The Ministry of Information and the British Film Hero during World War 2

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Acknowledgments

To my parents, who endured terrible experiences during WW2, but always found enjoyment in the cinema.

Before you lies the dissertation 'The Ministry of Information and the British Film Hero during World War 2'. It has been written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Oxford Brookes University within the department of Film Studies. I was engaged in researching and writing this dissertation from April 2018 to January 2024.

The project was undertaken following my successful completion of an MA (Credit) in Film Studies at Brookes. My research questions were formulated together with my supervisors, Dr James Cateridge, Professor Daniela Treveri Gennari, and Associate Professor Lindsay Steenberg. A special thanks to Dr Jane Potter for continuous help and advice, especially during the government Covid lockdowns. Fortunately, all my supervisors and other Brookes academic staff, such as Dr Pete Boss and Dr Warren Buckland, were always available and willing to answer my queries.

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Abstract

This project offers new understandings of the complex relationship between the government and the British film studios, relating to feature film content and production, during the period of the Second World War. It explores government policy and institutional organisation, and investigates the impact of underlying film production processes and propaganda demands on the representation of the hero figure in British feature films. It opens a dialogue with a broad range of archival resources to give a visibility and voice to an otherwise unarticulated aspect of British cinema history.

Through a combination of primary and secondary sources, this study examines whether there is evidence of institutional causal links between British government policies and film, and how any such links indirectly adapted and enhanced the role of the hero figure in feature films. Several previous studies have suggested the idea of a national identity being reframed to meet the demands of propaganda as war progressed, and that a hero-figure was a significant element in that framework. I have expanded on these findings to provide a new contribution to film history and stimulation for further studies.

A focal point of this research is the analysis of the processes and relationships by which the Ministry of Information (MOI) and its Films Division operated in conjunction with film studios, in the realms of feature film content and production. Using case studies with archival research, I propose the hypothesis that these working practices were effective, and have discovered that ultimately the relationships were collaborative, and converged with the propaganda demands of government. I have shown that America's eventual involvement in propaganda policies also influenced the changing role of the hero in British wartime films. Furthermore, this thesis contributes original research to academic studies of propaganda and film and, crucially, it throws new light on the British government's wartime film policies.

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INTRODUCTION

Part 1: Propaganda and popular entertainment during World War II

The primary objective of my research is to uncover the processes[1] and relationships by which the government, through the Ministry of Information (MOI), operated with the film studios in feature film content and production during World War 2. I ask these questions:

   a. How did the relationship between the MOI and the film studios affect film content and production during WW2?
   b. How did propaganda work on a daily basis for filmmakers during WW2?
   c. Did the changing role of the hero in wartime films correlate with government's and film studios' evolving policies on propaganda?

These questions are posed to reveal the underlying operations at work and provide original contributions to existing academic work.

Some background

My interest in this era stems partly from my own situation. As a young child in the late 1950s, the limited number of TV channels were full of war time feature films. I was captivated and intrigued by the portrayal of brave service personnel (mainly white men) and ordinary people going about their business, while the possibility of death hung over their heads at any moment. I began my research in this field with a master's dissertation on the same subject and remained interested enough to continue with a thesis. During work on my MA dissertation as an academic researcher, these aspects of war-time British cinema struck me as a puzzle. Who gave guidance for making these films, and how did they come about in the first place? One film favourite of mine, *The Way To The Stars* (1945), depicted RAF bomber pilots and their day-to-day existence. When one of the pilots was killed or lost in action, the remaining crew members said a few words, then continued with their work with no emotion. In films such as this, the heroes were of a certain type, upper class, public school, with a sense of fair play. A completely different take on war-time experience was depicted in *Went the Day Well?* (1942). This film

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[1] Kristin Thompson, *Film History* (New York: McGraw hill, 2009), 4.

concerns a small village in England being invaded by the Nazis, and the reaction of the villagers to this incursion on their way of life. The film demonstrates many characters of different class and standing in the community, who manage to work together against a common foe. That began a whole series of films which told of war-time experiences from an ordinary citizen's perspective. This made a very strong impression on my younger self. No longer did the hero figure come from an upper-class family, he (or she) could be anyone involved in the war effort. Films such as *The Gentle Sex* (1943), with Leslie Howard providing voice over, depicted seven women from all walks of life joining the services. This treatment was a long way from the approach of filmmakers from the late 1930s, where women were often portrayed in mortal distress.

There are academic works on the MOI, but there is a gap in knowledge of the processes involved in filmmaking and propaganda in the UK. One of the main aims of the MOI was, according to their official files, mobilising support for the war effort, and constructing the essential wartime ideology of popular national unity. Its duties were 'to cover the issue of official news to the press, censorship of the press, broadcasting and films, dissemination of propaganda, and the collection of information'.[2] As more government material has become available in the National Archives, I have taken the opportunity to explore these aims and close gaps in knowledge of the overall creation of feature films. This will enhance extensive research already published in this area. Scholarly interest in films based on this period of conflict has grown as well, as researchers are re-evaluating how the original films were made and produced. The primary objective of my research is to document and contextualise these debates, in order to forge a greater understanding of this period. Therefore, each chapter of my thesis takes an empirical and historical stance towards evaluating this material, expands on theories of propaganda, and uses some textual analysis of films via the hero figure.

The MOI was a wartime department, established in 1939,[3] responsible for disseminating government propaganda, including feature films. One of its principal roles was 'to monitor and maintain the morale of the British people'.[4] It also devoted attention to the surveying of public opinion. Its Home Intelligence Division monitored public morale, using qualitative and quantitative social research methods. It worked with Mass Observation, a social research organisation, and created regular Home Intelligence reports, including assessment of audience

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[2] INF1/2. Draft of memorandum on Ministry's duties, 3 December 1939
[3] Hansard; Described in Commons debate. 28 July 1939, vol. 350 col.1832
[4] CAB 4/24 paper 1253B

reactions to feature films, circulated to the rest of the Ministry. Using data provided by its Home Intelligence Unit, it possessed a communications system which, unlike most other contemporary publishers and communicators, provided rapid feedback to the MOI. It was alerted to its successes and failures and, if required, could 'radically…change the given public relations strategy',[5] depending on events in the war. Within my area of original research, this will assist the analysis of why certain films were planned and produced.

Highly praised key British war films made between 1939 and 1945, such as *London Can Take it* (1940) and *I Thank You* (1941) offered crucially emotive and widely recognized iconographic images of communities and common people under stress, like the dome of St Paul's prominent above the fires of the Blitz, and citizens united and sheltering underground. Touching scenes of loss and sacrifice for each of the armed services were depicted in films such as *The Way Ahead* (1944). This period was a moment of historical significance for the film industry and is a key motivation for this work. Popular interest in films based on this period of conflict has grown, as more scholars are re-evaluating how these original films were made and produced. Recent years have provided a whole series of award-winning war films made by respected filmmakers, examples being *Dunkirk* (2017) and *Their Finest* (2016), which cover certain aspects and periods of the Second World War. Interestingly, the latter film has a narrative depicting a filmmaker working within the MOI. Some would argue, and I would agree, that the British still perpetually define themselves by the events of WW2.[6]

In his introduction to *The British at War* James Chapman states that 'the role of the MOI's Films Division has hitherto remained largely unwritten'.[7] To some extent, this is true, but there are current attempts to make some sense of this giant bureaucratic organisation, the ongoing MOI digital project at London University is one.[8] There are many academic works which focus on the history of film production, but most have a limited scope, excluding any government involvement. Some examples of government participations can be found in Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards (2007) *Britain Can Take It* and Paul Mackenzie's (2001) *British War Films*. Consequently, the overall picture of government control and influence has been touched upon in these works. As such, this project will therefore be ground-breaking, in expanding and

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[5] Presentation from Professor Simon Elliot on the MOI. National Archives July 2019

[6] *The Sun,* 17 February, 1999, *'Why We Will Not Forget the War Herr Naumann',* claimed that Britain was proud of its role in freeing the world, editorial

[7] James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London: Tauris, 2000), 5.

[8] MOI Digital. Internet site: http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/about-project/

exploring the overall framework of government influence on feature filmmaking during the war and considering the film studios' interactions with government departments. It will contribute to the communications history of the MOI, by conducting practical analysis of the relationships between the department and interested parties, such as the film studios. The MOI introduced something new to British society – the idea of an arm of government with the power to control information. This study argues that there was a correlation between MOI propaganda policies and the changing role of the hero in fictional wartime films. Sonya Rose's *Which People's War?* (2003) illustrates the idea of a national identity being reframed as war progressed and that a hero-figure was significant in that framework. I shall explore this area together with her concept of a *people's war.* For example, I shall discuss acclaimed films featuring women as the main characters: - *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and *Millions Like Us* (1943).

Having introduced the framework of this study on British cinema history, the next section will outline the areas of study involving propaganda and film content.

Some definitions

There are many academic definitions of what a British film is. Here I might have used parameters defined by Dennis Gifford,[9] who determined that a British film is made by a British film studio. Within this general description, there still lies a degree of ambiguity, because some films may be dependent on elements of non-British financial backing. Here then, we are deploying a specific notion of British national cinema; British cinema is defined by production and distribution being supplied by a company based in the United Kingdom. In addition, I am following Stephen Shafer's definition of British films,[10] which is more apposite for this project, where the term British also refers to a cultural expression describing aspects of the life and society of the UK. Throughout the work I shall be using the term 'realism'. In this thesis I define 'realism' as a film which includes working class people in believable, non-comical roles within the context of a story, which is grounded in real life situations. Further, realism here defines a more diverse representation of classes, moving characters into positions of protagonists and heroic figures, not just conventional upper-class heroes. I will specify any deviations from these definitions of realism within the text. For example, many WW2 films have very accurate depictions of technical operations, which in many ways can be described as realist, even in early films such as *Target For Tonight*.

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[9] Dennis Gifford, *The British Film Catalogue* 1895-1970 (Exeter: David and Charles ,1973), Preface.
[10] Stephen Shafer, *British Popular films 1929-1939* (London: Routledge, 1997), 11

An important aspect of British films in WW2 was comedy. In pre-war Britain the main comedy types were music-hall stand-up comedians, pantomimes and slapstick comedy. Such pre-war themes of British comedy were reflected in film; a film might portray a bumbling working-class hero up against an institution, such as *Oh, Mr Porter* (1937). The comedy in such films was close to the type of comedy seen in the music halls, which would make appearances in films throughout the war. Another common theme was a portrayal of class and regional differences, which will be explored in chapter 4.

Part 2: The hero figure within the propaganda message

The heroic figure has always been a feature within cinema. Here we will explore ways in which the depiction of a hero developed in war time feature films, in response to national propaganda demands. From the point of view of conflicts between the MOI and the film studios directing film context and characterisation, this study will analyse how and why changes occurred. Within films, the different types of character represent a further layer of complexity but may still be defined as heroes. I have also discussed how they have been constructed within a film's narrative. To some extent, film genre will shape some of the heroes' narrative. So how should we define a 'hero'? Joseph Campbell is helpful here. He states:

> The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such as one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence, they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn.[11]

Campbell's definition presents the hero as the leading character of a story. This emphasis is significant, as it highlights how individuals are portrayed as heroes within film narratives. Joseph Campbell exposes the common structure of heroic quest narratives around the world, but Geoffrey Cubitt provides a more useful definition of the hero for historians:

> …a hero is any man or woman whose existence, whether in his or her own lifetime or later, is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment. [12]

While Campbell defines the hero primarily in terms of the qualities he or she possesses, like courage or bravery, Cubitt defines the hero as someone 'endowed by others' with special 'symbolic significance'. Heroes, then, are constructed by the societies in which they live. This point is crucial, as we can now ask, why did a past society elevate this individual as a hero? We can trace back definitions of hero figures to Greco-Roman epic literature, where heroes were central to the culture, and played a prominent role in literature.[13] Even at that time, one can see attributes, such as humility, as well as courage, which are recognisable in pre-war films.

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[11] James Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 19-20.
[12] Geoffrey Cubitt, *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3
[13] James Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), Introduction.

Pre-war stereotypes of officers as gentleman would give way to servicemen and servicewomen, regardless of whether they were actively fighting the war (*In Which We Serve*, 1942) or providing vital back-up at home (*Millions Like Us*, 1943). Public stoicism was all-important, with emotion only displayed in the most extreme situations. *The Way To The Stars* (1945) provides some particularly good examples, as the film explicitly contrasts British reserve with American exuberance. Other examples are firemen, medical workers, and women, working in the home, in fields or factories. Later in the war, family life was displayed within patriotic film narratives, including in *Millions Like Us* (1943), a film that looks at the effect of World War 2 on ordinary British people (especially women), where anyone could be called up and pressed into service. A popular trope was historical heroes, as there is evidence that the British have long been fond of taking real-life historical figures and championing their heroic exploits.

