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Pinewood

Anatomy of a Film Studio in Post-war Britain

Sarah Street

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CHAPTER 1

Setting the Film Studio Stage

Abstract This chapter introduces the book's main themes and approaches, setting out the key questions it engages with regarding Pinewood's history and reputation. Relevant literature on Pinewood and film studios is surveyed as context for the book's film-historical-materialist methodology combined with a 'tectonic' approach applied in the context of film studio analysis. The chapter presents a brief early history and information about Pinewood's foundation in 1936, its development as a studio facility, and its experience of being requisitioned during the Second World War. The chapter sets out how the book's particular structure and 'pivot' focus produces a micro history which offers new insights into the material, cultural, and social role of film studios during a key period of British film history.

Keywords Studios · Pinewood · Film History · Britain

This book investigates how Pinewood came to be Britain's most renowned and enduring major film studio. Focusing on the immediate years following the Second World War, it presents a revisionist, micro history organised around pivotal thematic areas which were crucial to understanding the studios' ongoing activities and sustainability during a period of severe economic constraints. In 1936 the film industry's expansion was reflected in the foundation of two new state-of-the-art studios

by different producer-entrepreneurs: Alexander Korda's Denham Studios, and J. Arthur Rank's Pinewood Studios. Built to last at a time when ambitions for the British film industry were high, both studios however had very different lifespans. From 1939 they were jointly controlled by J. Arthur Rank as D & P Studios, but rather than tie their fates more firmly together, Denham was closed as operating film studios in 1952. Pinewood, by contrast, was retained as a major production facility and today is a large, premier film studio complex used by filmmakers from all over the world. Pinewood's endurance is the focus of this book, but Denham's closure is in its shadow as a key strategic move by the Rank Organisation which in part enabled Pinewood to survive. Looking into Pinewood's structural operation, its facilities, and personnel in a pivotal period of its history also helps to explain its longevity.

While Pinewood has featured in historical accounts of the period, particularly with reference to films produced by the Rank Organisation, this book foregrounds the studios as material infrastructure.¹ As a study of cultures of management and labour organisation, new technologies, and innovative production methods, it presents new research into Pinewood's ultimate survival. A materialist-focused history of Pinewood foregrounds the roles that technologies, working practices, and leisure activities organised at the studios played in forming and sustaining Pinewood's studio culture over time. A central question addressed is how new practices and cultures of technological innovation became embedded in the studios' very fabric. In addition, some key films produced at Pinewood in 1946–1950 inform the analysis to demonstrate how filmmaking practices and aesthetic approaches changed during a challenging period of economic recession for the film industry.

Existing books about British film studios tend to be the well-illustrated, coffee-table variety which deal with films and genres, rather than concentrating on the studios as physical infrastructures, creative hubs, and

¹ George Perry, *Movies from the Mansion: A History of Pinewood Studios* (London: Pavilion, 1986) concentrates on the films produced at Pinewood and the history of the Rank Organisation rather than Pinewood as material infrastructure. Alan Wood, *Mr Rank: A Study of J. Arthur Rank and British Films* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), and one chapter of Sue Harper and Vincent Porter's *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) focus on the Rank Organisation; Pinewood is mentioned only briefly.

communities of workers.² It is only in recent years that research into film studios has become a more complex subject for academic analysis. This has been energised by research which conceptualises early studios in Hollywood as multi-functional architectural spaces which framed, facilitated, and enacted imaginative responses to the environment and technological change.³ By focusing on studios as heterotopic spaces Brian R. Jacobson observes that ‘studios offered key sites for exploring the nature of modern space and spatial experience by juxtaposing simulated versions of any and all real spaces in a single location’.⁴ While *In the Studio*, an edited collection, deals with a wider corpus of countries, including my own chapter on Pinewood Studios, it remains the case that studio studies are still an underdeveloped area; the overwhelming focus has been on Hollywood rather than Europe.⁵

This book’s methodology is based on the idea of ‘tectonics’ as applied to the case of film studios. This offers a route to understanding their multiple, stratified, and shifting experiences as structures embedded within their local geographies but which changed, often significantly, over time and according to circumstance.⁶ As an architectural term tectonics also highlights inter-relationships between design, structure, construction, and constructional craft, as well as a building’s ‘narrative capacity...primarily with respect to itself, but also as a part of a more

² A notable exception is David Threadgall, *Shepperton Studios: An Independent View* (London: British Film Institute, 1994). Elizabeth Grey’s *Behind the Scenes in a Film Studio* (London: Phoenix House, 1966) is a rare example of reference to Pinewood’s facilities including a plan and description of some of its functions.

³ Brian R. Jacobson, *Studios Before the System: Architecture, Technology, and the Emergence of Cinematic Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁴ Jacobson, *Studios Before the System*, 205.

⁵ Sarah Street, ‘Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation’ in Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and Its Material Environments: Visual Creation and Its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 103–21.

⁶ Tectonics is more typically a geological term which references the movement of plates in the earth’s crust producing seismic phenomena. It is often applied to architecture as in Pierre von Meiss, *Elements of Architecture: From Form to Place + Tectonics* (London: E & FN Spon, 2013), 244, and Chad Schwartz, *Introducing Architectural Tectonics: Exploring the Intersection of Design and Construction* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

general circumstance (physical, social, political, economic etc.)'.⁷ These integrative elements of tectonic theory which highlight 'the interwoven relationship between space, function, structure, context, symbolism, representation and construction' provide a framework within which to consider Pinewood as imbricated within, and generative of, resilient economic structures, technologies, and workplace cultures.⁸ Pinewood's story is thus orientated towards how its physical, spatial, and technological characteristics, combined with an ability to adapt these according to circumstance, contributed towards its longevity as well as having a profound impact on the people who worked there and the films they produced.

In addition to facilitating deeper understandings of the place, space, and function of film studios, histories grounded in material processes and phenomena bring to light lesser-known films which have eluded academic analysis. As this book demonstrates, these were significant for technical and other reasons at the time of their production and release, as evidenced by detailed accounts in the trade press and fan magazines of visits to studio sets which tracked new processes and methods. This alerts us to the potential of re-evaluating often overlooked information, what I term 'studio relay', an idea which is expanded upon in Chapters 3 and 4, as located in familiar historical sources such as the *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Film Industry*, British trade papers which frequently published reports on production processes and technologies. Reportage of new studio techniques became part of a film's attraction when the details of sets, equipment, and innovative technical methods used for scenes and sequences were highlighted. This approach overcomes dualisms between representation and technology to probe more deeply into the profoundly interdependent logic of that relationship. It also highlights the contribution of workers whose skills and ingenuity are typically overshadowed by attention to roles such as director. In taking advantage of the turn towards Production Studies and greater appreciation of collaboration in film production, this book introduces new names and activities to British

⁷ See Robert Maulden, *Tectonics in Architecture* (MIT theses, 1986), 11; Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

⁸ Schwartz, *Introducing Architectural Tectonics*, xxxii.

film history.⁹ During the years under investigation, Pinewood thus serves as a model of this kind of analysis while seeking to connect a specific group of films to its structural foundations and operational systems.

PINEWOOD'S FOUNDATION AND DESIGN

As a means of introducing Pinewood as a studio structure it is necessary to outline its early history and architectural properties. The opening of new studios including the British and Dominion facilities at Elstree in 1929, Shepperton Studios in 1931, and Denham and Pinewood in 1936 constituted a major shift in the ambitions of the British film industry.¹⁰ Buoyed by the expansion promoted by the Cinematograph Films Act 1927, and after adjusting to the introduction of sound, there was sufficient confidence to build Denham (seven stages with a total floor area of 110,500 sq. ft.) and Pinewood (five stages with a total floor area of 72,000 sq. ft.) as major new facilities which were instrumental in shifting the centre of importance in terms of the location of British studios 'a whole compass point from the north to the west of London'.¹¹ The West offered fog-free spaces, spacious land, gardens, and stately houses that could be used as sets. This opportunity was taken up by Charles Boot, chairman and managing director of a building company who in 1935 acquired a country estate not far from Denham in Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire, where he co-developed a new studio project with flour mill entrepreneur and religious filmmaker J. Arthur Rank who became the first chairman of Pinewood Studios Ltd.

Pinewood was designed by consulting architect A. F. B. Anderson, later known for theatre reconstruction work, and H. S. Scropton who was responsible for architecture and construction of works. Anderson worked in the same practice as Robert Atkinson who designed many iconic Art

⁹ Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, John T. Caldwell (eds.), *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Martin Stollery, 'Technicians of the Unknown Cinema: British Critical Discourse and the Analysis of Collaboration in Film Production', *Film History* 21, no. 4 (2009): 373–93.

¹⁰ Shepperton still exists today as part of the Pinewood Group. The British and Dominion Studios at Elstree, founded by Herbert Wilcox, were destroyed by fire in 1936 and thereafter Wilcox transferred production to Pinewood.

¹¹ P. L. Mannock, 'Our Studios of the Future', *Kinematograph Weekly*, Supplement, 1 October 1936, iv.

Deco buildings. Art Deco was not however chosen for Pinewood which relied on its visual identity and ‘fantastic functionality’ on the historic splendour of Heatherden Hall, the large Victorian mansion with an elegant columned frontage on the 100 acres estate purchased by Charles Boot.¹² In this sense there was somewhat of a schism between the decorative Hall and the workings of a modern film studio. Pinewood did not replicate Denham’s modernist, tectonic integration of exterior and interior.¹³ The new studio was also more isolated than Denham, with no nearby railway line or public bus route. The studios were located well back from the main road on the parkland north of Heatherden Hall. After passing through a double lodge workers and visitors encountered a marble figure of Prometheus which symbolised the spirit of invention therein. The luxurious mansion, complete with a Turkish bath, library, music room, gymnasium, swimming pool, and beautiful gardens, was the location of the Pinewood Club as illustrated in Fig. 1.1, a residential and social club ‘for members of both sexes and their friends, interested and/or engaged in the development and advancement of the British Film Industry’.¹⁴

The three-storey administrative block adjoining Heatherden Hall had a board room panelled with the inlaid, gilded library from the RMS *Mauretania*, the ocean liner scrapped in 1935. Pinewood’s self-conscious ‘narrative’ emphasised luxury, harmony, and beauty and was thus slightly different from Denham’s modern, streamlined character. The importance of establishing a congenial atmosphere was stressed by Richard Norton, a former banker and managing director of Pinewood:

Every care and consideration has been used to make what is ostensibly an industrial centre a harmonious whole with its inspiring surroundings, but I take pride and pleasure in being able to state with confidence that producers, stars and staff can live, eat and work under comfortable, healthy

¹² ‘Fantastic functionality’ is a term developed by Brian R. Jacobson which refers to studio architecture in early Hollywood as having functional, utilitarian interiors combined with elaborate exterior façades that projected spectacular images of corporate branding. Brian R. Jacobson, ‘Fantastic Functionality: Studio Architecture and the Visual Rhetoric of Early Hollywood’, *Film History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 52–81.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Denham Studios see Sarah Street, ‘Designing the Ideal Film Studio in Britain’, *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 330–58.

¹⁴ Pinewood Club members’ book: Lazare Meerson archive, 20 July 1938, Bibliothèque du Film, Paris.



Fig. 1.1 Bathers in the Pinewood Club, c. 1936. Alamy stock images

and beautiful conditions, that cannot be found in any other studio in the world...These new studios have in some curious way developed a definite personality of their own, and I shall do everything possible to foster their glamour, a quality hitherto non-existent in our film world.¹⁵

The studios' opening was well-publicised, including in an American trade almanac which announced its features as the 'most modern in the world' but also featuring details of the Pinewood Club.¹⁶ The aesthetic incongruity between Heatherden Hall's grandeur, the administrative block, and the complex of sprawling, factory-link buildings can be seen from a mid-1930s aerial map in Fig. 1.2.

¹⁵ Richard Norton, 'The Functions of Pinewood', *Kinematograph Weekly*, Supplement, 1 October 1936, iii-iv.

¹⁶ Terry Ramsaye (ed.), *Motion Picture Almanac* (New York: Quigley Publishing, 1938-1939), 963.

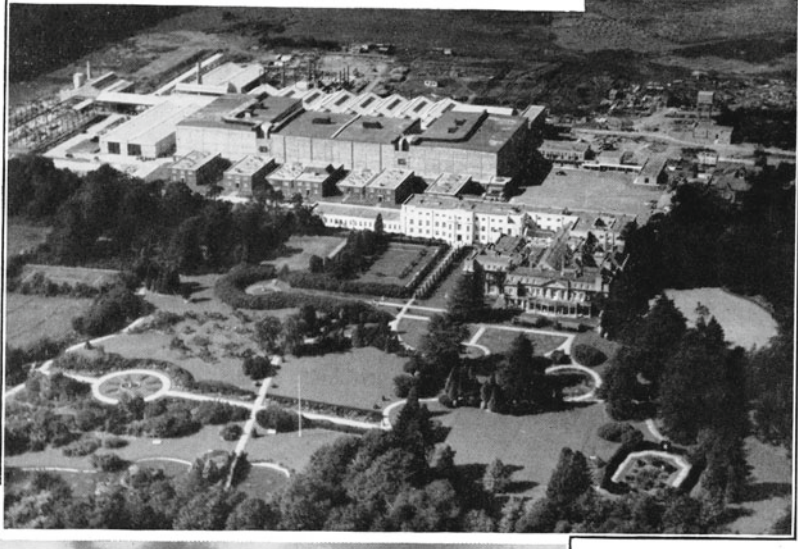


Fig. 1.2 Pinewood Studios, 1936. Alamy stock images

The idyllic pastoral surroundings, country mansion, and luxurious club connoted a traditional ‘personality’, or image of Englishness, whereas the streamlined, Art Deco façade and Korda’s network of émigré professionals associated Denham more with a modernist, cosmopolitan ethos. Graham McCallum, a sound engineer who worked at Denham, Pinewood, and Elstree in the late 1930s, recalled that Denham’s sound department had a reputation for being ‘a bit snooty’ on account of Korda’s reputation and extensive press coverage of the many ambitious films made at Denham.¹⁷ Rank, on the other hand, was an entrepreneur interested in producing and distributing religious films, a background that could not compare with Korda’s glittering reputation as the director of *Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), a box-office success in Britain and, unusually for a British film, also in America.¹⁸

¹⁷ Gordon McCallum BECTU interview no. 58, 19 November 1988. British Entertainment History Project.

¹⁸ Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 47–55.

A survey of productions for 1936–1938 shows that the 31 feature films produced at Denham and 49 at Pinewood tended to reflect the studios' different images. Denham's films were marked by an emphasis on spectacle, pageantry, and internationalism, many with high budgets and employing émigré professionals. Five films were shot in Technicolor, compared with only one at Pinewood. At Denham more use was made of the studio lots for exterior sets than at Pinewood, and foreign locations were also used such as India for *The Drum* (Zoltan Korda, 1938) and the Italian Alps for *The Challenge* (Milton Rosmer and Luis Trenker, 1938). Denham's expansive image as expressed by its long, narrow layout, and extensive exterior lots was conducive to the ambition of its pre-war output, even if this involved financial over-extension and accusations of mismanagement from the Prudential. The Prudential Assurance Company had heavily invested in Korda's London Film Productions in 1934 and thereafter closely monitored its management and finances.¹⁹ Pinewood's productions, by contrast, tended to be lower-budget and less likely to use exterior lots or location shooting. *The Observer's* film critic C. A. Lejeune described it as 'the neatest studio I have ever seen; a small but shining model factory in the heart of a model village'.²⁰ The emphasis on musical comedy, musicals, crime thrillers, and use of British stars from radio and popular theatre connoted a domestic, studio-based ethos that was facilitated by Pinewood's compact layout and self-contained stages which enabled studio-based realism that on occasion showcased feats of technical ingenuity.

One of its largest stages, for example, was used for the Grand Hotel set and sequence which featured a spectacular 'impossible from human vision' long crane shot in *Young and Innocent* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1937) that ranged from a distance of 145 feet across a crowded dance floor to an extreme close-up of the villain's twitching eyes as he plays the drums on the stage. This celebrated shot was described as 'a technical triumph necessitating the use of a special lens and mount which were invented for

¹⁹ Sarah Street, 'The Prudential Group Archive: Alexander Korda, London Film Productions and Denham Studios', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 19, no. 4 (2022): 447–69.

²⁰ C. A. Lejeune, 'Modern Films in the Making II—Pinewood', *Observer*, 7 November 1937, 13.

the occasion by the Gaumont-British camera department'.²¹ Pinewood's large 110 × 165 ft. stage enabled state-of-the-art technology to be showcased, even if the bespoke lens was not actually produced at the studio. Its generous capacity, particularly when compared with the largest stage (85 × 136 ft.) at the Gaumont-British studios at Lime Grove, made Pinewood the obvious studio to make the best use of the latest technology for this spectacular sequence.²² Pinewood's reputation for facilitating technical innovation was thus in place at its very beginnings.

Boot took a personal interest in planning Pinewood following discussions with academic and politician Sir Auckland Geddes about designing the ideal studio in Britain.²³ Hollywood's studios were researched and Jack Okey, who had been involved in Denham's design, was consulted during the process. In addition, the Ufa studios in Berlin were studied by James B. Sloan, former production manager for Basil Dean and British National, who advised on Pinewood's technical equipment and became its first general manager. Sloan had experience working in Europe, particularly as production manager and adviser to Rex Ingram in the Victorine Studios in Nice. These influences tended to be downplayed, the British trade press preferring to cite Hollywood's studios as offering lessons on design and planning.²⁴ In an influential report on British studios in 1945 Helmut Junge was however critical of the Warners studios at Burbank as too spread out, referring to the complex as a 'great jumble of buildings' with too much duplication of stores and offices as the number of stages increased, the newer ones inconveniently located some distance from the central workshop.²⁵

²¹ H. Mario Raimondo-Souto, *Motion Picture Photography: A History, 1891–1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 169.

²² Figures from the *Kinematograph Year Book* 1940 and Gaumont British relaunch brochure, c. 1933. The film was distributed by General Film Distributors, which from 1937 was controlled by Rank.

²³ Sir Auckland Geddes proposed the idea of creating a new British studio in the early 1920s, following a visit to California's studio lots. He planned with Charles Boot to build a studio at Elstree, but this never materialised. Boot finally realised his ambitions once J. Arthur Rank and Lady Yule provided financial backing for Pinewood.

²⁴ 'Welcome to Pinewood', editorial, *Kinematograph Weekly*, Supplement, 1 October 1936, iii.

²⁵ Helmut Junge, *Plan for Film Studios: A Plea for Reform* (London: Focal Press, 1945), 26–7.

Junge considered Pinewood to be closer to the ideal studio than Denham in several respects, even though Denham had more stages. He was particularly impressed by Pinewood's more compact layout and unit production principle whereby each unit had its own separate dressing rooms, offices, and camera room. Rank realised that to be successful studios had to facilitate several productions at the same time, renting studio space as well as being available to units connected with the Rank Organisation. Norton described it as a 'service studio for producers who wish to avail themselves of its unique and ideal conditions and organisation'.²⁶ Denham's heavy reliance on films produced by London Film Productions resulted in financial losses, and the studio's design did not so readily accommodate many different units producing films simultaneously. Norton soon formed Pinebrook, a low-budget film production company intended to fill the studios; Pinewood also provided space for resident companies including British and Dominion, Herbert Wilcox, British National and British Paramount. Pinewood's compact layout was a visible manifestation of how its architecture facilitated its longevity, enabling its own narrative as a resilient, enduring film studio to persist, deepen, and extend to the present day.

As illustrated in the studios' plan in Fig. 1.3 Pinewood had five main stages, three of them measuring 165×110 ft., with one divided into two smaller stages of 110×83 ft., and a fifth stage that was separate from this grouping. The total floor space was 72,000 sq. ft. Two of the large stages had a floor tank which could be flooded or heated as required, a very useful feature Denham lacked. The three large stages also had a central pit which facilitated working with sets on two levels and the central position of the property store gave immediate and equal access to all stages. These were constructed on a steel skeleton framework with solid concrete walls and sound-proofed ceilings. Each stage was air-conditioned by rotary fans mounted on the roof, and fog and dust filters were provided. Pinewood had its own powerhouse but unlike Denham this was more favourably located away from the art department and stages. The cutting rooms were near to the review theatre, another advantage over Denham. The system of covered ways between the workshops and stages facilitated quick, easy access between spaces and protection from bad weather.

²⁶ Norton, 'The Functions of Pinewood', *Kinematograph Weekly*, Supplement, 1 October 1936, iii.

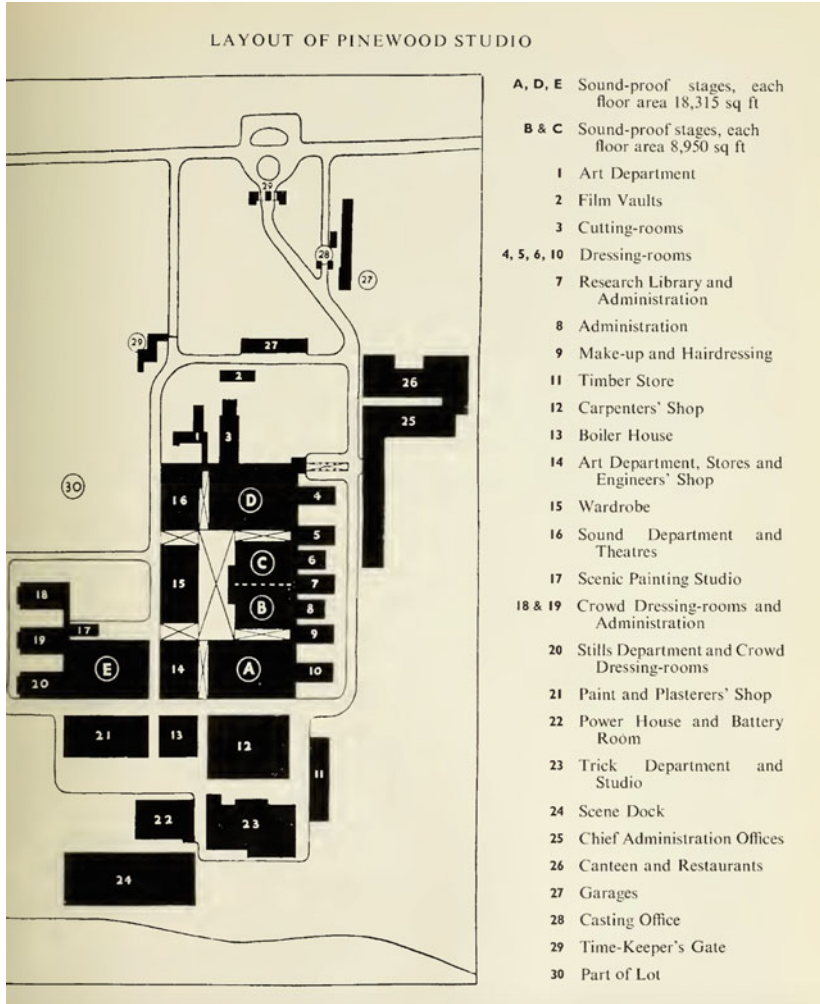


Fig. 1.3 Pinewood layout from Edward Carrick, *Designing for Films* (London: The Studio Publications, 1949 edition), p. 17

Pinewood was not however perfect since stage five's position, cut-off from the four grouped stages, made it less convenient for use in conjunction with the others. The carpenter's shop was located alongside one of the big stages, a position that risked the transference of noise and dirt. A final drawback identified by Junge was that because the scene dock and timber store were close to the road leading out through the site's main entrance, lorries passing the nearby dressing rooms, administrative, and club buildings created noise.²⁷ Like Denham, the workers' canteen and the restaurant were at opposite ends of the complex. Similar 'class conscious' dining arrangements at Ealing were commented on by production manager and assistant director Erica Masters, when recalling past conditions in studios with cinematographer Sydney Samuelson, who remarked that Pinewood still had two canteens separating staff in 1995. From this perspective, the worldview associated with Heatherden Hall reflected broader social class distinctions.²⁸ The contrast between the Hall's ornate Victorian architecture and the studio complex's modern, inner fabric may have created tensions within the 'harmonious whole' described above by Norton.

POST-WAR PINEWOOD AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

Pinewood was requisitioned in the Second World War. Commercial feature film production ceased but the studios were used by the Crown Film Unit, the Army Film and Photographic Unit, and the RAF Film Production Unit. Pinewood was also used as a subsidiary Mint for coin striking and for storage by the Ministry of Food.²⁹ Denham had been permitted to continue commercial feature film production during the war, in part because of its reputation as Britain's premier studio. On the other hand, the contribution made by Pinewood as a factory for war propaganda gave it a strategic status and enabled some levels of experimentation to continue. After the war Pinewood's de-requisition was held up somewhat by its designation as a Protected Area for secret work and

²⁷ Junge, *Plan for Film Studios*, 24–6.

²⁸ Erica Masters and Sydney Samuelson, BECTU interview no. 362, 2 August 1995. British Entertainment History Project.

²⁹ Sarah Street, 'Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

the slow pace of the Crown Film Unit's post-war relocation to Beaconsfield studios. Pinewood was however back in commercial operation at the end of 1945. An interest in investigating new technologies was evident from a series of visits made by technicians to Hollywood's studios in 1945. Chapter 2 discusses these in detail, how they aimed to gather information and insights to inform Pinewood's post-war policies around equipment and studio infrastructures. The resulting debates influenced the development of key areas such as special effects, art direction practices, and the use of time saving, cost-cutting methods, and equipment. The impact on the slate of films produced at Pinewood in 1946–1950 under the umbrella of the Independent Producers provides an opportunity in Chapters 3 and 4 to track how Pinewood's post-war culture evolved as a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking. While this resembled the mid-range budgeted type of films produced before the Second World War, the adoption of newer, more efficient modes was key to Pinewood's identity, an idea that connects prevailing studio practices to the types of films produced. While the 'quality' films produced by the Independent Producers represented an extraordinarily rich period in terms of the range of themes and genres they tackled, the chapters demonstrate how the desire to rationalise production methods was an important aspect of this trajectory; innovation was not necessarily compromised by economy. Many fascinating details of these developments were 'relayed' by studio correspondents reporting in the trade press.

An important aspect of Pinewood's evolving culture was how management sought to impose a set of new practices and economies. These attempts are analysed in Chapter 5 alongside trade union organisation and activity. It is argued that the studios were able to function with a degree of independence from managerial control. To some extent producers and workers were able to negotiate change on acceptable, though still relatively stringent, terms. The existence of a vibrant studio culture outside of working hours is documented in Chapter 6. It draws on the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, a newly discovered primary source, which is a rare surviving example of a film studio magazine, produced at Pinewood by employees in 1946–1947. The magazine articulated Pinewood's culture as a social enterprise as well as provided insights into its various working spaces. It brings to life the reality of being a studio employee, the day-to-day activities that are rarely described in film histories. The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides a rare glimpse into how studio employees bonded through sports and social clubs, musical and film groups, organising a Christmas pantomime, putting on art exhibitions, writing short

stories, sharing studio gossip, and reporting issues of concern such as transport to work and long working hours. Chapter 7 brings together the arguments advanced in the book concerning how a materialist, tectonic focus on a major, surviving film studio during pivotal years of its lifetime set in train an infrastructure that contributed to its longevity as a major international film studio that is still operating as a ‘world famous iconic studio’.³⁰

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³⁰ As described on Pinewood’s website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://pinewoodgroup.com/studios/pinewood-studios>.



CHAPTER 2

Cultures of Innovation at Pinewood

Abstract This chapter is based on documentation from the British Film Institute’s Special Collections which offers new, primary information on visits made in 1945 by British technicians to film studios in Hollywood. The visits aimed to gather information on and insights about contemporary Hollywood practices which then informed Pinewood’s post-war policies around equipment and studio infrastructures. The documentation sheds light on strategic areas such as special effects, set design, the evolution of Independent Frame technologies as well as attempts to change working practices at Pinewood during a time of economic recession. The chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on how British studio practices differed from Hollywood’s, with commentaries from technicians and leading figures in the film industry including Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, and cinematographer Ronald Neame.

Keywords Technology · Special Effects · Studios · Labour · Hollywood

In the immediate post-war years studios faced considerable problems re-adjusting to normal operations after being requisitioned, physically damaged, and subject to the severe material shortages which had affected

industries and the population during wartime.¹ The film industry was entering a period of instability as it waited for information on state legislation, and experienced fallout from the ‘Dalton Duty’ imposed on American films in August 1947 which resulted in Hollywood’s embargo of the British market which lasted until March 1948.² In July 1947 the *Kinematograph Weekly* anticipated that the following months would place great stress on the capabilities of British studios as they attempted to cut costs and increase production by reducing the time it took to shoot a film. As a studio associated with ‘quality’ pictures Pinewood was of strategic importance in meeting these challenges, even though its more complex productions such as *Blanche Fury* went seriously behind schedule.³ The pressures to produce British films of sufficient quality to respond decisively to the temporary absence of American imports were evident in the trade’s scrutiny of rising costs. Several strategic areas were identified as having risen sharply since 1938: materials, particularly plaster, paint, and timber; equipment; processing; technical and manual labour, including the relatively high salaries of stars and directors.⁴ Timber, in particular, was in short supply so that studios had to use materials such as plaster as a substitute. This did not however solve the problem entirely since increased demand for plaster also made it more expensive. It seemed as if the industry was caught in an impossible situation at the very time when it was required to take major steps forward. Much depended on British studios’ ability to turn out the films desperately needed in cinemas. While re-issues were an obvious help, the temporary absence of Hollywood’s films placed emphasis on both the quantity and quality of new British films as well on how best to sustain the industry’s reputation in the longer term.

This challenging context prompted studios to review their practices, and Pinewood was particularly keen to develop methods and facilities that would ameliorate the short-term production crisis while at the same time future-proof the studios. Hollywood was looked to as an environment which encouraged technical and scientific research that made it practically self-sufficient. As Marzola has demonstrated, with the establishment of a

¹ Sarah Street, ‘Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

² For details of the boycott and settlement see Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2nd edition 2009), 16–17.

³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 10 July 1947, iv.

⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 10 July 1947, iv–v.

technological service sector catering specifically to the needs of the film industry, ‘Hollywood became not just a cultural force, but also a technological hub demanding recognition’.⁵ Access to knowledge was a key driver in maintaining a vertically integrated studio system that for many in Britain was the epitome of technical quality and professionalism. As an integral part of the Rank Organisation’s vertically integrated operation, it was essential that Pinewood was a centre of technical innovation. It was in this spirit that in the spring of 1945, a few months before the cessation of the Second World War, a few key British technicians visited Hollywood. As this chapter details, these visits were crucial drivers of Pinewood’s technological introspection which occasioned the formation of several committees. These examined current kits, methods, and practices making some key recommendations and actions which helped to set Pinewood on a path to recovery and longer-term survival. This resilient ethos was underpinned by Rank’s own ‘unimpeachable’ commitment to research and innovation at a time when such attention was rare.⁶

LEARNING FROM HOLLYWOOD

One of the first technicians to visit Hollywood was Jack Harris, supervising editor at Pinewood who was widely regarded as one of Britain’s leading editors.⁷ Editing practices are not often documented, so the reports provide some key information on practices and equipment in Britain and Hollywood. Harris’ visit was motivated by more than mere interest in how other film industries functioned. He particularly wanted to investigate allegations that British films were notoriously ‘slow’ compared with Hollywood’s admired brisk transitions between sequences.⁸ Harris’ report focused attention on the cutting rooms, sound effects and music

⁵ Luci Marzola, *Engineering Hollywood: Technology, Technicians, and the Science of Building the Studio System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 72.

⁶ Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (1993), 121.

⁷ Harris was described by sound editor Winston (‘Wyn’) Ryder as a ‘film doctor’ who would skillfully ‘tie’ a film together, especially for inexperienced directors, in BECTU interview no. 11, 23 July 1987. British Entertainment History Project.

⁸ Roy Perkins and Martin Stollery, *British Film Editors: ‘The Heart of the Movie’* (London, British Film Institute, 2004), 131–2. This issue had been raised as early as 1931 following the release of Hollywood’s *The Front Page* (Lewis Milestone, 1931) in Robert Stevenson, ‘This tempo business’, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 16 July 1931, 37.

cutting departments, and film libraries at the major Hollywood studios.⁹ It noted that while methods and systems varied from studio to studio as in Britain, the organisation of cutting rooms and staff was directly controlled by an experienced, ‘keystone’ supervising editor. Rather than edit films the supervising editor oversaw all editing functions including inspecting daily rushes, liaising between editors and directors, and organising the administration associated with editing. Dialogue and action cutting were sub-departments, as were sound effects and music cutting. Harris was impressed by this system since it freed up editors from ‘much of the irksome responsibilities of his British counterpart’. He summed up the benefits: ‘If there is a Hollywood secret, it is specialization, co-ordination, and organization’.

