> Minutes — all from 1939 — 134 (24 January 19), 140 (10 February), 154 (13 March), 30 March special meeting, 170 (17 April), 183 (8 May), 194 (12 June) and 208A (10 July).

<sup>10</sup> Minute 136 (6 February 1939).

<sup>11</sup> Minute 159 (29 March 1939). Press stills photographers had been able to film HMS *Repulse*, but not the newsreels. The Chairman (W.J. Gell) undertook to buttonhole Lord Mountbatten and the Duke of Kent at an Admiralty reception and to ask them to help.

<sup>12</sup> Minute 209 (4 July 1939).

<sup>13</sup> See Minutes 253 (8 October 1939), 460 (11 July 1940) and 686 (12 June 1941).

<sup>14</sup> Minute 882 (8 January 1942).

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Minute 252 (30 October 1939) which records a hint of bitterness over the praise lavished on the aerial sequences in THE LION HAS WINGS. This was, in reality, newsfilm for which the newsreel companies that supplied it received 'a small sum'.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Minutes 317 (8 February 1940), 328 (22 February 1940), 344 (14 March 1940), 360 (11 April 1940)

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Minutes 244 (20 September 1939 — Sir Joseph Ball), 293 (8 January 1940 — Sir Kenneth Clark), 487 (12 August 1940 — Sir Walter Monckton), 574 (23 January 1941 — Jack Beddington) and 926 (5 February 1942 — Brendan Bracken).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Minutes 311 (2) (31 January 1940 — Head of MI5 agreed to special permits being granted to three cameramen: Jack Ramsden [Movietone], Jock Gemmell, [Pathe], and A.E. Aubury [Gaumont]), 408 (28 May 1940) and 418 (7 June 1940).

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Minutes 1282 (28 January 1943), 1326 (15 April 1943) and 1329 (19 April 1943). Cameramen assigned to cover USAAF missions received £5 per week extra and £50 for the initial operational flight. This was taxable at the normal 50% income tax rate.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes 1092 (18 June 1942), 1302 and 1303 (both 11 March 1943).

<sup>21</sup> Minutes 437 (18 June 1940), 439 (19 June 1940), 443 (25 June 1940), 445 (28 June 1940).

<sup>22</sup> Minutes 947 (19 February 1942) and 1096 (18 June 1942).

<sup>23</sup> Minute 1306 (11 March 1943): from 15 March newsreels were to be restricted to a maximum length of 700 feet. See also Minutes 1327 (15 April 1943) and 1361 (27 May 1943). Minute 1798 (18 January 1945) lists the newsreel companies' six-monthly film stock requirements as follows (in millions of feet): Movietone, 6.7; Gaumont, 7.8; Paramount, 5.7; Pathe, 7.1; and Universal, 5.6.

<sup>24</sup> Minute 1385 (8 July 1943) proposed liaison arrangements for the following eighteen months. The Departments covered were parcelled up as follows: (a) Home Office / Ministry of Supply / Ministry of Works and Planning / Ministry of Town and Country Planning; (b) War Office; (c) Ministry of Labour / Ministry of Aircraft Production / Scotland Yard and Police; (d) Air Ministry; (e) Admiralty.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Minute 1591 (13 April 1944): Fire Watching, 37-38 Golden Square (The NRA Secretariat's then location). The local Fire-Watch Committee had sent the NRA a letter asking for a contribution toward funds of nine shillings (three rooms at three shillings per room). After consideration the NRA agreed that the Secretary should be authorised to offer five shillings.

<sup>26</sup> Such as resulting in the agreement not to poach one another's staff — Minute 307 (22 January 1940).

<sup>27</sup> Minute 1303 (11 March 1943).

<sup>28</sup> Minute 1907 (3 May 1945), emergency meeting. There was a need to complete burial quickly due to disease. See Hannah Caven, 'Horror in our time: images of the concentration camps in the British media, 1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2001, pp. 205-253.

<sup>29</sup> Minute 2003 (25 October 1945).

<sup>30</sup> Minute 2026 (22 November 1945).

<sup>31</sup> Minute 2461 (1 January 1948). It was agreed that all relevant correspondence and minutes of special meetings relating to this would be kept in a bank.

<sup>32</sup> Minute 2665 (28 October 1948).

<sup>33</sup> Source: British Universities Film & Video Council website ([www.bufvc.ac.uk/databases/newsreels/staff](http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/databases/newsreels/staff))

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<sup>34</sup> Minute 3424 (7 June 1950). Turner was John Turner. See John Turner, *Filming History: The Memoirs of John Turner, Newsreel Cameraman* (London: British Universities Film & Video Council, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Minute 4101 (18 September 1952). Eventually, British Newsreel Association Services Ltd. was set up to employ Turner. See BNAS Memorandum and Articles of Association, 11 May 1953. These are to be found in Box 9, Item 3B in the BFI Special Collection: Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Ireland.