This framing of the hero figure could be applied to pre-war hero characters and be described within a classical film context. Pre-war and early war films followed the generic classical style, as defined by David Bordwell,[14] and 'as canonical narration'.[15] A three-act structure was the norm. In general, most feature films followed a classical narrative structure, so the audience could follow the action, since it was familiar to them. Bordwell's notion is that it is the hero (or protagonist) who has the goal, who orients the narrative and is upset by the antagonist. The hero is the driving factor of the whole system in many ways. Furthermore, this work takes the view, that the influence of government propaganda policy cannot be separated from the study of the hero. Why is the hero character so useful in these terms? For research purposes, the hero character is a benchmark that frames a narrative. Many of the early war films, both before and at the start of WW2, were constructed within a very limited frame of reference. All too often British feature films came across as restrictive, stifling, and compliant to middle class stereotypes and values.[16] Viewing and examining British feature films of the time, this thesis will identify typical depictions of a feature film's character heroes. For example, in *The Lion Has Wings* (1939) the hero is good natured, decent, hardworking, with a sense of humour and love of sport. In this and many films of this era, an upper-class gentleman hero is portrayed. The quintessential 'emotional reserve' of the respectable British man has a long history, which was rearticulated in the wartime version of the 'stiff upper lip', represented by the 'Blitz

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[14] David Bordwell, *Narration in Fiction Film* (Abingdon: Routledge,1987),162-164.
[15] Ibid, 157-162
[16] Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag*: *Constructing a National Cinema in Britain (*Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 245.

expression', and propaganda film *London Can Take It.*[17] As the war progressed, there was constant pressure as to what defines national identity in feature films. Old values of decency, kindness and fair play still had a strong hold, but many other forces were bearing down on these attributes, which we will explore in later chapters. In addition to looking at the introduction of working-class comedians, the depiction of women as heroines will be considered in wartime films, which also went through a transformation as the war progressed.

In addition, every feature film made during wartime, numbering 380,[18] has been examined; the hero's characteristics and form within each film has been categorised and summarised. This is my quantitative textual analysis of war time films. In this way, I generate data in the form of tables with categorisation of heroic types and follow the academic work of Shafer.[19]

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[17] Sonya Rose, *Which People's War*? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 156.
[18] Frances Thorpe, Nicholas Pronay and Clive Coultass, *British Official films in the second world war* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1980), ix.
[19] Stephen Shafer, *British Popular Films 1929-1939* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36-37.

Methodology and Structure

One advantage of researching wartime cinema is the extent of documentation and primary sources that exist on the era's film industry. My study is predominantly based on historical research, from primary research in archives, backed up with secondary sources. Instead of one single theoretical methodology, this qualitative project will draw from reception and film/cultural studies, but will also benefit from primary research in the National Archives. This will enable me to have a firm empirical base and marks this work as an original contribution to the field of new cinema history'[20] as defined by Richard Maltby.

The project will make an original and significant contribution to the communication history of the UK between 1939 and 1945. A number of publications tackle the MOI, but none has systematically and thoroughly surveyed or analysed the huge quantity of primary materials on the MOI, available in the National Archives and elsewhere. Just a few studies have tried to connect the MOI's internal activities to its impact on the narratives of feature films. This will involve close study of: the networks and hierarchies that controlled decision-making within the MOI; the feedback loops that allowed the MOI to assess and then adjust its performance; its products, and the ways in which they changed as different media were used and their relative impact was assessed; the ways in which changes in government funding and internal political control affected the MOI's policies; and the ways in which specific individuals and groups (unofficial and official), as well as particular and unanticipated events, could modify or even transform both policy and product.

In the methodological tradition that Richards and Aldgate once speculatively termed 'contextual cinematic history',[21] this thesis is partially an empirically based examination of films within the social and political context of their overall production history. The films are approached not as art, but as social practice, the underlying premise being that films are imbued with historical meaning about the society (in this case wartime Britain) from which they originated. I have placed less emphasis on textual reading of films, as we are less concerned with visual and compositional elements, than with characterisation and ideology (specifically towards the hero character). Equally, I examine the iconography of actors and their representation as a particular national type, for example, John Mills, identified by many as the

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[20] Richard Maltby, *Explorations in New Cinema History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 3.
[21] Jeffrey Richards and Anothony Aldgate, *Best of British: cinema and Society 1930-1970* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 132.

quintessential Englishman. To explore film history today, I follow Thomas Elsaesser's advice that 'one has to become an economic historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, know about censorship, read trade papers and fan magazines'.[22] Elsaesser's work has other suggestions for seeking out background information of film history and is a useful guide for my project.

The underlying analytical objectives of this thesis are broad. I seek to establish the importance of feature films for improving public morale; to analyse the production of feature films within a propaganda framework; and to consider any underlying characteristic trends and patterns (in particular the hero figure) in the film body as a whole.

The first stage of the research was to survey the entire output of British feature films made during the war, in order to categorise them from the storyline and by a definition of the hero figure(s). (See the tables year by year in the Appendix).[23] Within the case studies, specific criteria for choosing certain films have varied. Some films are investigated because they have not previously received much attention; others have the benefit of a large and concise 'paper trail'.[24] Another important factor in the choice of films is that they reflect the contemporary organisation of filmmaking, represented by government requirements and other influences.

What did the MOI learn from its early attempts at organising and planning feature films? Case studies are a good method of bringing all aspects of film production under the microscope and I have pinpointed some within each of my chapters. Thomas Cripps suggested that the documentation surrounding a film forms the 'paper trail', and that it should be examined in conjunction with a film, or else wrong conclusions may be drawn. So, several approaches are proposed and followed; I will suggest the type of influences at work in shaping a particular film and explain the iconography represented in a particular film. Mapping Christine Grandy's[25] definitions of types of hero figures into this mix, in particular her ideas on masculine characteristics of work and national identity, will help the understanding of common themes adopted in film. For assessing historical relationships between film and society, Allen and Gomery suggest an empiricist approach, using content analysis of the film's narrative arc.[26]

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[22] Thomas Elsaesser, '*The New Film History*' Monthly Film Bulletin, Volume 55, Issue 4, Autumn 1986, 246
[23] Frances Thorpe, Nicholas Pronay and Clive Coultass, *British Official Films in the Second World War, a descriptive catalogue* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1980)
[24] Thomas Cripps, *The Moving Image as Social History: Stalking the Paper Trail*, in Historical analysis of film and television, ed. John O'Connor (Florida: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co, 1990)
[25] Christine Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 67.
[26] Robert Allen and Gomery Douglas, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 164

Films are a collaborative effort, providing a unique record of contemporary issues, yet are always subject to interpretation, with aesthetic elements which enlist both our understanding and emotions. 'With each newly examined moving-image document the scholar is challenged to test the credibility, reliability, and authenticity of the film itself ... with the same rigor as that brought to bear on any ancient manuscript'.[27] Therefore, the methodology adopted will be that established by historians such as John O'Connor, Pierre Sorlin and Jeffrey Richards - using feature film as an historical documentary source. Three questions must be asked: What influences were at work in shaping the film? What is the connection between the medium and the message? Who saw the film and how might it have influenced them?

As a framework for analysing the hero character, this study will follow the statistical work done by Shafer. For the years up to the war, he defined the background of films' hero figures in respect of class. This is a useful counterpoint, which can be mapped onto the insights into the government's propaganda requirements. Following his definitions, I examine films in which 'members of the working class are protagonists, films where patriotism is a major theme, films with a working-class background'.[28] As far as possible, the aim is for an objective interpretation of the data, from which, insights into the relationship between film and culture may shed light on political influences on films.

For a methodological approach to researching the MOI's infrastructure, an interdisciplinary strategy has been employed. Organisational network analysis[29] will be utilised for analysing and mapping the communication and socio-technical networks within the MOI (and beyond, including the film studio interactions). Use of top-down and bottom-up business team analysis will frame the workings of the MOI as the War progressed.[30] These techniques will help create graphical models of the people, tasks, groups, knowledge and processes that form part of a film's journey from idea to conception.[31] The challenges of this approach, through a combination of archival research and film studio records, are in negotiating the difficulties posed by relying on MOI's surviving documents. In the case of the MOI, archive research is

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[27] John O'Connor, *Image as Artefact: The Historical Analysis of Films and TV* (Florida, 1990), and Thomas Cripps' Chapter *'The Moving Image as Social History: Stalking the Paper Trail'*; and Jeffrey Richards, *The Best of British* (Oxford, 1983) for a discussion on this.

[28] Stephen Shafer, *British Popular films 1929-1939* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

[29] Peter Groenewegen, Structure*, content and meaning of organisational networks*, (Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 20.

[30] Mary Crossan, *Organizational learning and strategic renewal*. *Strategic Management Journal*, Issue 24, 1087-1105. John Wiley &Sons, Ltd

[31] Lex Sisney, (2016) *Top-down vs. Bottom-up Hierarchy*. Organizational Physics.

hampered by the chaotic nature of the organisation's surviving documents. The origin of this disarray is attributed to the confused nature of the organisation's formation.

Although the pre-eminence of the organisation's primary documents to this study is evident, not all information can be obtained from these sources. Archives containing papers associated with the military during the twentieth century are often either incomplete or restricted. In these situations, the hierarchical infrastructure of the organisation offers an independent, alternative source of evidence, against which the accuracy of the archives can be assessed. A multi-method approach known as triangulation forms the basis of this methodology. Seale stated that:

> triangulation is to compare different kinds of data from different sources to see whether they corroborate one another. So data relating to the same phenomenon are compared but derive from different phases of fieldwork, different points in time. Accounts of different participants. or using different methods of data collection.[32]

As such, five different sources of data were used in this research, namely, key government archives, specific historical journals, newspapers and magazines, investigating memoirs of key personnel, and academic texts.

In terms of propaganda theory, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's work on The *Propaganda Model*[33] provides a framework for analysing the British government's actions in this area. Some of their theory around the five filters, ownership, advertising, social sources, flak and marginalising dissent, will go some way to explaining practical decisions made by the MOI. I have combined them to present these findings: -

- I am suggesting that concentrated ownership applied to the film studios; the importance of merchandising helps in understanding how MOI and the film studios worked together.
- My view is that a dependence on establishment sources helps, when analysing how things got done in wartime, when resources were scarce.
- I argue that creating flak assists the MOI in taking a view on critics of the MOI's work, of which there were many.
- I suggest that a dominant ideology of 'us' versus the 'other' aided the MOI's work on propaganda and the cinema.

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[32] Clive Seale, *Researching Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 2004), 231.
[33] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of Mass* Media (London, Vintage, 1995), 62

Althusser's ideas on ideology and interpellation assist understanding of the impact of British World War 2 propaganda. Concerned with the reproduction of the relations of production, Althusser sought to explain how an understanding of labour-power relations (the exploitation of the workers by the bourgeoisie) was 'integrated into our everyday consciousness'.[34] The filmic hero figures, moreover, operate according to Althusser's idea of interpellation. Subjects do not create ideology, but rather the other way around: 'I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it recruits subjects among the individuals… or transforms the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation'.[35] While cinema propaganda, to some extent controlled by the state, was part of what Althusser calls the 'Repressive State Apparatus,' Althusser's concept of the 'Ideological State Apparatus' better describes film propaganda within WW2. I propose that to some extent, the Government, the Administration, and the Services *did* interact and start working together with a common enemy to fight. More broadly, Janet Wasko's methodological framework of the 'political economy'[36] will assist with understanding the inner workings of societal structures, which in turn will help interpretation of the systems that govern how a society operates in wartime.

Structurally this thesis is divided into seven chapters, each corresponding to one year of the war. Each chapter has an internal structure of introduction to the period covered, an institutional analysis of the inner working of the MOI, a case study, followed by conclusions. Initial chapters deal with the early war years and the British government's attempts to create a framework of committees to help direct film production in Britain. The main groups will be investigated, as will their functions under the control of the MOI, concentrating on the Films Division. Furthermore, I shall examine whether the government organisational framework for films worked in practice. Memoirs of high-ranking government advisors, such as Sidney Bernstein and Kenneth Clark, will be consulted to determine their impact on the MOI and its effectiveness. Internal 'turf wars' were a continuing problem between the Films Division and the other committees and divisions. Communications between the Films Division and the British Film Institute (BFI) were said to be unworkable, which will be explored. Another

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[34] Louis Althusser: *Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971)
[35] Louis Althusser, *On ideology* (Verso, London 2008), 25.
[36] Janet Wasko, 'The Political Economy of Film' in *A Companion to Film Theory,* ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 221-233.

contentious area was the internal debate over how resources should be allocated between feature films and documentaries, which will be scrutinised.

Throughout the war, there were continuing arguments within each group over what constitutes propaganda, and this will be investigated. Controversy surrounds the input of MI7 to the role of propaganda in films, so I will attempt to interpret the original papers from each sub-group. Before the war, MI7 was in charge of propaganda and was absorbed into the MOI in 1940. Lastly, some commentators have suggested that, at first, the film studios ignored the government guidelines, which is investigated in chapters 1 and 2.

To better understand the Films Division, I have created organisational charts that map out the main governmental groups and their evolving relationships, as the war progressed (See Appendix). I explore the information flows between each group to understand how each organisational structure operated, and map these against the timeline of the war.