The report in addition gives some insights into health and safety issues arising from hazards associated with editing. Studios were often dangerous environments for workers and occasionally the reports provide glimpses of these realities. Sound equipment firms were trying to design a compact editing machine that reduced the risk of migraines commonly suffered by editors, as well as replacing incandescent with fluorescent lighting to reduce eye strain and ‘frayed nerves’. The Moviola editing machine, designed for use by a single editor, was used in both Hollywood and Britain. Harris noted some improvements to aspects of the technology including converted synchronous rewinders and numbering machines which assisted in keeping track of rushes. The technology was considered important in allowing editors to exercise agency in cutting films since its focus on lone viewing militated against too much interference from a director.¹⁰ In Hollywood retakes of scenes considered deficient following a preview screening were possible but only permitted if vital. Even so, Harris found that ‘in spite of its lavishness’, an impression which reflected popular impressions of Hollywood excess, the emphasis was on exercising ‘extreme economies’. Previewing films to assess a film’s box-office potential was however a far more common occurrence in Hollywood than in Britain. This perhaps influenced the somewhat slower editing pace of British films which were more often altered at the script stage rather than after shooting. In 1949 Ealing’s chief editor Michael Truman was sent to Hollywood to observe how to make British films

⁹ British Film Institute (BFI) Special Collections, ITM-18849: Hollywood Reports, Tom White box 13.

¹⁰ Perkins and Stollery, *British Film Editors*, 147.

more acceptable to US audiences. American preview reactions to *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius 1949), a film he had edited, included restlessness during its slow opening. To rectify this Truman made cuts for the film's US release.¹¹

A series of meetings were held in the autumn of 1945 to discuss the reports produced by other technicians, with a view to assessing the direction British studios might take in introducing improvements in methods, production technologies, and organisations. The attendance list included Tom White, Chair of the Research Committee representing Independent Producers; the Archers' filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger; cinematographer Ronald Neame; David Rawnsley, head of Rank's Research Department and developer of the Independent Frame (a system discussed later in this chapter and also in Chapter 4); and art director L. P. Williams. The meetings brought out differences between the two production environments, with Hollywood rated superior in the following areas: greater cooperation between art and sound departments; superior post-synching; greater 'mike-consciousness' in ordinary recording and for later post-synching; better equipment and laboratories.¹²

Michael Powell, in particular, took on board the observations about 'mike-consciousness', recommending that post-synching should be used for exterior locations, and also for crane and tracking shots in the studio. The practice was indeed more prevalent in Hollywood where Ronald Neame discovered the average American film involved at least 25% post-synching, especially in studios such as Disney where dialogue and music were pre-recorded when 'live' characters were used. Another issue was how built ceilings on sets could interfere with the sound, especially if they involved beams and were 'over built'. Art director Maurice Carter later reported that although art directors in British studios did confer with sound and cameramen concerning ceiling pieces 'unfortunately these people were usually unable to appreciate the full implication of a drawing or model at pre-planning stage'.¹³ Art directors were also urged to avoid using rough flooring which could also cause difficulties with sound.

¹¹ Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 144–45.

¹² BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: minutes of special meeting with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 21 September 1945.

¹³ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Joint Production Advisory Committee (JPAC) minutes, 4 August 1949.

Enabling conversations between the various specialists who had visited Hollywood therefore encouraged the sharing of useful information which connected the various departments as a joint enterprise, rather than each operating discretely without knowing what might be problematic in relation to other areas.

While there was a tendency to rate British methods and facilities as inferior to Hollywood's, the tone of the meeting was to make constructive suggestions about how to improve British studios, such as by importing new equipment such as Bell and Howell printers in the laboratories, and Inter-Modulating Testing Equipment for Western Electric Sound that would improve testing the quality of sound recording. This was an example of how 'technological sharing' between America and Britain was being promoted at this time.¹⁴ While Hollywood's possession of experience, knowledge, and up-to-date equipment was seen to benefit the British visitors, the investigations were by no means a one-way conversation. In some cases, they led to somewhat strident nationalistic comments about what might be possible in Britain. David Hand, for example, an American animator who at that time was employed by Rank to set up GB Animation at the Moor Studio in Cookham, stressed the long-term benefits of developing new techniques and equipment in Britain: 'Too much stress should not be placed on Hollywood's methods—given equivalent equipment, British brains and aptitude would more than equal Hollywood's products—we could overtake without catching up'.

Hand had worked for Disney where pre-production preparation was intense, involving sketching shots and camera angles that were then shot on 16 mm film so they could be studied very precisely prior to the commencement of floor work in the studio. Given the stress placed on the importance of pre-production planning in subsequent schemes such as David Rawnsley's Independent Frame, it is significant that these recommendations were made as early as 1945 when filmmaking environments were being scrutinised in the context of post-war reconstruction. While Hand's prior experience working for Disney in America might have influenced him to promote Hollywood's methods, he argued instead for taking steps forward in Britain that would make the industry more self-sufficient. This aim was also evident in his development of GB Animation which did not tightly replicate Disney's style. Hand aimed

¹⁴ 'Technological sharing' is a term used by David Edgerton in a discussion of 'the movement of technologies between rich countries' in *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2006), 111.

in some respects to rival the American company by recruiting former Disney employees; importing equipment and materials; devising British cartoon characters; and establishing specialist training schemes for animators. GB Animation did not however survive the crisis facing Rank in the late 1940s, and when its first animated cartoons were not commercially successful the unit was closed in 1950.¹⁵

The inclusion of Powell and Pressburger (see Fig. 2.1) in these discussions placed the culture of independent production they represented with their company the Archers and its involvement in Independent Producers, at the heart of future planning. Powell was especially interested in exploring new approaches and methods. He enthusiastically endorsed David Rawnsley's ideas about the Independent Frame as early as 1945, advocating the cost and labour-saving scheme to Rank as a 'revolution...[and] a big step forward' with 'consequences as far-reaching as the introduction of colour and sound'.¹⁶ Rawnsley had worked as an art director and devised effects for several of the Archers' wartime films. Powell was impressed by what could be achieved in a studio and made full use of pre-planning methods and preparatory drawings and sketches for subsequent films such as *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), both of which aspired to achieve his aim of 'total cinema'.¹⁷

When they visited Hollywood Powell and Pressburger examined how casting and writing were organised, as well as how films could be tested with audiences before they were finalised and, depending on the result, whether they should be adjusted or even dropped. They noted that while methods differed between studios more than one writer usually worked on a script, a practice they did not recommend was adopted in Britain. On the other hand, they recognised that the work of writers was better known in Hollywood where scripts were published as plays. These publications drew attention to how scripts could be appreciated as texts while also creating advertising opportunities for the films.

¹⁵ Jose Bellido and Kathy Bowrey, *Adventures in Childhood: Intellectual Property, Imagination and the Business of Play* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 191–94.

¹⁶ Michael Powell to Rank, Feb 1945, quoted in Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 122.

¹⁷ Sarah Street, 'Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation' in Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 104–5.



Fig. 2.1 Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell, 1947. Alamy stock images

An interesting debate arose from differing practices concerning the extent to which projects could be revised, scenes re-shot or even scrapped before being released for cinema exhibition. As reported by Jack Harris and others, scripts were more readily revised in Britain than making alterations to a film after it had been shot; this was the reverse in Hollywood where films were more often changed after ‘sneak previews’ with audiences to gauge their reaction, a practice that was rarer in Britain. These

differences can be linked in part to geographic and logistical factors. Shooting retakes in response to the reaction of audiences to rough-cut previews was easier in Hollywood because actors were more centrally located than in Britain where actors generally had long commutes to studios located some distance from central London. Another difference was that in Hollywood there was no danger of actors being unavailable on account of theatrical work that competed for the time of British actors. It is also the case that re-shooting scenes in Hollywood could be done more easily in view of the greater number of available stages. Practicalities apart, in Britain, retakes were regarded as ‘a shameful process’, a view those at the meeting considered should change to ensure that films were at their best when released.¹⁸ An advantage of Britain’s less centralised studio system however was identified when Powell informed the meeting that he would sometimes talk over a script with the art director, or a carpenter, or any other member of the unit, and he would rewrite it if they made useful suggestions. In Hollywood scripts were nearer their final stages on commencement of shooting, leaving little room for changes prompted by expert advice from technicians. This meant that there were fewer opportunities for revisions prompted by the consultations Powell was used to having with the team in a spirit of co-operative ‘individuality of thought’. Observations such as this give an idea of prevailing cultural and organisational norms at British studios, particularly the idea that scriptwriting was a craft to which all members of a team could contribute.

The related issue of British films being thought of as ‘slow’ that had been raised in the discussions about editing practice was however in this context connected with the view that stylistically British scripts were less ‘tight’, with ‘many unnecessary shots of people going up and down stairs etc.’. Pressburger advised that such transitions were often unnecessary because audiences were quick to grasp plot points; rewriting a script would avoid unnecessary repetition or redundant shots. It was clear from these discussions that perceived qualitative differences between British and American films might be related to the ways in which films in production were revised either at the script stage or once a rough cut was available. Underlying questions of film style can also be connected to debates about whether a British pictorial film aesthetic, based on longer takes for showcasing scenery as developed in the silent era, persisted

¹⁸ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: minutes of special meetings with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 and 26 October 1945.

once sound film was introduced.¹⁹ This was an especially pressing issue at Pinewood since Rank was keen for British films to be successfully exhibited abroad. The extent to which they adopted Hollywood's editing style or presented something more nationally specific remained a tension throughout this period. As noted above, British films distributed in the USA were on occasion previewed there, and as a result changes were made to make them acceptable to local audiences and local censors. On the other hand, British films that were simply seen as poor imitations of Hollywood's were likely to be criticised. A few British films were successful in the US market precisely because of their perceived national difference.²⁰

When visiting Hollywood Powell and Pressburger found that prevailing organisational principles in studios had important consequences. The specifics provide excellent examples of the impact of different workplace cultures and conventions. Conditions and practices could differ in Hollywood from studio to studio and from film to film, but generally crews were not necessarily carried from film to film as they were in Britain, a practice Powell valued highly for forging a strong team spirit. The visitors also gleaned that the higher salaries paid to technicians, directors, and producers in Hollywood resulted in hyper-specialisation; very rigid discipline on the studio floor; and the prevalence of 'time is money' attitudes. The higher salaries meant that technicians such as lighting gaffers could prepare sets to a very high degree of technical precision using skills usually undertaken by higher-graded pre-lighting engineers. In Britain, the generally more cramped studio stages meant that set building and shooting often took place on the same stage, and this could result in on-floor chaos. L. W. Williams condemned the practice in Britain of destroying exterior sets and advocated building sets that could be re-used or modified for different productions as they were in Hollywood. These points accentuate how structural issues such as space impacted on productivity.

Further organisational differences emerged between the two production cultures. One advantage of working in Hollywood was that five or six stages could be used on a film so that as soon as scenes were completed

¹⁹ Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema, 1919–1928: Between Restraint and Passion* (London: British Film Institute, 2003).

²⁰ See several examples of this in Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*.

work could continue seamlessly on a different stage. This helped productions to be turned out quicker than in Britain where this was not possible because studios had fewer stages. Timekeeping was thought to be better in Hollywood, as well as ‘discipline of artistes in co-operating with technicians and craftsmen’. The impression of greater efficiency impressed the visitors who observed that even though salaries were generally higher for skilled workers, hierarchical organisational structures meant that American directors ‘would not think of consulting senior technicians for advice about camera set-ups’. On the other hand, it was recognised that this resulted in a factory-like operation whereas in Britain there was greater respect for individuality, specialist knowledge, and closer collaboration between directors and producers. They were involved in many more aspects than simply being given a finished script for shooting without alterations.²¹ These differences which Powell had identified in his contributions about making important changes to a script as a production progressed, haunted subsequent discussions of how to preserve beneficial elements of British conventions while at the same time addressing the urgent requirements to cut costs and increase production. In terms of Powell’s own reputation as a filmmaker associated with occasional extravagance, it is interesting to see him firmly on the side of economy and innovation. The good levels of collaboration found in British production environments were seen to promote valuable cultural values not so evident in Hollywood.

Special effects and process work was a major theme which the visitors to Hollywood were interested in observing. Every studio had an effects department within which most techniques were controlled including optical printing; matte artists; the creation of rain and weather effects; a processing laboratory and sometimes a dedicated stage. Screens and other equipment for techniques such as back projection were maintained to a much higher level than in Britain. The lack of efficient equipment in Britain forced visitors from Hollywood to bring kit with them such as sprinkler-heads which worked silently and quickly to achieve the desired rain effects.²² This observation led to some progressive recommendations by Michael Powell who was keen to reform prevailing British practices. His ideas were inspired by the technical achievements of *The Thief of*

²¹ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC minutes, 3 March 1949.

²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 September 1946, Studio Supplement, xxv.

Bagdad (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell and Tim Whelan 1940), particularly its deployment of effects such as travelling matte and Technicolor. Above all, Powell stressed the need for imaginative painters, with one person leading the design of a whole production and conceiving sets and costumes as inter-related determinants of a film's 'total' style: 'There should be someone to take a bird's eye view of all the processes involved, so that imagination was not subordinated to stereotyped design'. To advance this aim Powell suggested setting up a new department specifically tasked to experiment with design and colour. He was also keen on establishing special effects departments that would co-operate closely with art departments. These, and Powell's other suggestions, demonstrate how the visits to Hollywood inspired visionary ideas about how production cultures and practices could be improved. Several of these ideas were subsequently incorporated into Pinewood's activities and enhanced its reputation as a technical hub, such as the integration of set design, costume, special effects, and colour design in *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger and 1947) and *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger 1948).

NEW AND EXISTING EQUIPMENT

David Rawnsley was particularly inspired by the tone of the meetings which promoted the experimental culture he was advocating for the development of projects such as lenticular back projection screens and apparatus for more advanced rain and wind effects. Rawnsley was not only interested in testing new equipment but, importantly, in refining existing methods such as back projection that had been in use for over a decade. As Edgerton has noted, older technologies are not necessarily inferior to new; there are typically several alternatives at any given time which may or may not be adopted.²³ Consulting technicians about how equipment fared when in use was a crucial part of Pinewood's review of post-war conditions, and some technologies which had been used for years were reassessed and modified rather than abandoned when newer, more expensive equipment became available. Repair and maintenance were important forms of skill and expertise in the studios' workshops which enabled the 'tools' of filmmaking to be adapted to changing demands and priorities.

²³ Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*, 8.

A recurring issue was indeed the need to repair, replace, and make new purchases of equipment that was badly needed in British studios. In the war it appeared that only two kinds of British cameras were used mainly by the Service Film Units: Vintens' studio cameras and Newman Sinclair for filming exterior locations. Stocks were however depleted, and the pre-war reliance on and preferences for American equipment persisted when Rank, as chair of the British Film Producers Association (BFPA), led representations to the Board of Trade in the summer and autumn of 1945. While the Board wanted to encourage the development of British-manufactured equipment, the importation of American kit was authorised.²⁴ The Board of Trade was keen to support re-equipping studios as quickly as possible, stating that: 'Equipment is to the film industry what machine tools are to the engineering industry. Without first class equipment the quality of British films must suffer'.²⁵

In October 1945 Rawnsley discussed projectors and lenses for back projection with a representative from the British company Taylor Hobson, as well as collaborations with British Acoustic.²⁶ Representatives of Vinten, the British company that manufactured studio and laboratory equipment, went on tours of the rest of Europe and Scandinavia to promote their stock as part of their 1949 export drive.²⁷ For the Independent Frame experiment in 1948–49, Rawnsley used British manufacturers to develop and supply equipment which was designed specifically for its application at Pinewood.²⁸ Although some of this equipment was considered problematic, such as the rostrums and scaffolds that caused sound problems, on the whole the absorption of the new kit was received with positive recognition that it contributed significant improvements to Pinewood's technical infrastructure. The benefits were more fully appreciated later by visual effects specialists such as Charles Staffell.²⁹ Director and producer Peter Manley attributed Staffell's highly regarded

²⁴ The National Archives (TNA), BT 64/2178: Briefing note about film studio equipment dated 13 September 1945.

²⁵ TNA, BT 64/2178: Film Studio Equipment, September 13, 1945.

²⁶ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Film Research meeting, 19 October 1945.

²⁷ *Film Industry*, 28 July 1949, p. 5 and 3 November 1949, 5.

²⁸ *The Engineer*, 26 August 1949, 223–5.

²⁹ Staffell, quoted in, Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 130.

experiments with process projection to his early experiences working with Rawnsley's ideas.³⁰ Manley recalled that the Vickers rostrums were another very positive legacy of the Independent Frame. These were still working excellently at Pinewood in 1999 when he was interviewed, especially because they could be adjusted to any height. Manley considered the Independent Frame to be 'very fine' as a studio tool, but it could become 'unwieldy' if expected to do 'everything'.³¹ But when it was used strategically, as for some back projected and effects shots in *The Sound Barrier* (David Lean 1952), the results were 'excellent'.³²

In this way the discussions about how to boost British production were connected to a desire to learn from Hollywood but at the same time future-proof the film industry to be more self-sufficient. This was evident in subsequent experimental testing of various pieces of equipment. The special effects department was permitted funds in 1948 to try new equipment for multiple effects projection, and a Cyclops Viewfinder, normally used with television cameras, was tested to assess its potential to assist film directors. Its advantages were that it permitted instant examination of what was being transmitted, allowing the director to see exactly what would appear on the screen when a scene was being shot, instead of waiting for rushes to be developed and then deciding on expensive retakes.³³ Rawnsley was keen to learn from television, and one of Pinewood's stages was modified to test techniques he thought would be beneficial for film production.³⁴ At the time Rank was interested in television but conceived it as a public rather than a private medium for cinema exhibition rather than in the home.³⁵

At the same time Rank was learning about the visits to Hollywood he was caught up in broader discussions with officials about the future of film production and its contribution to saving dollars. The BFPA was also pressing for British employees to be trained in specialist roles such

³⁰ Peter Manley BECTU interview no. 448, 16 March 1999. British Entertainment History Project.

³¹ Peter Manley BECTU interview.

³² Peter Manley BECTU interview.

³³ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: D & P Studios General Managers' Committee meeting, 15 December 1948.

³⁴ *Cinema and Theatre Construction*, September 1947, 64.

³⁵ Macnab, J. *Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 205–13.

as directors, producers, production supervisors, model and trick artists, cameramen, make-up artists, and back projection technicians. The suggestion that the best people to provide training would come to Britain from America was objected to by the Association of Cine Technicians (ACT), unless the scheme was a reciprocal one which ensured that British technicians were trained in the specialist roles. In subsequent years, British technicians did indeed go to Hollywood for a few months under ACT reciprocal agreements with unions in Hollywood.³⁶ These discussions make clear that a studio such as Pinewood's physical infrastructure was about more than bricks and mortar. Equipment, old and new, was crucial in testing its past, present, and future capabilities. It was also vital to employ and train technicians who could make use of it to the best advantage.

THE JOINT PRODUCTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The minutes of Pinewood's Joint Production Advisory Committee (JPAC) provide further insights into cultures of innovation which operated at the studios. The Committee was formed in 1948 as a forum for 'constructive criticism' and the promotion of new ideas which would 'contribute towards more production and less costs, without detriment to quality'. All studio employees were invited to make practical suggestions to the Committee, and an incentive to do this was that 'should a person submit a suggestion that was worthwhile and was ultimately acted upon, he would be worthy of some recompense'.³⁷ Notices were put up in Pinewood's works canteen, cafeteria, south corridor, and outside the Carpenters' Shop. An Awards sub-committee was established to consider suggestions and to recommend those it considered feasible to the JPAC. Ideas that were submitted included a method to site lamps on stages that would save time. While this was considered too expensive the employee had nevertheless identified 'an outstanding need for improvement in lamp rigging to save lighting time'.³⁸ Another suggestion was to use metal rails manufactured in duralumin, a strong, lightweight, hard

³⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 21 August 1947, 12.

³⁷ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC minutes, 29 July 1948.

³⁸ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC Awards sub-committee report, 18 January 1949.

alloy of aluminium, to improve the spotting of sets and to facilitate the positioning of individual lamps. This was rejected because of likely vibrations unless the lamps were lighter in weight. Other technical ideas were received more favourably, such as when an employee was awarded five guineas for suggesting a beneficial gadget for diesel engines that would eliminate the sticking of any individual fuel pump and so avoid piston seizure. Another proposal was for a lift for raising lamps onto rostrums on location. This was rejected but the head of the electrical department was asked to discuss with staff to see what apparatus could be evolved, using part of the suggestion where practical. While the committee did not address health and safety issues, this and other suggestions bring to light the heavy physical labour often involved in studio work. Not all issues were technical. One employee thought better catering arrangements would improve the efficiency of staff. The sub-committee agreed to ask the person who made suggestions for ideas on how this might be achieved. Looking at the committee's responses to employees' suggestions and the lack of documented follow-up on many of them however indicates limits to the collaborative methods and team spirit identified by Michael Powell.

The JPAC's core work was grappling with problems such as how to increase production and improve set building with the available stage space. The visitors to Hollywood were struck by the 'colossal wastage of set material in England...the reason being the almost complete lack of storage space for set pieces. We were at present spending two to three thousand pounds a year on sets, of which practically nothing could be retained until we had storage space several times larger than the studio area'.³⁹ One approach was to plan and build sets as accurately as possible to avoid the wastage of materials and taking up unnecessary space. The JPAC's sub-committee on drawings resulted in recommendations to improve the accuracy of preparatory working drawings by making them bigger in scale and with more precise measurements.⁴⁰ Stock materials such as cornices, mouldings, doors, and windows were used whenever possible. Rather than maintaining large stores a small stock of armchairs and settees was kept. This was made up with a calico or cheap white

³⁹ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: minutes of special meetings with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 and 26 October 1945.

⁴⁰ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC sub-committee report on Drawings, n.d.

material base and loose covers which were then fitted to suit art directors' requirements.⁴¹ In this way studio methods and materials were deeply affected by post-war shortages, a reality that emerges as a key theme driving the committee's work.

A major issue was where to construct sets, many of which were built up on rostrums or on scaffolding to save space, but this method caused sound problems and was expensive. Changes were made to improve the situation such as to erect sets wherever space became available. Another approach was to place greater emphasis on pre-production planning with art departments working closely from shooting scripts so that fewer sets needed to be built. George Archibald, JPAC member and chair of Independent Producers, identified this as one of the greatest difficulties to overcome since at Pinewood 'none of the films could be called "factory-produced", scripts were often being amended and improved', benefiting from new ideas as they evolved. He further stated: 'It would obviously be worth-while to introduce these even though the film had already commenced'. Producers tried to make scriptwriters aware of a greater sense of urgency, but 'although we have tried every means of argument, persuasion, and even threats, we still don't know the answer'.⁴² This debate exposed the ongoing tensions between the drive for detailed pre-planning, especially the time and cost-cutting methods advocated by Rawnsley for the Independent Frame, and the need to retain some of the creative spontaneity inherent in film practice.

The JPAC formed a sub-committee on Production Delays in August 1949 to identify and target key areas for improvement in seven departments. The reports are an instructive record of prevalent production practices, identifying problems that needed rectifying. The sub-committee's recommendations serve as a guide to attempts at Pinewood to address the issues being raised in the trade press and in government about increasing production, cutting costs, and reforming practices, particularly in preparing and building sets. One key issue was the need for greater coordination and communication between departments. Employees working in the Drapes Department, for example, needed greater co-operation from art directors in clearing sets before drapes could be hung, and it was recommended that floor layouts should be provided

⁴¹ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC minutes, 4 August 1949.

⁴² BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC minutes, 30 September 1948.

so that the necessary materials could be made correct to size by day staff so that night stagehands could then lay and fix them.⁴³ Other recommendations that were accepted by the D & P Studios management included greater pre-planning and phasing of work when constructing and striking sets; more accurate carpenters' drawings; improvements in moving equipment and technology; greater interchange of views between supervisory grades and management; better communication between day and night-time staff, and the need to use props held in stock at the studio rather than hiring them from outside suppliers. Highlighting these specific, practical ways of moving forward was complementary to the higher-profile methods and technologies associated with the Independent Frame which attracted more publicity. When *Poet's Pub* (Frederick Wilson 1949), a film made using the Independent Frame technologies, was being shot night-time work was re-introduced at Pinewood to ensure that the stages were working at full pressure. Since each production unit had its own stage and no more, night working was 'imperative' so that night floor staff could strike the sets overnight and set up each stage in readiness for the unit to shoot at once the next morning.⁴⁴

Special attention was also paid to delays in post-production. A report is detailed how costs would be saved if a film was more quickly 'finished off'. Sixteen films were completed at Pinewood in 1947 and 1948. With an average budget of £250,000 for each film, it was calculated that an average of over eighteen weeks was taken for all the finishing-off processes.⁴⁵ These included editing; post-synchronisation; recordings of effects and music, and dubbing by the sound department before completion in the laboratory where picture and sound negatives were cut. It was recommended that time would be reduced if the director and editor discussed a film's sequences during shooting, and that post-synchronisation could also take place during shooting rather than afterwards. Having the producer and director view a film with all departments concerned with finishing-off according to a detailed schedule was also recommended as a means of improving communication. A contemporary account of the work of a film editor by Sidney Cole, who was at

⁴³ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Interim report on production delays, 31 August 1949.

⁴⁴ *Film Industry*, 5 May 1949, 5.

⁴⁵ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Note on post-production delays, 31 August 1949.

that time working at Ealing, bears out this schedule. As an experienced editor, his account records typical practice as it operated in most studios. He described how the editor worked with assistants towards producing a rough cut which was then projected in the studio theatre and seen by the director, producer, and editor: ‘This is the first of many journeys it will make thither during the following weeks or months and it will undergo many changes’.⁴⁶ The latter steps were those the sub-committee on post-production delays sought to quicken by placing emphasis on anticipating a film’s shape as early as possible in pre-planning and greater collaboration between departments.

PRE-PLANNING IN PRACTICE

Specific examples from films did not feature much in the reports except for *So Long at the Fair* (Terence Fisher and Anthony Darnborough 1950) and *White Corridors* (Pat Jackson 1951). Both films were cited as examples, respectively, of poor and very good pre-planning. *So Long at the Fair*, a thriller set in Paris produced by Betty Box, was considered instructive because ‘lack of planning and adequate collaboration had hampered’ a set constructed at Pinewood of the Gard du Nord.⁴⁷ In this case the back projection set-up was poorly operated and modified at a late stage; late alterations to the script resulted in ‘considerable scrapping and “late panic” demands’, and there was little correspondence between the drawing office’s plans and the directors’ intentions. Box later recalled that employing new methods such as those of the Independent Frame was difficult because ‘we were all working so hard that we didn’t have time to absorb a new technique. It was quicker to get on the way you had always done than to sit down and try to learn a different way of doing things’.⁴⁸ *So Long at the Fair* was however one of the two most successful films to be made at Pinewood at that time, doing ‘reasonably well at the box office’.⁴⁹ This was an early example of Box’s production

⁴⁶ Sidney Cole, ‘The Film Editor’, in Oswald Blakeston (ed.), *Working for the Films* (London: Focal Press, 1947), 154.

⁴⁷ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC production delays sub-committee, 14 September 1950.

⁴⁸ Box quoted in Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 129.

⁴⁹ Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37, 159.

of successful films at Pinewood, building on her experience as Gainsborough's head of production where she managed to 'crank up production at Islington, meeting her production target, and making some genuinely popular British films into the bargain'.⁵⁰ In view of this, the issues identified as problematic with the Gard du Nord set preparation on *So Long at the Fair* seem less significant than the JPAC judged them to be, since the film ultimately delivered the profits that mattered to Rank. This set a precedent for Box's work with director Ralph Thomas, especially the box-office success of *Doctor in the House* (1954) and subsequent run of *Doctor* films which 'played no small part in keeping Rank [just about] financially afloat'.⁵¹

White Corridors, starring Googie Withers and James Donald as seen in Fig. 2.2, was set in a hospital and filmed almost entirely at Pinewood. The film was referred to by John Croydon, head of Rank's second feature film unit at Highbury who went on to work for the completion guarantee company Film Finances, as 'a producer's dream'.⁵²

It was seen to epitomise good practice and new ways forward, showing that lessons had been learned from the technicians' visits to Hollywood and subsequent debates on how to improve production schedules. The key factors in this case were the studio's efficiency, noting that services were readily supplied, and requests were carried out 'with the maximum of despatch and a complete absence of panic'. The film's uncomplicated sets were also thought to have assisted its efficiency. A slightly higher rate of shooting was achieved at a daily average of two minutes fifty-one seconds per day (Pinewood's normal rate was one minute nineteen seconds); the script was well-prepared 'with a complete director's breakdown, so that the production was "cut" on paper before going on to the floor', and continuity reports showed that there was a very close correspondence between what was shot and the shooting script. Thomas had spent two years in Hollywood which was thought to have increased his ability to achieve a high rate of shooting. The film was shot by Cyril Pennington-Richards whose 'unconventional' methods were

⁵⁰ Justine Ashby, 'Betty Box, the "Lady in Charge": Negotiating Space for a Female Producer in Post-war Cinema' in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge), 168.

⁵¹ Ashby and Higson, *British Cinema, Past and Present*, 171.

⁵² BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC sub-committee meeting on *White Corridors*, 26 February 1951.



Fig. 2.2 Googie Withers and James Donald in *White Corridors*, 1951. Alamy stock images: KLC Films

advantageous to the film's quality and speed. Collaborating closely with the director on the script and during shooting, he managed to reduce the film's schedule to such an extent that Rank asked to see him to explain what had happened.⁵³ Croydon summed up the film's success as being due to very good organisation, the fast assembly of rushes, and working from a director's breakdown of the script which anticipated any likely problems. When asked about the differences between American and British shooting methods he described the latest working practices in Hollywood such as simple set-ups, a reduction of camera angles with longer dialogue sequences, having a director's breakdown, and a blue-print script. Hollywood's directors started earlier in the day than their British counterparts, and artists were also made up and on the studio floor earlier. Directors discussed preliminary scripts from which art directors designed and planned sets; the final shooting script was then written according to these plans. The positive experience of *White Corridors* was

⁵³ BECTU interview History Project Interview No. 122, Cyril Pennington-Richards.

very much aligned with Hollywood's studio practices. The report on Pinewood's services and the efficient work of all departments contributed towards an impression that the visits to Hollywood and work of the JPAC had been worthwhile.

THE INDEPENDENT FRAME

The background of the committees and initiatives to both review and improve practical operations and working methods at Pinewood was the Independent Frame. David Rawnsley's position heading research at Rank until the end of 1947 and the subsequent establishment of Aquila Films with Donald Wilson, resulted in a highly publicised scheme involving a slate of low to medium budget films released in 1949 that were produced using the technologies and pre-planning scheduling with which the Independent Frame was associated. As I have discussed elsewhere, even though in the short term, the experiment did not transform production, in retrospect the Independent Frame was much more than an expensive gamble by Rank. Rather, 'it was an innovative response to the problems facing the British film industry at the end of the 1940s. It also helped to change Pinewood, both physically and in its production practices, contributing to its evolution into the effects hub it is renowned for today; it is thus a key part of Pinewood's history'.⁵⁴ Many of its key components surfaced in the discussions about Pinewood's future, including the ways in which special effects and process work could reduce the number of sets that needed to be built. Another means of saving time and money was using scenes previously shot on location as back projections in the studio which were then filmed with the principal actors completing the action. As we have seen, the use of mobile rostrums on which sets could be built was also referenced in several of the JPAC's meetings, and the benefits of pre-planning were raised on several occasions, culminating with the 'model' example of *White Corridors*.

Notes of the JPAC's meetings include a few examples of how the Independent Frame was working in practice. These included the use of assembly bays which kept stages clear until sets were required, and interlocking back projection set-ups that could be tricky to operate. On detailed pre-planning, it was further noted that 'considerably greater care

⁵⁴ Street, 'Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation', 104.

and greater co-operation on the part of all personnel concerned might be desirable from a production, artistic and economic point of view'.⁵⁵ Although there was some enthusiasm for the general approach and innovative spirit behind Rawnsley's ideas, their practical application often left much to be desired. The dependence on coordination, sharing of information, and updating staff on the requirements of new technologies exposed a gap between aspiration and the reality of operating Pinewood in the immediate post-war years. Although some staff working there had been employed in the 1930s and had worked with the service film units during the war, there were also new recruits with less experience. The *Kinematograph Weekly* described the Independent Frame as a challenge to producers and directors to adjust their practices to 'factory conditions of film making; they must learn to co-ordinate their ideas with the technical methods offered by their heads of departments'.⁵⁶ Essentially, it was 'a system of pre-production planning – with a difference', in which effects, or tricks of the trade were utilised to the full to speed up production and reduce costs. This meant deploying back projection, process shots, miniatures, and glass shots into a precise scheme of pre-production planning. Detailed storyboards informed the planning phase as well as location shooting using extras instead of principal actors.⁵⁷ While the Independent Frame promised in the longer term to increase production it nevertheless felt threatening to some technicians who feared that its cost-cutting rationale might result in lay-offs of studio labour.