<sup>36</sup> Post-Stalin USSR was interested in telling the West something about its achievements. It seems that the NRA had been become involved in this arrangement and it was resolved than an agreement with Sovexportfilm (the Soviet film agency) should be drawn up by the NRA Chairman and Tahu Hole, the BBC's senior news editor (Minute 4941 of 17 November 1955). The agreement took some time to finalise. Minute 4992 (16 February 1956) records that it was delayed pending instructions from Moscow. The agreement was only finalised at the meeting held on 24 May 1956 (Minute 5041). Soon after it became operational there was disquiet about the BBC's shipping of film to the USSR under the terms of the agreement. There was an exchange of correspondence and the Chairman undertook to speak to Hole (Minute 5151 of 9 January 1957). The details were revealed in Minute 5161 (21 February 1957). The BBC had apparently been sending a 'large amount, and type, of British propaganda material', which had been 'selected by the BBC for export to Russia, as opposed to carefully selected items, and quantity being sent on behalf of the Newsreel Association.' It is interesting that the term 'propaganda material' should be used and suggests that the NRA recognised that the arrangement was a two-way propaganda exercise.

<sup>37</sup> Minute 4440 (26 October 1953).

<sup>38</sup> Minute 4441 (26 October 1953).

<sup>39</sup> Minute 4486 (19 November 1953).

<sup>40</sup> Minute 4496 (17 December 1953).

<sup>41</sup> Minute 4591 (18 March 1954).

<sup>42</sup> Minute 4515 (17 December 1953). By the meeting on 27 July 1954 it is clear that the NRA's attempts to stop this had failed. It therefore resolved to follow a different policy — publicly express concern and privately exploit the opportunity to break some of the trade unions restrictive practices about weekend work.

<sup>43</sup> This occupied the whole of the special meeting of 9 October and much of the meeting of 23 October. Minutes 5401(9 October 1958) and 5417 (23 October 1958).

<sup>44</sup> Minute 4480 (19 November 1953).

<sup>45</sup> Minute 4542 (20 January 1954).

<sup>46</sup> Minute 5142 (9 January 1957).

<sup>47</sup> A letter from the BBC's Peter Dimmock to G. Grafton Green (Gaumont British) indicated that the BBC needed the space for its own crews. The NRA was forced to make alternative arrangements at short notice. Minute 5376 (18 June 1958). The Amateur Athletics Association's price was the NRA's agreement not to let any of the film shot by NRA members be shown on British television. Minute 5387 (24 July 1958).

<sup>48</sup> 'Mr Hargreaves [Gaumont] stressed the gravity of the situation, and pointed out that apart from the principle involved, if various Newsreels made a practice of accepting BBC coverage, the time could come when the BBC would seek a guid (sic) pro quo ...' There was no agreement on the way forward. A proposed cascade process, whereby the other newsreel companies should be approached

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in succession before any outside organisations were contacted, was clearly not acceptable — Minute 4632 (20 May 1954). This minute rather nicely demonstrates the tensions between the individual companies' commercial imperatives of presenting spectacle to their audiences, and the need to be unhelpful to the threatening medium of television. This re-surfaced in July when Hargreaves again tried to have the Pathe and Paramount actions censured. Again there was insufficient support, although clearly from the tone of the minute there had been a row — Minute 4675 (29 July 1954).

<sup>49</sup> Downing Street does not occupy a prominent position in the minutes. However, dealings with the Prime Minister do feature occasionally. Gerald Sanger of British Movietone was the NRA's roving ambassador responsible for relations with No 10. Following his resignation from the NRA (on his promotion to Director of Administration at Associated Newspapers) liaison with Downing Street passed to the NRA chairman of the day — Minute 4560 (18 February 1954). In 1955 there were concerns that the Downing Street press office was failing to co-operate with the newsreel companies and the NRA took this up with No 10, via its contacts within Conservative Central Office — see Minute 4850 (21 April 1955). On 14 July 1955 the NRA agreed to invite 'the [Prime Minister's] PPS' to 'lunch with the Principals at some future date to discuss ways and means of the Newsreels working more closely with the present Government'. (Minute 4908). The result was that the Prime Minister (Eden) 'granted' the newsreels an interview in December for presentation in their New Year issues — see Minute 4940 (17 November 1955).

<sup>50</sup> Minute 5434 (18 December 1958).

<sup>51</sup> Minute 5091 (22 August 1956).

<sup>52</sup> Minute 5170 (21 February 1957). See also Minutes: 5276 (21 November 1957), 5283 (28 November 1957), 5294 (19 December 1957), 5296 (23 January 1958) and 5321 (20 February 1958). On 19 November 1958 the NRA heard that the Registrar of the Restrictive Practices Court had taken out a reference against the NRA. The NRA considered the timing inappropriate, given news of the imminent closure of Gaumont British and Universal, and asked for a postponement. 'Members discussed this advice, and agreed that as three of the five newsreel companies had gone out of business, and, moreover, as newsreel rentals have only increased 25% since before the war whilst production costs have risen by over 200%, the remaining members of the Association (who were originally parties to the Agreements) felt there was no case to answer and were disinclined therefore to incur any unnecessary expenditure in defending same.' (Minute 5423).