From these case studies I can suggest answers to one of my fundamental research questions: were the MOI Films Division's endeavours to influence film content successful? My view is that to some extent they were, which I will demonstrate in the following chapters. For example, using primary archive research in government papers, I have also examined the scarce documentation from the relevant film studios. Therefore, I have established paper trails, connecting the filmmaking processes back to the Films Division and other interested parties within government. It is important to acknowledge that a great deal of high-level decisions at that time were made within, what used to be called, an 'old boys' network or club. Being both a member of a London gentleman's club, and an alumnus of a public school and Oxbridge, would be a big advantage for networking and getting decisions made within the Whitehall framework. I shall bear these specific historical conditions in mind throughout this work.

At the start of war, feature films conformed to a pattern. Sonya Rose states 'Masculinity was portrayed in the iconography of workers and their work, in armed services recruitment posters and in wartime advertisements aimed at men and women',[37] so this is a good starting point to show that these themes were incorporated into film content, analysed in chapter 5 onwards. Richard Dyer's work on star theory will assist in analysing developments in film content, specifically the hero figure.

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[37] Sonya Rose, *Which People's War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 152.

Chapter 1 considers the initial confusion and impact that the war had on the government's film policy. It tries to ascertain whether there is any documentary evidence that progress was made in formulating a coherent film policy, under a new Films Division leader. Pre-war ideas of what constitutes a film hero are investigated. Following what amounts to a period of government disarray, chapter 2 considers in detail the claims of some historians, that this period was also confused, as far as film propaganda was concerned. Pressure from many sources to get America into the war meant that ways were explored to include pro-American propaganda, and characterisations of Americans as heroes within films. Developing the theme of American-related propaganda, chapter 3 focuses on the strong influence of a single popular director/actor on feature film policy, in this case exploring Leslie Howard's wide sphere of control on film policy in the UK. His input is explored in relationship to the operations of the Film Division at that time. Chapter 4 moves on to discuss the ways in which humour and the film hero were the most important influences on propaganda and the general public's morale, one of the contentions put forward in this thesis. Humour in films had predated the conflict, but was now seen as an important weapon in the propaganda war. Chapter 5 shifts the focus away from feature films, as the distinction between fiction and documentary filmmaking was eroding; the two forms becoming more integrated and complex. The sub-heading of People's Heroes sums up the chosen case studies, in which realism had become paramount. This trend is examined in the context of a more organised MOI and Films Division. Chapter 5 discusses further developments in the hero figure which resulted from the influence of the Americans and enormous social changes in British society. With the end of the war in sight, Chapters 6 and 7 examine the enormous influence of the USA in determining the direction of filmmaking.

A central theme of wartime films reflects the time the war eventually impacted the entire population, and everyone was 'in it together'. Everybody was involved, and I argue this was a driving force behind the restructuring of film narratives. No longer a war of the upper classes, and secret agents, instead it had become everyone's war, the firefighters, the land girls, the factory workers, the neighbours, the friends back home, all dependent on one another's cooperation.

By the end of 1945 the Films Division had made or sponsored a total of 726 films for home and overseas markets.[38] This was an enormous body of work considering the shortages of

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[38] The Arts Enquiry, *The Factual Film* (Geoffrey Cumberlege and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 103.

resources and manpower. In this thesis, I shed light upon the hidden people, processes and institutions behind this impressive corpus of films.

Literature Review

Most of the material upon which this thesis is based was obtained from the files of the MOI, supplemented by relevant documents from other government departments. In order to answer the fundamental questions of the thesis, academic works have also been consulted. From my MA research, I was drawn to a group of academic historians who can best be collectively described as the empiricist school. The important historians in this group are Pronay, Chapman, and Aldgate; together their work resulted in the emergence of a new film historiography in the 1980s. Their research is based on primary sources, with the origins dating back to the 1970s, when, under the thirty-year rule, official documents relating to WW2 films in the National Archives were released. Their research uses other contemporary sources, such as personal papers, film journals and the trade press, to reconstruct the production histories of films. They are interested less in textual analysis of films, than they are in placing films in the context of the societies which produced them. This project has built upon and expanded the work of the empiricist school, which has revealed the need for more analysis, especially the relationship between narrative structures of feature films. Therefore, their work has paved the way for this study.

One example of the empiricist film study school is the collaboration between Richards and Aldgate. In *Britain Can Take It*, they provide close case studies of eleven wartime British feature films. However, there is as yet no real overview of the development of propaganda policy by the Films Division of the MOI. There is a large gap in knowledge with only a few examples of discussion of the organisation and policies of the Films Division within the MOI. Another relevant example is Nicholas Pronay's *Propaganda, Politics and Film* (1982). These studies provide a useful contextual framework for exploring the historiography of British wartime cinema. However, Chapman and other academics acknowledge in their work that they only scratch the surface of the vast amount of documentation in the National Archives. This project will add to their endeavours and expand on their work.

Chapman's *The British at War* provides a detailed investigation of the MOI and its policies for film content and exhibition. Chapman describes an inefficient department, with confusing lines of communication between sub-groups. Whilst I considered these bureaucratic turf wars, I also

attempted to find evidence that in practice some of the governmental policy and guidance for film production did work. Apart from Chapman's book, there are only single chapters in other texts focusing on the MOI's organisation (such as Aldgate and Drazin). There is little published research on the question of linkage between MOI policies and the end-product, a feature film. One key text is *The Ministry of Information and the Home Front;* [39] Sheila Watson completed primary research in the government archives, but states (p.6) that further research may revise her assessments of the MOI workings. Albert Moran's *Film Policy* also has chapters devoted to contemporaneous British film policies, which have been useful in analysing the frameworks that existed during the war.

The most comprehensive study of the function and output of the MOI is Ian McLaine's *Ministry of Morale* (1979). In this, McLaine considers the concept of 'morale' with the aim of understanding how morale on the home front has become a positive myth in British culture. This study has expanded on his work and provides an insight into the whole process of film production from original idea to the final product. The MOI have also received attention from other historians; David Welch has published books on the publicity material created. A useful text is *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War 2* (2016).

In his book, *Half the Battle* (2003), Robert Mackay looks directly at myths and traces their history, focusing on wartime communications and how they influenced public morale. Mackay draws upon a variety of examples of communications and propaganda, such as the MOI, the BBC and commercial organisations, to demonstrate the range of methods employed and, in some cases, their effects. He identifies the themes that began to emerge within these communications, for example, that of the 'people's war'. He suggests caution when trying to assess the effects of any of these communications on public morale, due to the range of influences that could affect personal responses and the difficulty of identifying these, which can be wide ranging reactions to specific propaganda efforts (Mackay 2003). Another element which Mackay raises as a key focus of much British war propaganda is the support of the countries of the Empire. Following the fall of France, the MOI worked hard to counter suggestions that Britain was 'alone'—an idea which has, itself, developed into a myth—by emphasising the contribution of colonial armies (Mackay 2003, 151). These communications via film content became more pronounced later in the war, when questions were starting to be asked about the continuation of the British Empire. Mackay draws attention to the use of the

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[39] Sheila Watson, *The Ministry of Information and the Home Front in Britain, 1939-1942.* PhD thesis 1980

idealised English countryside as a method to stimulate patriotism, in documentaries like *This England* (1941). Mackay argues that the images of locations used were 'idealized and Anglocentric' and 'were thought to represent the essence of Britain in the imaginations of ordinary people' (Mackay 2003, 164–65). It could also be that these images did not only match with ordinary people's imaginations, but also guided their beliefs towards a certain 'essence of Britain', which the MOI was straining to portray in the period.

Previous research has focused on the failures of the MOI. In 1941 Cedric Larson, who worked in the Morale Division of the US War Department, published an article for *The Public Opinion Quarterly* assessing the work of the MOI to this date. He presents notable examples of mistakes made by the MOI, caused by the conflicting concerns of censorship and providing information (Larson 1941). He also details the debates occurring at the time over its bureaucratic nature. Larson presents a widely held view that the MOI was being criticised in the British press during those early years of the war. Initially the *Documentary News Letter* contained many articles critical of the Film Division, a trend which only relented a few years into the war. These critical passages have been investigated to extract useful data concerning the workings of the Film Division and to evaluate data from other sources.

Mariel Grant in her book *Towards a COI* (1999)[40] argues that academic research has neglected the later years of the MOI, because 'it was wound up quickly with little public debate about the matter'. Contemporaries were interested in the early years of the MOI due to its mistakes; they were less interested in assessing its effectiveness at the end of the war. Grant focuses her attention on the overlooked area of the MOI's role in the development of Britain's information services after the war, arguing that 'the MOI is best seen not as a dead end but as part of a transition'. The Central Office of Information (COI) was created after the MOI was closed down in March 1946, in order to preserve staff and some of its functions under a different name. This new body was able to benefit directly from the wartime experience of the MOI. This study has attempted to address and analyse these areas.

Aldgate's and Richard's book, *Britain Can Take It,* tackles this period of historiography from a slightly different viewpoint. For each film, they consider script, reviews and box office returns to place each in its social and political context. They also draw from official

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40 Mariel Grant, *Towards a Central Office of Information: Continuity and Change in British Government Information Policy, 1939-51 .Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan, 1999), 49-67.

documentation in the National Archives - Home Intelligence reports, Mass Observation files, Ministry of Information papers and British Board of Film Censors archives - to illuminate the relationship between the official policy workers and the filmmakers in the production history of several feature films. Thus, this work is helpful in directing my searches within the archives. I mirror this approach with further insights into the government processes for filmmaking operational at that time, illustrated within each chapter's case study.

A more specific work is Sonya Rose's book *Which People's War*. Her chapter on 'Temperate Heroes' outlines the journey of British films' depiction of the hero character between the world wars. She traces trends back as far as the Victorian era, where chivalry, fair play, tolerance and kindness are typical attributes of the English hero. I agree with Rose, in that my study has established these attributes are continued into WW2 films. Rose also covers areas such as wartime Britons' attitudes towards class and gender. However, she does not demonstrate the actual pressures and linkages between her views of '*temperate heroes*'[41] and factors that formed them, a gap which this study attempts to address.

Grandy's work *Heroes and Happy Endings* is a succinct example of patterns of heroes' depiction at work within cinema. Her focus is the inter war years, but her research has important insights into the portrayal of hero figures during WW2. She explores the form and function of the interwar archetypes of hero and argues that fictional heroes of the period were easily recognisable by masculine characteristics. Pre-war, certain themes were common; for example, the hero is easily recognisable in polar opposition to the villain. She states that the wartime work of the British Board of Film Censors acted as constitutive of the 'ideological fantasy' of heroic work and nation.[42] Grandy analyses the censor-approved works of popular culture, establishing censorship to mean the 'silent production of an ideology' that 'buttressed' the heroic model of the breadwinning male.[43] Her emphasis on the influence of the Home Office and the censors on film content (especially the hero figure) is useful, as it provides a framework for this thesis to apply to the war years, and determine whether the same outcomes occur. Other useful works explore stoicism as a fundamental part of military identity, such as Sherman's *How to be a Stoic* and Steenberg's paper focusing on classical Roman heroes.[44] In this work, Steenberg explains that the hero figures 'embody a hybrid vernacular stoicism that can

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[41] Sonya Rose, *Which People's War*? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151.
[42] Christine Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014*),* 178.
[43] Ibid 213.
[44] Lindsay Steenberg, *Celebrity, vernacular stoicism and cinema*. (On Radar, Oxford Brookes University, 2023)

nostalgically recall the traditions of the past while retrofitting them in ways that are easily digestible', a good description that applies to many of the heroic figures in WW2 films.

There are several useful studies on the British film studios' history, for example, Walden's *British Film Studios*, Barr's *Ealing Studios,* Burton's *Elstree Studios* and Pykett's *MGM Studios*. On a more general level, Dickinson's and Street's book *Cinema and State, the Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* explores and illuminates examples of the MOI attempting to convey what we now call 'fake news'. They argue that, especially after Dunkirk, 'The MOI's key objective was establishing and controlling the narrative'.[45] They also suggest that class-based discrimination affected the narrative of the whole MOI.[46]

The task of examining the working processes of the Civil Service in this period is touched upon by Kevin Theakston's book *The Civil Service*. He demonstrates how some government departments operated during the war, emphasising that working practices had to change once war started, giving examples and case studies. Unfortunately, Theakston does not cover the MOI, but his analysis is useful in describing some of the Civil Service structures, as the war progressed. One example would be the new policy of recruiting temporary external staff within a very short timescale, which was against all normal Civil Service protocol. This book helps the understanding of how certain government processes worked or failed, due to disorganisation, a lack of protocol or, in some instances, political will. My organisational analysis is also informed by more recent ideas taken from business network theory. McCrystal's *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* looks at how organisations operate from a teamwork perspective. Again, this helps with my analysis of how the MOI operated and worked. Focused mainly on the USA, but with useful ideas of how government works, is *Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry* by Harold Wilensk. He concentrates on how interdepartmental groups do or don't work together.

In terms of challenges and difficulties facing this project, the fragmentary and incomplete archive records within government and the film studios was significant. Addressing such challenges has called for a creative approach in methodology, but the gaps in this knowledge are compelling enough to look for new and alternative clues, and to seek other ways in which

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[45] Wilkinson, Conor 'A Necessary Evil? Propaganda, Censorship, and Class in Britain's Ministry of Information, 1939-1941,' *Liberated Arts: a journal for undergraduate research*: Vol. 1: Issue 1, Article 13 (2015),17.
[46] Ibid, 27.

connections might be made. Using case studies of feature films, I have investigated the inner workings of the film studios and analysed the production history of films. This has helped form a complete and triangulated picture of the many political pressures on filmmakers creating the final product. Archive media sources in the UK, such as fan magazines and newspaper articles involving audience's reception, have been crucial to the work.