The technical innovations associated with the Independent Frame were widely praised, particularly the development of still and moving background projectors by British Acoustic. In addition, mobile lighting rails to carry lamps and crew were constructed by Vickers-Armstrong. It therefore offered encouragement to British manufacturers of such equipment, connecting with the aim of being less reliant on American kit. Lighting set-ups were typically indirect: 'An ingenious reflector system is employed which dispenses with light rails and reduces the candlepower of the normally lighted set by almost two-thirds'.⁵⁸ Sets built on mobile

⁵⁵ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: JPAC sub-committee on delays, 14 September 1950.

⁵⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 January 1949, 6.

⁵⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 January 1949, 8.

⁵⁸ G. R. Stevens, 'Independent Frame—An Attempt at Rationalisation in Motion Pictures', *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, November 1951, 436.

rostrums, shown in Fig. 2.3, could be moved through pre-production and production departments.

Some reconstruction had been necessary in Pinewood including the two smallest twin-sized stages, fitted with a collapsible insulated partition between them. The principle of the assembly line was evident in the rational, spatial flow for the organisation of materials, construction stores, and the assembly bay where sets were mounted on the mobile rostrums. A ‘waiting bay’ next to the stage held the sets until required when they would be flown into position by an overhead gantry. A similar approach had been applied in Hollywood when Fred Pelton, MGM’s studio manager, used mobile sets. But they were too large and unwieldy to be fully effective, which convinced Rawnsley that the Independent Frame would work best with smaller mobile sets and rostrums. He also studied Disney’s planning methods and was inspired by how the BBC’s technicians were effective despite working in cramped conditions

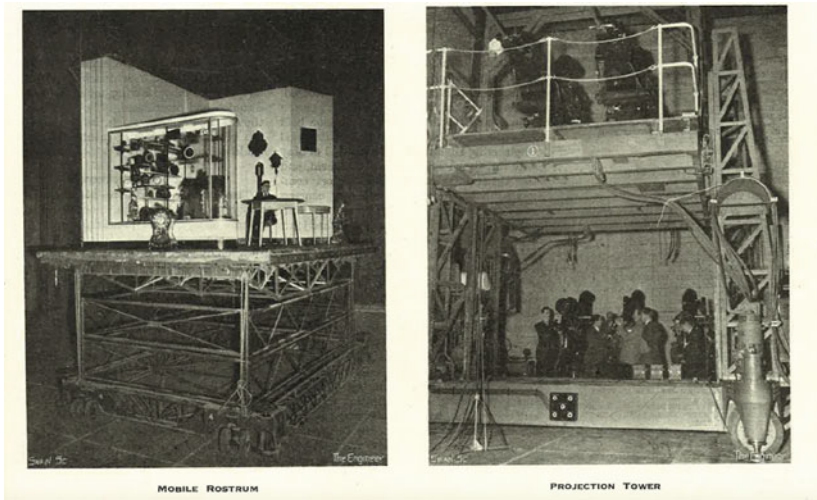


Fig. 2.3 Mobile rostrum and projection tower for the Independent Frame, *The Engineer*, 26 August 1949, p. 225. Printed with permission from *The Engineer*, www.theengineer.co.uk

at Alexandra Palace.⁵⁹ The rostrums proved very effective in later years once sound issues had been addressed, and the emphasis on back projection prompted research and development of travelling matte techniques which were also in the longer term very beneficial.

In all, as I have argued elsewhere, ‘even though the Independent Frame experiment lasted only a few years, in the longer-term it contributed to the establishment of a robust technical infrastructure at Pinewood which laid the foundations for the studio’s subsequent outstanding reputation for technical excellence as well as streamlined methods of production’.⁶⁰ This is a good example of what Edgerton terms ‘use-centred’ history, in which the uptake of technology is the dominant factor, rather than focusing solely on invention, to demonstrate how ‘technologies do not only appear, they also reappear, and mix and match’ across time.⁶¹ In this way technicians’ experience working with back projection technologies fed into travelling matte solutions, creating a circular link between past and present, research, development, and uptake.

PINEWOOD’S INFRASTRUCTURE AND TAKING STOCK

A Pinewood Producers’ Handbook accompanied by a studio plan gave an upbeat account of the studios’ basic infrastructure at the end of 1949.⁶² The three largest of the five sound stages had tanks, and it was noted how dressing rooms, production offices, and workshops were arranged for easy access. Four of the stages were grouped so they could all be approached and serviced by means of covered ways, a key factor in view of the vagaries of the British weather. As noted in Chapter 1, these were flagged up by Helmut Junge as advantages when compared with Denham in a detailed report on British studios published in 1945.⁶³ Other benefits were Pinewood having its own power supply and the ability to accommodate three to four films in the studios at the same time. During the fuel

⁵⁹ Alan Wood, *Mr Rank: A Study of J. Arthur Rank and British Films* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 181–2.

⁶⁰ Street, ‘Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation’, 118.

⁶¹ Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*, xii.

⁶² BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Pinewood Producers’ Handbook and Studio Plan, December 1949.

⁶³ Helmut Junge, *Plan for Film Studios* (London: The Focal Press, 1945), 24–6.

crisis of 1947 and power shortages, studios with their own powerhouses such as Denham and Pinewood were able to continue production.⁶⁴ The equipment listed confirms the dominance of American-manufactured Mitchell cameras, Western Electric sound apparatus, and cutting rooms fitted with American Moviolas and with Bell and Howell film splicers. One detail that appears to link directly to the work of the JPAC was the greater use of standard working drawings to assist set construction. Other organisational and administrative arrangements were detailed so that producers were guided through what Pinewood could offer them in-house. The studio was clearly being positioned as Britain's most modern and efficient, despite issues the various sub-committees had identified as problematic.

The impact of the debates on technicians' visits to Hollywood and the work of the JPAC in the following years needs to be considered in relation to the long-term ambitions of Rank and John Davis to control productions on a tighter basis than the more relaxed conventions which had been appreciated by Independent Producers. In the spring of 1949 announcements were made that Rank was 'telescoping' production in a streamlining process that reduced the number of independent units working at Pinewood.⁶⁵ Having to cut costs accelerated the trend towards a more rigid regime of retrenchment and economy exercised at Pinewood in the 1950s. As Macnab has argued, a different style of production emerged at Pinewood, 'one that in its regulation and efficiency, if not its inspiration, was as close as Britain ever got to a Classical Hollywood Cinema'.⁶⁶ The material presented in this chapter has indeed shown that this tendency began earlier with the visits to Hollywood in 1945 which concentrated on a number of issues which it was hoped might help transform British production methods and technologies. As we have seen, there was tension between the desire to replicate Hollywood's example and establishing levels of national specificity, particularly regarding technology and innovative techniques which it was hoped would result in a more global, competitive film industry. As Marzola has observed the role of managing technology, pooling knowledge, and 'creating ties across

⁶⁴ John Huntley, 'Juice! The Motive Power of the Industry', *Film Industry*, August 1947, 4-5, 22.

⁶⁵ *Film Industry*, 24 March 1949, 1.

⁶⁶ Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 216.

competitive interests' in establishing Hollywood's stable infrastructure, was to some extent influential in Britain.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Britain lacked the force of major organisations such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Society of Motion Picture Engineers which helped studios to take advantage of the latest research, collaborate, and standardise equipment. While the BFPA brought the studios' general issues and technical requirements to the attention of the Board of Trade, and J. Arthur Rank's chairmanship put him in a strong position to represent Pinewood's interests, its functions, and influence were more limited. While Britain was clearly *not* Hollywood, the British visitors to American studios and backlots took away ideas, learning from 'the system' to revive an industry which needed to re-equip and re-group after the war. When Denham was closed in 1952 even greater stress was placed on Pinewood's role in this process. In retrospect, the years 1945–50 were crucial in ensuring the studios survived and in the longer term thrived as a hub of 'facilities, services and expertise'.⁶⁸ The desire to embrace new technological experiments became one of Pinewood's hallmarks, notably Rank's interesting, yet under-appreciated in terms of its aesthetic merit, adoption of the American VistaVision widescreen process for popular comedies including *Doctor at Sea* (Ralph Thomas 1955) and *Simon and Laura* (Muriel Box 1955).⁶⁹ This tradition continues today. The studios are now the keystone of the Pinewood Group which in addition includes a global network of studios at Shepperton, Toronto, and in the Dominican Republic. Described in publicity as exemplifying a 'Pinewood brand', the foundations of this identity can indeed be traced back to the infrastructural and material changes Pinewood underwent following the Second World War.

⁶⁷ Marzola, *Hollywood Engineering*, 197.

⁶⁸ Pinewood is described in these terms on its website: <https://pinewoodgroup.com>, consulted 6 July 2022.

⁶⁹ Steven Roberts, 'High Fidelity Widescreen Cinema: VistaVision Film Production and Style in Britain and the USA', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 2019, 138–48.

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In the Studio and on Location: Mapping Pinewood's Culture in 1946

Abstract This chapter analyses how Pinewood's post-war culture was evolving as a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking with reference to some key film examples. While these resembled the mid-range budgeted type of films produced before the Second World War, it is argued that the adoption of newer, more efficient modes was key to Pinewood's identity. The chapter examines the desire to rationalise production methods in 1946 by focusing in detail on five films shot at Pinewood by the Independent Producers group. It concentrates on the methods used by set designers and other technicians working on the feature films *Great Expectations* (1946), *Green for Danger* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Take My Life* (1947) and *Captain Boycott* (1947). The chapter draws on the trade press's often extensive reportage of visits to Pinewood's stages when the films were being shot. It applies the concepts of 'studio relay' and 'situated art direction' to highlight the many innovative techniques which were integral to the films' economical and artistic creation.

Keywords Independent Producers · Set Design · Art Direction · British Cinema

Brian R. Jacobson has noted how film companies ‘use studio style to cultivate corporate identity’.¹ The power to embed such identities in the popular imagination was more than evident in Hollywood where MGM’s imprint was promoted and perceived as distinct from that of Warner Brothers and the rest of the ‘big five’. The tendency for each studio to be identified with a particular style of film, genres, and stars was accentuated by the fact that as vertically integrated companies the ‘majors’ each produced, distributed, and almost exclusively exhibited films in their own cinemas.² How a studio—as a physical place of filmmaking rather than relating solely to the product of a particular company—established, maintained, and developed its own culture can however be difficult to trace beyond matching film output to publicised corporate identity. This is particularly challenging in the British context since the vertical integration of film companies was less developed, and studios often rented out their spaces so output could be extremely varied. Periodic economic contraction in different periods also militated against the continuities of production that made studio styles easier to develop and track. Even so, it is possible to discern something of the cultures that pertained to studios such as Shepherd’s Bush when under the control of Gaumont-British, Denham, and Pinewood, particularly as they developed in the 1930s and 1940s. As noted in Chapter 1, the external-facing architectures of Denham and Pinewood, for example, reflected their different images and products. Denham’s streamlined Art Deco façade expressed an expansive, ambitious ethos that was to some extent evident in films produced on its stages in 1936–38 that were ‘marked by an emphasis on spectacle, pageantry and internationalism, many with high budgets and employing émigré professionals’.³ Pinewood, by contrast, was represented by Heatherden Hall, the Victorian mansion at the studios’ frontage which connoted a more traditionally ‘English’ image. A ‘Tudorbethan’ gatehouse lodge through which most visitors and employees had to pass was built as part of the studio complex in a contemporary style which

¹ Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and Its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 15.

² Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s* (London: British Film Institute, 1983), 8.

³ Sarah Street, ‘Designing the Ideal Film Studio in Britain’, *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 348.

imitated Tudor and Elizabethan architecture.⁴ Productions filmed during the same period tended to reflect this domestic orientation which featured in musical comedies, musicals, crime thrillers, and frequent use of British stars from radio and popular theatre.

The Second World War and requisitioning studios to aid the war effort disrupted these evolving identities. Dealing with material shortages, re-purposing, and in some cases closure, meant that studios were keen to return to normal as soon as possible. Experiencing the material and psychological strains of war gave them a renewed sense of purpose and even some strategies for survival during times of crisis. The immediate post-war years were therefore an opportunity for studios to resume making their mark by developing different images and styles of production. In this respect, Pinewood provides an interesting case of positioning itself as Britain's premier studio when Rank's corporate operations consolidated into a powerful, vertically integrated concern.⁵ Although Pinewood is the main studio under consideration, Rank also controlled Denham, Islington, Shepherd's Bush, and Ealing studios.⁶ This chapter will examine the extent to which Pinewood's culture was formed by and evident in films produced on its stages and on location at a crucial point in its history. As we have seen, Pinewood's investigations of methods, technical equipment, and cultures of production in the USA were inextricably related to acute economic imperatives as studios resumed filmmaking once they were de-requisitioned. How studios were organised was intimately related to their capabilities to deliver films at a time when there was pressure to expand British production.

⁴ The two studios' different images were noted by film critic C. A. Lejeune who described Pinewood as a 'garden city' whereas Denham as 'a grand hotel'. *The Observer*, 7 November 1937, 13.

⁵ This involved production, distribution (via General Film Distributors), and exhibition (via Odeon Theatres), as well as links with Universal and United Artists Margaret Dickson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government, 1927-84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 101.

⁶ Of these studios Pinewood was the only one built by Rank.

THE INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

The Independent Producers began to develop the ‘prestige’ label the Rank Organisation was promoting to both offset Hollywood competition at home and increase the chances of distribution in America. The key to this drive was to uncouple quality from cost, anticipating Rank’s criticism of *The Red Shoes* (1948; budget £505,600) as too profligate and lavish.⁷ As Chapman has noted, even though this expensive film and *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier, 1948, budget £572,500) returned large profits from the American market, the high-risk strategy they represented was questioned, even in retrospect by Michael Powell, and budgets were subsequently reduced.⁸ While the Independent Producers were given considerable freedom in 1944–47, an emphasis on making economies was nevertheless increasingly pervasive. When commenting in 1946 on the generally shorter shooting schedules in Hollywood (ten weeks for a ‘big picture’ and two for ‘B’ pictures) compared to British studios, Hollywood director Edward Dmytryk attributed the disparity to a ‘slowing down effect’ caused by independent companies renting studio space and service departments, and a unit’s producer not having a unified control of the whole studio. Another factor thought to lengthen schedules in Britain was an inconsistent and unpredictable turnover of different teams working in a studio at any one time.⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, Michael Powell extolled the benefits of using the same team from film to film. The advantages of consistency of personnel in areas such as art direction can indeed be seen in several films discussed in this chapter. Different companies renting studio space and facilities allowed studios like Pinewood to avoid over-committing space and resources to only one production company. The Independent Producers’ arrangement with Rank enabled the studios to benefit from different companies’ activities while reducing some of the risks identified by Dmytryk.

⁷ Alan Wood, *Mr Rank: A Study of J. Arthur Rank and British Films* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 157.

⁸ James Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen: A History of British Film Finance, 1945–1985* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 21–2.

⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 September 1946, Studio Supplement, xxv.

Even though the Independent Producers consortium financed by Rank attempted to offset these issues by concentrating its constituent production companies at Pinewood, its aims and ethos could not be sustained when subsequently reigned in by John Davis, leading to the companies' departure to 'the apparent haven of British Lion' and Alexander Korda.¹⁰ How to maintain quality and box-office appeal became intertwined with the raft of cost-cutting mechanisms that featured widely in the trade press. Gainsborough producer R. J. Minney resigned from the Rank Organisation in 1947 as a criticism of how the company had become enmeshed in financial difficulties after overspending. He published a book the same year advocating lower-cost, good quality British films primarily aimed at the home market, recommending 'careful reorganising...an economical use of [studio] space' and 'the utmost attention to detail so as to attain maximum saving of time'.¹¹ A film's budget did not necessarily reflect its box-office receipts; winners and losers can be found in low, mid-range, and higher-budgeted films.¹²

In the post-war period, a plethora of other publications focused on how British filmmakers could make films more economically, and which highlighted studio techniques and personnel.¹³ These evidence how knowledge about filmmaking practices was very much part of contemporary film culture. The work of various production designers was often celebrated by the trade press and in publicity, linking the studio experience to contemporary design practice and the development of associated filmic effects. What could be achieved despite material shortages and cost-cutting was regularly reported. As for popularity, or notoriety, the work of various production designers was often celebrated by the trade press and in publicity, linking the studio experience to contemporary design practice and the development of associated filmic effects. These discourses created a kind of 'studio relay' effect in advance of a film's release. These generated a set of expectations about how a film's production circumstances contributed to its pleasures, especially in trade papers aimed at exhibitors with an eye on 'showmanship' strategies and box office. How particular

¹⁰ Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years: British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: André Deutsch, 1998), 52.

¹¹ R. J. Minney, *Talking of Films* (London: Home & Van Thal, 1947), 15.

¹² Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen*, 71.

¹³ For example, Junge, *Plan for Film Studios*; Oswald Blakeson, *Working for the Films* (London: Focal Press, 1947).

effects were achieved was a consistent area of fascination. On-set visitors representing trade papers such as *Kinematograph Weekly* and *The Film Industry* and in fan magazines revealed production ‘secrets’ which then informed reviewers and audiences interested in those aspects.

ART DIRECTION AND STUDIO RELAY

The following case study films illustrate how Pinewood’s post-war culture was evolving as a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking. While this resembled the mid-range budgeted type of films produced before the Second World War, the adoption of newer, more efficient modes was key to Pinewood’s identity, an idea that connects prevailing studio practices to the types of films produced in the key years 1946–50. While the ‘quality’ films produced by the Independent Producers in 1944–47 represented ‘an extraordinarily rich period’¹⁴ in terms of the range of themes and genres they tackled, as this chapter demonstrates, the desire to rationalise production methods just after the war was an important aspect of this trajectory; innovation was not necessarily compromised by economy. While the Independent Producers’ films have received fairly extensive critical commentaries, including canonical British films such as *Great Expectations* (David Lean, 1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (David Lean, 1948), and *The Red Shoes* (1948), these have overshadowed other titles which were part of the same cycle. These included several mid-range budgeted films at the heart of Pinewood’s post-war culture as it evolved into a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking. The cyclical approach to analysing these films brings out continuities in production methods across different genres as well as communicates a sense of how Pinewood operated during a pivotal period of transition.

How this could be achieved was largely dependent on how set designs were planned, organised, materialised, and shot in the studios. Each phase took an approach of ‘situated’ art direction, a term I use to reference art direction that was securely and precisely suited to the time, materials, and resources which reflected Pinewood’s physical capacity and creative capabilities. Except for Alexander Vetchinsky, a production designer who ‘always combined an acute visual sense with cost-cutting abilities’, Harper

¹⁴ Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 96.

has argued that in the 1950s neither Rank nor Pinewood was ‘designed...nor was Pinewood a hotbed of innovation, since it was rigorously controlled from above. In consequence, in-house art direction at Rank was unremarkable’.¹⁵ This verdict underestimates the influence of other designers’ responses to tighter economic constraints in ways that were both pragmatic and creative, particularly towards the end of the 1940s when the tone began to be set for an era of ‘cut price aesthetics’ and ‘pragmatic design techniques’.¹⁶ How designers responded to severe shortages of timber, and when the costs of other basic materials used for set construction such as paint and plaster were rising, allows us to track a particular mode of economical production that left its imprint on the films.¹⁷ Examples that in addition featured location shooting are interesting to gauge the extent to which Pinewood’s methods and working practices continued to support production teams when working away from its own physical and material parameters.

Developing Ede’s focus on art direction’s great varieties from a ‘new’ film history perspective, as the following films illustrate, the studio context can be prominently foregrounded so that as well as designers, other personnel, methods, and technologies become a more fully integrated aspect of film analysis.¹⁸ This approach highlights the role of the film studio, its techniques, and equipment in shaping a film’s aesthetic. It also stresses how particular contexts encouraged practical, creative responses that were part of a film’s evolution. The films discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4 featured prominently in trade paper reports, particularly those generated by studio correspondents who were able to relay key details of a production’s technical innovations and development to readers. As noted above, the *Kinematograph Weekly* in particular reveals details that, in the absence of actual production records, allow us to track the ways in which the films were embedded within and contributed towards a film culture that was fascinated with how films were made.

¹⁵ Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 202.

¹⁶ Laurie Ede, *British Film Design: A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 71.

¹⁷ ‘Rising Costs: A *Kine* Investigation’, *Kinematograph Weekly*. Studio Supplement, 10 July 1947, iv–v.

¹⁸ Laurie Ede, ‘Art in Context: British Film Design of the 1940s’ in James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper (eds.), *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 73–88.

While technical reviewers may not constitute what we usually understand to make up typical film audiences, their opinions and specialist knowledge influence a film's reception. As Staiger's work on interpreting films has shown, 'extratextual' discourses such as knowledge of production circumstances, are important for historical materialist approaches.¹⁹ Films that were 'popular' in terms of the discussions in *Kinematograph Weekly*, *Film Industry*, and other trade papers gained respect, even notoriety, precisely because the paper revealed the 'secrets' involved in their production. Fan magazines occasionally relayed such information, such as when *Picturegoer* reported on the filming of *Green for Danger* at Pinewood.²⁰ Interest in how films were made was an important aspect of film culture more generally through competitions with prizes of studio tours, reportage of and interest in location shooting and novelties such as when British National at Elstree went on tour in 1946 to demonstrate studio techniques.²¹ Film industry exhibits such as models of sets were also displayed at the annual Ideal Home Exhibitions, Olympia, London. Looking at the following titles in Table 3.1 as a slate of productions at Pinewood allows us to compare strategies as they evolved from film to film, as well as bringing to light the specifics of both famous and lesser-known films.

GREEN FOR DANGER: PINEWOOD'S FIRST POST-WAR FILM

The first film to be produced once Pinewood was de-requisitioned sheds light on the ingenious and resourceful ways in which production teams rose to the challenge of making films when materials required for building sets such as hessian, plaster, timber, paper, rubber, and canvas were in short supply, and post-war recovery was only just beginning. As the *Kinematograph Weekly* put it: 'Pinewood is the mirror of the production industry: in it we can see many of the problems that are going to face

¹⁹ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁰ *Picturegoer*, 27 April 1946, 7.

²¹ For details of such activities see STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2022/10/10/who-wouldnt-want-to-have-a-peek-studio-tours-in-britain-and-germany/>.

Table 3.1 Films in production at Pinewood in 1946

<i>Film and UK release date</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Pinewood schedule</i>	<i>Locations (non-studio)</i>	<i>Production design Art direction</i>
<i>Great Expectations</i> 27 Jan 1947	Cineguild	£391,600	Jan–May 1946	Kent marshes	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>Green for Danger</i> 10 Mar 1947	Individual Pictures	£202,400	Dec 1945–July 1946		Peter Proud William Hutchinson
<i>Black Narcissus</i> (Technicolor) 26 May 1947	The Archers	£280,000	May–Aug 1946	Leonardslee, Horsham	Alfred Junge
<i>Take My Life</i> 30 Jun 1947	Cineguild	£211,800	July–Oct 1946	York Railway Station	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>Captain Boycott</i> 1 Sept 1947	Individual Pictures	£250,000	Sept 1946–Feb 1947	Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Ireland; Lough Mask, Co. Mayo, Ireland	Edward Carrick

our other major studios when they resume production'.²² Pinewood reopened its doors to companies in the Independent Group: Cineguild, the Archers, and Individual Pictures. Individual was a newly formed production company of prolific British filmmakers Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, and *Green for Danger* (1946), an adaptation of a detective novel by Christianna Brand, was the first film they made at Pinewood after the war, with shooting commencing in December 1945.²³ In Fig. 3.1 they are shown in a publicity shot which features the set in the background.

The fiction revolves around a detective's often rather blundering investigations into some unexplained murders which have taken place in a hospital, and possible suspects are key people who work there: a surgeon, three nurses, the theatre sister, and an anaesthetist. The action takes place within the confines of the hospital, and for this an elaborate, convincing set was required. Apart from two brief shots at the beginning, the film was made entirely in the studios spread over two of Pinewood's sound stages. The work of production designer Peter Proud was remarkable for achieving some amazing results: the creation of a composite hospital set which in the story has been established within the interior of an Elizabethan house requisitioned for an emergency wartime hospital. A design (Fig. 3.2) by Proud shows the exterior. This plot concentrates action within the hospital's spaces including a main corridor, several wards, Sister's office, a large operating theatre, a scrubbing-up room, sterilising room, hospital laundry, a social hall, adjoining nurses' rest room, an office, reception desk, and porter's lodge. Proud made detailed sketches of the sets in advance of filming, collaborating closely with director Sidney Gilliat to work out the most effective shot constructions. Proud devised several ingenious methods which made filming on this set as smooth and mobile as possible, including making ceilings on runners which could be moved quickly to assist the camera crew. Most of the wall sections were mounted on rollers so that entire sections could be swung in and out of position very quickly.²⁴

To save time the operating theatre set (Fig. 3.3) was built twice, each set providing a different viewpoint that the unit could easily capture by

²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 14 March 1946, 12.

²³ *The End of the River* (Derek N. Twist, 1947; produced by Powell and Pressburger) was shot almost entirely on location in Brazil in 1946; studio work was completed at Pinewood from January 1947 and the film was released in October 1947.

²⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 28 February 1946, 29.



Fig. 3.1 Frank Lauder and Sidney Gilliat on set of *Green for Danger*, 1946. Alamy stock images

moving effortlessly between the two. Proud also used materials in highly resourceful ways such as covering a ceiling by sandfly netting to create a strong, solid ceiling effect but which was transparent enough for the studio lights to penetrate. He used paint rather than plaster on floors to create the impression of concrete and a brick wall effect was made using painted details on glass. Another clever trick was created by special effects expert plasterer Bill Baines who made a bas-relief in plasticine on a glass



Fig. 3.2 Set design by art director Peter Proud for *Green for Danger*, 1946. Alamy stock images

panel to create the effect of a tower. A report on the film's production gave the details: 'The lower outline was painted to match the lower half of the tower set. Foliage and a cloud effect were painted on a plaster cyclo-rama, standing behind the bas-relief. The camera crew panned down on a model head'.²⁵ The large number of specialist props including hospital equipment were loaned from the Ministry of Supply. The incongruity of a camera crew in an operating theatre provided some wonderful photo opportunities for reporters, such as a photograph of the crew taking a tea break during filming, as seen in Fig. 3.4. This is an example of how knowledge about the filmmaking process was considered a novelty in the popular fan-orientated press as well as in the more specialised trade journals.

The camera operator on *Green for Danger* was Oswald ('Ossie') Morris, who recalled difficulties working on the film because Pinewood had started to use American-designed Mitchell cameras which had a different viewing system from the French manufactured Debric cameras

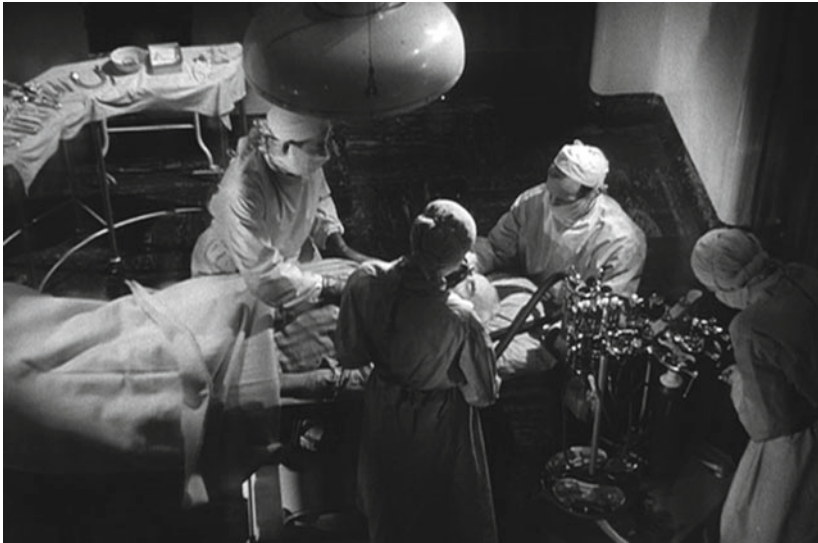


Fig. 3.3 Operating theatre set, *Green for Danger* (1946)

²⁵ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 May 1946, 40.

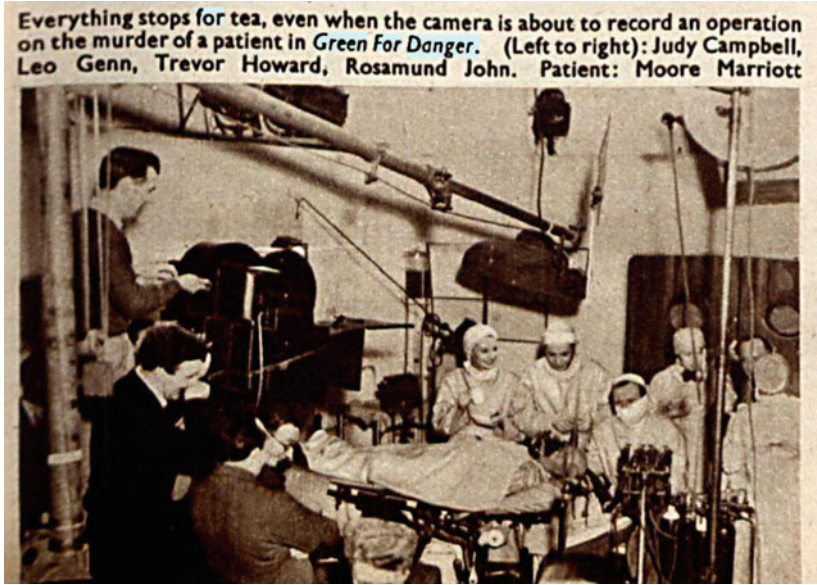


Fig. 3.4 Tea break on set of *Green for Danger*, *Picturegoer*, 25 May 1946, p. 9

with which he was more experienced. Rather than being able to see exactly what the camera would capture through the viewfinder, the Mitchell camera had its viewer on the left-hand side, away from the axis of the lens and the film gate.²⁶ This caused parallax problems and particular difficulties in shots which included all the murder suspects even though Morris could only see three in the viewfinder. As he put it: ‘Getting compositions in the viewfinder you have to adopt a whole different approach...You have to make your brain realise you’ve got five people [*sic*] in there’.²⁷ Early on in the film a very challenging 360 degrees shot required the camera to pan across the suspects in the operating theatre set. In the finished film this shot provides the key visual setting which is

²⁶ Mitchell had long been the camera of choice for cinematographers in British studios, as observed by Charles Christie, vice-president of the company on a visit to Europe in 1935: *American Cinematographer*, February 1936, 53, 56.

²⁷ Oswald Morris, BECTU interview no. 9, 21 July 1987. There were actually six suspects present in the operating theatre scene.

accompanied by the voice-over of Police Inspector Cockrill (Alastair Sim) as he recalls the investigation. Morris's experience is a prime example of technicians having to learn to operate new equipment quickly, often on the job, at a time when resources were limited.

Even though most of *Green for Danger* was shot inside Pinewood, an exterior flashback sequence to a London air raid required a perfectly clear sky. This provided an opportunity, as publicised in the trade press, to show off Rank's interest in using the latest ideas and technologies to save time and therefore money when shooting films both inside and outside the studios. Gilliat was equipped with meteorological reports provided by IMCOS (International Meteorological Consultants), a new service recently hired by Rank which provided production units with supposedly more accurate local weather reports than had previously been possible from the Air Ministry. But although the service aimed to save producers time and money, Gilliat was not impressed with its rather inflated claims of super-accuracy.²⁸

IMCOS's American director Ken Willard and the employment of American personnel were criticised by the Association of Cine Technicians which at the time was pressing for any hiring of non-British studio personnel to be a reciprocal arrangement. IMCOS was connected at that time to Rank's internationalist policies and post-war export drive even though in the end producers preferred to rely on local weather reports when scheduling exterior location shooting. On this occasion night shooting was however successful, but the sound crew encountered an unusual problem when some nightingales they had disturbed started singing into the mike. The *Kinematograph Weekly* reported: 'The unwelcome guests were quickly dispersed by a flood of light from an inverted arc'.²⁹ The trade press relished this kind of anecdote which lightened the tone of location reports. These drew attention to how new methods and economical techniques were achieved. Models were used to supplement studio and location shooting, and these were also a source of commentary such as the notable work of special effects expert Percy Ralphs, whose V-1 (flying bomb) model was flown over a foreground model hospital for *Green for Danger*.³⁰ The film's wartime setting tapped into recent

²⁸ Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 104.

²⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 20 June 1946, 43.

³⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 25 July 1946, 35.

memory of aerial bombing raids, and Pinewood's experience of wartime requisitioning was evident from the studios still being 'drably camouflaged' with 'conspicuous' Army Film Unit signs.³¹ An aerial shot of Pinewood taken in August 1945 (Fig. 3.5) shows the camouflaged roof clearly. For this reason it was referred to in the trade press as a 'studio in battledress'.³²

Green for Danger was greeted favourably by critics; it did good business at the British box office and despite distribution problems comparatively well in the USA. For Launder and Gilliat it represented another well-crafted, mid-range budget film costing £202,400 whose reputation has increased over time.³³ The film nearly did not get made because the British Board of Film Censors got the wrong end of the stick, thinking the proposal would be a literal adaptation of Brand's novel which was set in a military hospital, rather than the civilian facility which featured in the film. Gilliat recalled their reasoning was 'that any soldiers would be so overcome by the fear of being murdered by one of the nurses that it could seriously affect their chance of recovery!'³⁴ As soon as they were put right, the production was given the go-ahead. It was praised for its economical approach and, as we have seen, for making the most of Pinewood's space and facilities in novel ways. The sets were key in communicating 'a darkness of tone that creeps into even its comic moments', the aerial bomb attacks mirroring those from within the hospital.³⁵ The requisitioned Elizabethan house setting for the hospital also served this purpose through the strangeness of the older property's new, emergency purpose. All in all, it indicated an excellent post-war start for Pinewood as working conditions were gradually being orientated towards a return to normalcy.

³¹ *Picturegoer*, 27 April 1946, 7.

³² *Kinematograph Weekly*, July 5, 1945, 21.

³³ Geoff Brown, *Launder and Gilliat* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), 120.

³⁴ Brown, *Launder and Gilliat*, 120.

³⁵ Geoffrey O'Brien, 'Laughing while the bombs fall', booklet in *Green for Danger* DVD release, p. 6: Criterion Collection, 2007 release CC1682D.



Fig. 3.5 Aerial photograph of Pinewood August 1945. Reproduced with permission from Historic England: RAF 106G UK 620 RP 3041

BLACK NARCISSUS: ‘THE ATMOSPHERE IN THIS
FILM IS EVERYTHING, AND WE MUST CREATE
AND CONTROL IT FROM THE START’ (MICHAEL POWELL)

Michael Powell’s insistence, as expressed in the above quotation, that the Archers’ latest production *Black Narcissus* (budget £280,000) was very much a studio production, is testament to his confidence in Pinewood’s technical infrastructure and facilities to deliver the film’s highly stylised

Himalayan setting.³⁶ The studio environment became a site of technical virtuosity and team collaboration to produce what is regarded as one of Powell and Pressburger's most important Technicolor films.³⁷ Filming began in May 1946 and was completed in August but before that considerable preparation took place to create the fabricated environment of an old palace at Mopu, a fictional place described in Rumer Godden's popular novel published in 1939 on which the film was based, where a group of British nuns begin their mission to establish a school and dispensary for the local people. The evolution of Alfred Junge's set designs from drawings to structures erected and filmed on Pinewood's studio lot and grounds show the ingenuity involved, and photographs of the now much-celebrated sets are still proudly displayed at Pinewood Studios. They had considerable influence over *Black Narcissus*, a television mini-series produced in 2020 which was also based on Godden's novel and shot at Pinewood and select locations.³⁸ Both the mini-series director Charlotte Bruus Christensen and production designer Kave Quinn were highly respectful of the 'look' of Powell and Pressburger's film. Using digital technology, they tried to replicate the Technicolor aesthetic of Jack Cardiff's cinematography as well as Junge's set designs seven decades after the film's release.³⁹

Junge's drawings and their realisation in the finished film create the impression that the old palace, renamed by the nuns as the Convent of St Faith, is located high in the mountains on a terrifying precipice from which Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) dramatically falls to her death at the film's climax. Location photographs reveal however that the bell tower set was only a few feet above the ground. Junge's drawing shows a precise and vivid visualisation of the bell tower and a photograph taken when the film was being shot reveals the constructed set on the exterior lot. The palace/Convent set was built high above other buildings and trees, surrounded by a wall of timber planks and inclining at an angle of 35 degrees. A model (Fig. 3.6) was created to inform the construction. This created a slope that would banish shadows, meaning that shooting could

³⁶ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 562–3.

³⁷ Sarah Street, *Black Narcissus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 9–22.

³⁸ The TV mini-series featured location shooting in the district of Mustang in Nepal.

³⁹ Sarah Street, 'The "Exaggerated" Colors of *Black Narcissus* (1947 and 2020)', *Comparative Cinema* IX, no. 17 (2021): 10–37.

take place throughout the day.⁴⁰ The ‘mountain’, terraces, and winding pathways were built on scaffolding, 120 feet high, and strengthened by sleepers which formed ‘stilts’ or a framework for the sets. These were then covered with prefabricated plaster or cement sheets to create the impression of natural rock. The ‘mountain’ was then filled in with gravel and soil and the terraces were planted with quick-growing seeds.⁴¹ Junge also prepared clay models of the palace/Convent set prior to construction. This was another technique that saved time while facilitating very precise planning of the rooms and particular iconic design features such as the wall paintings and latticed, cross-cross patterned window frames which help suggest through *mise-en-scène* the film’s unsettling psychological atmosphere.

The artificially created world required for *Black Narcissus* also called on the skills of matte painters Walter Percy (‘Poppa’) Day and his sons, since many of the ‘locations’ created in the studio were scenes painted on glass. Day, a special effects director who had previously worked for London Films and the Archers, was particularly known for the technique used on *Black Narcissus* whereby they would ‘matte out the “NG” [no good] parts of the frame with black card very exactly and then rephotograph the painted glass with mountains and clouds as a second exposure of the film’.⁴² Careful modification of the exposures used for the process was required for Technicolor which saved time because tests were no longer necessary before the shooting of actual scenes and the film could be developed and printed straight away.⁴³ Use of these techniques to achieve a consistent stylistic vision for *Black Narcissus* realised Powell’s aim stated in the autumn of 1945 that production designers should be allied to special effects and imaginative painters working in close co-operation with art departments: ‘There should be someone to take a bird’s eye view of

⁴⁰ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 563.

⁴¹ *Black Narcissus* pressbook, British Film Institute Library, London.

⁴² Justin Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff: Art, Light and Direction in Cinema* (London: Batsford, 2003), 73.

⁴³ W. Percy Day, ‘How the Matte Process Works’, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 29 January 1948, 27–8.



Fig. 3.6 Model of the palace at Mopu constructed for *Black Narcissus*, 1947. Alamy stock images

all the processes involved, so that imagination was not subordinated to stereotyped design'.⁴⁴

The film was shot in Technicolor, so the specificities of that technology had to be carefully considered, both at the design stage and when shooting. As cinematographer Jack Cardiff explained, for colour films issues such as the use of backgrounds and lighting were particularly challenging. The backgrounds of the physical environment surrounding the Convent would have been very expensive at that time if enlarged colour photographs were used. A more practicable solution was to use black and white photographs which were hand-coloured using chalk. The elaborate backdrops were set up against the sky to hide the shrubbery in

⁴⁴ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Minutes of second special meeting with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 October 1945 and 26 October 1945 follow-up meeting.

the studio grounds at an angle of 30 degrees from the vertical to catch as much sunlight as possible to facilitate longer filming slots.⁴⁵ A wind machine was used to create the gentle breeze which throughout the film is an important feature of the region's physical environment. The breeze was one of the key registers of the nuns' increasingly unsettled state of mind when attempting to carry out their challenging mission. Cardiff recalled that instead of the very noisy wind machines that were normally used for such purposes, they devised a silent method involving 'a sort of long sleevelike tube that ran straight out of the studio's air control vents'.⁴⁶ Achieving effects such as candlelight posed problems because of the high levels of light required for Technicolor. The arc lights they used could not be faded up or down so Cardiff had to use other diffusion methods including moveable lights with adaptable light modifiers hanging above the candle, filters, tracing paper, dimmer shutters, and spraying ochre paint on a candle below the wick so it would look as if it was alight.⁴⁷ These methods, combined with Cardiff's highly creative and expressive colour design, mark *Black Narcissus* as a classic of Technicolor filmmaking.⁴⁸ It also demonstrates how quickly Pinewood was able to mount an ambitious studio-based film less than six months after commercial filming had resumed there after the war.

TAKE MY LIFE: DESIGNING CRIME MELODRAMA

Shooting began in July 1946 for *Take My Life*, a mid-budget (£211,800) British *noir* thriller directed by Ronald Neame and produced by Anthony Havelock-Allan for Cineguild. Neame had been a cinematographer since the 1930s, and the film was his first time as director. *Take My Life* was adapted from a novel by Winston Graham and shot by Guy Green at Pinewood and on location at York railway station.⁴⁹ The sets were

⁴⁵ Herb Lightman, 'Black Narcissus: Color Masterpiece', *American Cinematographer*, December 1947, 433.

⁴⁶ Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, 73.

⁴⁷ Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, 75.

⁴⁸ Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation, 1900–55* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), 179–83.

⁴⁹ Winston Graham was a British novelist and screenwriter. Several of his novels were adapted for the screen with Graham as co-scriptwriter. The most famous film adapted from his work is *Marnie* (Hitchcock, 1961).

designed by John Bryan and Wilfred Singleton, and the drama presented a variety of challenges which tested the studios' post-war capabilities. Bryan had worked on *Great Expectations* (1946) which started production at Denham in December 1945 but then moved to Pinewood early in 1946 after the studio re-opened, locations were filmed on the Kent marshes, and production was completed in May 1946. The historical setting of *Great Expectations* provided Bryan with an opportunity to develop his skills in an area in which he excelled, producing remarkable designs which incorporated expressionist elements based on detailed thumbnail sketches which also informed the camera set-ups.⁵⁰ The contemporary setting of *Take My Life* offered different challenges but showed that Bryan's methods were easily transferable to a different genre.

The filming of *Take My Life*, completed by October 1946, involved shooting 447 set-ups. Some of these were complex, such as constructing in the studio a model tunnel which was filmed, and the footage was then used as back projections for scenes in a studio-built railway carriage. An entire street, an entrance to some flats, a porter's lodge, a chemists' shop, and a pub were constructed on 'E', one of Pinewood's largest stages (165 × 110 ft; 18,150 sq ft). Covent Garden Opera House was created as a 'hanging miniature', that is a forced perspective, in-camera effect using a model or photograph. A report noted that 'mathematically planned camera angles, exact perspective workings and clever lighting' made this set-up particularly impressive.⁵¹ Bryan was known for favouring forced perspective as a means of saving on space with built sets; in this case the miniature achieved the same stylistic effect of presenting the audience with a world in which all might not be right.⁵² Hanging miniatures had also been a feature of *Great Expectations*, so this film gave Bryan further opportunity to use the technique.⁵³ To obtain close-up shots of a railway engine a small unit was sent on location to Hatfield; the main railway scenes were shot at York. Models were used for sets so that camera positions and lighting could be carefully planned, such as for the courtroom scene. The model was featured as part of a film industry exhibit

⁵⁰ Ede, *British Film Design*, 61–2. A few of the sketches for *Great Expectations* are reproduced in Edward Carrick, *Designing for Films* (London: Studio Publications, 1949), 54–5.

⁵¹ *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round (PMGR)*, November 1946, 12.

⁵² Ede, *British Film Design*, 61.

⁵³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 June 1946, Studio Supplement, xxiii.

at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, in 1947. The film was very tightly edited, and it is significant in this regard that the editorial associate was Jack Harris, one of the technicians who visited Hollywood in 1945. As we have seen in Chapter 2, comparisons between editing techniques there and reputedly ‘slower’ British films were detailed in Harris’s report. It is likely that its findings influenced the crisp editing of *Take My Life* which indeed never wasted a moment in its prioritisation of suspense while communicating key points of detail and locale.

The narrative, likened by critics to the work of Hitchcock, concerns Nick Talbot (Hugh Williams), a man accused of murdering his former girlfriend Elizabeth, and the attempts of his wife Philippa Shelley (Greta Gynt), an opera singer, to clear his name when circumstantial evidence and mistaken identity lead the police to suspect him of being guilty. Philippa’s investigations take her to a school in Scotland where she discovers that Elizabeth was married to headmaster Sidney Fleming (Marius Goring), a fact he has tried to conceal which makes Philippa suspect him of being involved in the murder. She leaves with photographic evidence of Elizabeth’s identity but Fleming, suspecting that Philippa has found him out, follows her. Travelling by train, Fleming confronts Philippa and confesses that he murdered Elizabeth. He attempts to kill Philippa but jumps to his death when interrupted by an undercover police officer whose corroboration of Philippa’s discovery leads to Nick’s acquittal. The inclusion of suspenseful scenes on a train, a musical clue, and mistaken identity contributed to the film’s association with Hitchcock’s British thrillers.

This suspense-driven narrative and variety of sets was highly conducive to testing the full capabilities of Pinewood’s stage ‘E’. This stage was conveniently located close to the stores and the painters’ and carpenters’ workshops. In terms of planning the ideal film studio layout this configuration was considered by architects to be beneficial for productivity.⁵⁴ Neame originally wanted the film to access two stages but limitations on space when shooting commenced forced the original ten-week schedule to be lengthened. This was because Pinewood had only recently reopened, and material and labour shortages affected studios’ capacities. Shortages of materials were indeed embedded within the film’s creation.

⁵⁴ Frank Woodward, ‘The Planning of Film Studios’, *Building*, April 1935, 154.

As noted above, the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1947 featured a ‘British Film Section’ in which models of selected film sets were shown.⁵⁵ The catalogue explained how a convincing ‘modern apartment of some luxury’ set was achieved in one of the sets for *Take My Life* despite the need for economy. The sets were supposed to inspire visitors to the exhibition by giving tips on how to create an impression of luxury at a time when many materials were still rationed. A complete suite of furniture was covered in ‘filter cloth’, or muslin, dyed in the studio workshops. The impression of a ‘rich fitted carpet’ was created by using dyed hessian on a layer of unrationed felt. Canvas rugs were placed on top and again to create an impression of luxury these were hand-painted in the traditional carpet weavers’ designs. Net curtains were made with butter muslin and other curtains with dyed ribbed linen. Ornate cigarette boxes were cast from the quick-setting plaster of Paris and painted. In this way the film was promoted as an example of pragmatic ingenuity in set dressing, a theme which spoke to the film’s imbrication within the exigencies of post-war rationing and shortages. Audiences were thus encouraged to link the film’s economies with their own personal experiences of rationing.

The drive for economy also involved the costumes, as with designer Joy Ricardo’s ‘mushroom-pink’, English tailor-made topcoat for Greta Gynt as shown in Fig. 3.7. This, claimed the *Kine Weekly*, was ‘the first to use a new material which – born of the post-war shortage – may revolutionize winter fashions’.⁵⁶ It reported that the fabric called Bedford cord had hitherto been used only for car and cinema upholstery. A virtue was made of this because it had proved so easy to mould and tailor that it would be featured ‘prominently’ in London couturiers’ winter collections for home and sport. As Richard Farmer has documented, the film occasioned another fashion ‘first’—a special hat designed by London milliner Hugh Beresford. It was known as the ‘Philippa’, named after Gynt’s character in *Take My Life* in a film that featured the star donning several different hats.⁵⁷

A studio-by-studio top feature output survey for July–December 1946 conducted by *Kinematograph Weekly* demonstrated that Pinewood (five

⁵⁵ Ideal Home Exhibition 1947 catalogue, V&A archive of art and design, London.

⁵⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 September 1946, 33.

⁵⁷ Richard Farmer, ‘Philippa’ Arrives at Pinewood’. STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2023/03/03/philippa-arrives-at-pinewood/>.



Fig. 3.7 Greta Gynt as Philippa Shelley wearing Bedford cord topcoat in *Take My Life* (1947)

stages) could only accommodate eight feature films a year; Denham (seven stages) could produce twelve. The thirty or so stages available to MGM in Hollywood, by comparison, meant seven films could be in production at once.⁵⁸ Even so, the production team managed to work well within these parameters, providing optimism that the current restrictions affecting the film industry did not necessarily prevent turning out good quality films with good box-office potential. The film's approach to economy meant that some shots, such as the backstage area of Covent Garden, were shot using Pinewood's own corridors and non-stage spaces which convincingly doubled for Nick's walk to see Philippa in her dressing room. The shot, without edits, takes time to follow Nick's journey down the corridor. Rather than being an example of a British film taking too much time in showing transitions from location to location which as noted in Chapter 1 was seen as a scriptwriting issue, Harris's editing here chooses to show that exact thing but to great effect. The shot is an example of how Harris deftly alternates between shots to create rhythm and pace as Nick walks briskly past busy technicians moving theatrical scenery. As he moves, we fleetingly see various dials on the corridor wall

⁵⁸ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 July 1946, 28.

and technical kit. While this is meant to evoke a theatrical backstage area, Pinewood's corridor is a perfect double to evoke an atmosphere of hurried activity. In this case Pinewood quite literally comes into the frame (Fig. 3.8).

The set built for the school's cloisters was a replica based on the school attended by Ronald Neame at Hurstpierpoint College, West Sussex. The back-projected footage referenced earlier for the climactic scene when Fleming is trying to strangle Philippa on the train is also effective in heightening the impression of danger while the train is passing through a tunnel. This is skillfully set up in the previous scene when Phillipa is on the first part of her journey as the space of the carriage is prepared for future suspense. Here we see the mechanics of studio practices being used: back projection (Fig. 3.9), dissolves and a slow tracking shot as the camera follows her eyeline outside the train carriage window and using a dissolve to transition to York station. Here the location footage is used as Philippa gets out of the train to buy a newspaper. The camera's apparent movement outside the window foreshadows the villain's death in the following scene when he jumps from the train. Using the studio in these resourceful



Fig. 3.8 Hugh Williams as Nicholas Talbot. Using Pinewood's corridor in *Take My Life* (1947)



Fig. 3.9 Greta Gynt as Philippa Shelley travelling by train. Back projection in *Take My Life* (1947)

ways demonstrated that to deal with current problems Pinewood was actively experimenting with many initiatives. At the same time, these were designed to promote the film industry's longer-term recovery.

CAPTAIN BOYCOTT: IN THE STUDIO AND ON LOCATION

Captain Boycott (budget £250,000) made use of both the studio and locations to depict its nineteenth-century Irish setting. Frank Launder directed for Individual Pictures a film based on the theme of landlord tyranny involving tensions between violence and non-violence which resonated with more contemporary politics in Ireland. The film's combination of 'picturesque and star values within a coherent political framework' yielded moderate business at the box office, and there were reports of a positive reception in the USA.⁵⁹ Shooting began in September 1946. Much was made in the press of the location shooting in Mullingar, County Westmeath in Ireland. This had been chosen because of its racecourse, a key site in the drama, which involved just over a thousand extras recruited through advertising in the local press and cinemas,

⁵⁹ Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 168.

who were paid a little extra if they wore period costumes.⁶⁰ Although a Dublin firm supplied some of the vintage costumes, a dockers' strike at Dublin prevented the rest being imported from Denham. Residents were therefore encouraged to wear their own claw-hammer coats and voluminous skirts.⁶¹ Another location was a nearby seventeenth-century country mansion for the military encampment scenes.

Mullingar was pleased to have been used as one of the film's locations, recognition of which was indicated by two parties that were given by the National Federation of Irish Ex-Servicemen and by the Mullingar Industrial Development Association at the end of filming.⁶² The ex-servicemen had been employed during shooting scenes for the film.⁶³ The experience of shooting on location seems to have been very successful, with the film crew receiving a positive local reception. Ossie Morris, who had shot *Green for Danger*, also worked on location as a camera operator on *Captain Boycott*. As well as employing Irish people locally 'a great many Irish artists came to Pinewood Studios to take part in the film'.⁶⁴ Details such as this were celebrated in the press, tying in the participation of residents with publicity about the locale's authenticity. This theme was repeated in reports of scenes shot in the studios. Shooting appears to have been very efficient, including on the exterior lot at Pinewood where an Irish village was created. The set was unusually visited by Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, a dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁵

Edward Carrick was the art director on *Captain Boycott*. He went with Frank Launder to inspect the Irish locations after which he decided to build some of the locations, such as a hill over which a cavalry rode, on the studio lot.⁶⁶ In addition, a model of the set was made with the purpose of being able to assess how much or little needed to be built to obtain a particular shot by looking at the model through a miniature frame which replicated what a camera would shoot.⁶⁷ This technique was welcomed by

⁶⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 9 September 1946, 13.

⁶¹ *The Irish Times Pictorial*, 27 July 1946, 2.

⁶² *PMGR*, September 1946, 1.

⁶³ *The Irish Times*, 27 July 1946, 7.

⁶⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 December 1946, 193.

⁶⁵ *PMGR*, January 1947, 16.

⁶⁶ Edward Carrick, BECTU History Project Interview 1991, no. 182 transcript, 19.

⁶⁷ *PMGR*, May 1947, 10.

Carrick who thought set sketches would eventually be replaced by ‘properly lighted models around which the miniature viewfinder can move’ so that the designer could concentrate on creating a mood by illustrating the script.⁶⁸ Sets with intricate camera movements which involved tracking an actor’s movements going upstairs or across a hallway required models in the planning stages ‘in order that complete understanding can be reached between director, art director, and cameraman as to the working of the scene’.⁶⁹ Using models saved time planning lighting set-ups and the positioning of microphones by the sound crew. In *Captain Boycott* the character Hugh Davin’s (Stewart Granger, Fig. 3.10) cottage had two levels and the model created to help plot the relationship between camera and the set was used as one of Pinewood’s ‘film studio’ exhibits in the Ideal Home Exhibition, 1947.⁷⁰ The technical ingenuity of filmmaking was thus publicised to a wide audience. This was especially impressive in the case of creating *Captain Boycott*’s distinctive locales with historical detail. Attention to the film’s production values enhanced its status as a key indicator of Pinewood’s post-war recovery. Although filming on location and, to a lesser extent, filming on the exterior lot, introduced difficulties such as weather problems and the need to control other logistical issues, in this case valuable stage space was saved at Pinewood.

When Carrick published the 1949 second edition of his book on set designing for films, he included a plan and sections of Davin’s cottage. It showed in detail the plotting of some of the camera set-ups and Carrick noted that the drawings were to be read in conjunction with a construction sheet which described the materials used for the walls and ceiling, and also the treatment of wood surfaces, the floor, and backings.⁷¹ Sam Eastlake, a plasterer at Pinewood, followed Carrick’s instructions for the floor around the fireplace ‘to be carried out in cement and sand modelled on the job to represent old slabs.’⁷² Eastlake was credited in the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* for demonstrating in this job ‘outstanding ability in

⁶⁸ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 20.

⁶⁹ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 50.

⁷⁰ *PMGR*, March 1947, 3.

⁷¹ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 62–5.

⁷² Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 65.



Fig. 3.10 Stewart Granger as Hugh Davin in cottage set in *Captain Boycott* (1947). Alamy stock images

reproducing natural stone'.⁷³ The large set allowed for freedom of movement for the actors and was constructed to evoke maximum verisimilitude concerning the spaces, materials, and 'lived in' appearance. The detail provided by Carrick further showed that as well as using the model shooting was anticipated at the drawing and construction stage of the designs which were also crucial for saving time and cutting costs. Further ways of ensuring that the shoot was both efficient and pictorially effective were achieved by instructions in the script. As noted by Harper the film was filmed in such a way as to 'wring the maximum picturesque effect from the scenery: the final shooting script insisted that the castle ruins "should be situated on a piece of rising round, so that the broken walls stand out in sombre contrast to the evening sky"'.⁷⁴ In this sense the production was in step with the post-war issues of scriptwriting debated by Pinewood's Research Committee in 1945, as well as anticipating

⁷³ *PMGR*, November 1946, 12.

⁷⁴ Harper, *Picturing the Past*, 168.

recommendations made by the Joint Production Advisory Committee in 1948–51.

Captain Boycott was an example of how both studio and location shooting could be achieved without undue delays or rising costs. After the commencement of shooting in September 1946 production stayed on schedule and once filming in Ireland was completed, intermittent shooting was continued on the Irish lot at Pinewood, and then the bulk of the work in October 1946 was concentrated in the nine sets constructed on the floor. A report detailed the complexity of the sets: ‘Certainly there was very little of “D” stage left by the time the Country Fair – complete with side-shows – the cottage, the grassy bank and the tree had all been built in...Not to mention the crowd of more than 200 extras and small-part players, and the camera crane for the overhead shots of the Irish Reel dancing’.⁷⁵ Stage D was one of the largest (165 × 110 ft; 18,150 sq ft) of Pinewood’s five main stages. Launder and Gilliat collaborated once again with precision, with Launder leading a second unit in Ireland to clear up some remaining shots while Gilliat took a third unit to Brighton to obtain ‘matching shots’ of Hugh riding his horse and coach scenes. By February 1947 the rough cut was ready for the final stages of post-production and the film was released in the UK on 1 September 1947; its US release was on 5 December 1947 in New York. The production showed how coordinating different units, the Irish locations, and studio work could be effectively achieved at a time when working conditions in studios were still adversely affected by the pressures of post-war recovery; the exceptionally harsh winter of 1946–7; the dollar crisis and conflict with Hollywood over the Dalton Duty; and the need to rapidly increase British productivity.

REVIEWING 1946

Pinewood had done well in 1946 to bring to completion four high quality films, one of which was in Technicolor. *Captain Boycott*’s production started in 1946, and the film was completed in February 1947. *Great Expectations*, one of Rank’s prestige pictures, was the most expensive, with *Black Narcissus* reflecting the generally higher costs for Technicolor films. The budgets for the five films averaged £267,160, which was the

⁷⁵ *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

mid-range region that would not attract adverse criticism as too expensive. While in the shorter term few of the films made profits, *Great Expectations* and *Black Narcissus* have long since been considered classics of British cinema and both films were eventually successful at the box office. Both *Take My Life* and *Captain Boycott* were very good examples of post-war genre filmmaking which, as we have seen, involved set designs which used the studios' facilities and expertise very effectively. When assessing the period from September 1945 to August 1946, the trade press emphasised the need for more floor space. Figures were published (Table 3.2) showing the number of films produced by each studio in relation to the square footage of their floor spaces.⁷⁶ These ratios produced variable results but when compared to Hollywood, with its much higher number of stages, it was demonstrated that the studios there produced more films using less space than in Britain.⁷⁷

This kind of commentary was in step with the interest shown in studying production methods in Hollywood which resulted in the visits there made by British technicians just after the war detailed in Chapter 2.

Table 3.2 Completed floor work in British studios September 1945–August 1946

<i>Studio</i>	<i>Number of films</i>	<i>Available floor space square feet</i>	<i>1 film to space ratio</i>
Denham	7	108,700	1: 15,528
British National, Elstree	6	43,256	1: 7209
Ealing	4	24,694	1: 6173
Riverside	3	12,265	1: 4225
Nettlefold	3	13,076	1: 4358
Pinewood (open 8 months)	3	54,360	1: 18,120
Shepherd's Bush	5	30,785	1: 6157
Sound City (some space requisitioned)	1	53,300	1: 53,300
Welwyn	3	15,368	1: 5123

⁷⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 October 1946, 12.

⁷⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 November 1947, 9. The deduction was that even though Hollywood had far more stages than in Britain, their efficient use of stage space also enabled it to produce more films.

The figures need to be taken with caution however, since the use of floor space simply stated in square feet ratios does not account for the type or quality of films being shot on the stages. Also, considering floor space without reference to the other facilities that made studios run efficiently, such as the proximity of workshops and equipment stores, or the ability to assemble sets adjacent to stages, limits understanding of how studio infrastructures functioned holistically. As we have seen, effective use could be made of the exterior backlot for *Black Narcissus* and *Captain Boycott*, as well as location shooting. The calculations seem to indicate Denham's quicker return to normal after the war than Pinewood and Sound City, the other larger studios on the list. But in the war Denham continued to be operated as a commercial studio, so it was in a different position to other studios in relation to difficulties associated with de-requisitioning and adjusting to peacetime conditions.⁷⁸ While films had been made by the Crown Film Unit (CFU) and Service Units at Pinewood it took some time before the CFU transferred operations to Beaconsfield when the war ended and the Service Units were disbanded. These units had specialised in short and instructional propaganda films, rather than fiction feature films. Even so, none of the films produced in 1946 at Denham were particularly significant in terms of quality, box office, or the prestige tag associated with *Great Expectations* and *Black Narcissus*. British National at Elstree was relatively productive in turning out six films, along with the five completed at Shepherd's Bush. The general point that British studios needed more space to cope with an expansion of production was made repeatedly in the trade press, a situation that became more intense in the wake of the Dalton Duty crisis the following year.

The films made at Pinewood in 1946 thus reflect in microcosm the multiple temporalities and spaces of studio production. These first films on the floor in the post-war period showcased some of the techniques and economies that were to typify Pinewood's production culture for the next decade. Thinking about them as *studio* films invites a different way of evaluating the films, their reputations, and identities as they constituted Pinewood's image, capabilities, and evolution as a studio very much situated in the contexts of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation. As detailed in the following chapter, this trend continued in subsequent years.

⁷⁸ Sarah Street, 'Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

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In the Studio and on Location: Mapping Pinewood's Culture in 1947–1950

Abstract This chapter focuses on films produced by the Independent Producers at Pinewood during 1947, a key year in which the film industry was under great pressure to produce more films. It examines in detail the new techniques and approaches to set design in the films *Blanche Fury* (1948), *The End of the River* (1947), *The Woman in the Hall* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (1948), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *Esther Waters* (1948) and *London Belongs to Me* (1948). Experiments in Technicolor design in particular emerge as an important theme, and also techniques used for films shot primarily on location. The chapter concludes with an overview and assessment of the immediate post-war years when Pinewood supported many productions whose art direction practices and working methods were very much situated in the exigencies of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation.

Keywords Set Design · Technicolor · Technology · Studios · British Film Industry

As Pinewood continued its return to production in the early post-war years, this chapter continues to examine how set designs and other innovative technical methods were deployed to rationalise production. During 1947–8 the Independent Producers enjoyed relative freedom while supported by Rank and Pinewood's resources. As the following

chart in Table 4.1 illustrates, some iconic feature films were made at the studios before the pressures for greater economies dictated even more cost-cutting regimes. As we shall see, further experimentation in studio-based ingenuity however continued, albeit overshadowed by broader economic and political issues which affected the film industry. Pinewood's infrastructure ultimately proved resilient at a time when other facilities struggled to survive.

BLANCHE FURY: COLOUR DESIGN AT PINEWOOD

Before *Black Narcissus* fifteen of Britain's twenty Technicolor sound feature films had been produced at Denham.¹ *The Mikado* (Victor Schertzinger, 1939) and *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson, 1944) were made at Pinewood, but the studios had not yet established a particular reputation for colour filmmaking. The situation was changed by the Archers' role in the Independent Producers, particularly with the seminal films *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes* (1948) which were admired internationally for promoting a particularly distinctive 'British' style of Technicolor.² While *Blanche Fury* (1948) was not an Archers film, it was an important Technicolor historical costume drama shot at Pinewood and on location. Marc Allégret came over from France to direct the film, an experience which, as detailed in Chapter 6, prompted a comparison with filming in contemporary French studios.³ The historical, melodramatic setting allowed cinematographer Guy Green to experiment with low-key lighting and colour. The film had an expressive colour design in many sequences, making it a significant Technicolor film that has tended to be overshadowed by the better-known Archers' films.⁴

The production design for *Blanche Fury* by John Bryan, working with Wilfred Shingleton as art director, needed to take Technicolor into account since colour values in cinematography as well as lighting technique were crucial variables in the planning of sets. Carrick likened gauging the emotional effects of colour to the coordination of different

¹ John Huntley, *British Technicolor Films* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1949).

² Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation, 1900–55* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), 179–93.

³ *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round (PMGR)*, January 1947, 4–5.

⁴ Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 148–53.

Table 4.1 Films in production at Pinewood in 1947

<i>Film and UK release date</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Pinewood shooting schedule</i>	<i>Editing completed*</i>	<i>Locations</i>	<i>Production design Art direction</i>
<i>Blanche Fury</i> (Technicolor) 22 Mar 1948	Cineguild	£382,200	Jan–Oct 1947	Feb 1948	Wootton Lodge, and Shire Hall, Staffs; Weaver Hills; Dunstable Downs, Beds	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>The End of the River</i> 1 Dec 1947	The Archers	£217,400	Jan–Sept 1947	Oct 1947	Brazil	Fred Pusey
<i>The Woman in the Hall</i> 24 Nov 1947	Wessex	£201,200	Mar–Sept 1947	Oct 1947		Peter Proud
<i>Oliver Twist</i> 25 Oct 1948	Cineguild	£371,500	July–Dec 1947	June 1948		John Bryan
<i>The Red Shoes</i> (Technicolor) 6 Sept 1948	The Archers	£505,600	June–Nov 1947	July 1948	Monte Carlo; Monaco station; Villefranche-sur-Mer; Opéra and Gare de Lyon, Paris; Royal Opera House and Mercury Theatre, London	Hein Heckroth
<i>Esther Waters</i> 1 Nov 1948	Wessex	£338,600	Oct 1947–Feb 1948	Sept 1948	Folkington Manor, E.Sussex	Fred Pusey
<i>London Belongs to Me</i> 13 Sept 1948	Individual	£271,300	Oct 1947–Apr 1948	July 1948	Burnham Beeches, Bucks; London	Roy Oxley

* Editing was included in the *Kinematograph Weekly*'s production charts from 1947

elements required for musical orchestration, an analogy that was often used about colour design. This echoed Michael Powell's comments on his return from visiting Hollywood about the need for British films to foreground colour as an integral aspect of a production's total design. Carrick pointed out that in turning two-dimensional sketches into three-dimensional coloured sets, designers had to allow for factors such as how light reflects from one surface to another and on the faces and costumes of the actors as they move.⁵ Technicolor rendered colours in a particular way, with an emphasis on accentuating 'warm' reds that were exploited in *Blanche Fury* in scenes involving the leading character's femininity and transgression.⁶ Ossie Morris, one of the camera operators on the film, admired Bryan's production designs and sets, with their emphasis on vertical composition which suited the film's standard Academy aspect ratio (1.37: 1) and *mise-en-scène* very well. The scenes of Clare Hall, for example, are designed to accentuate the impression of high ceilings, doors, and staircases, shot in low-key with the heroine's vivid red dress providing a stark contrast as seen in Fig. 4.1.