Legal advice was received on 18 December 1958, setting out grounds for defending the restrictions, and the solicitor (Mr Nance of Booth and Blackwell) was instructed to discuss the matter with the Registrar. An Extraordinary Meeting on 16 January 1959 recorded the NRA agreeing to cancel the Library Material Agreement (LMA) and that 'each member company shall henceforth be free in all respects to make its own terms as to prices and conditions.' (Minute 5442) By 18 February 1959 the MRPC had clearly considered the rota system to be a restrictive practice, but had not referred it to the Restrictive Practices Court (Minute 5451). That was the last time that this subject appeared in the minutes.

<sup>53</sup> The system of charges was confirmed with the existing rates (no details provided) at the meeting held on 22 November 1956 (Minute 5120). It was rescinded on 9 January 1957 (Minute 5141) and the NRA agreed in principle to register both the Price Schedule Agreement and the LMA with the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission. The NRA reaffirmed its satisfaction with the LMA rates and decided that it was up to individual companies to follow it or not. (Minute 5144 from the same meeting.) On 21 February 1957 the NRA accepted

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Sir Gordon Craig's suggestion that a minimum price for Library Material would eliminate confusion and the NRA rescinded the decision taken in Minute 5144 (Minute 5165). The NRA finally decided to register the LMA under the Act and that it would establish a scale of minimum prices for the sale of library material for television films (Minute 5170 [21 February 1957]). (Interestingly, Minute 5118 [22 November 1956] records that the NRA refused to supply the BBC with 'library material of the 1956 Grand National and Derby Races for inclusion in "Television Sports Review of the Year".')

<sup>54</sup> See Alf Tunwell, 'Newsreel Monopoly: Personal Statement', in *Impact*, Spring, 1949, pp. 24-26. Tunwell argues that the NRA helped freeze out MGM's *Metro News* and *Tele News*.

<sup>55</sup> A good example of the often tortuous processes through which the NRA — probably like most organisations of this type — needed to pass before taking collective action is illustrated by the way in which this issue was handled. The NRA considered a draft submission to the Board of Trade on 22 August 1956 (Minute 5076) and returned to the matter on 9 January 1957 (Minute 5150). It re-emerged on 18 July 1957 when the NRA agreed, in the light of the closure of British Paramount, to bring the newsreels' case to the attention of government once again. A letter was to be drafted and, once approved by the member companies' boards, sent to government (Minute 5236). It was again considered on 21 October when a further draft of the letter appears to have been ready for agreement by the member companies (Minute 5263). By 21 November the NRA had decided to defer the despatch until a meeting had been held with ex-Pathe boss Howard Thomas who was, by this time, working in television (it took place on 28 November). A further draft was prepared and the NRA agreed to submit it for final approval by member companies' boards before submission to the Board of Trade (Minute 5297 of 23 January 1958). It had, therefore, taken sixteen months to reach this stage.

At the same meeting, it was agreed that Gaumont British should compile a film setting out the case for opposing the levy (Minute 5304). By 20 March 1958 it was reported that Pathe had taken over making the anti-tax film since Gaumont had said it had no intention of making the film and was not interested in it (Minute 5333). This did not stop Castleton-Knight, who was at his last NRA meeting, from ordering prints of it, however. The NRA agreed that the Chairman and Sir Gordon Craig should approach 'certain members' of the Cinematograph Advisory Council to try to interest them in the NRA's case. The representatives to be approached were Sir Alexander King, Sir Tom O'Brien, Mr Hinge and Mr Elvin. On 24 April 1958 the NRA was given details of the lobbying activities, although, frustratingly, details were not provided.

On 24 July 1958 it was agreed that the Chairman should seek to put the NRA's case to Dr Charles Hill, who was the Minister responsible for co-ordinating the conservative government's information activities (Minute 5391). The results of this meeting were reported on 21 August (Minute 5397) and it was agreed to send a letter putting the NRA's case to the Prime Minister, subject to the endorsement of the Council and the member companies' boards (Minute 5397). Thus two years had elapsed.

<sup>56</sup> Minute 5277 (21 November 1957).

<sup>57</sup> Minute 5278 (21 November 1957).

<sup>58</sup> Minute 5281 (28 November 1957).

<sup>59</sup> G Thomas Cummins, 'The Cinema Newsreel and the Impact of Television', *The Financial Times* (23 September 1957).

<sup>60</sup> Minute 5160 (21 February 1957).

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- <sup>61</sup> Minute 5188 (18 April 1957).
- <sup>62</sup> £233.49. Minute 5207 (27 May 1957).
- <sup>63</sup> Minute 5223 (27 June 1957).
- <sup>64</sup> Minutes 5242 ( 3 October 1957) and 5254 (24 October 1957).
- <sup>65</sup> Minutes 5256 (24 October 1957) and 5339 (20 March 1958).
- <sup>66</sup> Minute 5428 (18 December 1958).
- <sup>67</sup> Minute 5443 (21 January 1959).
- <sup>68</sup> Minute 5455 (5 March 1959) and Minute 5459 (18 March 1959).
- <sup>69</sup> Minute 5489 (15 June 1950).
- <sup>70</sup> Peter Noble (ed.), *British Film and Television Yearbook*, 1968 (London: British and American Film Press, 1968), p. 421.