I have examined and analysed pre-war British war/thriller feature films to determine the types of hero depicted. With help from Campbell (1993) and Levi-Strauss (1978).[47] I have established which structures and myths form the framework of heroes within feature film narratives. Richard Dyer and his studies of movie stars is useful to the reshaping of the British hero in war time films.

Additional works that underpin my project include: Philip Taylor's *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (1988); Conor Wilkinson's '*A Necessary Evil? Propaganda, Censorship and Class in Britain's Ministry of Information 1939-1941*'. Consulting these academic works and those featured above has helped in answering more original research questions and I have expanded on their scholarship in many ways, using a combination of primary archival research and previous academic discourses on feature films.

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[47] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York*:* Schocken Books, 1995), 53.

Sources

What follows is an overview and description of the many primary archive sources, which form the background to this thesis, reflecting that a large amount of this study is dependent on archival research. Their inclusion and importance to the whole project has been justified.

Film studio archives

In comparison with the impressive corporate archives that are available for Hollywood studios, primary sources relating to British film companies, particularly in the years before 1950, are relatively rare. One factor here would be the demise of some of the British studios since the end of the war. A partial solution to this problem would be to pursue indirect routes, uncovering documentation archived by existing businesses, whose historic activity involved the British film industry, such as the Prudential Group (Denham Studios).

Government archives

The MOI's prime duty was to sustain civilian morale and I have researched the sub-groups under its control, for example, the Policy Committee**,** tasked with formulating and approving propaganda for all films, the Planning Committee**,** whose aim was to find means to sustain civilian morale, and the Intelligence Division**,** whose task was to check the public's reaction to feature films. The most important, as far as this project in concerned, was the Films Division, tasked with setting policy guidelines for all aspects of film production, including censorship.[48] At present, relatively few government papers from this era are digitised, but they contain a wealth of information to be analysed and reviewed, as part of my research.

Institutions, such as the MOI and its sub-committees, provide extensive archive material, in the form of meeting minutes, papers and guidelines. These were accessed at the National Archives at Kew and the Imperial War Museum, both in London. I used Charles Barr's essay 'War Record' (1989) to help guide my research in these archives. In his essay, Barr describes the main archive areas for the MOI, and describes methodological approaches on how to make more efficient searches within the archives, as most are on paper and can absorb vast amounts of reading time. Other important government files held at Kew are Home Office records and the War Cabinet papers. One of the main drawbacks of the nature of these resources is the fragmented state of many of the archives. True, they are large in number, but following a paper

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[48] INF 196/2 Draft of memorandum on MOI duties, 3 December 1939

trail often ends in crucial documents being missing. Another complication is the virtual absence of indexing.

The largest file is INF 1/56, which contains a vast collection of papers that relates to workings of the MOI. I used this to build my organisational diagrams of the MOI. Amazingly, I could not find any overall diagram of the MOI structure in the archives, other than a very high-level layout. This hindered my work of establishing the communications and information flows between subgroups that relate to feature films (See Appendix).

INF 1/196 contains all Film Division correspondence, which I used to trace the Division's work during the war years. Two of the main MOI groups that communicated with the Film Division are the Planning and Policy Committees. Their papers are found in INF 1/253 and INF 1/848 and provide an insight into their workings with the Film Division. The Intelligence Division papers HO 262 give some information on feedback from the public on films, but the file is incomplete, as large amounts of data have been either deleted or lost. I have chosen some other archives that may shed light on the workings of the Film Division. To examine the toxic relationship between the British Film Institute (BFI) and the Film Division, INF 1/615 supplies some background. INF 1/199 has papers on abandoned feature films, which could illustrate how decisions on films were made. BT 64/60 provided material on Ealing Studios' efforts to make patriotic films under Michael Balcon. The *Documentary News Letter* digital files are stored at the University of St Andrews Film Studies department. These were an invaluable source for critical study of the Film Division.

Another rich archive source for my research are the Wartime Home Intelligence reports and the Wartime Social Surveys. These reports were part of the British government's attempt to understand the public during the war. In doing so, it hoped to develop better material for its information campaigns, to address the population's concerns in wartime, and to direct their propaganda efforts more effectively. Before the war began, public opinion was something that ministers, and other parts of government, learned only through news reporting and feedback from MPs' constituents, but the war marked the beginning of an attempt to incorporate something closer to bona fide market research into government policy making. The Home Intelligence Reports attempted to show what people were thinking, and why they were thinking it. They were compiled from a wide range of sources and covered reactions to current events, alongside attitudes towards life on the Home Front. The reports were produced daily from 18 May to 26 September 1940, and weekly from 9 October 1940 to 27 December 1944. They were

distributed throughout government, with the purpose of getting a better sense of the mood of the country, and thus to improve the government's work. The Wartime Social Surveys were statistical, a form of market research, and would cover a wide range of information needs from across government.

A full list of National Archives sources accessed can be found in the Appendix.

Special collections

I have consulted the era's main cinema journals, such as *Sight & Sound, Documentary News Letter* and *Kinematograph Weekly*. These gave an insight into the overall state of the film industry in wartime. Initially, the *Documentary News Letter* contained many critical articles on the Films Division, which only eased a few years into the war. I have investigated these passages and attempted to extract useful data concerning the workings of the Films Division. *Sight and Sound* took a very similar viewpoint, so I have considered reasons why this was so, and analysed articles for insights into the workings of government. *Kinematograph Weekly,* does contain specific articles expressing the views of studios' heads on government interference, which makes it an invaluable source of information. Local archives and newspapers, such as *The Times* and *Evening Standard*, have been significant in terms of data collection. Here the objective was to find a consensus among the differing sources of evidence. Other sources consulted include Churchill's archives in Cambridge, as well as Eden's private papers. Churchill took an active involvement in the production of several feature films, so this has been a useful source for checking the processes.[49]

Memoirs and personal papers

Personal papers can be a good source, especially when the original government papers have been destroyed, are missing or still under wraps. For example, the papers of Kenneth Clark (an early head of the Film Division) are located within the Tate Britain Archives in London.

One good primary source are the personal papers of Bernstein, Senior Advisor to the Films Division, held at the Imperial War Museum in London. An important figure, who moved in high circles, up to and including the Prime Minister, his large collection of private papers

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[49] Chapman, *The British at War*, 145.

includes dealings not only with the Films Division, but all other relevant committees and divisions, and so is an invaluable record.

College and university archives

The University of Sussex holds the Mass Observation archives. These provide evidence of feedback loops from the general public, back to government departments, which might have impacted decisions on film propaganda.

Postscripts

Differences between this century and the last are profound, but not sufficient to render an analogy irrelevant. In many respects, the MOI story parallels the British government's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic; enormous pressures on all aspects of government control meant that it was slow off the mark to develop processes and put them into action. So it was with wartime film policy and production, which severely impacted British filmmaking, with harmony only being achieved after long periods of confusion.

This introduction has laid the foundations for the thesis. It has established the research problems and issues. Definitions have been presented and the methodology described. On this basis the thesis can proceed with a detailed description of the research and its findings.

CHAPTER 1: 1939 Propaganda, myths and censorship

War in our time has come to mean a struggle in which millions of ordinary men fight and die heroically without being singled out for honour or glory.[50]

Timeline of main events on this phase of the war[51]

- September: Poland invaded by Germany.
- September: Declarations of War by Britain and France against Germany
- September: British Expeditionary Force transported to France
- September: National service introduced for ages 18-41

Introduction

Even before the onset of war, the British government was busy building a propaganda strategy, which included the hugely popular medium of cinema. Of all the means of reaching the public, the cinema was to play a major part. Going to the pictures, as it was then known, became far and away the most popular entertainment during the war. The weekly average number of cinemagoers rose from 19 million in 1939 to over 30 million in 1945.[52] No government could afford to ignore these figures when targeting propaganda.

The cinema reached more people than any other medium of visual communication, as a visitor analysis commissioned by the Ministry of Information (MOI) in 1940 showed:

> The cinema is able to reach large sections of the population, which are less accessible by other publicity media. In general, it may be said that the larger groups of the population are relatively better represented in the cinema audience than they are in the publics reached by other visual publicity media such as newspapers and books.[53]

The message from this was clear, that the authorities recognised that cinema would play an important part in propaganda. Historically, other media played a part, but from this time onwards, the reach of films would be a major factor in decisions on propaganda and messages to the public.

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[50] Sir Kenneth Clark, 1955 BFI Press release
[51] R67/44. BBC Archives: MOI paper on War events.
[52] Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds). *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1987), 12.
[53] INF 1/849 Policy Committee minutes, June 1940

This first section of this chapter will look at some of the different groups and individuals who contributed to the guidance on propaganda presented to the MOI on cinema. We will then look at each group of advisors and connect them to specific references to film content. The MOI did not materialise out of thin air; it was based on experience gained in the First World War. That earlier conflict had established discourses on how to adopt strict measures of censorship and propaganda relating to films. Architects of the MOI were somewhat influenced by handling the state media in Germany and Soviet Russia. But, as Chapman has noted with reference to film propaganda, 'even though democratic governments could increase their powers drastically during wartime, they did not have the powers of coercion exercised by the dictatorships'.[54]

However, it is true to say that the subject of propaganda was discussed within government circles. The film studios had never previously been a conduit for government messaging, except in a few cases during WWI. Complete control of the media would have been a major logistical and political operation and was certainly not considered as a serious proposition at this initial phase of the war. A key government document on propaganda has several detailed references to cinema.[55] It was based on the UK's experience in WWI and created before the MOI came into existence. It carried political weight. Coming from the Royal Institute of International affairs, it addressed the need to recognise the importance of cinema for propaganda. A pertinent issue for this study (point 28 in the document) states 'one effective propaganda area being the idealisation of heroes' which is an area explored further in subsequent chapters.

Althusser's ideas on ideology and interpellation help us understand the impact of British World War 2 propaganda. Ideology is 'integrated into our everyday consciousness'.[56] British propaganda within the images and messages of feature films framed the imagined relationships of individuals to their reality of war. The subject of hero figures, moreover, operated according to Althusser's idea of interpellation, where the family, church and state were represented within film narratives. While film propaganda, produced and controlled by the state, was fully part of what Althusser calls the 'Repressive State Apparatus'.[57] In many

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[54] Chapman, *The British at War*, 4.

[55] INF 1/724, '*Techniques of Persuasion: Basic ground rules of British Propaganda during WW2', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 1, no. 1 (1981): 57–65.

[56] Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation*, in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays trans. Andy Blunden (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971)

[57] Louis Althusser (1970). Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)'.

ways UK film constructs mirrored Hollywood in their depiction of society, but that was not always the case, as British feature films had their own design and place for the UK market. In later war years, a constructive relationship did develop between the two countries filmmaking, but it did take time. Propaganda in films was found in both independent and official government productions. People were being asked by the millions to risk their lives to do their duty, so it is no surprise to find that ideas of bravery and self-sacrifice are prevalent in representations of film heroes during the period. In addition, Chomsky's theories of propaganda help to explain why the general public believed the government's 'trusted sources' when they spread anti-German sentiment. This tapped into the public's fear of what the enemy was, and the threat of invasion would be a driving force in film propaganda from 1940 onwards.

Planning ahead for war

Early plans for the MOI were a reaction to the possibility of another war with Germany. Hitler's rise to power and the failure of the international disarmament conference in 1934 brought a war within touching distance. To be prepared for the emergency, the British government began to draw up its first plans for a MOI as early as 1934. The planners' realisation that a war with Germany would not be on foreign battlefields but would take the form of enemy air raids in its on-home territory, prompted the Ministry of War to consider how such a war could be tackled. The strategic planning of the multi-services Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) started from the hypothesis that the hostilities lead to an intensive use of air bombardments. It was believed that the side whose morale would collapse first would lose, hence a renewed focus was placed upon propaganda initiatives. The CID drew up plans for the mass evacuation of cities, for the protection of civilians, for relief measures for bomb victims and for the hundreds of thousands of English civilians expected to die in bombings. Such a scenario inevitably required an institution that could prop up the morale of the population in the event of war. The CID made provision for a MOI with this aim. A sub-committee developed guidelines for the concrete establishment of this ministry; not only did they want to control news and information, but they also wanted to establish an apparatus for distributing news. A different sub-committee dealt with censorship measures. In 1936, the CID stated that:

> The main function of the MOI is to present the national case to the public at home and abroad in time of war. To achieve this end, it is not only necessary to provide for the preparation and issue of National Propaganda, but also for the issue of news and for such control of information issued to the public as may be demanded by the needs of security. The Ministry should, in principle, be the centre for the distribution of all information concerning the war, and the Press and the public should be encouraged so to regard it.[58]

This important paper on propaganda remained the basis for the establishment of the MOI and its policies in subsequent years. One issue with this defining statement was the different interpretations of security across government departments. Persuading the press and media, including film makers, to co-operate would be a further challenge, as will be explored in subsequent chapters.