The film required quite complex set-ups which at times stretched the crew: at one point the film was six weeks behind schedule, but the team tried to make up the time by shooting with dual technical crews. Producer Anthony Havelock-Allan directed a second unit on a set representing the gardens of Clare Hall while Allégret led the first unit directing scenes set in the Assize Court.⁷ Morris's recollections of *Blanche Fury* attest to the efforts that were attempted on set to achieve particularly challenging effects. One shot required the camera and crane, on which the large, heavy Technicolor camera and blimp were mounted, to track through an open window into a room on the set. The cumbersome technology made the shot very awkward, and the blimp fell off the crane when it caught the window frame when being pulled out. The crane then became unbalanced and shot upwards, causing camera operator Ernest Steward to fall to the studio floor, giving him a concussion and injuring his hand quite badly.⁸ The set had been redesigned so that part of the wall could be pulled away

⁵ Edward Carrick, *Designing for Films* (London: Studio Publications, 1949), 69.

⁶ Liz Watkins, 'Colour Consciousness and Design in *Blanche Fury* as Technicolor Melodrama', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7, no. 1 (2010): 57.

⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, iii.

⁸ *Birmingham Gazette*, 20 January 1947, 1.



Fig. 4.1 Contrasting colour and light. Valerie Hobson as Blanche Fury in *Blanche Fury* (1948)

at a precise moment to allow the camera to go through the window, but poor timing executing this difficult move caused the blimp to catch the frame. Morris took over from Steward the following day, but the shot as originally conceived by production designer John Bryan was abandoned.⁹ The idea for the shot may have come from *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), the Technicolor film that featured several remarkable crane shots and in part inspired the ‘look’ of *Blanche Fury*.¹⁰ Cranes were in short supply in Britain and those in use at Pinewood at that time were ‘antiquated’.¹¹ Despite its cumbersome size and weight Morris however liked using the three-strip Technicolor camera because ‘the viewfinder was mounted so close to the lens axis that all problems with parallax were

⁹ Ossie Morris interviewed by Sarah Street and Liz Watkins, 6 August 2008, published in Simon Brown, Sarah Street and Liz Watkins (eds.), *British Colour Cinema: Practices and Theories* (London: British Film Institute/Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 61.

¹⁰ Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 151–2.

¹¹ Oswald Morris, *Huston, we have a problem* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 44. MGM at Elstree had ‘prize pieces of apparatus’ including a special light, very easily manoeuvred crane made in the MGM engineering shop under special licence granted by its American manufacturer, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, xv.

virtually eliminated'.¹² In this sense shooting *Blanche Fury* was easier than Morris's experience as noted earlier with *Green for Danger* when the location of the viewfinder on Mitchell cameras challenged the operator.

The production of *Blanche Fury* indicated a confidence in colour film-making that had been identified towards the end of the war by the British Film Producers Association (BFPA) as an area for research and further expansion.¹³ It is no surprise that Michael Powell was a keen advocate, but it is significant that other filmmakers were considering colour at a time when any such production was more expensive and, as Morris's anecdote above indicates, could be more complex than shooting in black and white.¹⁴ Costs for the latter could still reach the higher range, especially the prestige Dickens adaptations produced by Cineguild. The budget for *Blanche Fury* (£382,200) was similarly well above average for the period and considerably higher than *Black Narcissus* (£280,000). These costs were however considered to be worth it, especially in view of the emphasis given by the BFPA to exploiting colour in the long-term. While this may have seemed a risky strategy to pursue in view of current economic pressures, the fact that Technicolor films were attempted indicates trust in locating Pinewood as the best studio to ensure both the future of colour and its own success. During this period Rank did not shoot any colour films at Denham, thus reversing the previous trend whereby Denham was the main studio producing Technicolor films.

The End of the River and the Woman in the Hall

The End of the River (Derek Twist and Lewis N. Twist, 1947), mostly shot on location in Brazil, was not in colour because of the expense. Although produced by the Archers, cinematographer Chris Challis recalled that Powell and Pressburger 'had very little to do with it'.¹⁵ In spite of the stunning Amazonian location and casting of Sabu, Esmond Knight and Brazilian actress, singer, and theatre director Bibi Ferreira,

¹² Morris, *Huston, We Have a Problem*, 44.

¹³ The National Archives (TNA), BT 64/95: 'The Future of the British Film Production Industry', BFPA report 1 July 1944.

¹⁴ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Minutes of second special meeting with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 October 1945, and follow-up meeting 26 October 1945.

¹⁵ BECTU interview no. 59: Chris Challis, 11 October 1988.

Powell considered that *The End of the River* was directed in a ‘dull’ way from a poor script.¹⁶ This verdict was echoed in *Kinematograph Weekly*’s review: ‘For a time its finely photographed vistas and panoramas thrill, but after that all attempts to wade through its grisly detail and interpret its message become an unutterable bore’.¹⁷ When the film was finished in Pinewood no major issues were reported. Once released it was not profitable, although the Rank Organisation reported to the Board of Trade in 1950 that the film’s UK and overseas receipts were similar at a time when British films generally were making more money at home than abroad.¹⁸ *The End of the River* remains an interesting curio that could not quite deliver on its promise; although it was shot in an ‘authentic’ location, it could not match the more generally successful production values of the other films produced at Pinewood just after the war.

The next film to begin filming at Pinewood was *The Woman in the Hall*, directed by Jack Lee. Designer Peter Proud remembered the film as a failure ‘that should never have been made’ because of a poor script and cast.¹⁹ Proud’s efforts were however recorded in the trade press as ‘remarkably fine’.²⁰ One of the sets for a restaurant was built ‘in a long, narrow triangle formation’ to allow for long tracking shots. This is an interesting approach to making such shots interesting through significant contributions from designers, as was the strategy demonstrated in *Take My Life*. Despite giving the appearance of being expensive the film was created using basic materials. The production report explained that Proud and the design team had through ‘imaginative improvisation’ nevertheless created a sumptuous, rich-looking set. Decorated drapes, for example, were made of hessian and plaster was used to give them shape and texture, as was typical at the time when fabric shortages caused by rationing necessitated using practical alternatives and improvisation. ‘Sumptuous ceilings’ were made of carpets slung across from wall to wall and fringed with frayed rope. The restaurant’s tablecloths were ‘cut and folded into a deceptive semblance of elegance’.²¹ There were no delays in filming

¹⁶ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 648.

¹⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 30 October 1947, 28.

¹⁸ TNA, BT 64/4490, J. Arthur Rank memorandum.

¹⁹ BECTU interview no. 27: Peter Proud, 18th November and 3rd December 1987.

²⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 May 1947, 37.

²¹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 May 1947, 37.

and astute use was made of art direction and set-dressing teams preparing different sets at the same time. Such reportage illustrates the extent to which there was interest in how effects were achieved, and an emphasis on ingenious set design often tended to offset criticisms of films like *The Woman in the Hall* that were otherwise judged to be below par. These considerations draw attention to how the team's skills in economical art direction and resourceful set dressing were appreciated at the time of production. These were seen as a continuum of Pinewood's resilience, and in this respect the studio relay generated marks *The Woman in the Hall* as a significant film in the slate under consideration in this survey.

OLIVER TWIST: DESIGNING DICKENS

Oliver Twist was a large-scale prestige production that began shooting at Pinewood in July 1947. Directed by David Lean and designed by John Bryan, *Oliver Twist* was intended as a follow-up to the achievements of *Great Expectations*. One report during the filming implied that it might be shot in Technicolor, but this did not happen, probably because of costs but also the film's association as a prestige film with *Great Expectations* which was known for its striking, graphic black and white cinematography.²² The film's visual design was plotted precisely by Bryan in thumbnail sketches and inspiration for the city scenes was taken from illustrator Gustave Doré's nineteenth-century engravings of London. As Ede has noted, a great sense of movement and contrast was conveyed in *Oliver Twist*, with its 'tall, twisted buildings' and cramped interior spaces: 'He emphasized the claustrophobic elements by placing "lids" (ceilings on many of the sets). Moreover, Bryan used all of the elements of production design—sets, locations, and optical effects—to produce an impression of Dickens' London which was at once believable and exhilarating'.²³ As Carrick noted of Bryan's work, the unnatural emphasis of ceilings had the effect of lending perspective to a set.²⁴ Bryan used his signature method of 'perspective construction' for sets, as seen from shots taken of the lot during filming which show how sets were built using unrealistic dimensions so that objects and buildings in the

²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 August 1947, 11.

²³ Laurie Ede, *British Film Design* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 63.

²⁴ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 47.

distance were built smaller to create the illusion that they were further away from the foreground view. In this way space was saved on the set but when filmed the view looked accurate.²⁵ In addition, a visitor to Pinewood when *Oliver Twist* was in production reported that the sets appeared to be constructed of interchangeable sections which could be rearranged to suit different story requirements and fresh camera set-ups.²⁶ Bryan thus continued experiments in perspective previously demonstrated in *Great Expectations* and *Take My Life*. Lighting director Guy Green used a simple approach of one key light, a smaller backlight, and a soft fill light.²⁷ The film enabled him to demonstrate his proficiency with low-key lighting as in *Blanche Fury*, but this time using black and white to achieve similar results to animate evocative period sets. Green's lighting design was a judicious means of achieving what was best for the film without using unnecessarily complex set-ups. In these ways the ambition of prestige production was not incompatible with time, space, and cost-saving methods.

THE RED SHOES: ORCHESTRATING 'TOTAL CINEMA'

In production at the same time as *Oliver Twist*, *The Red Shoes* was a prestige film of a different style. Shot at Pinewood and on location in Paris, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Monte Carlo, and London, it used Technicolor, music and ballet as inspiration for innovative production designs by Hein Heckroth (Fig. 4.2). Michael Powell wanted a very specific approach of lighter, 'flimsier' art direction that created 'atmosphere rather than naturalistic reproduction of so-called reality'.²⁸ Rather than reproduce buildings as concrete structures Powell advocated scenery that was more flexible, an idea that Heckroth responded to most effectively. As Ede has commented, *The Red Shoes* exhibited Heckroth's successful balance of non-naturalistic approaches utilising the idea of 'mobile' design.²⁹ It provided the Archers with the opportunity to also experiment with

²⁵ *PMGR*, September 1947, 19.

²⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 August 1947, 11.

²⁷ Morris, *Huston We Have a Problem*, 44.

²⁸ Monk Gibbon, *The Red Shoes: A Critical Study* (Addlestone: Saturn Press, 1948), 52.

²⁹ Ede, *British Film Design*, 59.

the concept of the ‘composed film’ in which all elements, particularly music and colour, were designed to cohere into a ‘total cinema’ experience. Heckroth’s prior expertise in fine art, theatre, ballet, film costume design and as set designer for *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal, 1945) convinced Powell that he was the best person for the job. On *The Red Shoes* he worked with set designer Arthur Lawson to realise Powell’s ambition for an imaginative production which was particularly evident in planning ‘The Red Shoes Ballet’, a spectacular 12.5-minute ballet-within-the-film sequence. This was planned by creating a short 141-shot ‘story strip’ film of 500 paintings which had been produced by Ivor Beddoes based on Heckroth’s original 300 sketches of the ballet (Fig. 4.3). This method, used by Disney in the USA, was discussed in 1945 at meetings attended by Powell and Pressburger to discuss reports by British technicians who had visited Hollywood. A model (Fig. 4.4) was also used to plan the set.

The short film guided how the sequence should finally be filmed on Stage ‘E’ at Pinewood with the music and actors on the actual set. It



Fig. 4.2 Hein Heckroth designing *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images



Fig. 4.3 Hein Heckroth design for the Red Shoes ballet in *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images

also allowed for any necessary adjustments to be made to the timing in advance of preparing the shooting script. This level of planning was essential, especially because the ballet had to be filmed in sections which posed challenges to dancers not used to having their movements interrupted. The short film was shown to the different production departments to aid the construction of sets and planning of effects. It demonstrated Heckroth's careful planning of colours according to a particular scheme, as well as lighting, camera angles, and trick effects such as the illusion of a dancing newspaper figure and the use of reflective materials such as cellophane.³⁰ Once in production, the shooting of *The Red Shoes* posed many

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of colour in *The Red Shoes* see Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 184–93.



Fig. 4.4 Hein Heckroth with model for the Red Shoes ballet sequence in *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images

challenges for cinematographer Jack Cardiff, especially in terms of accelerating camera speed to film dancers as they leapt in the air and needing to allow for Technicolor's high-key lighting requirements.³¹

Many different techniques and devices were used for the sequence shot on the studio's stage including mountain ranges each painted on a separate glass sheet and set at intervals one behind the other, and in the foreground 'various coloured chemicals which wave streaks and trails in the water' that was poured into a flat glass tank which separated the camera from the set.³² It was an elaborate orchestration of production design involving high levels of collaboration between technicians, whereas the film's other sequences, such as Lady Neston's house in Belgravia, used more conventional sets.³³ Degrees of realism were required for some sets. Pinewood's modelling department of seven craftsmen headed by Fred

³¹ Jack Cardiff, *Magic Hour* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 94.

³² Gibbon, *The Red Shoes*, 73.

³³ Ede, *British Film Design*, 57.

Newman, provided models. The team's previous work on *Black Narcissus* had 'demanded all the reserves of ingenuity and improvisation they could muster', and this was no less the case with *The Red Shoes*.³⁴ Their work, mostly in clay, provided a basic design which was then completed by plasterers, painters, carpenters, and riggers. One such model was created for a theatre box which appeared as very realistic in the film. Details of the skilled work of modellers were reported in the studio magazine the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, with images of the process and this particular model.³⁵

While the showcase ballet sequence has been admired by many critics, less attention has been paid to location shooting for *The Red Shoes* which was an important part of the film's appeal of quality combined with aesthetic sumptuousness.³⁶ Heckroth produced sketches for the whole film which was typified by imaginative responses to both working in the studio and in exterior locations. In June 1947 exteriors were shot in Monte Carlo and Nice, followed by Paris and four weeks in the Cote d'Azur.³⁷ This was documented by Ken Rick, second assistant director, in the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*.³⁸ When filming at the Gare de Lyon in Paris the unit used hourly paid labour hired from Parisian film studios and local extras. This was reported as a positive experience, with the French technicians in particular keen to learn about shooting in Technicolor. This coincided with a time when French filmmakers were considering making greater use of colour, although at that point they were not certain which process—Technicolor or Agfacolor—might deliver the best results.³⁹ At Cannes station several complete trains were used for filming, and action props featured in other locations included yachts in the bay of Monte Carlo and an outdoor lift with hydraulic power at Villefranche. The

³⁴ *PMGR*, November 1947, 13.

³⁵ *PMGR*, November 1947, 13.

³⁶ Shooting films abroad required multiple considerations, including restrictions on the convertibility of sterling into foreign currencies (as formalised by the 1947 Exchange Control Act). Location shooting for *The Red Shoes* thus required very careful planning to maximise the opportunities it provided in terms of authenticity of locale, use of local labour etc.

³⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 June 1947, 15.

³⁸ *PMGR*, June 1947, 4–7.

³⁹ Dudley Andrew, 'The Post-war struggle for colour' in Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (eds.), *Color: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40–49.

Casino terrace and entrance to the Hotel de Paris was very high above Monte Carlo station. To make the most of the spectacular location Powell filmed in the lift which transported people up to the terrace. The location shooting was recorded as an exhilarating experience by Jack Cardiff, and Rick noted that ‘we felt we were truly making a great picture’.⁴⁰ In this way facilities at Pinewood and on location were used for maximum visual impact.

As is well documented, the reception of *The Red Shoes* was not what one might have expected for so exceptional a film, even though the extent of negative critical responses has been exaggerated.⁴¹ Issues over the budget, and Rank’s decision not to give the film a lavish publicity campaign or gala première, were related to the timing of its release when the Rank Organisation was concentrating on cutting costs, although in the longer-term *The Red Shoes* was a successful international release. Its reputation as an extravagant film has been overshadowed by its demonstration of many of the techniques and creative ideas Michael Powell flagged in 1945 as important in his reports on visiting Hollywood. The film is a prime example of many of the insights and observations gained during that trip being put to use in extraordinary ways.

ESTHER WATERS: NATURALISM AND THE COSTUME FILM

The next production on the floor at Pinewood was *Esther Waters* (1948), and this film took a completely different approach to design. As an adaptation of a naturalistic Victorian novel by George Moore, the production took ‘an unusually painstaking approach’ to reproducing elements of the *mise-en-scène*, including the life-size interior of a Victorian mansion named Woodview.⁴² It was directed by Ian Dalrymple of Wessex Films and Peter Proud, but for this film the art direction was by Fred Pusey. The narrative called for many different sets and the film also featured location shooting at Folkington Manor in East Sussex, as well as exterior scenes for the Derby which were used for two sequences including a tense climax towards the end of the film. While for some reviewers the

⁴⁰ Cardiff, *Magic Hour*, p. 95; *PMGR*, June 1947, 7.

⁴¹ Mark Connelly, *The Red Shoes* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 67.

⁴² Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 168.

focus on detail for the *mise-en-scène* was ‘superfluous’, from the point of view of design it was extraordinarily precise in its aim to painstakingly reproduce accurate period detail.⁴³ The film’s publicity drew attention to the level of detail that had been researched for reproducing authentic facsimiles of items such as race cards and flags. While such claims were not uncommon for period films, in this case they were central to its pitch. Proud later said he disliked *Esther Waters* and that he ‘didn’t approach it with the proper attitude’.⁴⁴ His disavowal may have been influenced by the film’s failure at the box-office and generally negative critical reception, but the scenes he directed at the Derby are remarkable in many ways. These include an establishing shot at the beginning of the Derby Day sequence which closely resembles an engraving and painting by William Powell Frith (‘The Derby Day’, 1856–8) which appears to come to life as the crowd becomes animated. The camera tracks past them to evoke the event’s ebullient, funfair atmosphere and festivities. When representatives from six Scottish newspapers visited Pinewood in June 1947, they were amazed at the ingenious techniques being used at the studios to cut costs. These included illusory experiments such as using cardboard figures to create the illusion of background crowds in *Esther Waters*.⁴⁵

Fred Pusey’s art direction contained remarkable period detail such as the kitchen set of Woodview, as well as its other rooms that had been constructed as life-size sets. The mansion’s interiors were enhanced by high camera angles which augmented the impression of ornate grandeur and the imposing, vertical dimensions of the hall, its furniture, tall candlesticks and statues, paintings, and formal, precisely situated decoration. As a form of visual contrast, these helped to articulate through embellished *mise-en-scène* the film’s theme of class (the kitchen is shot from lower angles), the drudgery of domestic work and material hardships experienced by the heroine which are made clear by her very different, impoverished lodgings after losing her job at Woodview. The cinematography also helps to enhance the visual impact and thematic function of other sets: in a scene set in a conservatory used for keeping plants, deep focus cinematography captures their sheer abundance, almost as if they

⁴³ *Monthly Film Bulletin* review *Esther Waters* 15, no. 169 (1948): 138.

⁴⁴ BECTU interview no. 27: Peter Proud, 18th November and 3rd December 1987.

⁴⁵ *The Falkirk Herald*, 18 June 1947, 1.

have taken over the space, looming large in the foreground with the human figures in the background (Fig. 4.5).

Having worked on several British films as an art director and in art departments in the 1930s, Pusey's credentials included several high-profile films including as a sketch artist on *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936), and as assistant to Vincent Korda in creating the sets for *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). While the emphasis for *Esther Waters* is primarily naturalistic, there are occasional scenes which are less so, for example, the visually striking sequence at a servants' ball held at the mansion. The festivities include free reign of the gardens, an experience which acquires heightened intensity through illuminations, fireworks, and an unexpected use of tubular scaffolding. This is used in a graphically composed shot, shown in Fig. 4.6, which replicates figures on a bridge with a firework display in the background. While the scaffold's horizontal and vertical tubes form the structure on which the figures are standing,



Fig. 4.5 Conservatory set in *Esther Waters* (1948)

wooden poles positioned diagonally form part of the design which frames the servants enjoying the festivities. This non-realistic structure acquires added, self-reflexive interest in the material history of film studios since tubular scaffolding was increasingly used to replace timber which was in short supply; Pinewood faced a 50% reduction in its timber quota from the beginning of 1947.⁴⁶ This is a rare instance of it appearing in a film as a prop, rather than its usual invisible role as a material structure used to support sets, lighting, scenery, etc. during production. While *Esther Waters* was not profitable for Rank it nevertheless demonstrated how a production could deploy many attributes that can in retrospect be seen as experimental, and as a real attempt to make production design and cinematography cohere in a consistently expressive manner. In addition, the film's climactic sequence, which intercut the Derby Day with a death-bed scene, used effective editing as a culminating, evocative technique.

LONDON BELONGS TO ME: SPATIAL DESIGN

In a very different context and genre, *London Belongs to Me* (Sidney Gilliat, 1948), the final film which commenced shooting in October 1947, also focussed on the spatial dimensions of a house. The majority was filmed at Pinewood, including 'Dulcimer Street' which was built as a set, with some location shooting in London and at Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire. The narrative, set in London just before the Second World War, centres on the inhabitants, as the opening voice-over informs us, of number ten, an early Victorian house once situated in a 'quite exclusive' part of London (SE11) which had since 'gone down in the world'. Even though the film is set in the 1930s the décor of the house displays its rather faded Victorian heritage, as was common in houses of the period, and art director Roy Oxley's sets made the most of this design opportunity. The designs, as seen in Figs. 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, evoked the film's London locales and prevalent atmosphere.

The house serves as an economical yet effective means of delineating the different tenants' lives, particularly following Percy (Richard Attenborough), whose failed attempt to steal a car leads to him being accused

⁴⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, iv; *PMGR*, 2: 1, February 1947, 2. For the earlier development of tubular scaffolding in Britain see Richard Farmer, 'Supporting Feature: Tubular Scaffolding' STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2021/05/25/supporting-feature-tubular-scaffolding/>



Fig. 4.6 Scaffolding being used as part of the set in *Esther Waters* (1948)

of murder. Following the set of Dulcimer Street at the beginning of the film, the camera looks in through the windows of each floor of the house, as if inviting us in to introduce the tenants in their immediate domestic environments. Oxley used this situation as the basic template through which to communicate key visual information about the tenants' slightly different social positions in terms of wealth and status. The Jossers, the tenants on the ground floor, are about to start a new stage in life since Mr. Josser (Wylie Watson) has just retired and plans to move with his wife to a country cottage. Their lodgings, where their daughter also lives, are tidy but cluttered with treasured possessions, photographs, paintings, plants, cards on the mantelpiece, and ornaments accumulated over many years. These are material embellishments included by Oxley as indicative of a respectable, hard-working family. Mrs. Boon (Gladys Henson) lives on the first floor with her son Percy where the residue of Victoriana is also evident, although the difference between their bedrooms signifies Percy's



Fig. 4.7 Roy Oxley design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

youth, with his posters and photographs pinned to the wall in a skewed manner, as if to show that he is in transit, on the way to a different stage in his life. The top floor and basement, more grandly referred to by the landlady Mrs. Vizzard as ‘the lower ground floor’, are occupied by people not quite as materially comfortable. Connie Coke’s (Ivy St. Helier) top floor rooms are drab and untidy, her stockings hung to dry across a dishevelled space which, as the voice-over tells us, seems appropriate for someone with ‘irregular habits’. The basement becomes a feature of the narrative when a new tenant, Henry Squales (Alastair Sim), turns out to be a fake spiritualist who tries to charm Mrs. Vizzard with a view to accessing the money left to her by her late husband. This space is drab and dingy, the least appealing part of the house, with its subterranean darkness as a suitable milieu for a shady character.

The hallway and staircase of the house also feature prominently to show the characters entering and exiting, encountering each other as they pass through an environment that exudes the familiarity of co-habitation while at the same time revealing the differences between the



Fig. 4.8 Roy Oxley busy London street design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

tenants. Mrs. Vizzard's rooms on the ground floor are the most elaborate, indicating her position as landlady with high ceilings, long, formal heavy curtains, elaborate patterned wallpaper, and ornaments as material possessions which connote her relatively well-off position. In this way the central sets of the house and street are economical ways to stage a drama which otherwise favours medium-close shots of characters. Many established techniques used by art directors were employed effectively on the film. The office set, for example, where Mr. Josser's retirement event is taking place, shows him coming through a door carrying a pile of books. Perspective is created by the illusion through the doorway of a long corridor, a painted background effect created by the Art Department. After Percy's arrest he is held in a police cell where he has a nightmare of various terrifying scenarios regarding his fate. Intercut with this is a darkly lit set with shadows of the cell's bars starkly cast on the wall as expressive of the gravity of his predicament.

Oxley recreated some other parts of London such as 'a perfect reproduction' of a railway viaduct. The lot stood alongside another setting



Fig. 4.9 Roy Oxley courtroom design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

of London since there was some overlap with the production period of *Oliver Twist*.⁴⁷ A few scenes were shot on location in London, including the garage where Percy works, a cinema frontage, canal bridge, and Westminster Bridge. Trinity Church Square, Southwark, became Individual's unit base when shooting scenes of a procession carrying a petition to the Home Secretary. Artificial rain showers were created by using water pressure from a local hydrant as well as studio hoses to produce the effect of a building storm.⁴⁸ In all, the sets were perfect examples of work that was very precisely situated in a milieu that was about to experience change. The typical houses in east London were, like the fictitious Dulcimer Street, a hundred years old, but many of these were destroyed or damaged by wartime bombing. The sets were based on photographs

⁴⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 November 1947, 25.

⁴⁸ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 21 April 1948, 7.

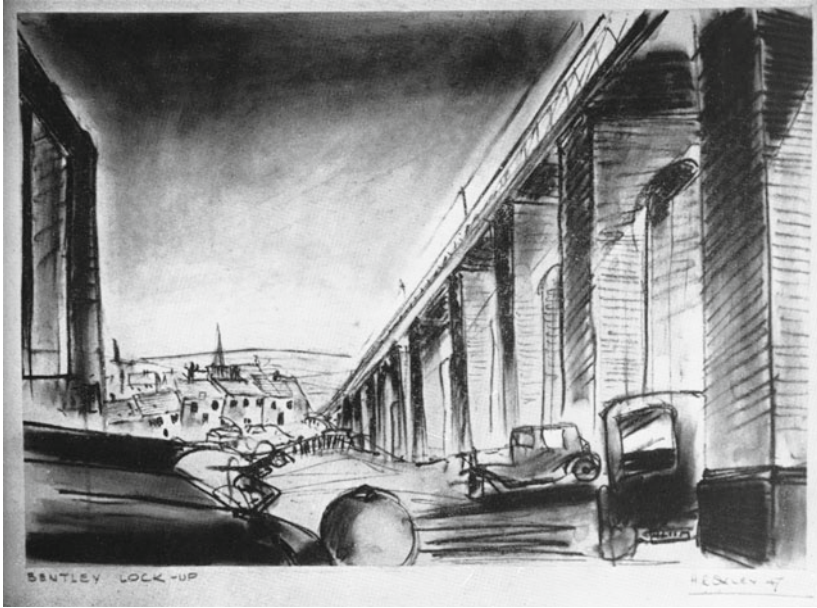


Fig. 4.10 Roy Oxley Bentley lock-up design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

of two Lambeth squares off the Borough High Street which were ideal because they were ‘untouched by war, although bomb damage lies all around them’.⁴⁹ The film therefore provided an opportunity to document pre-war housing at a time when post-war reconstruction included new building projects. The film generated considerable commentary while it was in production as its methods were closely followed by reporters who visited Pinewood. Like the other films discussed in this survey, their reports brought to people’s attention the skills and ingenuity involved in working in British studios in the first years after the war.

⁴⁹ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 7 April 1948, 9.

REVIEWING 1947–1950

The quality and generic variety of films shot at Pinewood in 1947 was in many ways remarkable. The various pragmatic approaches taken to enable different stages and the exterior lot to be used for several productions at the same time, combined with selective location shooting, meant that production designers continued to be central to the effective delivery of an impressively varied slate of films. The year was however a momentous one in terms of Anglo-American film relations, with the imposition of the Dalton Duty in July 1947 which effectively stopped Hollywood's new films and other imports from being distributed and exhibited in Britain until March 1948 when the dispute was settled. The trade press charted the dramatic developments of the crisis which placed great pressure on British studios to supply cinemas with new films, but also because it had created a unique chance of a market which could for the first time be dominated by British films.

The 'Studio Supplement' of the *Kinematograph Weekly* published in October 1947 reflected the cautious tone of prevailing discourse: 'British film makers...are presented with a magnificent opportunity—but it is an opportunity alarmingly hedged around with harsh conditions'.⁵⁰ The shortages of studio space, materials, and labour were cited as causing difficulties, and a survey of the crisis was accompanied by articles on reducing production time and money through increased use of special effects and greater economies in set building and shooting time.⁵¹ Less than a year later degrees of 'recovery' were in evidence, indicated especially by the reconstruction of the ABPC Studios, Elstree, and of Teddington, studios which had been severely damaged in the war. Conditions were nevertheless uncertain for producers, as evidenced by the generally lower-cost slate of films produced at Pinewood in 1948–9, several of which developed David Rawnsley's Independent Frame experiment. Economy of space was achieved at Pinewood by permitting one unit to use one end of a stage while another could come in and put up a set on the remaining half without waiting for the whole stage to be vacated.⁵² Shifts in the

⁵⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 2 October 1947, iii.

⁵¹ Howard Cricks, 'A few leading questions About reducing shooting time', *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 2 October 1947, xix.

⁵² *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 12 January 1949, 3.

management style of the Rank Organisation failed to retain the Independent Producers as a group beyond the end of 1948 when the company was wound up, although during 1948–9 some of the associated companies such as Cineguild, Wessex, Two Cities, and Aquila made films at Pinewood.

When a Board of Trade Committee published its report on the *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films* in 1949 one of the appendices included detailed information on film production and studios in 1948.⁵³ A production costs table examined by the Board of Trade showed that budgets were at their highest in 1948. An official commented that any financial aid to the industry had to be conditional on future cost reductions.⁵⁴ On occasion, the language used in official communications about the film industry was invested with critical, even punitive tones. Harold Wilson, President of the Board of Trade, for example, was adamant that ‘extravagance’ in the industry should be curbed:

The extravagance of the film industry is proverbial and much of the criticism is justified. Not only will the City hold completely aloof from the industry unless it can be shown to be taking radical measures to eliminate waste, but even such limited assistance as the Government is giving will be liable to criticism so long as it can be said that we are merely underwriting the continued supply of fur coats and other luxuries to the film moguls.⁵⁵

A crisis of production and employment was declared because none of Britain’s thirty-one studios was working at full capacity even though some studios, including Pinewood, Denham, ABPC, and MGM at Elstree, Shepperton, and Nettlefold at Walton-on-Thames, were working to full forward programmes. Of a total of 7,800 feature studio employees 25.6% were unemployed.⁵⁶ Persistent difficulties were blamed for the crisis including the length of production schedules; an alleged increase in the number of sets requiring complex lighting set-ups which took up space on the stages; scripts not being sufficiently ready when shooting commenced,

⁵³ *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films: Report of Committee of Enquiry* (1949), Cmnd. 2324.

⁵⁴ TNA, BT 64/4467, minute by Ms Brewster, May 1950.

⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 129/33: Memo by Harold Wilson on the Film Industry, 15 March 1949.