As part of overall planning for the MOI, in the summer of 1938 the Home Publicity Planning committee[59] produced a paper entitled ˙Goals and machinery of domestic publicity'. This consisted of a list of guidelines covering all types of media output, some of which would apply directly to films: -

(1)   *To get British war aims understood.* The government's efforts in pursuance of them, at home and overseas, should be clearly interpreted and appreciated in the United Kingdom.

(2)   *To perform a like service for the aims and efforts of our allies.* Even at the early stages, some effort would be made to convince allies, especially America to enter the war.

(3)   *To secure the prompt and wide dissemination of such instructions, advice and reassurance, as individual government Departments may wish to communicate.* We shall see that the MOI, via its programs of short five-minute publicity films fulfilled some of this edict.

(4)   *To prepare the public mind for new measures contemplated by the government.* As with (3), the MOI used a mixture of film, posters and publications to prepare the public for events. A good example was during the phoney war period, where threat of invasion required a great deal of preparations by the public.

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[58]CAB 24/259/30 Committee of Imperial Defence. 7.2.1936
[59] INF 1/712. Annex to the Report of the Home Publicity Sub-Committee of 27.9.1938.

(5)   *To prevent panics, to allay apprehensions and to remove misconceptions.* In some ways this would be handled by the Censorship Department of the MOI, eventually to be hived off into a separate body.

(6)   *Generally, to keep the public in good heart.* This would be incorporated into the main task of the MOI, to keep up morale of the whole population.

The Committee made several suggestions on how to implement publicity. The Public Relations Department of the General Post Office (GPO) was to serve as a role model. The Committee recommended that the Post Office's Film Production and Distribution Department be transferred to the new MOI and that the GPO should make their own Film Unit the nucleus of an official state film department, eventually known as the Films Division. Crutchley, who was a keen supporter of more documentaries saw problems: -

> Film production units organised to supply the theatrical market and concentrating much more on box-office appeal than the interpretation of the public consciousness will find it difficult at first to adapt themselves to new and constantly changing requirements and it will be a great advantage for the publicity division to have film production resources of its own.[60]

This anticipates likely disagreements on filmmaking and content. A pragmatic approach to box-office appeal would have to be adopted, as pressures on resources increased. In these early days, the film studios did not encounter resource issues, but they knew that this might change. At this time there was little effort to reach out to the film studios for consultations. There were certainly discussions, as in a 1938 meeting between Korda, Michael Powell and Winston Churchill. Ideas for films were discussed, with a promise from Korda that he would divert all the resources of Denham film studio to making anti-Nazi films.[61] In parallel, the War Cabinet were considering ways of maintaining morale in the planning of the MOI. The War Cabinet minutes from September 1939 specify that:

> It is essential that there should be sustained propaganda on the Home Front and that the MOI should have regard to this consideration and to the importance of maintaining public morale.[62]

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[60] INF 1/712 E.T. Crutchley, *Films*, September 1938, The British Documentary Film Movement
[61] 1/194. Churchill had been employed by Korda several times in the 1930s, writing scripts. They had always kept in close contact as Korda rose to head Denham Studios.
[62] CAB 65/1: War Cabinet Minutes, September 1939

Part of these moves would eventually morph into a consensus what would be described by many academics as the national identity.[63] This was not a new consensus, but an affirmation of an existing viewpoint. One MOI memorandum outlined the preferred themes in film by pointing to the value of inclusion of 'British Life and character, showing our independence, toughness of fibre, and sympathy with the underdog'.[64] These are themes that will appear in many subsequent films discussed further in later chapters.

Quotas and initial concerns on propaganda

One bone of contention between the trade and the government were the rules on film quotas. When the future of the British film industry was threatened by Hollywood in the 1920s, the Cinematograph Films Act, or Quota Act, was brought in to protect the industry.[65] This established a minimum quota of British films which exhibitors were required to show. One of the justifications, even then, was to ensure favourable images of Britain were displayed on screen. The Act was reviewed in 1938 when war threatened, but the central rules remained. Its influence in the making of several feature films will be considered in a later chapter.

Using cinema for improving morale was part of the International Propaganda and Broadcasting Enquiry;[66] A Royal Institute of International Affairs commission enquiry into Broadcasting and Propaganda and marked 'Secret'. The aim of this plan was to give direction to the planners of the MOI. Within the report's introduction one can see the main concerns: 'This report recognised the advanced use of cinema',[67] and that its use would be even more important than in WWI. The report covers many areas of the media, but these are the main film references relevant to this study:

Point 14 states that the '*WW1 USA films were made for profit'.* This was not a complaint, rather a warning that without some sort of central governmental control the film studios would go their own way in terms of content and themes. Their main drive would be profit-led and might

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[63] David Edgerton, 'The Nationalisation of British History: Historians, Nationalism and the Myths of 1940'. *The English Historical Review*, Volume 136, Issue 581, August 2021, Pages 950–985.

[64] INF 1/867. Desired Propaganda paper

[65] Margret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State*: *The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84.* (London: BFI, 1985), 66.

[66] INF 1/724 June 1939. Prewar publicity division

[67] Philip Taylor, '*Techniques of persuasion: basic ground rules of British propaganda during the second world war*', Historical Journal of Film. Vol1 No1 1981, 57-66

not be based on any consideration of national interest. Point 12 '*Films picking up classes (in Film)'*. The intention of this is unclear, as there is no further explanation. It is included here because it might reference the representation of class, which would become quite an important issue in feature film content. Point 21 states that '*cinema provides great mass-audiences'.* The implicit message is that film gives access to the whole population and every element of society in Britain, irrespective of wealth and class, since the cost of a cinema ticket is within the means of everyone. Point 28 states that 'an *effective means of propaganda is idealisation of national heroes*'. This is one of the earliest official mentions that a particular type of hero should be displayed to the public. It also states that a '*Desire to Serve'* should be influential and implies that this aspect should be demonstrated in film projects. This is reflected in other government policy statements, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Funding issues

Funding of films emerged as an issue in early 1940. The 13th Report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure in August 1940: 'shows on-going discussion in both trade and official circles about the government's involvement with feature film propaganda'. British film studios started to form a view that making films for the government at their own expense was not a good proposition. There were valid reasons for this concern, as the studios had benefited financially from the Film Quota Act in 1927. This Act required distributors and exhibitors to process an annually increasing number of British films.[68] Drazin states that 'having revealed itself to be anything but viable, in spite of the help of the quota, many felt that the film industry did not deserve any further protection'.[69] He was referring to the fact that some film studios had produced lavishly made, and expensive, films that had lost lots of money. Any idea of spending, and losing, public money on filmmaking was not therefore popular. American film studios were lobbying for expanded access for their films, so the Act could not stand as it was. At this point, the MOI was still in the early stages of film policy, so one view is that it was keeping its options open on funding. Further chapters will investigate this issue, as the whole process of funding films became a major issue throughout the war.

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[68] The quota started at 7 % and was 20 % when the Act was replaced in 1938.
[69] Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years, British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: Deutsch, 1998), 192.

Improvements in government directions on film

Following a direction from the Cabinet Office, a Film Publicity Sub-Committee was set up, which presented its first interim report in July 1939. The working group should investigate 'what arrangements ought to be effected now, and to make any necessary recommendations, for the use of films for the purpose of steadying the national spirit during a state of emergency'. The MOI's Films Division was then modelled on the WW1 equivalent, the Cinema Propaganda Department. No effort was made to adapt it to the new world (sound, colour). The general belief was that cinemas would be closed for some time and were therefore low priority.[70] From the Home Publicity Planning Committee, it had been agreed as early as May 1939 that the MOI would stress three basic propaganda themes:

- The justice of Britain's cause
- Britain's strength
- The commitment of the whole community to the war effort[71]

This short list in some ways reflected the same requirements proposed by the Films Division that will be discussed in the next chapter. It was the start of attempts to define what form of propaganda was required to fulfil these demands.

From the film industry's side, an early attempt was made to reach out to the MOI. Within five days of the start of war, in 1939 a memo was sent to MOI signed by leading producers/directors suggesting how film could be used in war...'no response, just filed'.[72] Unfortunately, no record of this memo exists in the National Archives. However, there is some evidence the MOI took time to seek out views from academics. They commissioned a renowned Cambridge don, Professor Frederic Bartlett, to write a *Political Propaganda* monograph, to obtain ideas on propaganda for all forms of media interaction, including film.[73] This would inform MOI's thinking on what role it should play in the war. Bartlett's work was mostly theoretical but contained some interesting ideas. Chapter 3 of Bartlett's book talks of 'comradeship'; He makes the point that social groups were more complex than during WWI. Due to better education, any propaganda should be constructed to appeal to many differing social groupings.

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[70] Caroline Moorehead, *Sidney Bernstein* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 115.
[71] INF 1/725 Home Publicity Paper May 1939
[72] Chapman, *The British at War,* 67.
[73] Fredric Bartlett, *Political Propaganda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940, 66

Improved communications meant that the leaders of one group could shape their policy or reactions, considering other groups with alternative viewpoints. This was a very important point, as it meant that propaganda from the MOI had to be wide ranging in scope, even considering one aspect that Bartlett ignored was the issue of class boundaries being broken down. Like others, he made the point that the use of humour is very powerful in propaganda, especially sarcasm and irony. But Bartlett did warn that what might be deemed as 'humour' to some social groups, might not be seen as such across the boundaries of class and countries. As others will find in filmmaking, Bartlett highlights that, within propaganda it is very difficult to get humour right, by which he means a satisfied audience.

There is evidence, explored in subsequent chapters, that this advice was followed to some degree in later films, helped by the use of famous and familiar music hall performers. What the film studios eventually discovered was that even a weaker script could be made into a popular film by the right comic performer, such as George Formby or Will Hay. In fact, after 1940, almost all British wartime films incorporated some element of humour, which will be discussed in further chapters.

Where do the documentaries fit in film policy?

On 7 September 1939, twelve themes for documentary films were submitted to the MOI Co-ordination Committee by the Films Division Deputy Director, G. Forbes.[74] At this time, the documentary film movement, supported in full by the journal the DNL, was attempting to take over the agenda for filmmaking in Britain. Chapman takes issue with this view - 'some contemporary commentators believed that the documentarists had infiltrated the Films Division'. Ideas such as these will be explored in a later chapter. Joseph Ball had, as Chapman puts it, 'some antipathy towards the documentary movement', and progress on these ideas had to await action from Sir Kenneth Clark. Elements of these are explored in the case study.

From other interested groups came more ideas on filmmaking; before the start of the war Korda, a friend of Churchill, suggested using his team to make a propaganda film, 'it may just hold Hitler back'.[75] The film was *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), produced by Korda, co-directed by Powell. It was the first full-length propaganda film of the war,[76] and one aim was to show that

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[74] Chapman, *The British at War*, 88.

[75] Michael Powell. *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (London: Mandarin, 1987), 307.

[76] Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman*, (London: Hatchette, 2002), 160.

the RAF was ready for German bombers. In terms of style and content it is clearly closer to the documentary form than the popular fiction film. Korda's involvement makes for an interesting case study with his close connection to Churchill. Here was a powerful figure, famous in the 1930s in producing films on Empire and historical epics, such as *The Private Life Of Henry VIII* (1933) and *Fire Over England* (1937), exploring a new approach in filmmaking, strongly focused on the heroic figure. Roy Armes states that Korda's pre-war films displayed 'the establishment myths of England, which had little relationship to the observable facts of English life',[77] but their ideas would be incorporated into depictions of contemporary events, as will be explored in later chapters.

Where do film censors fit in film policy?

Another group with a view on film content were the censors. It was not until December 1938 that representatives of the MOI, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of War agreed on a policy of 'voluntary' security censorship of films. In July 1939 the provisions for implementing the wartime security censorship of films were in place. The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), as an existing censorship authority, should take on the role of implementation of the new security censorship. Summarising its remit, it proposed that censorship of films would be compulsory and that any censorship the BBFC undertook was on behalf of the MOI. The BBFC would also provide advice to the film industry and act as liaison between the MOI and the industry as required. Other State bodies also intervened in film production. The Control of Photography Regulation of September 1939 classified it as an offence to photograph or film war-related objects without permission ('the list [of the objects, J.B.] covered practically anything which had war interest').[78] Permission to film or photograph certain objects was granted by a so-called Red Permit from the Films Division which also required the submission of all recordings to the BBFC before they were released.

At this early stage, with so many diverse interest groups feeding in advice, guidance and regulation, it was quite a feat for the MOI to have achieved anything in the field of movie making. In some cases, these conflicting views on film content flowing into the Films Division must have exerted immense pressure on those tasked with implementing decisions. With this in mind, the following institutional analysis examines a short period in the early days of the

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[77] Roy Armes, *A critical history of British cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 121.
[78] George Thomson, *Blue Pencil Admiral, The Inside Story of the Press Censorship* (London: Sampson, 1946), 6.

Films Division, illustrating the working practices, both official and unofficial. Then follows a case study of the film *Target For Tonight* (1941). Created first as a documentary idea, it expanded during production into a feature length movie. It is a landmark film; in that it encapsulates some of the edicts and propaganda ideas under discussion in these early days.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

These were dismal times for the whole country. Once started, the war only brought bad news for the public. Events in 1939 pointed towards an inevitable German invasion, as many countries had already fallen. Given this background, it was not surprising that many committees and think tanks sprang up to suggest ways of fighting back through propaganda. Looking at the archives, one can discern some small degree of panic. As has been illustrated, in this phase of the war the MOI, and the Films Division in particular, received many ideas on how use propaganda in film. The War Cabinet recognised that strong individuals with organisational skills were needed, to take on board some of the suggestions and push the division forward. At that time, the decision of civil servants to employ outsiders was a gamble and had not been attempted before. The success, or otherwise, of this strategy will be explored here, looking at the early work of the Films Division within the MOI from late 1939 to early 1940. The first section discusses the impact of Kenneth Clark and John Betjeman within the Films Division.

Matching films with propaganda, first steps from the Films Division

Very early in his tenure as head of the Films Division, Kenneth Clark presented a paper entitled 'Programme for Film Propaganda'[79] to the coordinating Committee of the MOI (29 January 1940). This paper outlined ideas for feature films under three headings, 'What is Britain fighting for', 'How Britain fights', and 'The need for sacrifices'.[80] It was influential on future film production; henceforth, one can trace elements of each of these ideas within the context of many British-made war films. Two of these themes, 'What Britain is fighting for' and 'How Britain fights' had been seen pre-war in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). In the case of *The Lady Vanishes*, there had been political pressure on film scripts from the BBFC. Jeffrey Richards notes that 'The censors followed a policy of appeasement to overseas governments. Scripts were regularly referred to the relevant embassies'.[81] Hitchcock circumnavigated the censor's prohibitions by using a fictitious setting for this film. Within the film, although enemy is clearly the Gestapo, it is never named as such. The theme of the film also diverges from early 1930s thrillers, in that the hero figure turns to violence to save innocent (and not so innocent, in the case of the British spy) lives. Christine Grandy writes 'of 1930s films...when faced with War

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[79] INF 1/868: Coordinating Committee, Paper No 1,'Programme for Film Propaganda'
[80] INF 1/867: Co-Ordinating Committee No.1
[81] Robert Murphy (ed). *The British Cinema Book*, Chapter 18. (London: BFI, 2019), 158.

subjects, the film chooses peace'.[82] Indeed the evidence shows that feature film content was starting to become more explicitly political even before the start of war. In pre-war Britain, there was always a dilemma, what was the heroes' quest? Campbell states 'the first stage of the mythological journey (of the hero) signifies that destiny has summoned him'. That is certainly true of *The Lady Vanishes* as the hero in the film closely resembles the image of a knight from long ago: Campbell describes 'King Arthur and his many Knights' riding off to do good deeds.[83] Once war had been declared, the filmic definition of 'the hero' would clearly need to change to reflect the massive upheavals within British society.

Returning to the MOI, once installed as the Films Division head, Clark wasted no time in recruiting his old Oxford college friend, John Betjeman, from the *Evening Standard* film review pages. This choice needed careful handling as, on later occasions, Clark had to defend his friend's behaviour. Betjeman did not have a high regard for authority, especially within the civil service ranks, and was the cause of friction on many occasions. The reason for the focus on these two men is to enable consideration of their contribution as a team. Repeatedly, the references supply examples of their cooperation with one another. The idea that these two men, in these early days of the war, were acting as catalysts will be explored, as they pushed the Films Division in the right direction, thereby influencing the course and direction of future feature films. That their efforts led to successful films becomes evident much later, when 'proper' control descended on the Ministry.

Complaints from many sides of government

In 1939 and 1940 organising the multifarious parts of the MOI was a major undertaking; Looking at the archive records, I agree with Charles Barr, who wrote 'the MOI, including the Films Division, was a byword early in the war for muddle and inefficiency'.[84] An impression of amateurs at work dogged the MOI (and the Films Division) during this period. In fact, Clark was self-deprecating later of his time there and quite often downplayed his role at the Films Division. In the face of conflicting pressures on the Films Division's future direction, the influential Select Committee on National Expenditure's 13th Report had many complaints: 'The Films Division is largely ineffective via lack of clearly defined objectives...Messages in

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[82] Christine Grandy *Heroes and happy Endings*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 77.

[83] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a thousand faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 58.

[84] Charles Barr, *Churchill and Cinema in the Second World War*, 573.

film should be related to particular needs. The aim should not be merely the enhancement of patriotic spirit, but its direction into channels of activity'.[85] Also, there was the start of pressure from other government departments to encourage America to take a bigger role in the war.

In confronting some of these external pressures, Clark's experience was invaluable in many ways. He had inherited the Directorship of the National Gallery when it was in 'considerable turmoil; the staff and the trustees were in a state of continual warfare with each other'.[86] To some extent, he cajoled the warring factions to work together, utilising his academic background as a lecturer in Fine Art. Clark had a reputation for reaching out to the public, by attempting to present art in more accessible ways, such as evening openings for galleries. However successful these interventions were, at least they were an attempt to illustrate things going on as normal. His background undoubtedly influenced his future work at the Films Division, as there are clear patterns in his initial approach, which were followed after he moved on.

A lack of planning

The Films Division's previous head, Joseph Ball, failed to establish a good rapport with the film industry and eventually left that position, due to industry pressure.[87] According to one anecdotal story, he owed his position to being Neville Chamberlain's fishing companion, and did not have any relevant experience of cinema. This was another example of nepotism within government circles, which (one hopes) would not be tolerated today. A reluctance to plan was one of Ball's shortcomings. Film directors Thorold Dickinson (*High Command* 1937 and the *Arsenal Stadium Mystery* 1939) and Anthony Asquith (*Pygmalion* 1938, *Moscow Nights* 1935) had visited Ball and asked how the film industry could contribute to the war effort. The response was dismissive. 'It's no use coming here, you will all be drafted soon'. They tried to argue that 'propaganda was a vital weapon of war'; Ball's response 'No, no, it's been decided'. This was not well received by the two directors, who therefore used their influence to get Ball removed. There was a lot of pressure on the Films Division in the press at this time. A typical article stated '...for a considerable time there was not a single person who could be considered a film expert...it needs a kick in the pants…(the) Films Division has been wrong from the start,

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[85] INF 1/196. 21st Aug 1939: INF 1/196, 4 para 5
[86] Peter Stansky, *Sassoon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 189.
[87] Drazin, *The Finest Years,* 105.

wrong in policy, wrong in ideas, wrong in its old school-tie attitude to experts in the film trade...what it needs to do more than anything else is to tell the world about our war effort'.[88]

According to Thorold Dickinson[89], Clark was selected after a meeting of the Association of Cine Technicians (organised by Margot Asquith, mother of Anthony Asquith), who were protesting about the closures of cinemas in wartime. They did not have a candidate in mind, but quite soon Clark's name was being discussed. Clark had heard from unofficial sources that his name was in the running, but he was not sure if the role would suit him, so he took advice. His influential good friend, sculptor Henry Moore, thought that film 'is easily the most powerful reflective medium for propaganda of all'.[90] This helped convince Clark that it was a worthwhile position. Clark later wrote, 'I had no qualifications for the job (Films Division head), knew absolutely nothing about the structure of the film world, and was not even aware of the difference between producers, distributors and exhibitors'.[91] He later summed up the public (and governmental) view of the MOI:

> For anyone with my background there was an obvious source of employment, the so-called MOI. This notorious institution had been put together rather hastily when the threat of war could no longer be ignored, and housed in an enormous modern building, fortunately very solid, the Senate House of London University....Most of the 999 staff consisted of an uneasy mixture of so-called intellectuals, ex-journalists and advertising men, ex-politicians and discarded eminences grises. In this undirected orchestra, it was necessary for each man to blow his own trumpet as loudly as he could.[92]

The description of a 'solid' building is accurate, as the photo illustrates. It is now part of London University. As to other comments, my view is that he is emphasising his amateur status, a common trait among the upper classes at that time.

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[88] *Aberdeen Press and Journal*: 6th September 1940,
[89] James Minney, *Puffin Asquith* (Frewin, London 1973), 102-103.
[90] Letter from Henry Moore to Clark, 23 December 1939. Tate 8812/1/3/2040
[91] Kenneth Clark, *The Other Half: A self-portrait* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 10.
[92] Ibid, 9.

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1: The former MOI building in London

A new head for the Films Division

Clark started work in December 1939, aged 36, and there is anecdotal evidence that his arrival was not welcomed by everyone. The *Documentary Newsletter* (DNL) stated that 'his arrival at the Films Division should be welcomed by everyone, save the less imaginative of Wardour Street',[93] alluding to the home of the major film studios in London. The DNL's views were influential in all areas of government, however when appointed, some journalists were more complimentary 'He has profound knowledge and fine judgement...and one more task does not worry him'.[94] Another stated that 'The government had now recognised the power of the film industry by setting up what was perhaps, the most important division of the MOI, the Films Division'.[95] One strong suit Clark could play in his dealings in government was his good reputation in artistic circles, and that he was very well connected. He was Surveyor of the King's Pictures and Director of the National Gallery, he had dealings at the highest level, including with the royal family. Before taking over, Clark attempted to obtain advice from Ball, but Ball admitted to Clark that he had never met his own staff at the Films Division and could not help.[96] There may be other reasons for Ball's response, as it is difficult to believe that someone in high authority had no connection with his staff. Despite this, Clark was not

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[93] DNL 1, January 1940, 4.
[94] *Cambridge Daily News,* 21st December 1939
[95] *Daily Herald*, November 8, 1939
[96] Clark, *The Other Half*. 10.

deterred. It gave him comfort that, despite his lack of experience, he was broadly welcomed by the film industry. In an interview with *Kinematograph Weekly*[97] Clark stated his views on film, stating 'no film is good propaganda unless it is good entertainment'. This is an interesting observation; Clark had already started to think about the direction war films should take. From his tenure at the National Gallery, it was clear that he was not a person to dither; he wanted to make things happen, an attribute he carried into the Films Division.

This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions

2: Clark in later life, almost always photographed with a background of books or art.

Clark gets to work

Shortly after taking over, Clark met with the MOI Director General, who stated that 'money was no problem...Clark should make a full-length feature film describing why we were fighting the War'.[98] Canny enough to double check, he found that the Treasury was not quite as committed to funding, as had been suggested. He soon realised that he would have to fight for resources, like any other department. This did not deter Clark, and in spite of the financial restrictions, he invited leading members of the film industry for meetings. He found that he got on well with Michael Balcon (Ealing Studios) and Sydney Bernstein (senior advisor on Film to the Cabinet). Nevertheless, the Treasury did not want him to employ them, even in an unpaid capacity, as they were from 'industry'. So, Clark was prepared to meet them unofficially, bypassing official channels, or in the course of his social life. For example, he often dined with Nicolson (junior minister for the MOI), Churchill and Leslie Howard (film director and actor), where discussions included feature film content.[99] It is plausible that these unofficial

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[97] Interview with Kenneth Clark, *Kinematograph Weekly* 11 January 1940
[98] Clark, *The Other Half*, 11 – 12.
[99] Nicolson diary, 2 April 1940, Balliol College archive.

discussions were a significant influence on Clark's thinking. Churchill was a very keen film fan and 'recognised the important effects the medium could exercise at a variety of levels'.[100]

Other forces were at work within the Films Division that would shape the narrative of film content. At the time of Clark's appointment, another key position in the Films Division was filled. Alderman Sir Joseph Reeves of Deptford Borough Council and secretary of the Workers' Film Association was appointed. His programme included films depicting labour's role in the war effort.[101] showing real people in everyday work situations. He was keen to introduce realist themes and content into films for the wartime public.

In addition to reorganising his department, Clark wasted no time in beginning talks with the industry. On Feb 15th, 1940, he met with the Film Trade Organisation, representing British film makers, including Balcon. Clark stated that it was not the role of the Films Division to produce feature films, but that short films would be supported.[102] Clark proceeded to present to them a paper on the use of feature films as propaganda,[103] coaxing the Treasury into providing finance for a slate of feature films. He suggested a programme of short five minute films to simplify the complicated procedures of the GPO film unit. In April 1940 the GPO film unit was transferred to MOI, after pressure from Clark. A rationalisation of short film propaganda was initiated, and a Clark memo of March 1940 suggested that shorts and documentaries should be accommodated in cinema, alongside main feature films.[104] Under his direction, the Five-Minute Films (free) scheme started in July 1940, with Betjeman as the script reader. Examples of these films were *Britain At Bay* (a clear morale booster) and *A Call To Arms* (featuring women in factory work). In practice, these were early examples of real people who were involved in war effort becoming suitable subjects for films. Clark oversaw the introduction of official shorts and documentaries into cinema programs, but the Five-Minute Film Scheme was only fully integrated and negotiated by his successor, Jack Beddington. At a meeting of the MOI Co-ordinating Committee April 1940, Clark reported 'that film producers

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[100] Charles Barr. 'Churchill and Cinema in the Second World War'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol 31, No.4 December 2011, 573.
[101] *Daily Herald*, November 23rd 1939
[102] Tate Britain Archives: TGA 8812.1.4.274 Minutes of Film Trade Advisory Committee. February 15th 1940
[103] MOI Policy Committee Paper of December 1939 entitled 'The principles underlying British Wartime propaganda'
[104] Chapman, *The British at War*, 88.

were asking for fresh subjects…that could be made into suitable films'.[105] His successor, Jack Beddington was able to expand the scope and range of the films.