⁵⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 17 March 1949, 1.

and insufficient planning in general. The reference to sets is interesting in view of the creative strategies used at Pinewood the previous two years, practices which I have termed ‘situated’ art direction. The comment was perhaps influenced by optimism about the potential benefits of increased use of back projection and other cost-cutting methods associated with the Independent Frame, although the report was cautious about its general applicability to all types of production. The reference to an increase in the number of sets was not accompanied by figures or detailed evidence. While a rise in the material costs of making sets was clear, no specific figures were given to support the claim that the number of sets had actually increased. Sets attracted attention because of their obvious relation to material price rises, shortages, and the labour involved in their assembly. From the films reviewed in this chapter it does not however seem to be the case that there had necessarily been a rise in the number of sets; as we have seen the opposite was true in some cases when great efforts were made to be economical with stage space, and some productions made considerable use of location shooting. Sometimes a film would be shot in more than one studio. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949), for example, was on the floor at Pinewood for five weeks in the autumn of 1948, with the rest filmed at Ealing. Michael Balcon decided this was a good way to speed up production.⁵⁷

Although, as noted in Chapter 2, in the longer term the Independent Frame was significant for its introduction of new equipment and techniques at Pinewood, its immediate reception was mixed, not least when criticised by art directors including John Bryan and Alfred Junge.⁵⁸ The Independent Frame was applied by Aquila Films for the following feature films released in 1949: *Warning to Wantons* (Donald Wilson); *Floodtide* (Frederick Wilson); *Stop Press Girl* (Michael Barry); *Poet’s Pub* (Frederick Wilson); *Boys in Brown* (Montgomery Tully) and with partial application by Gainsborough and Sydney Box Productions for *The Astonished Heart*

⁵⁷ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 6 October 1948, 3.

⁵⁸ For a full discussion of the Independent Frame, its methods, films and legacy see Sarah Street, ‘Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation’ in Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press), 103–21.

(Terence Fisher and Antony Darnborough), released the following year.⁵⁹ Special effects were of paramount importance in reducing the number of sets that needed to be built. Process work included hanging miniatures, glass shots, matte shots, and foreground transparencies. Sets were built on wheeled rostrums so that studio floors were never idle as one set replaced another very quickly. Michael Powell's approach to production design was in some ways applied in the Independent Frame: 'Realism is one thing and naturalism another. I hate naturalism. I hate it when we have a simulated exterior scene in the studio, and I see prop men bringing in great branches of living trees, covered with leaves, which wither under the light and are thrown out the next day'.⁶⁰ Simplified sets had the potential for stylization via emphasis on shadows and props and a few of the films, such as *Floodtide* and *Boys in Brown*, demonstrated such creative techniques even though neither film achieved the 'total cinema' artistry of *The Red Shoes*. A production report on *Boys in Brown* concluded that the Independent Frame's techniques such as sets constructed on mobile rostrums, use of models and back projections, did not rule out on-the-spot changes: 'In certain respects the director could have as much freedom as he desired in controlling the movements of both his players and his camera despite the need for having everything pre-arranged'.⁶¹ A few more Technicolor films were made at Pinewood in the final years of the decade including *The Blue Lagoon* (Frank Launder, 1949) and *Trottie True* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1949), and *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend, 1948) was made at Ealing which was under Rank's control. During the 1950s the cheaper Eastmancolor format gradually replaced Technicolor as the primary colour process.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Boys in Brown* began production at Pinewood but completed at Denham as reported in *Film Industry*, 16 June 1949, 10.

⁶⁰ Michael Powell, *Million-Dollar Movie* (Heinemann, London: 1992), 79.

⁶¹ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 4 May 1949, 9.

⁶² Powell and Pressburger's *Tales of Hoffmann* (1950) was made at Shepperton. Technicolor's expense continued to limit its use during this period.

CONCLUSION

In the first years after the war, as the examples discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, Pinewood supported many productions whose art direction practices and working methods were very much situated in the exigencies of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation. The trend towards pre-planning and utilising stage space and exterior lot spaces as effectively as possible did not necessarily relate to a film's budget. While *The Red Shoes* was an expensive film and on first release its overseas success could not necessarily have been predicted, its methods were nevertheless very much in step with Michael Powell's advocacy of pre-planning, use of effects, and non-realistic design that were associated with the Independent Frame techniques he endorsed in 1945 as 'a revolution...[and] a big step forward'.⁶³ All of the films produced at Pinewood in 1946–7 demonstrated some of these initiatives, indicating the extent to which post-war production culture was dominated by the need to find practical, creative ways to grapple with adverse economic conditions. They also show that some of the techniques associated with the Independent Frame were already being used before its official roll-out in 1949. Resourceful use of stage space was particularly evident in *Green for Danger* and *London Belongs to Me*, the first and last films in this survey of art direction practices that built self-contained sets for the hospital and house that were at the heart of their respective fictional dramas. In its concentration on the people and activities of a single house, *London Belongs to Me* demonstrated the benefits of a formula which was particularly suited to economical filming. This was taken up in other films shot at Pinewood, most notably *The Woman in Question* (Anthony Asquith, 1950). Production reports show that this film was carefully pre-planned before shooting on Pinewood's Stage 'C' which ran very smoothly.⁶⁴ The turn towards greater use of effects such as hanging miniatures and models can be seen in *Take My Life* and *The Red Shoes*, as well as how some of the tighter editing practices admired in Hollywood's films were being applied in Britain. In addition to *Take My Life*, Jack Harris edited other films featured in Chapters 3 and 4: *Great Expectations*, *Blanche Fury*,

⁶³ Michael Powell to J. Arthur Rank, quoted in Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 122.

⁶⁴ Report on *The Woman in Question*, Film Finances archives, London.

and *Oliver Twist*. In these films he was given considerable autonomy for creative decision-making.⁶⁵

The role of production and set designers in making economic production choices possible for lower, medium, and higher-budgeted films was clearly crucial. The incidence of location shooting in films such as *Esther Waters* and *The Red Shoes* enabled stage space at Pinewood to be occupied for less time which was also helped by using the exterior lot to build ambitious sets for films such as *Black Narcissus* and *Oliver Twist*. Even Pinewood's non-production spaces could be utilised for filmmaking, as in *Take My Life*. This idea was adopted by later productions, such as *Once a Jolly Swagman* (Jack Lee, 1949) which used Pinewood's very useful 'covered way' (a servicing point between the workshops and stages) as a corridor contrived to give impression of that normally found under terraced stands of a speedway grandstand.⁶⁶ Art director Fred Pusey and construction manager Charlie Cusack had to be ingenious to construct 'attractive and adequate sets in the space available'.⁶⁷ The momentum of all this resourceful inventiveness was nevertheless held in check by wider adverse economic conditions affecting the industry. The Independent Frame's difficulties in gaining general acceptance indicate the problems of launching such an experiment at a time of post-war re-adjustment. The longer-term benefits for Pinewood however highlight how rather than being an isolated experiment, it relates to the many similar and different ways in which art directors and other technicians responded ingeniously and resourcefully to the realities of making films in the immediate post-war years. Pinewood's facilities, spatial design, and culture were central to supporting that enterprise.

⁶⁵ Roy Perkins and Martin Stollery, *British Film Editors: 'The Heart of the Movie'* (London: BFI, 2004), 207.

⁶⁶ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 19 May 1948, 11.

⁶⁷ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 5 May 1948, 9.

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Managerial Culture and Labour Relations at Pinewood

Abstract This chapter examines the role of management and labour during a pivotal period of the studios' post-war development. Drawing on documentation by Frank L. Gilbert, an executive who worked for the Rank Organisation in 1944-47, the chapter considers how management strategies evolved and assesses their effectiveness. It also discusses the role of film industry trade unions, particularly the Association of Cine Technicians, in responding to economic constraints and pressures for cutbacks, while including several key, inter-related themes including the contribution of women to the studio workforce. It concludes that technicians who worked at Pinewood exercised degrees of creative agency in coming to terms with the constraints associated with budgetary control. The immediate post-war years were key in influencing Pinewood's survival despite the fluctuations and uncertainties associated with different managerial regimes, and the impact of economic and material constraints.

Keywords Labour · Trade Unions · Management · Studios · Film Industry · Rank Organisation

Studio cultures are shaped by the skilled technicians who work in them, including those in administrative and managerial positions. While the physical spaces and equipment which constituted the core activity of studios such as Pinewood were of paramount importance, how these

were used, as the following chapters demonstrate, depended very much on employees' responses at all levels to challenges they faced. In 1944 Frank L. Gilbert, a new executive, was employed by the Rank Organisation. He worked there until 1947, and his recollections of these years provide a useful way into understanding how both a managerial culture and labour relations were developing in the immediate post-war period. Gilbert, a former civil servant, was given the title of Managing Director of Production Facilities (Films) Ltd (P.F.F.), a company which provided common services to the production units working under the Rank orbit at Pinewood. P.F.F. was responsible for forming a 'bank' of actors under a common form of contract, arranging story material for films, establishing a common style of publicity, a library of sound effects, and a centralised accountancy service.¹ The aim was to establish a degree of coordination so that the film units operating under the Independent Producers' umbrella would not have to compete for stars, story material, and studio space. Although these services were designed to reduce costs, producers soon resented P.F.F., pejoratively referring to it as 'Piffle', or an overly bureaucratic structure that 'ended up throttling producers and directors with red tape'.²

P.F.F. was short-lived, lasting until the end of 1949, but its formation relates to debates about how to develop British film production after the visits in 1945 to Hollywood by technicians and other specialists. The tendency to look to Hollywood, with its centralised, vertically integrated structures and studios as models of best practice, can be detected in these initiatives, even if it was recognised that in many respects the production cultures and histories of Britain and Hollywood were very different. This chapter discusses the development and ethos of both managerial and labour relations, arguing that their inter-dependence offers insights into Pinewood's post-war history. While historians have analysed private sector management in industries such as cars, engineering, and shipbuilding, as well as nationalised industries such as coal mining and railway transport, as Booth and Melling comment: 'There are important categories

¹ Frank L. Gilbert (Gilbert memo), 'The Apogee of Rank's Film Empire, 1944-46', n.d., memo sent to Geoffrey Macnab.

² Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 104.

of workers and sectors of the economy that have not attracted the attentions of researchers on industrial relations and industrial cultures'.³ In this regard P.F.F. and other managerial-led ideas, and contemporary disputes and agreements with the trade unions ACT (Association of Cine Technicians), NATKE (National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees), and the ETU (Electrical Trades Union), offer an interesting case study of the logistical, operational and political shifts taking place in the film industry which influenced future developments.

The roles of studio manager and head of department had developed as the number and size of studios increased in the 1930s. As Atkinson and Randle point out, managers worked with teams of core personnel including unit producers, directors, editors, scenario and script editors who were signed on longer-term contracts than the larger number of 'below the line' studio workers who were hired on a temporary basis.⁴ As the Rank Organisation evolved into a vertically integrated company, and Pinewood's reputation as having 'the best studio layout' in the country was confirmed by 'many leading personalities and technicians' when responding to a questionnaire in 1945, the environment was considered appropriate for rationalising activities, systems, and structures.⁵ The appointment of Gilbert as Managing Director of P.F.F. reflects the turn towards professional managerialism, even if as his account attests, its authority was limited by Rank's tendency to defer to the perceived creative expertise of the managing directors of the film companies which he had grouped together as the Independent Producers. With no prior experience of the film industry, Gilbert's background was as a temporary civil servant at the Ministry of Food where he had met J. Arthur Rank's brother. Gilbert's position with Rank was obtained due to this contact and he was enticed into the role by a generous salary with an expense

³ Alan Booth and Joseph Melling, 'Workplace Cultures and Business Performance: British Labour Relations and Industrial Output in Comparative Perspective' in Alan Booth and Joseph Melling (eds.), *Managing the Modern Workplace: Productivity, Politics and Workplace Culture in Post-war Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 21.

⁴ William Atkinson and K. R. Randle, "'Sorry mate, you're finishing tonight": A historical perspective on employment flexibility in the UK film industry', University of Hertfordshire Archive, 2014, 13, website accessed 2 October 2023: <http://hdl.handle.net/2299/16829>. 'Below the line' refers to technical employees such as camera operators, focus pullers, carpenters, boom operators. 'Above the line' refers to 'creatives' in roles such as main actors, directors, screenwriters, and producers.

⁵ Helmut Junge, *Plan for Film Studios* (London: Focal Press, 1945), 60.

allowance which exceeded rates in other industries.⁶ This role gave him access to the Rank Organisation's upper echelons as a member of 'a very high-powered committee' of top production personnel which was chaired by J. Arthur Rank at his offices in Park Lane, London. As well as Gilbert representing P.F.F. the committee's membership included accountants Leslie Farrow and Barrington Gain; solicitor Woodham Smith; the managing directors of Independent Producers (George Archibald), Two Cities Films (Filippo del Guidice) and Gainsborough (Maurice Ostrer). Also serving as 'secretary' was John Davis, the legendary and much criticised businessman who by 1948 had been promoted to Managing Director of the Rank Organisation.

Gilbert explained that this top-level committee discussed 'all matters concerning films about to go into production, films in production and films just completed'; contracts were scrutinised and 'a general eye kept on budget and performance against budget'. While the minutes of the committee do not appear to have survived such details are indicative of the management culture Rank was trying to develop, even though Gilbert concluded that budgets were normally too high, and 'supervision was virtually non-existent as the three main production companies had rather different policies and attitudes'.⁷ It seemed that the profits from distribution and exhibition allowed for 'extravagance' to be to some extent tolerated, since the benefits of vertical-integration were that profits could be spread across an operation's total sectors.

The fact that the five units in the Independent Producers all had their headquarters at Denham Studios under the direction of production manager James B. Sloan, attests to the physical and cultural distance that appears to have existed between Rank's desire for greater managerial authority and the limits of its exertion. Active productions however used offices at Pinewood for more immediate administrative tasks, located close to the particular stage where a film was being shot. Pinewood was essentially the central focus of the creative agency as well as being a hub of technical experimentation. Gilbert recalled that the producers were suspicious of P.F.F., seeing in it a danger of curbing their authority and questioning their expertise. Managerial decisions could indeed have important

⁶ Gilbert memo, 3. It is ironic that a role designed to enforce cost management offered a generous salary for Gilbert, particularly since he had no prior experience in the film industry.

⁷ Gilbert memo, 4–5.

implications for how best to run the studios, and which producers to accommodate. Tensions between domestic-orientated films and those aimed at attracting international audiences pervaded this period; the complexities of film finance required constant monitoring. After *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945) was criticised as an extravagant gamble, John Davis sought to rein in the producers, leading to the subsequent break-up of the Independent Producers, as well as the closure of P.F.F. *Caesar and Cleopatra* was, in fact, more successful in America and Canada than in Britain, grossing \$2 million overseas. But Rank saw little of this because the film had undoubtedly been expensive at £1.3 million, and US distributor United Artists retained 45% of the American and Canadian earnings.⁸

Looking at the actual work of P.F.F. as recorded by Gilbert provides some detail on its operation for the few years of its existence. Its offices from 1945 were at Denham, as opposed to the location in Park Lane of Rank's executive committee of which Gilbert was a member.⁹ It seemed that the most successful departments which ran smoothly were Publicity, and Finance which was controlled by Robert Robinson, a former executive at Gainsborough, and its purpose was to pay all bills, wages, and salaries. Even so, the fact that P.F.F. charged for its services was resented; there was no imperative for producers to use them despite its role as part of Rank's attempts at corporate rationalisation. While in theory P.F.F.'s coordination of centralised workshops to make them available to all the filmmakers seemed a good idea, according to Sidney Gilliat, in practice this turned out to be more expensive than if the materials had been hired from outside.¹⁰ In the Stories Department, the insistence that interest in properties such as novels or plays had to be registered through P.F.F. caused friction between producers since they could not bid directly or be assured that any proposal would be accepted on merit.¹¹ The Independent Producers were by no means favoured in such arrangements since

⁸ Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 106.

⁹ Denham was the location of the offices perhaps because it was less disrupted by requisitioning than Pinewood during the Second World War. Meetings of the Directors of D & P Studios took place at the offices of the Prudential Assurance Company following the outbreak of war.

¹⁰ Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 105.

¹¹ Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 105.

P.F.F. serviced all filmmakers operating under the Rank Organisation's umbrella. For his part, Gilbert also began to be frustrated: 'At no time was I ever consulted as to the function or performance of P.F.F. There was no financial control and no budget. So it was not long before everyone found they could go their own way without penalty'. In addition, Gilbert felt that Rank 'never spelt out any authority, responsibility or sphere of action as far as I was concerned'.¹²

It would appear therefore that while the ideas behind P.F.F. generally made sense, and as a managerial strategy its formation was in step with current practices towards efficiency, in practice it was unable to curb rising costs and budgets, so much so that one of the obvious economies in December 1946 was to close it down. Its operations had been perceived as interfering, causing resentment amongst the producers and technicians who saw in it an attempt to question their expertise. Divisions between managers and film industry professionals were thus exposed by the P.F.F. experiment which either had to be granted more assertive executive power or fold. Some of its departments subsequently became their own trading departments, including the film library and special effects which remained important facilities at Pinewood. Directed by technician Henry Harris, the special effects department had been attached to P.F.F., but once it was wound up David Rawnsley, one of its key experts, was able to sell his ideas to individual producers and to the BBC. This was important in the subsequent evolution of the Independent Frame which developed productive synergies with technological innovations at the BBC.¹³ Publicity was charged out according to clients and the remaining spheres of activity—artistes and the Rank 'Charm School', legal matters, and finance—were henceforward handled by solicitor Edmund A. Davies as a streamlined form of P.F.F. At the end of the 1940s Pinewood's General Manager was A. W. Robinson who handled all contracts for studio facilities. Production personnel and requirements were overseen by Production Controller Arthur Alcott who held meetings with heads of departments,

¹² Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 26.

¹³ Sarah Street, 'Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation' in Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 109, 117.

the operations manager, production managers, art directors, chief and unit construction managers, and the personnel manager.¹⁴

Reflecting on the significance of P.F.F, Frank Gilbert's testimony and the Independent Producers' negative experience, it seems that there were tensions between imposing new managerial structures and the practicalities of ensuring that they had sufficient power and authority to be effective. The timing of these interventions in the final stages of the Second World War and immediate post-war years did not help, as studios were being de-requisitioned and units such as Two Cities Films and the Archers were keen to maintain and extend their reputations for quality filmmaking. As we have seen, the films made during this time at Pinewood were in many ways remarkable, carrying on a positive trajectory that J. Arthur Rank seemed reluctant to curb despite imposing new systems that were quickly perceived as overly bureaucratic. P.F.F. was perhaps an attempt to appear to be acting in the best interests of the Independent Producers while being unsure, in the final analysis, as to whether this was the best formulation of the centralising strategy it was supposed to represent. The more devolved managerial structure which emerged at the end of the 1940s was perhaps an unintended consequence of the P.F.F. experiment. The restructuring of production and conservative managerial control under Davis resulted in small, 'but respectable' profits in production and distribution in the years 1953–7.¹⁵ Rank continued to be personally interested, albeit from a non-expert, managerial capacity, in his company's production ventures and there are many photographs of him visiting Pinewood. In Fig. 5.1 Rank is seen examining production stills with E. Woods, director of Rank Films in 1955.

While this period did not repeat the creative élan associated with the Independent Producers, some more formulaic films such as *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas 1954) and its six sequels, were box-office successes. In the immediate post-war and subsequent years, other significant shifts for Pinewood involving management and labour were taking place.

¹⁴ British Film Institute Special Collections: Tom White box 13: Pinewood Producers' Handbook and Studio Plan, December 1949.

¹⁵ Vincent Porter, 'Methodism versus the market-place: The Rank Organisation and British Cinema' in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1st edition, 1997), 128.



Fig. 5.1 J. Arthur Rank and E. Woods director of Rank Films, 1955. Alamy stock images

LABOUR RELATIONS

After the Second World War working conditions in the film industry and consultations between management and the trades unions appeared to have improved following the formalisation after 1945 of the closed shop with the major studios, and in 1947 the agreement of a five-day, 44-hour week, wage increases and other benefits as negotiated between the British Film Producers Association and the three unions.¹⁶ As Atkinson and Randle have observed, larger companies such as Rank were in a better position to offer workers employment contracts that could run-on,

¹⁶ George H. Elvin, 'Working Conditions and Salaries' in Oswald Blakeston (ed.), *Working for the Films* (London: Focal Press, 1947), 184–96.

rather than the more insecure tenures which prevailed in more precarious working environments.¹⁷ At Pinewood there was a personnel manager who producers had to consult regarding any discussions with shop stewards or trade union officials. In addition, a Works Committee operated in close co-operation with personnel to settle any problems. Such committees and other joint consultative groups were considered important in managing change in the workplace, as noted in a contemporary study which dealt with the Glacier Metal Company which had factories in London and Scotland. The book was influential as an early text on management science and behaviour.¹⁸ Its focus on engineering was partly applicable to the film industry, and the analogy often made between factory management and the running of film studios provided a context for its relevance. The principles of joint consultation had become part of film studio management at around the same time as the trend for such procedures grew in other industrial contexts. While there is no direct evidence of the book's influence in the film industry or at Pinewood, its publication coincided with similar developments in the studios.

Joint consultation provided a platform for union representatives to advocate better pay and working conditions. During the war their participation in issues investigated by the Board of Trade concerning requisitioning enhanced their consultative agency, even if at times there could be friction. The ACT's expertise, for example, provided very useful sources of information on equipment and personnel needs of studios when post-war requirements were being investigated. Although the ACT had only existed since 1933, the union had become adept at circulating technical and other studio knowledge via its magazine *The Cine Technician*. The publication provided a debating ground for studio-related issues, as well as expressing and symbolising the expertise of technical workers. This arguably increased their bargaining power, especially since many management executives did not have technical backgrounds. It would seem from the ACT's perspective, as recorded by George Elvin, the union's General Secretary, that by 1947 'the film industry has followed the trend of the times: detailed consideration has been, and is being given to the employees' human problems and privileges', including questions such as sickness

¹⁷ Atkinson and Randle, "“Sorry mate, you're finishing tonight”: A historical perspective on employment flexibility in the UK film industry", 16.

¹⁸ Elliott James, *The Changing Culture of a Factory* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1952), 156–84.

and grievances, holidays, hazardous work, location work and salaries.¹⁹ Even so, that is not to imply that there were no persistent issues or potential conflicts between management and workers at Pinewood; rather, structures had been developed which enabled them to be aired at an earlier stage than had been possible in the 1930s when the unionisation of studio workers was in the early stages of consolidation.²⁰

Co-operation between the unions and management was crucial throughout the immediate post-war years to meet the considerable economic challenges facing studios. Pinewood was only able, for example, to accommodate four production units working at full pressure in the autumn of 1947 because of an agreement with NATKE over night work. Construction manager Ted Hughes accordingly planned Pinewood's day-to-day set arrangements and placed as many workers as possible on night work.²¹ It was recognised that the five-day, 44-hour week did not necessarily cut the amount of screentime shot per day since such figures depended on several factors and did not allow for the quality of the film in question. George Archibald however acknowledged that the five-day week had 'come to stay'.²² But there were recurring problems which some studios experienced particularly acutely, as evidenced by an ACT report in March 1949 which noted a slump with idle stages, unemployment, and decreases in union membership.²³ The grades most affected were assistant directors, publicity personnel, assistant editors, and sound department crew. ACT members were more affected since workers belonging to NATKE and the ETU, with their membership spread across a greater number of trades, to some extent had skills that were more transferable.

As noted in previous chapters, the causes of the slump were the rising costs of films, especially overhead costs such as story and script charges, the cost of sets, labour rates, and studio rents. As we have seen, the reported rise in the cost of sets was to some extent offset at Pinewood

¹⁹ George Elvin, 'Working Conditions and Salaries', p. 184. For details of the 1947 Agreement: The National Archives (TNA), LAB 83/3189.

²⁰ On conditions in the 1930s see Michael Chanan, *Labour Power in the Film Industry* (London: British Film Institute, 1976).

²¹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 13 November 1947, 31.

²² BFI Special Collections: Tom White Box 13: Pinewood Joint Production Advisory C 'tee (JPAC) minutes, 3 March 1949.

²³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 17 March 1949, 1, 23.

by the ingenuity of art directors, and in any case the rise was related to the cost of materials which were more expensive in a context of post-war shortages. Studio overhead costs were generally large, and these costs weighed heavily on Rank in part due to the number of studios the Organisation controlled as well as Pinewood. An attempt was made during this time to reduce overhead expenditure by instituting some of the cost-cutting methods described in previous chapters.²⁴ While figures from the 1930s to the early 1950s in respect of production costs show increases for sets and materials, those for studio facilities decreased.²⁵ The studios most affected were Shepherd's Bush, National, and Islington, indicating that to some extent Pinewood was more able to weather the storms.²⁶ In July 1950 it was reported that Pinewood was working to capacity and was in a healthier state than it had been for the previous eighteen months.²⁷ Pinewood was the largest employer at the end of 1951, according to comparative figures for the three largest studios Pinewood, Shepperton and Associated British, Elstree (Table 5.1).²⁸

Despite the crisis affecting studios and the slump identified in most trade publications, figures for first feature film production compiled at the end of the 1940s do not show a dramatic reduction. In 1946 British studios turned out 49 films, and this figure rose year on year to 66 by 1949. In 1950 the slump resulted in a small drop to 62, and again in

Table 5.1 Studio employment December 1951

<i>Studio employment</i>	<i>Technical</i>	<i>Craft</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pinewood	222	380	254	898
Shepperton	127	157	235	519
ABPC, Elstree	125	309	193	627

²⁴ James Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen: The History of British Film Finance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 65.

²⁵ Patricia Perilli, 'Statistical survey of the British Film Industry' in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 381. Figures for Table 10, 'Analysis of production costs' are based on film budgets held in British Film Institute library.

²⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 31 March 1949, 9–13.

²⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 13 July 1950, 1.

²⁸ *Kinematograph Year Book* 1954, 144.

1951 to 53, but the following year there was an upturn to 63 films.²⁹ There was a drop in shorter feature productions, and it seems that most film companies were not making sufficient profits despite the fact that first feature production was not in decline.³⁰ Rank's overall operation was losing money, resulting in cuts including senior production executives, imposed by John Davis, the business manager with a reputation for imposing economies where possible.³¹ By 1951 the situation had improved somewhat but 'the company was still making a loss on production and distribution'.³² Production was concentrated at Pinewood, and the Gainsborough studios at Shepherd's Bush and Islington, and the Two Cities studio at Denham were closed. Denham finally ceased to be a functioning film studio in 1952. With an eye on cutting budgets, Davis and Rank were keen to keep Pinewood going so it could supply the cinema circuits under their control with sufficient films to meet the requirements of the statutory quota of British films which had to be shown by exhibitors. This had risen in June 1948 to the highest it had ever been at 45% for first features and 25% for supporting features; the first feature quota was reduced to 40% in 1949–50, and then to 30% where it remained for 1951–2.³³ It was designed to support British production and, to some extent, Rank's funding of independent filmmakers. This point was observed by United Artists' representative in London: 'The Board of Trade, in its action with the Quota, is using the Independents to sustain the Rank production enterprises'.³⁴ The quota legislation however created tensions with the exhibition part of the Organisation's business which needed to be sustained by top quality, often expensive British films, rather than cheaper supporting features, as well as by US

²⁹ *Kinematograph Year Book* 1954, 144. These figures were compiled by the Board of Trade.

³⁰ Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government, 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 193.

³¹ For an overview of John Davis's career see Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years: British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: 1998), 43–54.

³² Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37.

³³ Political and Economic Planning, *The British Film Industry* (London: Political and Economic Planning, 1952), 214.

³⁴ United Artists Archives: David Coplan to Arthur Kelly, 13 July 1948: US Mss 99AN, Series B, Arthur W. Kelly files, box 2, folder 11 on Rank.

films. Rank's resources were stretched to such an extent that exhibition was subsequently prioritised in the 1950s as a principal Rank revenue base in the UK and overseas.³⁵

The role of the trade unions, particularly the ACT, in charting developments during this period, was significant. The Labour Government of 1945–51 instituted a programme of post-war reconstruction, and the film production industry received indirect assistance in the form of the National Film Finance Corporation and the Eady Levy.³⁶ Although the trade unions were consulted in the evolution of these measures, the ACT's calls for more extensive intervention towards nationalisation were rebuffed. In its evidence to the Portal Committee on Distribution and Exhibition the ACT recommended the foundation of a state film studio that would create more opportunities for independent producers.³⁷ This issue was intertwined with criticisms of the Rank Organisation as a monopolistic concern.³⁸ The unions' interest in extending the state's involvement in the film industry can be seen as representative of how unions more generally in the immediate post-war years were 'ready to contemplate radical economic policies as well as distinctive approaches to bargaining within a framework where employers as well as workers were held to account for the exercise of their rights and responsibilities'.³⁹ For US distributors the news of increased state support for British films was alarming, as United Artists' representative in the UK reported to the home office: 'The nationalisation of the motion picture industry here is not along the next step but one that is now spoken of in terms of the foreseeable future'.⁴⁰ While ideas on a state film studio and nationalisation received no support from the Board of Trade, their articulation is

³⁵ Porter, 'Methodism versus the market-place', 124.

³⁶ For further details of these schemes see Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 211–19, 225–6.

³⁷ ACT: Evidence to the Portal Committee on Distribution and Exhibition, 1949.

³⁸ Frederick Mullally, *Films—an Alternative to Rank* (London: Socialist Book Centre, 1946); Ralph Bond, *Monopoly—the Future of British films* (London: Association of Cine Technicians, 1946).

³⁹ Alan Booth and Joseph Melling, 'Trade Unionism, Labour Politics and Shop Floor Bargaining in Post-war Britain' in Alan Booth and Joseph Melling (eds.), *Managing the Modern Workplace*, 162–3.

⁴⁰ United Artists Archives: David Coplan to Arthur Kelly, 13 July 1948: US Mss 99AN, Series B, Arthur W. Kelly files, box 2, folder 11 on Rank.

another indication of the ACT's evolution since the 1930s into a strong and politically committed union representing technical roles.

The achievement of the five-day, 44-hour week in 1947 was a considerable advance on the previous 47-hour week. It offset several recurring grievances at Pinewood. As detailed in Chapter 6, travelling to and from the studios could exacerbate the adverse impact of long working hours, especially in winter. The 1947 Agreement between the BFPA and unions stipulated that transport should be provided for workers if working hours fell outside normal public transport schedules, and on occasion individuals' start and finish times could be adjusted so that travelling to and from work using public transport was easier. The Agreement ensured minimum salaries for many technical grades, although roles such as supervising Art Director were still subject to individually negotiated contracts. The hierarchy of grades noted that the highest salaries were still paid to producers, directors, and cinematographers. Company production managers, editors, art directors, scriptwriters, and sound recordists were the next rung down, although the figures quoted referred to approximate minimum salaries since as Elvin noted: 'It is perfectly possible for a film worker to be given more'.⁴¹ The provision of one-hour meal breaks, and fifteen-minute morning and afternoon tea breaks was also written into the Agreement. Clauses in respect of overtime, night work and location shooting ensured employers provided travelling expenses, accommodation, subsistence, and that on longer shoots away from home for eight or more weeks workers could return home for at least one weekend. An important provision was for minimum crews in respect of both studio and location work: floor, production and casting, camera, sound recording, and sound maintenance. An Apprenticeship and Training Council was also established to train new entrants to the film industry, although many still learned on the job. Described in the studio magazine *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* as a 'landmark' event, this Agreement was crucial, particularly its timing in August 1947 on the heels of the imposition in July of the Dalton Duty.⁴²

Effective collaboration between the film trades unions was also evident in October 1947 when it was announced that the ACT, ETU, and NATKE would operate as co-operative labour exchanges. This meant that they were in control of labour: studio technicians were given jobs

⁴¹ Elvin, 'Working Conditions and Salaries', 188.

⁴² *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round (PMGR)*, September 1947, 14.

through their union instead of having to report to a local Ministry of Labour office every time they commenced working on a new film.⁴³ As previously noted, the closed shop was key in ensuring the conditions of film industry employment as set out in the 1947 Agreement, including minimum crewing levels, were adhered to; this was especially important in periods of recession.⁴⁴ The ACT had evolved into a particularly effective craft union by the 1950s, as noted by Seglow: ‘It had become a force to be reckoned with in its relations with employers...Its power and influence were out of all proportion with its size’.⁴⁵ At larger studios such as Pinewood many employees could rely on full-time employment. Even in the 1960s Pinewood retained its own full-time construction staff that all production companies using its stages had to employ; this applied to some extent to camera crews. Even so more precarious, freelance contracts became more common as studios were rented by production companies for making only one film, for which they hired crew and cast on fixed-term contracts.⁴⁶

WOMEN WORKERS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

Opportunities for women working in the film industry expanded in the 1940s, particularly following their ‘high profile’ contribution to the film economy during the Second World War.⁴⁷ While male dominance of roles such as directing, producing, cinematography, sound engineering, and musical composition, was not disrupted, inroads were made by women into areas including editing, screenwriting, documentary filmmaking, art direction, costume design, casting, and publicity. Art director Carmen Dillon worked mainly at Pinewood during her career, and she remembers the studios as her ‘spiritual home’, ‘rather comfortable’, and ‘better

⁴³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 23 October 1947, p. 1.

⁴⁴ The closed shop was in operation from c. 1940 until the early 1980s. See Iain Reid, *The Persistence of the Internal Labour Market in Changing Circumstances: The British Film Production Industry During and After the Closed Shop*, Unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2008.