The MOI bureaucracy at first presented a challenge to Clark, but he reverted to methods he had used successfully at the National Gallery. He divided individual MOI committees into 'deliberative', 'executive', 'coordinating' or 'informative'. In this way Clark could have some measure of control and/or influence in correspondence and in meetings. Clark worked closely with Bernstein, persuading the industry to screen government films and obtain audience feedback. This was an innovative approach, conducting market research on the Films Division's output, films. Film producers could use the analysis to influence further film projects.

Clark soon encountered external pressure on the Films Division. The MOI was tasked by the Empire Division of the MOI with creating films for countries of the British Empire, particularly Canada, South Africa, India, Australia and 'tropical' (their words) countries. The minutes of a meeting on the subject describe ideas for each region. As an example, the need to avoid duplication was discussed, as the famous and influential British filmmaker John Grierson was already heavily involved in creating a feature film about Canada's contribution to the war. For South Africa, a life story of General Botha (the country's first Prime Minister) was suggested. As to India, Clark was reticent. The archives show that he was concerned about cost and logistics, and a particular worry was the 'delicate nature' of the politics of the place. For Australia, one idea was a film on Sir Kingsford Smith, the aviator who in 1928 made the first trans-Pacific flight from the United States to Australia. A series of documentaries on British rule was suggested for the 'tropical' countries.

At a subsequent meeting, Clark agreed that the British film director Michael Powell would go to Canada 'without a script and a free hand to make whatever feature film he wanted', but the subject matter would have to be submitted to the Films Division for clearance before production could start. The resultant film was *49th Parallel* (1941; *The Invaders* in the USA). This was one of the first examples of a concerted attempt to influence opinion in neutral America, to support their government's entry into the war.[106] Another illustration of very early efforts to 'reach out' to USA was a request to Clark, from the newly formed American Division of the

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[105] INF 1/867 Minutes of the Co-Ordinating Committee, 11th meeting, 1st April 1940
[106] Tate Britain Archives. Film Publicity Division, March 25th 1940

MOI, to plan a series of projects to teach British people about the USA. 'Films (and trailers) are the most important means of propaganda'.[107]

Despite his early reservations about mass culture and film's value within it, Clark was active in early discussions to improve the lives of much of the population. There are tantalising clues in the archives of related work that emanated from discussions within the Films Division. In Nov 1940 Clark suggested and wrote an article for *Picture Post* (weekly circulation over one million), 'A Plan for Britain, for after the war ended…proposing a universal welfare system, clearing slums'.[108] Within government consideration was being given to the creation of a new welfare state; this is one of the first examples of publicity on that subject.

Clark's promotion in April 1940 to be Controller of Home Publicity, meant that he would oversee several divisions within the MOI, including Films. His leaving remarks suggested he would maintain his open approach: 'he would prefer not to lose touch with members of the film industry, whose help and co-operation had been so valuable to him'.[109] Further chapters will illustrate his input and involvement when discussion of film content took place. His promotion was not welcomed by all… Cassandra (*Daily Mirror* columnist) stated his work was 'the dilettante dabbling's of a brash amateur'.[110]

One negative aspect of Clark's work was the isolation of the British Film Institute (BFI), which was supported by a government grant but was an independent organisation. There are many examples of BFI's head Oliver Bell, offering its services, which Clark always rejected. From Clark's autobiography, one can deduce there was a lot of animosity between the two. Clark writes 'Mr Bell a muffle headed busybody'.[111] The BFI was also regarded by many in government as 'a conservative body, who's Board of Governors was controlled by trade interests.[112] In the BFI's view, they had tried hard to offer help, but the animosity was too great. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in his official history of the BFI, writes 'the attempts of the director of the BFI, to interest the government in giving the BFI a role in the war effort came to nothing'. He did not fit in personally or politically, and 'returned to the BFI with his tail between his

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[107] Tate Britain Archives. Memo to Clark, *Questions and answers to North America*. June 1941
[108] Daniel Todman, *Britain's War* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 163.
[109] Tate Britain Archives. Film Trade Advisory Committee April 13th 1940
[110] Cassandra. 'Musings on the MOI'. *Daily Mirror*, 16 April 1940, 6.
[111] INF 1/615: Kenneth Clark to Mr Brass, 8 April 1940.
[112] Chapman, *The British at War*, 27.

legs'.[113] With hindsight, it was damaging for the two principal government bodies with an interest in film to be at loggerheads with each other. At this point the BFI role was quite narrowly defined covering film education and factual films. To be excluded from helping the Films Division was a missed opportunity. Relations improved later in the war, but the general policy of keeping the BFI at arm's length continued until the war's end.

Old friends working together

It is my view that Betjeman's arrival galvanises Clark's work. Clark foremost liked his 'flexibility and originality of mind'.[114] They met at Oxford and quite often had lunch, where Clark enjoyed his company.[115] Betjeman was certainly an amateur, in terms of working within government and dealing with civil servants, but he had a keen love of film, being the film critic on the London *Evening Standard* newspaper. His appointment was popular with the other staff once they got used to his slightly eccentric ways. As a film script editor, Betjeman worked with writers such as Graham Greene and J.B Priestley, with whom he had a good working relationship. Nevertheless, Clark had to defend his friend after numerous disagreements with the Civil service bureaucracy: 'John has more ideas than the rest of the Films Division put together'.[116] Indeed, their working relationship was very close and productive. Betjeman's main work was commissioning films and reading the scripts (mainly Five-Minute Films), for example *Dig For Victory* (1941). Betjeman also tried to get Sidney Gilliat (of Individual Pictures) to make a film on the British Empire...the eventual result was *From the Four Corners* (1942).[117] Gilliat stated that in later life 'John was a lot more effective than Beddington, because all John wanted was to get things done'.[118]

Betjeman's influence on other members of the team was to make them more productive. There are several examples where team spirit was improved by his daily visit to the local pub. He also devised ways of intimidating civil servants he found pompous.

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[113] Geoffrey Nowell, 'Foundation and early years' in *The British film institute, the Government and film culture, 1933-2000* Ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 25

[114] Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman* (London: Hatchette, 2002), 145.

[115] Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman*, 161.

[116] James Stourton, *Kenneth Clark*. 46.

[117] Clive Coultass, *Images for Battle: British Films and the Second World War* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 64.

[118] Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman*, 174.

This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions

3: John Betjeman in later life. His personality shows in this photo; eccentric, funny.

A good example of Betjeman's way of team working can be found in his work on 'A Rill Mill'.[119] The title is meant to suggest how a true London cockney pronounce a 'Real Meal'. It follows the adventures of a family trying to make ends meet for a proper family meal. This project illustrated Betjeman's determination to get a script right, as the archives show many script versions being rejected by Betjeman. Unfortunately, the project was cancelled, due to the time constraints on the main actor Jack Warner.

Of his 18 months at the MOI, Clark was head of the Films Division for just four months, before being promoted within the MOI, but he always involved with the Films Division as he continued to show an interest in films throughout the war. His main achievement was closer cooperation between the leaders of the film industry,[120] but in his memoirs Clark was dismissive of his team '...an uneasy mixture of so-called intellectuals, ex-journalists etc'.[121] Clark was downplaying his work at the MOI, because he considered it beneath him, he considered himself an amateur autocrat. Rather, he was considered a world expert on fine art, and that was his main passion. Amongst the upper classes, this disparaging view of film was widespread. Stefan Collini writes:

> These developments (i.e. Feature films) were conditioned by social attitudes towards culture which had deep historical roots. Summarising ruthlessly, one might say that the dominant tradition in Britain had been an uneasy mixture of indifference, suspicion, and the largely unreflective perpetuation of the tastes of the traditional upper class.[122]

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[119] Dan North. *Sights Unseen*: *Unfinished British Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2008)*, 87-89.
[120] James Stourton. *Kenneth Clark*, 180.
[121] Clark, *The Other Half*, 9-10.
[122] 'Culture Inc', *The Guardian*, 28th October 2000.

Collini was writing about the establishment of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in 1940, which had chosen not to include Film as part of its remit. (It was not until the 1960s that film was included, under its new name of the Arts Council of Great Britain).[123] Returning to 1940, and exploring cinema attendance, Mackenzie explores this issue from the services point of view. 'Going to the pictures was a familiar activity for the humble urban families. Those in command came from a very different social background'.[124] He goes on to say that officers tended to view mass culture of the lower orders with disdain, as vulgar and 'without serious importance'. This may have been a common view at this time, but further chapters will illustrate how propaganda needs would elevate the significance of films for everyone.

In conclusion, 'getting things done' is a good summation of the achievements of these two men in these early days of the war. Clark really liked talking to people and exhibited a desire to influence events. Encountering bureaucratic obstacles did not deter him and generally he managed to circumvent them. Being well connected did help, both formally through the MOI and informally, through many dinners with Churchill and members of the royal family. Betjeman, on the other hand, was keen to make progress but not afraid to state his mind. This rich mixture of British eccentrics was the right team at the right time. Their actions in pushing forward the Films Division's operations laid the foundations of future developments, under subsequent leadership. Both of their memoirs tend to play down their work within the Films Division, but this might be classed as British understatement.

As far as the general work of the MOI is concerned, their initial contribution to filmmaking is demonstrated in the in the following case study. John Sedgwick's pioneering work on cinema-going in the 1930s highlights: 'One way of pointing up cultural differences a decade later is to consider whether there was a distinctively class-based taste in film programmes'.[125] With this point in mind, examples of heroic stereotypes form the basis of the next section.

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[123] James Caterer, The People's Pictures: National Lottery Funding and British Cinema, Preface.
[124] Paul Mackenzie, *British War Films 1939-1945: The Services and cinema*, (London, Hamilton, 2006), 2.
[125] John Sedgwick, 'Film hits and misses in mid-1930s Britain', *Historical Journal of Film. Radio and Television.* 1995, 333-51.

Case Study: *Target For Tonight* (1941)

This chapter has demonstrated some of the confusion and turmoil that characterised the early days of the MOI. The film, *Target For Tonight*, is a landmark film for British Cinema during World War II, essentially the story of a bombing raid on Germany, incorporating a great deal of logistical detail. A landmark film in that each role was played by the person doing that job in real life. This was quite a departure from pre-war depiction of heroes in films. The semi-documentary style would be copied by later films. It was also very popular with the public and in some ways captured the national mood. At this time, when every week seemed to bring more bad news of the war, for the first time, the RAF was shown fighting back. The director, Harry Watt, came from a working-class background, unusual at that time. He once stated 'I believe I'm the only one who went into the film business because I wanted to eat. All I wanted was a square meal.'[126] One view is that his background gave the film its style of semi-documentary, with the minor working-class characters not as stereotyped as in other films of that era. Drazin agrees and he explains that 'he shared the common goal of documentarists in the 1930s - to depict the working class with realism'.[127] Drazin goes on to say that Watt was revolutionary in that, for the first time in British films, the working man was depicted with dignity and contributing to the war effort. Watt himself put forward the argument that 'by showing, for the first time, the achievement, the essential and overwhelming contribution of the ordinary man to society, we could give them the pride to act on their own behalf'.[128] This is a major point to consider, as this film influenced many others in the later war years, which will be analysed in further chapters.

Here, and in further chapters, the aim is to analyse and to produce a detailed production history, rather than any critical or textual analysis. From this analysis the relationships and connections between government policy requirements can be revealed. The film's origins can be traced to the creation of the Royal Air Force Film Production Unit (RAFFPU) which produced propaganda films depicting RAF personnel and aircraft, both on the ground and in aerial action during 1941 to 1945. Personnel included Flight Lieutenant John Boulting, and later director Richard Attenborough. At conception, the unit, based at Pinewood studios, was to provide documentary films for the MOI. For the origins of the film, speculation suggests that

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[126] Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 30.
[127] Drazin, *The Finest Years*, 140.
[128] Basil Wright, *The Long View*, (London, Harper Collins, 1976), 109.

it was an original idea from Harry Watt. Certainly, his memoirs give that impression…'I had my best idea of the war. I went to the Ministry and asked why we couldn't make a hitting back film, and bombing was a good subject.'[129] However, documents from the National Archives contradict Watts' story. From the air ministry in early 1940 came a film subject request: - 'The Air Ministry has proposed that a film be made immediately on the Bomber Command of the RAF'.[130] There was a lot of initial discussion between the ministry and Watt concerning the script, which Watt completed in 1940. The treatment archive shown below details the use of photographic evidence for pre- and post-mission analysis, illustrating the RAF's insistence on accurate depictions.

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[129] Harry Watt, *Don't look at the Camera* (London: Elek, 1974), 145.
[130] INF 1/210. Films Division memo on *Target for Tonight* film.

15. FADE IN
Int. Photographic room. C.U. (Dark lighting - mysterious effect)
A photographic dish full of water. A hand comes in and joggles the dish.