⁴⁵ Peter Seglow, *Trade Unionism in Television: A Case Study in the Development of White Collar Militancy* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1978), 54.

⁴⁶ Seglow, *Trade Unionism in Television*, 127.

⁴⁷ Melanie Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women who made British cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 100.

in some ways than Denham'.⁴⁸ In Fig. 5.2 we see Dillon as art director in 1948 with set designer Robert Furse working on *Hamlet*.

Dillon, a trained architect, had the unusual position of a woman occupying a senior position in the art department. Following the recognition of her early work designing much of *The Mikado* (1939), shot at Pinewood, and her distinguished work during wartime, Dillon's ingenuity was highlighted by the trade press and in reviews in relation to productions at Pinewood such as *The Woman in Question* (1950). This film necessitated working with only one set but presented in slightly



Fig. 5.2 Set Designer Robert Furse and Art Director Carmen Dillon on set of *Hamlet*, 1948. Alamy stock images

⁴⁸ British Entertainment History Project, BECTU interviews no. 288, 1993–94.

different ways, as were the costumes and appearance of the central character Astra played by Jean Kent. These changes were necessary to reflect impressions of Astra by five characters who recollected events leading up to her murder. Each of their viewpoints, presented in five consecutive segments, revealed a different opinion of Astra. As well as Kent's acting and appearance, small set details were altered between segments.⁴⁹ In spite of Dillon's recognition, change was slow in the industry, particularly concerning women occupying senior roles. Although there had been some important shifts, as Bell notes: 'Wartime opportunities did not lead to lasting structural change'.⁵⁰ A gender pay gap prevailed, as in many other industries and professions, and skilled jobs most often held by men were better paid than 'broadly equivalent jobs held by women, such as wardrobe mistress and production secretary'.⁵¹ These were key, but less recognised, roles within studios, personal accounts of which rarely feature in archives.⁵²

LOCAL CONDITIONS AT PINEWOOD

In terms of political allegiance, Harper and Porter note that while most Pinewood employees lent towards conservatism, they did not necessarily support management.⁵³ Gordon McCallum, resident sound mixer at Pinewood from 1945 to 1985, was a shop steward for some years, a role he gave up when dubbing work he undertook in the post-war period demanded his full-time attention. He recalled that one personnel officer at Pinewood recognised that his job was to 'find holes' in the 1947 Agreement.⁵⁴ So while the Agreement achieved greater clarity regarding employment conditions, in practice its operation was not always smooth

⁴⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 13 April 1950, p. 22. For a discussion of this film see Tom Ryall, *Anthony Asquith* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 101–4 and Melanie Williams, *Female Stars in British Cinema: The Women in Question* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 48–50.

⁵⁰ Bell, *Women Workers*, 117.

⁵¹ Bell, *Women Workers*, 21.

⁵² Vicky Ball and Melanie Bell, 'Working Women, Women's Work: Production, History, Gender: Introduction', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, no. 3 (2013): 550.

⁵³ Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 40.

⁵⁴ Gordon McCallum, BECTU interview no. 58, 11 October 1988. British Entertainment History Project.

or without conflict. The regime of tighter budgets imposed by John Davis at the beginning of the 1950s influenced a production culture that tended towards hierarchical control, especially by departmental heads. This structure was similar to Hollywood's, and it was designed to avoid the problems which had arisen with the P.F.F. experiment. As Drazin has observed: 'Reminiscences of the Rank Organisation in the 1950s make it clear that it was a place where any originality or creativity could not possibly thrive'.⁵⁵ But Pinewood was well-equipped and, as we have seen, had developed an infrastructure geared towards technical innovation, even if this was not always exploited in terms of high-risk projects or the quality hallmark that typified films made in the mid-late 1940s by the Independent Producers.

The types of originality and creativity that marked productions at Pinewood in the 1950s were perhaps a little different from those in the preceding years; indeed, their values have been appreciated by revisionist histories of the 1950s.⁵⁶ The studios were carried by the box-office success of films such as *Genevieve* (Henry Cornelius 1953); the *Doctor* series of films produced by Betty Box; films starring popular comedian Norman Wisdom; and the first *Carry On...* films. Other titles such as *The Browning Version* (Anthony Asquith 1951), *White Corridors* (1951), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Anthony Asquith 1952), and *A Night to Remember* (Roy Ward Baker 1958) were notable, critically applauded Pinewood productions. Even so, by the end of the 1950s the Rank Organisation was forced to curtail film production due to falling cinema admissions and the financial failure of a slate of productions aimed at international markets. But in terms of technical and material infrastructure, Pinewood remained as Britain's premier studio, a status that was further enhanced in the 1960s, largely through the James Bond franchise with its innovative set designs by Ken Adam. When Cyril Howard, who first worked in Pinewood's Secretarial Department in 1948 and subsequently became a studio manager, was interviewed for the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications Trade Union (BECTU)'s oral history project, he commented on the studios' longevity, its survival in the face of triumph and adversity, and recalled that it was one of the best studios

⁵⁵ Drazin, *The Finest Years*, 52.

⁵⁶ For example, Ian Mackillop and Neil Sinyard (eds.), *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

with generally good working relations with employees.⁵⁷ He also recalled that workers at Pinewood were generally less politically active than at Denham.⁵⁸ While there is no evidence to support the role this may have played in the decision to close Denham, it may well have been a consideration although as noted in this chapter and in chapter 6, workers at Pinewood were generally active union members.⁵⁹

The example of Pinewood highlights how a studio focus brings to the fore a different set of variables than are normally taken into consideration in relation to the history of the Rank Organisation. Although managerial roles were not necessarily held by filmmakers, technicians who worked at Pinewood exercised degrees of creative agency in coming to terms with the constraints associated with budgetary control. In a period that was difficult for the film industry, particularly in relation to increased competition from television in the 1950s, maintaining a large studio facility for filmmaking was a ‘bricks and mortar’ asset that in the 1960s became very profitable as it became a ‘four walls’ facility. Film and television production companies could rent a stage and associated space, hiring additional facilities and freelance labour. As we have seen, the latter became the dominant model for employment in the film industry after the late 1950s which involved ‘the associated unpredictability of rates, intervals of unemployment and the frequent obligation to assist, unpaid, in speculative and promotional work’.⁶⁰ From this perspective, Pinewood’s longevity was influenced by long-term trends in the labour market which were not necessarily beneficial for employees. As the Rank Organisation backed

⁵⁷ Cyril Howard, BECTU interview no. 52, 25 August 1988. British Entertainment History Project. BECTU was formed in 1991 as a merger of the Association of Cinematograph Television Technicians (ACTT) and the Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance. The British Entertainment History Project is custodian of the interviews conducted for BECTU’s oral history project, as well as recording newer interviews.

⁵⁸ Cyril Howard, BECTU interview.

⁵⁹ An indication of the politicisation of workers at Denham is *Our Film* (1942), a short film financed and produced by workers and technicians at Denham. The film, directed by Harold French and featuring actors including John Slater, Edward Rigby and Walter Hudd, was about workers and management at a factory discussing the formation of a production works committee. A Soviet trade unionist visits and urges management and workers to unite for the war effort and so increase production. All participants in the film worked for free. University of Warwick Modern Records website accessed 2 October 2023: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives_online/filmvideo/ourfilm/

⁶⁰ Reid, *The Persistence of the Internal Labour Market in Changing Circumstances*, 36.

away from film production Pinewood took the opposite direction towards becoming the hub of international production it is today. As this chapter has shown, the immediate post-war years were key in influencing its survival despite the fluctuations and uncertainties associated with different managerial regimes, and the impact of economic and material constraints.

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Cultural Life at Pinewood: The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* Studio Magazine

Abstract This chapter draws on *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, a newly discovered primary source, which is a rare surviving example of a film studio magazine, produced at Pinewood by employees in 1946–1947. This chapter details how the magazine articulated Pinewood’s culture as a social enterprise as well as providing insights into its various working spaces. It brings to life the reality of being a studio employee, the day-to-day activities that are rarely described in film histories. The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides a rare glimpse into how studio employees bonded through sports and social clubs, musical and film groups, organising a Christmas pantomime, putting on art exhibitions, writing short stories, sharing studio gossip, and reporting issues of concern such as transport to work and long working hours.

Keywords Leisure · Sports · Labour · Recreation · Clubs and Societies

Film studios were communities of workers who established close bonds through the collective enterprise of film production. They employed many diverse occupations, including canteen employees, art directors, costume designers, hairdressers, secretaries, publicists, electricians, and carpenters. Establishing a sense of community was important, especially when working conditions could be pressured and intense, with each production throwing up new challenges, especially when working within tight

budgets and time constraints. The large numbers of ‘hidden’ contributors to a film’s production, particularly administrative personnel, or craft workers such as carpenters and wardrobe assistants, were not explicitly credited when films were released. Yet their work was crucial to the enterprise, constituting key elements of Pinewood’s complex infrastructure of experts whose labour was fundamentally important to the successful production of a film. While the details of their working practices and skills are to some extent apparent, far less is known about the broader experiences of the workplace community in an operation as large and complex as Pinewood. Surviving documentation on the social lives and activities of film studio employees is rare to find, even though it seems that several British studios produced in-house magazines.

One such example is the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, published monthly from August 1946 to December 1947 by Independent Producers, the holding company established by Rank in 1942 to finance and manage independent production companies including the Archers (Powell and Pressburger), Cineguild (David Lean, Anthony Havelock-Allan, and Ronald Neame), Individual Pictures (Lauder and Gilliat), Wessex Productions (Ian Dalrymple) and Aquila (the company associated with the Independent Frame films that joined in 1947). The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides a rare glimpse into how studio employees bonded through sports and social clubs, musical and film groups, organising a Christmas pantomime, putting on art exhibitions, writing short stories, sharing studio gossip, and reporting issues of concern such as transport to work and long working hours. This chapter details how the magazine articulated Pinewood’s culture as a social enterprise as well as providing insights into its various working spaces. It brings to life the reality of being a studio employee, the day-to-day activities that are rarely described in film histories.

The publication of a magazine such as the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* during a time when film studios were challenged by material shortages, the dollar crisis, and pressures to cut costs was remarkable. After the Second World War ended paper was still rationed but the magazine was rather lavishly produced, with a glossy colour cover design. The first issue’s cover (Fig. 6.1) featured red, white, and blue vertical lines which resembled closed stage curtains with a top ruffle emblazoning the title *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*. Peeping through the centre, as if making an entrance, was a clapper board with the Independent Producers’ logo and



Fig. 6.1 *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* cover image, August 1946

date. Its sixteen issues, each with sixteen pages, were very professionally produced and gave the impression of a coherent group of creative workers who were intimately connected to Pinewood's identity as premier film studios. The extent to which it was a 'bottom-up' publication or whether the support it received from Rank personally was a signal that it functioned as a tool of management, is interesting to ponder. While much of the magazine's content seems to be driven by the enthusiasm of its contributors some features, such as reports on how British films fared in the USA, undoubtedly served to advance the Rank Organisation's post-war export drive.

It was imperative for film studios to keep their stages occupied at a time when producers were struggling to produce enough British films, especially in the wake of the ‘Bogart or bacon’ dollar crisis which resulted in the imposition of the ‘Dalton Duty’ in August 1947 on American film imports, and Hollywood’s subsequent boycott of the British market before a settlement was reached in March 1948.¹ Even though during the brief time of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round’s* publication the emphasis was on making films for the domestic market, a cornerstone of Rank’s plans for future sustainability was getting British films screened in America via the Organisation’s distribution links with United Artists’ Eagle Lion and Universal-International.² This crucial period provides a formative context for how larger studios negotiated pressures to increase, manage, and re-calibrate film production after the severe disruptions caused by the Second World War when studios, including Pinewood, had been requisitioned for various wartime purposes.³ It was imperative to recreate Pinewood’s positive pre-war culture that was described by John Dennis of the Association of Cine Technicians (ACT) as typified by a ‘happy atmosphere with a working spirit all of its own’.⁴

Considering the magazine’s publication in the immediate post-war years of reconstruction and optimism, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round’s* effervescent glimpses into employees’ leisure activities can be read as unique traces of cultural abundance and the creative energies which emanated from the ethos of Independent Producers at Pinewood. At that time this grouping was associated with creative agency and freedom from managerial interference, as Sidney Gilliat recalled: ‘From the beginning of 1944 to 1947 filmmaking conditions were good and we had a remarkable freedom in most departments’.⁵ Rank’s attempt to impose supervisory structures through Production Facilities (Films) Ltd (P.F.F.), the company formed to provide common services to all of the production units under the managing direction of Frank L. Gilbert as discussed in

¹ Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2009 Edition), 16–7.

² Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 96–115.

³ Sarah Street, ‘Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

⁴ *The Pinewood Merry-Go Round (PMGR)*, August 1946, 11.

⁵ Sidney Gilliat to Geoffrey Macnab, 3 June 1991 (private correspondence).

Chapter 5, could not prevent producers insisting ‘on having a completely free hand in their own productions’.⁶ But as costs increased in 1946 the need for economies, including streamlining and then winding-up P.F.F., began the trend towards budgetary controls. Indeed, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round’s* abrupt cessation in December 1947 coincided with a tightening-up of the regime at Pinewood under the direction of Rank’s business manager John Davis when a severe cost-cutting culture was instituted in 1948–1949. As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the films produced at Pinewood while the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* was being published were however distinctive for their innovative approaches to economical filmmaking practices. Some of these were indeed referenced in the magazine, often in a light-hearted way, as part of its reportage on employees’ skills and prevalent creative ideas that were circulating at the time.

FIRST ISSUES OF THE *PINEWOOD MERRY-GO-ROUND*

The first issue’s editorial declared the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round’s* purpose as ‘an interesting, informative and amusing magazine for all Pinewood people, written and illustrated by them’.⁷ Rank provided a welcoming message saying that the magazine’s purpose was ‘to help spread knowledge’ about what everyone did in the studios, and there were also supportive messages from the three main trade unions, the ACT, the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the National Association of Theatrical and Kinematograph Employees (NATKE).⁸ This encouragement from management and unions reflected the magazine’s co-operative culture that was very much centred on Pinewood’s identity as an institution and collaborative workplace, as described in Chapter 5. The editorial stated further that: ‘Nothing will be included that is not of interest to Studio people themselves. It must be remembered however, that copies are bound to find their way into the hands of “outsiders”, so we must make every effort to do ourselves justice’.⁹ This emphasis on exclusivity gestures to the idea that Pinewood employees associated themselves with

⁶ Memo by Frank L. Gilbert on the Rank Organisation. I am grateful to Geoffrey Macnab for sharing this private document.

⁷ *PMGR*, August 1946, 1.

⁸ *PMGR*, August 1946, 11.

⁹ *PMGR*, August 1946, 1.

a particular brand. When other studios showed interest and asked to be put on the mailing list their approaches were firmly rebuffed: 'This is Pinewood's own Magazine, for us and by us, a policy that is unalterable'.¹⁰ This attitude was later criticised as 'insular' in *The Cinema Studio*, a supplement to *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* published weekly from March 1948 to November 1951.¹¹

At a time when studio employment was unstable, and the economic advantages of renting stages militated against long-term contracts, the Independent Producers set-up to some extent provided a sense of continuity and orientation centred on Pinewood. The connection with the Rank Organisation however meant that the companies involved were not technically 'independent', a reality which in time became problematic for producers such as The Archers whose film *The Red Shoes* (1948) was criticised by Rank and John Davis as too costly and over-indulgent.¹² The short lifetime of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* is in part explained by the winding-up of Independent Producers in 1948 as John Davis sought to curb any semblance of 'independence' the enterprise might have encouraged. While the magazine was recognised as a symbol of Pinewood's success its dependence on the Independent Producers meant that its lifetime was limited. But its existence had provided a short-term sense of confidence in British prestige production, a context with which the magazine's ethos was fundamentally connected. Its features communicated a spirit of camaraderie and excitement about film production, as well as documenting the numerous communal social activities that were organised by Pinewood's employees. Considering the turbulent period in which it was produced, the magazine emerges as a defiant attempt to promote the ethos of a 'Pinewoodian' studio culture.

The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* was posted free of charge to every member of the studios once a month. Joy Redmond, the Acting Editor who was a film publicity director with an editorial office located in Room 176, Block J, called for contributions: 'We need short stories, cartoons, details of any hobbies you have, technical articles that are of interest

¹⁰ *PMGR*, October 1946, 1. Copies did however circulate widely, as reported by Michael Powell in the last issue, presumably passed on by studio workers.

¹¹ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 21 September 1949, 9.

¹² The irony was that *The Red Shoes* was one of the biggest-grossing films in Rank's American export drive: Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 109–10.

to us all; sketches, amusing incidents and bits of gossip that are always happening in the studios and hundreds of other items that will make the magazine representative of you all'.¹³ Other people involved in producing the magazine's launch issue were Vivienne Knight, Sally Sutherland, Betty Carter, and joining a few months later were Stuart Chant of Cineguild and David Pursall of Individual Pictures. When Joy Redmond took up a new position as Publicity Director for Wessex Film Productions she was succeeded as Editor in October 1946 by journalist Tom Moore who occupied the role for the rest of the magazine's lifetime. The magazine provided a 'pass' into the studio like no other, as captured by a cartoon printed in the first issue and shown in Fig. 6.2. The freely drawn black and white line drawing shows a person at the studio entrance wearing a placard with 'Merry-Go-Round' written on the front being given a studio pass by a much larger, uniformed porter. The disparity in height communicates something of the studios' sense of grandeur, with an implication that official sanction was needed for entry. Such imagery supported the idea that Pinewood was an exclusive environment to which employees had unique access. It also indicates the magazine's status as a publication approved of by studio management.

By November 1946 the magazine had established a clear role for itself, its success leading to a broadening of its scope, as noted in the editorial: 'There can be few industries which call for greater team-work than ours. The more a film worker knows about the broad principles of the other man's job and what he is trying to get at, the greater will be his own contribution to the general efficiency of his studio and ultimately, of course, to his own well-being'.¹⁴ This slight shift from emphasising strictly social activities to highlighting inter-work relations and efficiency introduced the combination of features which became typical for the magazine. Both unions and managers were represented, the former writing columns and reports on key issues such as poor transport links to and from the studio and working hours, while J. Arthur Rank's involvement as President of the Music, Art, and Drama Group reflected his benevolent enthusiasm for such activities and the magazine's role in helping to spread knowledge about what everyone did in the studios. As the following analysis will show, several themes ran through its

¹³ *PMGR*, October 1946, 1.

¹⁴ *PMGR*, November 1946, 1.



Fig. 6.2 'Pass to the studios' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, August 1946, p. 1

pages, reflecting inward-looking activities including cultural and sporting pursuits, recurring issues affecting studio employees, as well as outward-looking reports on international themes, location shoots, and conditions in other film industries. The co-presence of these issues communicates something of the diverse range of activities the magazine covered in pursuit of its aim to spread knowledge amongst employees about areas with which they might not necessarily be familiar.

TRAVELLING TO AND FROM WORK

One issue that was repeatedly raised concerned poor transport links to and from Pinewood. Situated in Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire, approximately eighteen miles West of central London, Pinewood was not very accessible for workers living in London who spent considerable time travelling during a five-day, 44-hour working week. In these circumstances it is hard to see how employees fitted in some of the social activities organised in the studios. Indeed, the transport issue was first linked to the ‘very poor’ response to an appeal in October 1946 for those interested in forming a Social and Sports Club. The transport problem was blamed in the ‘messages from the unions’ regular column which reported that employees were worried about getting home after Club events. A special meeting was held on Pinewood’s ‘D’ stage, and the issue declared to be ‘a canker eating into the minds of the Studio personnel’.¹⁵ Rank promised to secure better bus transport and appointed a Transport Minister but the unions nevertheless concluded: ‘The fact remains that the transport position is unsatisfactory’.¹⁶ A new bus timetable was agreed, adding additional journeys from Pinewood to Uxbridge, leading F. W. Lawrence of D & P Studios’ Transport Department, to conclude that travel conditions had improved. Tension between management and workers over the issue was however palpable and discontent persisted as a report from the unions urged: ‘We do feel that “time” is the major factor in the minds of our members. The Standard Studio Agreement covering travelling facilities must be amended to suit outlying Studios. Until this is done we contend that there will never be a “contented and happy feeling” amongst the rank and file workers at Pinewood; and, unfortunately, it must tend to have repercussions on Production generally’.¹⁷

Some employees were in favour of Rank building houses near Pinewood, an idea which chimed with a report (never implemented) published in 1945 which recommended re-planning Denham and Pinewood and co-locating a new town for studio workers.¹⁸ An early advocate who worked in the electrical department, wrote a letter to the magazine making the case that a ‘Pinewood Settlement’ of houses and

¹⁵ *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

¹⁶ *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

¹⁷ *PMGR*, January 1947, 15.

¹⁸ Helmut Junge, *Plan for Film Studios* (London: The Focal Press, 1945).

shops would extend the community spirit that existed in the studios, ‘and altogether it could easily become a model of happy communal life’.¹⁹ Another letter was published by G. Manders, shop steward for the drapery department, making the point that: ‘Many of us who have only rooms, and a considerable distance away at that, would gladly welcome a small house within easy distance of work, more especially as the surrounding country is so beautiful, and certainly beneficial from a health point of view. On top of all this, what a lot of lost time, late transport and sickness could be avoided’.²⁰ One carpenter wrote a letter to the magazine on the subject giving a heartfelt account of the difficulties he was experiencing. The journey to work took him 2.25–2.50 hours and the same time to get home:

Being on night shift I have to leave home at 5.30pm at the latest and do not get back until after 10am. At the most, I get in about 5 hours sleep. These travelling times are in normal weather conditions. With the present winter snow, I realise that I just could not make it, so stop away. I have hunted high and low for other accommodation nearer Pinewood, and during the past year even slept in a tent in the orchard by the gate. Is it any wonder that I arrive at work tired, sometimes (very often, in fact) late and lost time through being indisposed. Could not the studio provide somewhere for long-distance workers to sleep? It would repay them many times over in time saved. I am a keen sportsman and would wholeheartedly support the Sports Club, but cannot under the present conditions. I would like to add that I like my job and find D&P studios the best of them all – having tried the lot.²¹

Other employees, particularly workers in the Art Department, however, opposed living very close to the studios. They were not impressed with the Hollywood model or living with the same people they worked with day in and day out. One report quoted writer Evelyn Waugh who described studio workers in Hollywood as ‘a people apart. They are like monks in a desert oasis, their lives revolving about a few shrines – half a dozen immense studios – two hotels – one restaurant;

¹⁹ *PMGR*, August 1946, 16. Pinewood’s original plans envisaged the studios as part of a wider housing development in Iver Heath that was possibly intended for studio employees.

²⁰ *PMGR*, May 1947, 1.

²¹ *PMGR*, February 1947, 1.

their sacred texts are their own publicity and the local gossip columns'.²² The issue rumbled on inconclusively and complaints about poor transport persisted. Inconvenient bus timetables often resulted in workers having to walk considerable distances to alternative stops; inconsistent numbers of buses meant some became full too quickly at the end of the day. A humorous poem entitled 'The Charge of the Home-bound Brigade' published in the January 1947 issue captures something of the strong views and emotions involved in the housing issue including the lines: 'Out of the studio gate, Quickly they rush – then wait! That is their horrid fate, Poor old Six Hundred! Theirs is not to reason why, Theirs not to make reply, Theirs but to wait and sigh, Hopeless Six Hundred!'.²³ While items such as this invested the issue with humour it was nevertheless the case that the magazine articulated the contours of debate about a grievance that was clearly very deeply felt. The accumulation of pressure for action percolated outwards with varying results. A new bus shelter designed by John Evendon, formerly of the art department, was erected at the studio entrance. Evendon had won a prize for this work which was the result of a competition.²⁴ While this item indicates employee involvement in some aspects of transport, it is somewhat ironic that a new shelter was a way to make waiting for buses more bearable. C. E. Ayers, Operating Superintendent at London Transport, visited Pinewood and agreed to additional buses and some adjustments to timetables.²⁵ By May 1947 transport for studio workers was being considered by the British Film Producers Association (BFPA), and the Regional Transport Commissioner was asked to help. A positive development was securing travel ticket concessions for workers at Pinewood and Denham and the BFPA agreed to subsidise fares for employees on lower salaries.²⁶

²² *PMGR*, May 1947, 17.

²³ *PMGR*, January 1947, 6.

²⁴ *PMGR*, April 1947, 18.

²⁵ *PMGR*, April 1947, 15.

²⁶ *PMGR*, May 1947, 15.

SPORTING AND OTHER CLUBS

Despite these difficulties some employees were able to join the various sporting clubs organised from the studios, as evident from the magazine's reports on a host of competitive activities including football, tennis, cricket, table tennis, and a rifle club. As Hill has noted, such often overlooked recreational pursuits provide fascinating insights into the social history of twentieth-century Britain.²⁷ While Hill documents leisure provision in a variety of commercial, voluntary, and state sectors, the existence and significance of such pursuits in a film studio context have not previously been documented by scholars. In this respect the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* brings to light an aspect of film studio life that has been obscured by the prominence film production has understandably been given as a studio's major concern. While it is not clear how many workers were able to fully participate in Pinewood's sporting teams and clubs, matches, and competitions were organised both between studio employees and playing against teams in other studios. In this sense the activities gesture outwards, chiming with what was clearly a trend in the early post-war years when workers were either returning to studio employment or employed as new entrants to the industry. An emphasis on communal bonding was perhaps more intense as workers sought in a different context to recreate something of the camaraderie they had experienced during the war, particularly while serving in the Forces. Re-orientating film production in peacetime thus involved more than increasing British film production. It required galvanising a disparate workforce while making the sector an attractive one in which to work. While these aims were shared by the state, management, and workers, a focus on the nature and extent of leisure pursuits organised by Pinewood's employees provides rare glimpses into 'bottom-up' studio culture. Such activities were viewed by management as productive, and the BFPA covered the expenses of clubs in all studios.²⁸ A sense of a communal identity was also encouraged by opening Pinewood's review theatres to studio personnel when new films were completed.²⁹

²⁷ Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

²⁸ *PMGR*, September 1946, 13.

²⁹ *PMGR*, October 1946, announcement on back of the issue's front cover.

Not helped by the logistical issues concerning poor transport, it clearly took time to establish a thriving leisure culture. A report noted that the Pinewood 'Sparks' football team lacked supporters at their matches. When they played Denham's 'Sparks' team on their home ground located on the Pinewood backlot in December 1946, there were only two supporters present. Denham fans were better represented, and they beat Pinewood by six goals to five.³⁰ Yet it seems that branding was all-important to inculcating the team spirit necessary for sports competitions with other rival studios. Pinewood's team colours were white shirts with green cuffs and collars and the three pine trees of D & P's (Denham and Pinewood) trademark on the pocket. These activities were made possible because of the extensive exterior lot at Pinewood and hosting activities there undoubtedly conferred on them a sense of place and identity. As well as a football pitch the tennis courts in the gardens were converted for netball, and boxing marquees were erected in the paddock.

The location of space and facilities for sports and clubs within Pinewood's interior and exterior complex tied such activities to a work-play ethos rather than experienced as separate spheres. Having activities taking place in locations that were further away from Pinewood might have conferred on them a greater sense of freedom as leisure time that was more physically and psychologically removed from everyday employment. A strategy to increase interest in the team sports was, however, through organising events that took place in larger locations that were more easily accessible to participants and supporters. Clubs and societies were being organised in other studios and a British Film Industry Sports and Gala Day was held at Uxbridge RAF Stadium in September 1947.³¹ Ealing won overall, and the report noted 'many exciting races' took place. The runners-up were Technicolor, with Denham third, and Pinewood, one point behind, came fourth. A further note comments on the event's convivial, social function: 'The prevailing spirit of friendly rivalry encouraged competitors and spectators alike to meet and mix with colleagues from other studios'.³² A fun fair and open air dancing in the evening concluded the Gala Day. In November 1947 a swimming pool gala was open to all studios, production offices, companies

³⁰ *PMGR*, January 1947, 15.

³¹ *PMGR*, October 1947, 14.

³² *PMGR*, October 1947, 14.

and works connected with the film industry. Sporting activities organised at the studios were representative of sport's social role as one of Britain's most powerful civil cultures. Works-based sports had advantages for both management and workers, although their existence could arouse suspicion that they were encouraged only to inculcate company loyalty.³³ Judging from the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, studio workers did however value these pursuits especially when one considers that being able to participate was voluntary and required considerable time, energy, and commitment. Even though the magazine was considered by some as insular, as far as its reportage on sports and social events involving other studios was concerned, this was not so pronounced.

SOCIAL MIXING, THE CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME, AND GOSSIP

The opportunity for social mixing within film studio complexes appears to have been somewhat limited. Both Denham and Pinewood had restaurants that were generally used by management for entertaining important visitors and film stars, but these were separate from the canteens used by studio workers. It seems however that stars and employees found other ways to mix outside of their working commitments. The darts section of the Sports and Social Club had the biggest following of Pinewood's clubs. A competition held in May 1947 involved a stars' team playing *The News of the World's* visiting team. Cecil Parker threw the winning dart that won the competition for the stars.³⁴ Valerie Hobson presented the trophies at the Sports and Gala Day noted above; the event was attended by other stars including Jean Simmons and Dermot Walsh.

Stars also attended a Christmas pantomime organised by employees in October 1946 (Fig. 6.3). Pinewood's Music, Art, and Drama group prepared a production of *Cinderella*, to be performed in one of the studio theatres' smaller stages. It was an ambitious production, involving sixty studio employees including riggers, make-up artists, stagehands,

³³ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures in Britain, 1918–51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 332, 380.

³⁴ *PMGR*, May 1947, 13.

hairdressers, carpenters, and lighting and effects specialists.³⁵ Some interesting Pinewood employees were involved including Geoff Woodward of the art department who wrote the script and lyrics, and a few years later worked as frame supervisor on several films produced using the Independent Frame, a time-saving production technique developed at Pinewood. The pantomime was produced by Adele Raymond, a casting director who had cast several of Powell and Pressburger's films. Film publicist Lillana Wilkie played the Prince, in addition to assisting Valerie Turner in directing the pantomime, and production secretary Cynthia Frederick acted the part of Cinderella. In playing a prominent role in producing the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* and occupying central roles in such activities, women in the studios were at the forefront of promoting a shared workplace culture.

The pantomime encouraged staff to try their hand at doing a job they were unfamiliar with: 'Although many of the people taking part are "professionals", it can truly be said that *Cinderella* is a show in the best tradition of amateur theatricals – as the distribution of parts and jobs has been so arranged that no professional takes part in his or her own professional field'.³⁶ This would appear to be the case although the décor and costumes were by Bill Holmes, an assistant art director on *In Which We Serve* (Noël Coward and David Lean, 1942), and draughtsman in the art department for *Great Expectations* (1946). The production was the most ambitious undertaking by the recently formed Music, Art, and Drama Group which had J. Arthur Rank as its President and D & P Studios' managing director Spencer Reis as Vice-President. The Group had 100 members, or 10% of studio personnel, and as well as performances activities included gramophone recitals held fortnightly in one of the studio theatres when free, and exhibitions of drawings in the picture gallery of the Club House. Members included well-known names such as musical director and composer Muir Mathieson; cinematographer Ronald Neame; art director Teddy Carrick, and film stars Deborah Kerr and Valerie Hobson.³⁷ There was clearly an 'all hands on deck' culture around the event's preparation, something film employees would have been

³⁵ *PMGR*, December 1946, 16.

³⁶ *PMGR*, December 1946, 16.

³⁷ *PMGR*, November 1946, 16.



Fig. 6.3 The Christmas pantomime at Pinewood, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, January 1947, p. 8

familiar with although for some, being involved in a theatrical production was a novel experience. Due to scheduling issues the ‘Pinewood Pantomimeers’ had to bring forward their performance by a week to the end of December. The shorter preparation time meant that ‘production had to be speeded up, rehearsal efforts doubled – and everybody put generally on their toes to get the show knocked into shape’.³⁸

Even though the emphasis was primarily on fun and enjoyment, there was clearly more than a touch of professionalism evident when the ‘enthusiast’ ballet dancers were taken as part of their training for the pantomime to see the Ballet Rambert perform *Giselle*. This outing clearly made an impact since in January 1947 during the ‘revelry’ of the Pinewood’s New Year’s Ball, ‘the Pinewood Ballet took the floor to give a repeat performance of their excerpt from the Pantomime, and earned unstinted applause’.³⁹ The piano accompaniment was provided by Vivian Shaw of Cineguild’s Art Department, which he followed up with an impromptu selection during the band interval. The ballet was choreographed by sketch artist Ivor Beddoes. The pantomime’s audience consisted of members of the Music, Art, and Drama Group, other Pinewood employees, and their friends. Valerie Hobson and her mother attended, along with Spencer Reis and his wife. Illustrations were drawn of ‘Baron Nobubble’, played by Bill Holmes, and ‘The Talking Picture’ on a wall by Phil Shipway who had been second unit assistant director on *Great Expectations*. A report in the *Kinematograph Weekly* noted how working in a film studio was incorporated into the production: ‘No one in the studio escaped the wit in Geoffrey Woodward’s script, which this art department man made to follow a film business background. First crack was about studio manager Hector Coward and Cinderella’s turkey was naïvely labelled: “Shot by Rank”’.⁴⁰

In view of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s short lifetime, the pantomime seems to perfectly represent the communal aspirations of employees to band together for something that was most definitely not a film production. This achievement was impressive considering the exceptionally harsh winter and fuel crisis at the start of 1947. Consumer goods were in short supply and rationing persisted. Employees skated in

³⁸ *PMGR*, November 1946, 16.

³⁹ *PMGR*, January 1947, 2.

⁴⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 9 January 1947, 26.

Pinewood's gardens, and because the studio had its own power supply work continued despite the difficulties caused by the adverse weather conditions.⁴¹ Yet it must have been difficult for workers to resist the temptation to go home at the end of the working day rather than stay longer at the studio for pantomime rehearsals. The latter can perhaps be seen as a marker of the extent to which an active leisure culture had been established. This was also evident when Pinewood's social calendar included the Paint Shop's outing to Southend in November 1946 which was organised by shop steward Bert Tabor. This social event was much desired and popular, judging from the considerable efforts made by the workers to finance the trip. Funds were subscribed by the painters themselves and enlarged with proceeds from raffles, cash forfeits from bingo and darts games held in the paint shop, a dance, and by private donations.⁴² In July 1947 there was a joint Denham and Pinewood daytrip to Margate. The party travelled in coaches and the attractions included lunch at 'Dreamland', tea and an all-star variety show in the evening.⁴³

The magazine's tone could at times be effervescent, especially in regular features such as the Pinewood log and gossip section. These established an 'at home' culture which shared a range of different experiences and humorous incidents. One such item reported: 'The Fitting Room cat recently produced four kittens who considered the lathes, drills and milling machines ideal playthings. General relief is now felt by all in the Shop – the kittens have been distributed among less dangerous departments, with their tails intact!'.⁴⁴ Another shared a welcome by-product of a recent production: 'Anybody feeling that the English summer has let them down, can borrow tropical clothes and sit under the Bamboo trees that have been made for *Black Narcissus* (1947). Rumour has it that the men working on these models have been nicknamed "The Bamboo-zlers!"'.⁴⁵ Another item publicised employees' hobbies, occasioned when a large colony of bees swarmed onto the roof of Pinewood's covered way. Bill Creighton, who worked in the carpenter's shop, was called in to help since it was known he was a bee enthusiast. Clad in protective headgear

⁴¹ *PMGR*, December 1947, 16.

⁴² *PMGR*, November 1946, 6.

⁴³ *PMGR*, May 1947, 14.

⁴⁴ *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

⁴⁵ *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

Creighton was hoisted up to the roof where he secured the queen-bee, ‘and the rest of the workers followed her meekly into a box which Bill had taken up with him. The whole colony is now thriving nicely under Bill’s expert care at home’.⁴⁶ Creighton wrote an article on beekeeping that was published in the September 1946 issue.⁴⁷ The sharing of leisure pursuits outside the studio was similarly evident when a worker in the machine shop who had worked at Pinewood since it opened, was keenly interested in Football Pools. His offer to help employees complete their forms was advertised with enthusiasm.⁴⁸

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND LOCATIONS

Even though the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* primarily focused on domestic matters at Pinewood, it certainly was not insular or uninterested in following developments in other studios and film industries. An article on Marc Allégret, a French director who arrived in Pinewood straight from a French studio in January 1947 to direct *Blanche Fury*, is a case in point. This highlighted some of Pinewood’s advantages, such as having its own powerhouse. Allégret recalled how in France working hours were restricted owing to an acute shortage of electrical power. This meant increased night work because the drop in industrial and domestic consumption meant that more power was available. His comparison between current conditions in French studios with those prevailing at Pinewood were instructive, for example, his observation that when faced with a ‘rain’ shot British electricians had less reason to worry about the very real possibility of severe electric shocks since their cables were less aged and worn than those in French studios which should have been scrapped. Allégret also claimed that Pinewood’s floor units were not forced into inactivity by the acute shortage of equipment affecting studios in France. Another difference was the lack of heating in French studios which meant cameramen were forced ‘to add insult to injury by making their shivering subjects suck ice cubes during “takes” in an effort to minimise fog caused by warm breath meeting frost-cold air’.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

⁴⁷ *PMGR*, September 1946, 10.

⁴⁸ *PMGR*, October 1946, 2.

⁴⁹ *PMGR*, January 1947, 4–5.

Despite these problems Allégret noted that the French studios were still making good pictures, referencing the success in London of *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Marcel Carné, 1945). Allégret's comparative knowledge in these respects was useful, especially since he had previous experience of working in Britain on trick shots in the 'flying carpet' sequence in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). The report closed with an interesting comment on studio methods, and the exchange of ideas between workers and managers:

The equipment and material here has impressed him tremendously - but equally so did the men who use it and their methods. Soon after he arrived here Marc attended a meeting of the Studio Works Committee; he came out full of enthusiasm for what to him, was a new and thrilling departure in the business of picture making. In French Studios there exists no such system whereby the employee and employer can meet for the express purpose of exchanging ideas for the improvement of their industry. He has already written to France, urging them to adopt a similar system in studios over there. Perhaps this is the forerunner of the inter-change of talent and ideas he so earnestly hopes to see develop between his country and ours.⁵⁰

This comment reflects the great instability in employment for French technicians in 1947–1948 when there were mass redundancies. Workers were in discussions with unions, but the quick turnover of employment from studio to studio meant it was difficult to establish dialogue with managers in terms of improving working methods.

When George Busby, production manager and assistant producer for *The Archers*, returned to Pinewood after a trip for location scouting in France and Italy, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* reported on his impressions of studios he had visited including Cinecittà which was being used as a camp for displaced persons. He found the studios in Rome to be very well-equipped 'although the employment of tubular scaffolding for set building has only just been introduced. Hitherto wood has been in plentiful supply'.⁵¹ This was considerably later than in Britain where tubular scaffolding had been used for some time, a trend that was accelerated by timber shortages, as well as using plaster as a wood substitute.⁵² Busby

⁵⁰ *PMGR*, January 1947, 4–5.

⁵¹ *PMGR*, December 1946, 6–9.

⁵² *PMGR*, February 1947, 2.

considered the studios in Nice to be well-equipped, ‘with sets of a quality second to none’, and he witnessed the first colour film in the post-war period being processed in Agfacolor. In Paris, Busby visited Pathé and the old Paramount studios. Another issue featured an article on Arab films by British matte painter and storyboard artist Ivor Beddoes.⁵³ The first Cannes Film Festival was attended and reported on by Anthony Dowling, an assistant director of publicity.⁵⁴ When productions were shot using overseas locations, such as *The Red Shoes* (1948), the local conditions, atmosphere, transport, equipment, and collaborations with other technicians were detailed in various articles, providing interesting perspectives on the trend for location shooting.⁵⁵ Such incidents and reports opened-up the magazine’s content to international film news.

ARTWORK AND CARTOONS

The magazine was well-produced, featuring cartoons by studio employees. These provided amusing visual commentaries on several themes. One cartoon (Fig. 6.4) was titled ‘Pinewood Phantasmagoria!’.⁵⁶ The full-page feature contained eight sketches of people who worked in the studios. Their names, located underneath each sketch, were spelt out with missing letters so that readers had to work out who the person was by studying the sketch. The figures included production designer Alfred Junge, depicted towering over some tell-tale decorations with the caption: ‘The Genie of *Black Narcissus* sets’. Another cartoon (Fig. 6.5) was titled ‘Pinewood Fashionotabilities’, a full page of humorous illustrations featuring the many different types of costume seen at Pinewood.⁵⁷ While the artists are not generally credited, one line drawing by H. Hale entitled ‘Art Director’s Dilemma’ (Fig. 6.6) was a graphic comment illustrating the tricky issues of perspective and a wry comment: ‘That fly on the ceiling isn’t in true perspective’.⁵⁸ A visual commentary on the work of carpenters working on the busy studio exterior lot was also reproduced

⁵³ *PMGR*, September 1946, 15.

⁵⁴ *PMGR*, November 1946, 4–5.

⁵⁵ *PMGR*, July 1947, 4–7.

⁵⁶ *PMGR*, October 1946, 11.

⁵⁷ *PMGR*, January 1946, 14.

⁵⁸ *PMGR*, October 1946, 15.

in cartoon form.⁵⁹ Photographs were reproduced in a ‘still of the month’ feature such as Cornell Lucas’s dramatic shot of two silhouetted figures standing in the foreground with a lighting set up casting light on the stage floor to illuminate scaffolding in front of them.⁶⁰ The magazine’s interest in creative pursuits further extended to reporting exhibitions organised by the Art Group which were displayed in one of the studios’ corridors.⁶¹

These examples in particular show film studios as places in which leisure/social activities exuded a somewhat playful, carnivalesque atmosphere. The extent to which these operated under the radar of managerial oversight is unknown, but the effervescent ethos of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* gives an impression of excess and enthusiasm despite the adverse circumstances experienced by the film industry at the time of its publication. This resilient spirit communicates something of the studios as a partially separate sphere from their financial control and management which, as we have seen from Chapter 5, operated from central London. While there are photographic records of J. Arthur Rank visiting Pinewood and he clearly had a personal investment in the studios’ success, his offices in Park Lane were some distance from the studios. The managerial controls he sought to put in place were frustrated in part because they were perceived as outside interference. While the drive towards economic production was harnessed within Pinewood’s culture of survival many of its creative aspects, as documented in Chapters 3 and 4, were more the result of filmmakers’ ingenuity and expertise. The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides additional evidence for this impression, with its focus on filmmaking practices and insights into a leisure culture that was irrepressibly creative.

CELEBRATING PINEWOOD’S HISTORY AND SPACES

Respect for Pinewood’s history and the people who worked there in the past was another consistent feature. Some reports highlighted employees whose contributions are not normally recorded such as Ben Goff, General Foreman of Messrs. Boots, who was engaged in construction work in the studios. Goff had been employed as a brick-layer foreman when Pinewood

⁵⁹ *PMGR*, September 1946, 12.

⁶⁰ *PMGR*, February 1947, 15.

⁶¹ *PMGR*, November 1947, 16.



Fig. 6.4 'Pinewood Phantasmagoria' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, October 1946, p. 11

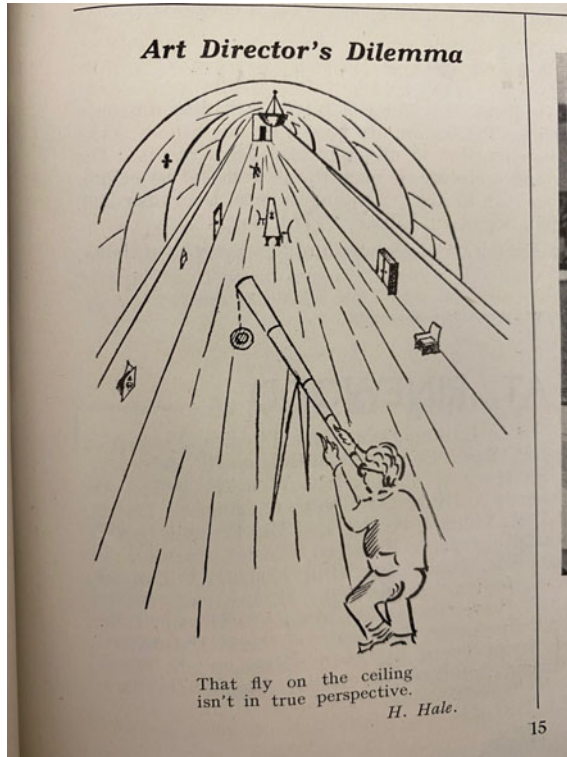


Fig. 6.6 'Art Director's Dilemma' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, October 1946, p. 15

was being built. He was back at Pinewood in October 1946 supervising construction work with four colleagues who worked with him when the first bricks were laid in the studios. He recalled that the first brick was laid by Mrs Spencer Reis, wife of Charles Boot whose engineering and building company designed and constructed the studios following Boot's purchase in May 1935 of extensive parkland and Heatherden Hall, a country mansion, located at Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire.⁶² Frank Ellis, first camera assistant on *Green for Danger* (1946), worked on the

⁶² *PMGR*, November 1947, 16. See Chapter 1 for further detail on Pinewood's building and construction.

first camera ever to turn at Pinewood. Before the studios were officially opened in 1936 an acoustic test was arranged by the Hon. Richard Norton, and Ellis came over from Elstree to assist. Another former worker was Robert J. Blackburn, Chief Electrician, who had worked at Pinewood from 1936 to the beginning of the Second World War.⁶³ This honouring of personnel encouraged the impression that employees, past and present, belonged to a Pinewood family. One report emphasised the persistence of key issues affecting the film industry. When veteran film producer Cecil Hepworth was shown around Pinewood in November 1946 by his old friend Tom White, a production manager for Independent Producers, a major point of discussion was the export of British films, a topic the magazine reflected on by publishing choice enthusiastic quotations from American publications about the British films spearheading Rank's post-war export drive.⁶⁴

The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* showed how Pinewood's working spaces, corridors, and exterior lot could easily be adapted for purposes other than filmmaking. The studios' expansive layout clearly had potential for use by the various clubs and sporting activities reported in its pages such as darts matches in the workers' canteen, exhibitions in the corridors, and trade union meetings held in the stages. For some, the sprawling complex could be difficult to navigate, as when a visitor reported getting lost in 'the maze of narrow stairways and passages of the Old Club House', and the incongruity of 'huge and starkly utilitarian [administrative] blocks married to a dignified Georgian mansion'.⁶⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, the co-presence of old and new architecture was a distinctive feature of Pinewood's physical infrastructure, in contrast to Denham's overall more overtly modernist design which can be seen to express much of its character as a studio.⁶⁶ When a visitor got lost when looking for the offices of Wessex Films he encountered a cleaner polishing a balustrade on one of the long corridors who told him of her great fondness for the building, having worked at Pinewood since 1936.⁶⁷ Such interest in

⁶³ *PMR*, August 1946, 2.

⁶⁴ *PMGR*, November 1946, 2–3. Tom White featured prominently in the discussions of post-war technical developments featured in Chapter 2.

⁶⁵ *PMGR*, April 1947, 4–5.

⁶⁶ Sarah Street, 'Designing the Ideal Studio in Britain', *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 348–9.

⁶⁷ *PMGR*, February 1947, 16. The cleaner referred to the studio as 'a lovely old place'.

the studios' physical architecture reflects public curiosity about the work of film studios. The magazine noted that the 1947 Ideal Home Exhibition held at Olympia, London, featured thirteen exhibits from British studios, three of which were from Pinewood. The Archers sent a replica of Sister Clodagh's bedroom in the palace set from *Black Narcissus*; a model of an Irish cottage from *Captain Boycott* (1947), and designs for *Take My Life* (1947) which showcased the work of the art department directed by production designer John Bryan.⁶⁸ As noted by Hollie Price, such exhibitions were designed to illuminate 'the world behind the silver screen', featuring miniature reconstructions of sets from contemporary films which showed a variety of periods, styles, and locales produced by skilled craftsmen in the studios.⁶⁹

WINDING DOWN THE *PINEWOOD MERRY-GO-ROUND*

In December 1947 the last issue of the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* was published. The reasons given were continuing paper shortages and the amount of time it took to produce each issue. In the context of continuing post-war austerity, the editors decided to cease publication on the grounds that: 'We cannot argue that [the magazine] is really essential'. This verdict was not without regret since its purpose had helped to 'create a good spirit all round' the studios, and 'we can look forward to its return when the crisis is over'.⁷⁰ Appreciative statements praising the magazine's achievements by some key figures in the film industry were published. Sidney Gilliat reflected on its community ethos: 'It was nice to have a place of our own where flashlight-conditioned producers and stars could play second fiddle to Bill Sparks' brand new twins, or Joe Chippy's silver wedding, or the Pinewood F.C. [Football Club]'s trying out yet again one man short'.⁷¹ Ian Dalrymple regretted its passing, commenting that 'it should have been the last economy', and Michael Powell said it had readers 'all over the world', perhaps referring to how it reached overseas through staff passing it around when working on location. For Emeric

⁶⁸ *PMGR*, March 1947, 3.

⁶⁹ Hollie Price, *Picturing Home: Domestic life and modernity in 1940s British film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 137–8.

⁷⁰ *PMGR*, December 1947, 18–9.

⁷¹ *PMGR*, December 1947, 18.

Pressburger, the magazine's high quality meant that a 'shabby', cheaper version was out of the question.⁷²

The magazine was never revived, so the existing record cannot be compared with a later publication from Pinewood.⁷³ For the years 1946–1947 it however provided many insights into what it felt like to work in a studio and how workers socialised outside of working hours. As well as documenting a wide range of activities the magazine had drawn attention to novel uses of Pinewood's spaces such as an Art Exhibition staged in the South Corridor, and training for a forthcoming boxing tournament carried out in a marquee erected in the paddock area. It maintained a light touch, even when the business of filmmaking took up more of its pages, such as a regular feature initiated in November 1946 entitled 'Dispatches from the Floor' which provided monthly surveys of shooting progress. The reports could be detailed, such as for *Take My Life*, which included information on back projected scenes, a model tunnel, set constructions, and obtaining close-up shots of railway engines.⁷⁴ Saving time and the importance of achieving production efficiencies were highlighted in the report on *Captain Boycott*.⁷⁵

An essay competition inspired by a 'studio talk' by Ronald Neame sought the views of 'Pinewoodians' on what sort of films should be made at Pinewood. The winner, Jean McLellan of the scenario department, emphasised the importance of British films that delivered 'something other than mere entertainment', citing *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) as an ideal example. McLellan also argued that films based on English literature and history would be well received abroad, and that these films need not be too costly. In view of this result, it is perhaps no surprise that the competition's judges were George Archibald, chair of Independent Producers, and David Lean.⁷⁶ In this respect the magazine reflected current trends in the immediate post-war years, trends the Rank

⁷² *PMGR*, December 1947, 18.

⁷³ Sports and social activities clearly continued at Pinewood as well as in other studios, as reported in *The Cinema Studio*, a supplement to *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* published weekly from March 1948 to November 1951. This publication was far less lavish than the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* and did not cover social activities at the studios in great detail.

⁷⁴ *PMGR*, November 1946, 12.

⁷⁵ *PMGR*, January 1947, 16–7.

⁷⁶ *PMGR*, November 1947, 3.

Organisation sought to accelerate as the production crisis deepened. Yet the publication undoubtedly was a vehicle for a wider range of issues, including trade union commentaries on matters such as film quota legislation, transport and providing a forum for debate on issues such as the need for a shorter working week. It also publicised the contingency fund which provided relief for studio workers experiencing ‘hardship’ or ‘distress’. Co-funded by contributions from employees, D & P Management, and Independent Producers, the fund was administered by representatives of the ETU, ACT, and D & P Management.⁷⁷ The aim of spreading knowledge about employees’ work was important in studios as large as Pinewood. An extended feature, for example, was run about night staff.⁷⁸ It was illuminating about the very different atmosphere in the studios as many key activities continued into the night, and its tone encouraged respect for workers active in unsocial hours who were presumably less able to participate in the clubs and sports activities.

The publication’s convivial tone reflects studio employees’ energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity about each other’s lives and work in the shared enterprise of British filmmaking at a crucial time in its history. Such features evidence the pride and pleasure studio workers took in their work. A similar trend can be observed in other occupations, as well as how fostering a sense of loyalty to a particular workplace was largely a positive experience for employees.⁷⁹ This is not to imply that there were no conflicts or recurrent pressure points which tested those very loyalties. When Pinewood was officially re-opened after the war a ceremony and exhibition were held to mark the occasion, but ‘while the delegates were being shown around the studios, a token half-day strike was staged by workers who had assisted in preparations for the opening, as a protest against the fact that they were not invited to the ceremony’.⁸⁰ Indeed, a report noted that 25.3% of day workers and 32.7% of night staff were absent on 5th March 1947 for reasons that were ‘unclear’ beyond the persistence of transport problems and the abnormally harsh weather conditions.⁸¹ This supports Hill’s argument that interpreting the

⁷⁷ *PMGR*, April 1947, 10.

⁷⁸ *PMGR*, February 1947, 10–11.

⁷⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures in Britain*, 128.

⁸⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 April 1946, 6.

⁸¹ *PMGR*, April 1947, 6–7.

social functions of sport and leisure purely as forms of social control fails to recognise them as more complex processes ‘which themselves have a determining influence over people’s lives’.⁸² While they did not necessarily confer a culture of satisfaction with the workplace, their existence and vitality as recorded in the pages of the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* nevertheless convey a sense of their supportive role in the working lives of film industry employees.

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⁸² Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 2.



Conclusion: Anatomy of a Film Studio

Abstract This chapter brings together the arguments advanced in the book concerning how a materialist, ‘tectonic’ focuses on a major, surviving film studio during pivotal years of its lifetime set in train an infrastructure that contributed to its longevity as a major international film studio that is still operating. It constitutes a test case of how a micro history of such an enterprise augments and on occasion revises established historical interpretations. It reflects on the contrasting experience of Denham, Britain’s other premier studio also opened in 1936, but which was closed by Rank in 1952. Why Pinewood survived, it is argued, is rooted in the post-war years, the development of the studios’ physical and material infrastructure and practices, and the experience of producing films within a culture of constraint, key areas which have featured as the book’s central themes.

Keywords Studios · Micro History · Tectonics · British film industry · Technology

The fortunes of the Rank Organisation were characterised by a dramatic turn-around from incurring ‘massive losses’ in the late 1940s to recovery

and relative stability for most of the 1950s.¹ As a vertically integrated company Rank was able to offset losses in production with profits from cinema exhibition. The closure in the late 1940s of smaller studios linked to the Organisation including Shepherd's Bush, Islington, and Highbury, ensured that production was concentrated at Denham and Pinewood. Then, following Denham's closure in 1952, Pinewood was in a dominant position to service remaining active production companies.

As this book has demonstrated, Pinewood's robust physical infrastructure and facilities, seen from an aerial view shot in 1958 in Fig. 7.1, were central to its longer-term survival. The studios were owned by the Rank Group until 2001; Shepperton and Teddington Studios were subsequently absorbed as part of the 'Pinewood Group', a British-based, multi-national facility with overseas operations in Toronto and in the Dominican Republic. In 2016 Teddington was demolished and the site used for new housing.²

As argued in previous chapters, the immediate post-war years were pivotal in enabling Pinewood to survive crises that had more devastating effects on other studios. While the dominant historical narratives have privileged the fluctuating fortunes of the Rank Organisation and rise and fall of particular production companies, focusing on Pinewood as a physical entity highlights the significance of embedded, infrastructural elements which impacted its longevity. Put simply, Pinewood's design, architecture, equipment, technical innovations, labour, and studio culture enabled it to ride out shorter-term crises. A comparison between the studios' layout in 1945 and 1966 (Fig. 7.2) shows that the basic structure remained the same, but there had been notable additions: a special effects stage; a stills room; a scene dock by the generating station; a projection tunnel off stage 'E'; two small stages, an assembly bay next to the plasterers' and carpenters' shops; film vaults and a few more storage rooms. The original physical arrangement and size of the site as purchased in the 1930s had proved very durable, enabling the studios to easily extend as features such as devising and servicing special effects became essential.

¹ James Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen: A History of British Film Finance, 1945–85* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 114–5; Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35–56.

² For Pinewood's current operations see Pinewood website accessed 20 April 2023: <https://pinewoodgroup.com/studios>.



Fig. 7.1 Aerial view of Pinewood Studios, 1958. Alamy stock images

Analysing a key, relatively short period but from a *longue durée* perspective has allowed Pinewood to emerge as a highly significant, material entity; the studios' have been brought into visibility. A tectonic approach as used here emphasises how studios can be thought of as containing multiple zones of collaborative activities, adaptable materials, and spaces that shift from production to production. While studios often recede from visibility to make way for the illusion of cinema, they are emphatically material sites embedded in the histories of technology and architecture, quasi-utopian designs on efficient labour, and moments of political and economic crisis and transformation. Shaped by designers, planners, and engineers, studios are engines of novelty in industrial production methods, generating unconventional and even revolutionary creative practices. Conceptualising Pinewood in this way highlights it as a



Fig. 7.3 Denham Studios, 1948. Alamy stock images

The timing of the closure of Denham was influenced by additional factors. One consideration, following the establishment in 1949 of the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC), was the government's decision to make Rank one of three groups to benefit from an additional NFFC provision in 1951 known as 'The Group Scheme'. After an initial plan by NFFC Chairman Lord Reith that was further developed by J. H. Lawrie, managing director of the NFFC, and producer Michael Balcon, this was designed to finance films made by three groups of independent production companies. The first and largest was British Film Makers (BFM), a holding company associated with Rank's General Film Distributors which guaranteed 70% of the finance for at least six films to be made at Pinewood.³ The remaining capital was provided by the NFFC,

³ The National Archives (TNA), T228/273: Lord Reith to Harold Wilson, 12 January 1951.

thereby spreading the risk with the object of providing ‘a programme of sufficient size to enable profits and losses of individual films to be evened out, thus ensuring a reasonable measure of stability’.⁴ Each production team received an annual fee and a percentage of any profits which, in the spirit of the scheme, would not be distributed until they had been used to cover losses on other films made by the group. The intention was also to provide steadier studio employment and make economies through using common services. *The Final Test* (Anthony Asquith 1953) was a notable film co-produced by British Film Makers and ACT Films, the company established by the trade union in 1950. Although it was the only ACT film to be shot at Pinewood, many Rank employees were involved in other, lower-budget films produced in subsequent years.⁵ The second group was associated with Elstree Studios and ABPC, the other large combine, and the third catered for less established producers making short films and second feature films at Beaconsfield Studios. The bolstering of the large circuit-owning companies however caused concern. Sir Wilfred Eady at the Treasury, for example, feared the scheme would provide films for their own studios rather than prioritising the needs of non-associated independent producers. He regretted that an earlier plan for a single group led by documentarist John Grierson had not been adopted.⁶

The Group Scheme however helped Pinewood at a strategic point. It bridged a gap during a difficult time when lower and mid-budget films were losing money, and until Rank’s resources could be fully deployed to re-establish a more stable momentum. The BFM group included notable filmmakers including Anthony Asquith, Edward Baird, Betty Box, Thorold Dickinson, Anthony Havelock-Allan, Ronald Neame, Peter de Savigny, and Paul Swoskin. The scheme funded fourteen BFM films in 1951–2 but when these were unprofitable Rank ceased its operations; the whole Group Scheme was wound up in 1955. Even so, some of the BFM’s funded films have subsequently gained reputations as significant British films including *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Anthony Asquith 1952) and BFM’s highest box-office success *The Card* (Ronald

⁴ TNA, BT 64/4521: Note of discussion of Lord Reith’s memo, 3 November 1950.

⁵ Martin Spence, “‘Praise those Daring Men’: ACT Films Ltd, 1950–63”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 20, no. 4 (2023): 481–501.

⁶ TNA, T 228/273: Note on Eady’s objections to scheme, 14 December 1950. Nicholas Davenport also criticised the scheme in similar terms in the *Financial Times*, 18 January 1951.

Neame 1952).⁷ The centrality of Pinewood to the Group Scheme's structure emphasised confidence in its pivotal role in the recovery of the British film industry. As Chapman has noted: 'It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Rank saw BFM as an easy source of end money that reduced its risks in offering distribution guarantees to independent producers'.⁸ That this occurred at a time when the Rank Organisation was rationalising its operations, and the fact that Denham played no part in forward planning, indicates the shift in the balance of power between the studios that was taking place.

Rank's decision to close down production at Denham was explained as necessary so that production could be carried out 'more economically' at Pinewood.⁹ When news of Denham's closure was announced, Tom O'Brien, general secretary of NATKE, appealed to Prime Minister Clement Attlee that the studios should be requisitioned.¹⁰ But the government had already decided against Lord Reith's recommendation for state control of studios, opting instead to accept the reality of the combined power of Rank and ABPC. As a civil servant at the Board of Trade commented: 'As long as the present set-up in the film industry exists, there is no doubt that in one way or another producers must work through the Rank and the ABC distribution organisations and any lasting settlement of production problems must either recognise this fact or set out on some much more drastic measures'.¹¹ When Henry Strauss, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, was asked in the House of Commons in May 1952 about the leasing of Denham to EMI, a non-film producing company, he replied that since Denham's closure Pinewood was being used 'more efficiently'.¹² The passing of such an iconic film studio was justifiably lamented by many, not least the Association of Cine Technicians, for the loss of jobs that resulted. In 1953 an auction consisting of 4,000 lots was held of the former studios' 'entire contents' including cameras, sound projection, and cutting equipment, as well as

⁷ For a record of gross billings and 'quality' according to John Davis of the Rank Organisation, see table in Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 41.

⁸ Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen*, 115.

⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 October 1952, 1.

¹⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 July 1951, 6.

¹¹ TNA, BT 64/4521: Golt's memo 4 December 1950.

¹² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 22 May 1952, 7.

props, furniture, and other key articles.¹³ The film laboratories at Denham remained as a working facility until 2014. When Rank ceased co-financing productions at Ealing in 1955 production was further concentrated at Pinewood.

Pinewood also benefited from another newly available financial incentive—guarantees of completion provided by the company Film Finances that had been incorporated in March 1950. The guarantees gave banks and other lenders financial security against films in which they had invested going over budget or schedule. John Croydon, a former production manager who had worked for Gaumont-British, Ealing and Rank, scrutinised projects presented to Film Finances in the early stages of development, commenting on the feasibility of scripts, proposed budgets, and other logistical issues. Guarantees were not offered until such pre-production plans and budgets were approved, and during development and shooting the company continued to monitor progress.¹⁴ *The Woman in Question* (Anthony Asquith 1950), shot at Pinewood, was the first film guaranteed by Film Finances. The film came in £18,362 under its £129,986 budget. Savings had been made in part because the start of shooting had been delayed, during which time each shot was planned in detail so that when shooting commenced the process was very smooth.¹⁵ In its first year of operation, Film Finances guaranteed eight films shot at Pinewood. This was more than any other studio, making up nearly half of the eighteen films guaranteed in 1950–51, and demonstrating Rank's readiness to take advantage of new opportunities.

Pinewood exploited this and other schemes as it adjusted to challenging vicissitudes which affected the film industry over the following decades. While many studios took on, and were eventually used for television production, Pinewood's commitment to film remained a constant, especially in the 1960s when it facilitated large-scale American productions as well as the lucrative James Bond franchise. The Rank Organisation's diversification of interests in this period included radio manufacture and records. In addition, the profitable merger in 1956 with American company Haloid Photographic to form Rank Xerox to some extent

¹³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 January 1953, 28.

¹⁴ James Chapman and Charles Drazin, eds., Special Issue of *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34 no. 1, March 2014.

¹⁵ Charles Drazin, *Making Hollywood Happen: The Story of Film Finances* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022), 8.



Fig. 7.4 Pinewood Studios logo and exterior view, 1957. Alamy stock images

enabled Rank's film interests to be subsidised. A sign outside the studios in 1957 (Fig. 7.4) shows them clearly identified with Rank's famous 'man-with-the-gong' trademark familiar to millions of filmgoers.

During the 1970s and 1980s precarious financial conditions were alleviated by the success of large-scale international productions. In 2000 the Rank Organisation sold Pinewood to a management team led by Michael Grade and Ivan Dunleavy. When Shepperton merged with Pinewood in 2001 the studios consolidated and expanded their reputation as state-of-the-art facilities. The aim was 'to increase their flexibility and enhance their capacity to service every size and type of film and television production'.¹⁶ While the two studios had been the largest in the UK before

¹⁶ Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan, *The Film Studio: Film Production in the Global Economy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 138.

the merger, afterwards together they constituted ‘a mega media-city’ able to pitch for and accommodate high-budget productions. While publicity emphasised larger-scale filmmaking the flexible structure, with soundstages of varying sizes, could cater for smaller-scale productions as well as television.

Film studios continue to develop worldwide. Pinewood’s expansion has seen it develop its global network at a time when the future of how film production is undertaken is being profoundly affected by developments in virtual production and Artificial Intelligence. Many technical procedures for set design and established cultures of expertise are being impacted by an increasingly virtual workplace environment. Many technical employees will need to be re-trained and re-skilled as film studios adjust to changes which are already underway. How the Pinewood Group manages its own transition will in part be influenced by its long-standing reputation for innovation and flexibility. An increasingly hybrid workforce will produce films made up of new roles such as virtual production and visualisation supervisors, LED engineers, as well as existing roles in film and games/visual effects expertise. As it experiences another tectonic shift, Pinewood will need more than ever to rely on its durable design, established and emerging technical infrastructures, and maintain a resilient studio culture which this book has argued was formed out of a different set of challenging circumstances in the 1940s.

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