16. Close shot. Through the water we see appearing the outlines of an aerial photograph (Carrick).

17. C.S. The aircraftsman intent over the dish.

18. M.S. 2nd Aircraftsman by an enlarger says: "How are they coming along?"

19. M.S. Without looking up from the dish, 1st Aircraftsman replies: "Not bad. Quite a decent neg."

20. M.S. 2nd Aircraftsman fiddles with the enlarger, says: "Yeah. Rush 'em along to the Squadron-Leader, when they're up."

21. Int. Main Photographic Room. TRACKING SHOT.

Camera starts on C.U. of huge photographic map of Ruhr, then pulls back to reveal the Squadron Leader standing by it making a note.
He starts to walk back towards his desk, CAMERA TRACKING with him. He stops by one of the men in the row of desks (most of whom are examining stills through magnifying glasses) and asks: "Any luck?"
The Examiner looks up with: "Oh yes, sir! There's a lovely hole in the power-house."
As the Squadron Leader passes on (CAMERA still TRACKING with him) he says, half to himself: "Good, that'll make 'em think!" CAMERA TRACKS him back to his desk.
As he sits down, he looks towards the door.

                                                    CUT TO

22. L.S. From the Squadron Leader's point of view.

The 1st Aircraftsman comes through the door, carrying some wet prints. He walks up to the Squadron Leader's desk (into S.C.S.) and handing him the prints says: "The prints from to-day's Reconnaissance, sir!"
CAMERA PANS with him to Two-Shot
The Squadron Leader takes the prints, saying: "Fine. How are they?" The Aircraftsman answers: "Very good negative, sir."

25. C.S. Squadron-Leader.
He has put the prints on the board in front of him and is now examining them through a magnifying glass. He looks up right of Camera.

26. M.S. Squadron-Leader and his Second.
He turns to his Second: "I may be wrong, but I think these are the goods." As the Second gets up to come to the Squadron Leader's desk, the Squadron Leader turns to the Aircraftsman (who has been waiting).
Squadron Leader: Ask the sergeant to enlarge some of these as big as he can, will you? And let's have 'em back right away."

4: Example of accurate RAF story depictions

The film's origins

In brief, this was a story of the RAF, one of the first films to show us 'fighting back', as had been suggested by Clark. 'F for Freddie', was used as the 'star' aircraft, piloted by then Squadron Leader 'Percy' Pickard, Britain's most famous fighter pilot. It formed part of RAF 149 Squadron from November 1940 to September 1941, but never saw actual combat operations. For one month in March/April 1940, 149 Squadron aircraft and crews were used as background for Freddie, around which the story was written. In documenting the making of the film, this study will focus will on the role of the Films Division.

Clark's 'why are we fighting' paper had been produced in 1939 and had been widely circulated among the service chiefs. It is possible that the original concept originated from the RAF, and then being passed on to the Films Division by means of an Air Ministry request to Beddington in 1940 as already described. The RAF suggested that all members of the flight and ground crew should appear within the narrative of the film. This is one of the first examples where film heroes would be depicted as coming from a cross-section of society, flight officers tending to be upper class, and ground crew from the lower and middle classes.

There were initial Air Ministry talks with Harry Watt over the proposed subject matter. The Films Division suggested using the GPO film unit. This unit was at the time the only film production house aligned to the MOI, so was an obvious choice. An initial working title was agreed, *Bomber Command.* The figure below shows the original agreement to proceed with the film. Notice that a lot of information has not been determined at that stage, especially budgeting and other costs. I have included it as it does show the details recorded for each film project, but the archives are not clear on which fields should be completed.

Registry No: of Papers. ..../....6/....

Type of Film: Art

FINAL TITLE:

Working Title: Bomber Command

Purpose: Information + Morale

Intended Distribution:

Subject suggested by: Harry Watt
External body consulted: Air Ministry

Honorary Adviser's Opinion:
Accepted by Dir.F.D.
Accepted Planning Ctee:
Authorised by Finance Div:

Synopsis of film:

Reason if film abandoned at Script stage:
Reason if film abandoned during prod:
Reason if film shelved after completion:

Ministry Prod: No:

Length:
Playing Time:
Reg: No:
Cons.Cert:
Perm C completed:

Script ordered:
Script approved:
Script cost:

Prod.Coy:
Producer:
Director:
Sound system:

Date of commission:
Contract Accepted:
Date of completion:
Shown F. Div:
Shown User Divisions:
Nega stored at:
Cutouts stored at: £.s.d.   £.s.d.

Authorised cost:
Authorised excess:
First Payment:
Second payment:
Final payment:
Total cost:

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5 min scheme release date:
    Total theatres:
    as at date: No: copies

Cost copies:
Other charges:
Total cost:

Non-Theatrical Dist: Home
  Printer
As at date   No: of Prints   As at date   Cost of prints

Total cost Prints:

Theatrical Dist.
Dist. Coy. for U.K.

Theatrical & non-theatrical Dist. abroad.

Date of Allocation

As at date	No. of Theatres	As at date	Gross Rev:	As at date	Countries	Agent	As at date	No: Cops	As at date	Cost of Copies
			Tot: Rev.					Total cost Prints: Other charges: Total Cost:			

5: Film planning document for Bomber Command

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Films Division involvement

Watt contributed much to the story line. He was more interested in the objective of the raid, whereas the RAF wanted a depiction of the everyday work of the RAF. This led to a series of disagreements during the making of the film between Watt and the RAF, specifically Wing-Commander Lawrence. Eventually a treatment/script was sent to Betjeman to give the script a thorough check, a process that exploited Betjeman's considerable experience in reviewing films for newspapers. It is also further evidence of the Films Division's involvement in all aspects of the films production, which had not occurred before. Furthermore, details of the project were then sent to Planning Committee of the MOI, whose role was to work out what was needed to complete the film. This was not any easy task, as requesting resources from an already overstretched RAF was a tall order. Meanwhile the Finance Committee became involved once the Planning Committee had reached an agreement that the project could proceed; what would today be described as 'green lighting' the film.

Remember the Americans

An important archive letter from Films Division script expert, Roger Burford, suggested to the Crown Film Unit that they include some US content. This must have been instigated at a senior level, as documents show there were already moves afoot to get American involved. The suggestion was accepted. Further appeal to the American market was with the over-dubbing of English accents with American accents for its US release. As a chief film advisor to the War Cabinet, Bernstein retained authority over the MOI, despite not being part of it. The latest script was sent therefore to Bernstein for checking. This seemed to have worked in practice, probably because of his 'people' skills, which will be explored in further chapters.

At this point Bernstein was happy and passed the script to ATP (Associated Film Distributors) to consider whether it presented them with issues. They responded that it was acceptable to proceed. Shortly afterwards, the Air Ministry complained to Bernstein about some elements and wanted a 'stop' applied to the film. This was a common occurrence, as the services were very concerned at the release of any details that might help the enemy, and so meetings attempted to address any RAF concerns. In April 1941, at last, the film script was agreed by all parties and given the go ahead. The budget was also agreed, as the Air Ministry wanted an early (July) release. At this point the film censors became involved, requiring small changes.

The main concern here was the scene showing a fire within an aircraft nearly causing deaths. There was a limit to how much realism the censors wanted the public to see.

Ultimately the Air Ministry was happy with the result, and they were not the only ones. The film proved to be very popular at home and in America. Even the newspaper critics were impressed. For example, the *Daily Express* carried a front-page review 'The War's Greatest Flying Film'. Within the *Documentary Newsletter*, it was reviewed by a serving RAF officer who stated that the film 'illustrated routine work, but in an interesting way' and that 'it was magnificent propaganda for the British cause'.[131] More evidence of the popularity of this film were sales of 1.25 million copies of the published film pamphlet. Later, in 1943, after America had entered the War, *Target For Tonight* was included in a list of recommended films with the description 'no finer film on bomber command has come out of the war'.[132] A pamphlet with this information was on sale to the public in the USA and might have helped to boost box office sales there. In many ways the film followed the pre-war model in that the officers were portrayed as the main providers of morale and discipline. There was no questioning of plans or orders, as the men followed their tasks without question and deaths were accepted at face value and did not disrupt their work. At this early stage of the war, these narrative simplifications would have been acceptable to cinema audiences as positive propaganda but in subsequent chapters I explore how these themes in films would be under pressure as the public became more knowledgeable on the effects of war.

Ideas proposed within Clark's 'Programme for Film Propaganda', were illustrated with this film. For example, showing the RAF in action fulfilled the 'How Britain fights' requirement of Clarks advice. My view is that it resonated with the public. In terms of popularity, the success of the film with the British public generated an extremely good return. Its investment of £6,000 was repaid as box-office receipts were around £250,000, with the MOI's share of the distributor receipts £73,000. As a sad side note, Harry Watt, later regretted that most of the allied aircrew who starred in the film, did not survive the war.[133]

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[131] *Documentary News Letter*, Vol 2, No 8, August 1941, 148.

[132] Mary Losey, *Films for the Community in Wartime*, (London: Nabu, 2010), 79.

[133] Mark Connelly. *Reaching for the Stars a New History of Bomber Command in World War II* (London: Tauris, 2002),59–62.

Conclusions

This chapter has laid the foundations for the thesis. It has introduced the research areas which further chapters will build on. When assessing this period of government involvement in film, one must consider the many pressures the MOI faced. As shown, there was little clarity in the creation of the MOI; with so many groups feeding in ideas and trying to gain influence, this is not surprising. I would contend that one of the MOI's main issues was confusion as to its aims and processes. At this time, it was lacking a minister at Cabinet level, which would partially explain the lack of clear political direction. In common with many government departments, the MOI experienced disagreements over ownership of tasks. There was no consensus on how to promote morale. The armed services advocated for a significant say in the content of films, but at this time in the war there was no decision-making paths that provided for this. Michel Crosier is right to describe 'the vicious circle that characterise bureaucratic systems…results in a lack of communication among groups'.[134]

As for the Films Division, initial problems were in some part due to it being modelled on its WW1 equivalent, the Cinema Propaganda Department. During WW1 there should have been close co-operation between the film studios and government, but in practice arguments over censorship dominated proceedings. As Thorpe describes, a major problem was that 'the Films Division was designed to fight the previous war and to operate under the technical and structural conditions of communications prevailing in 1918, rather than 1939'.[135] It was also handicapped by its original head, Sir Joseph Ball showing no interest in the Division. In Drazin's view, Ball was 'hopeless at running the Films Division'.[136] It's fair to say that, with the exception of Korda, Ball failed to bring the commercial producers on side, even though the MOI files demonstrate that he was keen to work with newsreels and the documentarists, despite anecdotal accounts to the contrary. Turning to the hierarchy Ball had created, it conforms to a command-and-control leadership structure, shown diagrammatically in the following figure[137]:

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[134] Michel Crosier, *Bureaucratic phenomenon*. 194.
[135] Frances Thorpe, *Official Films of WW2*.
[136] Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years,* 177.
[137] Stanley McChrystal. *Team of Teams,* 16.

In the figure each node is self-contained and there is little communication other than upwards. McChrystal's view is that this type of organisational structure itself leads to dereliction of duties. His viewpoint is practically important, as he had considerable experience both as an Army General and a business expert. The hierarchy plainly did not work, with the inept Ball at the helm, and the Films Division did not therefore make headway. McChrystal also makes the point that in this type of structure, better leaders, with good team leading skills and decisive decision making, can make an immediate difference, if they take control at an early stage. In this case when Clark took over, he was well-matched to this leadership style and fulfilled this role with aplomb; the Films Division thrived under his leadership. Later changes in the team structure helped the division to adapt in fast paced, unpredictable situations, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Command of Teams

Small teams operate independently but still within a more rigid superstructure
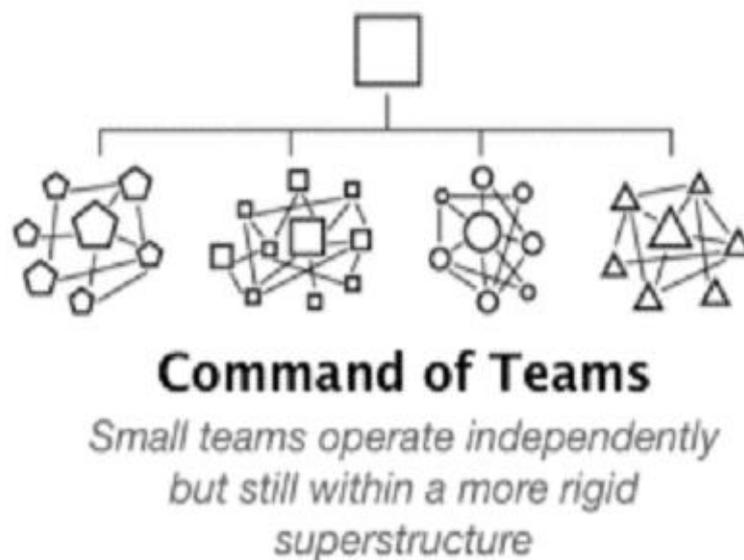
6. Example of team structures

Confusion over where the Films Division fits

Initially, the MOI suffered from one of the worst imaginable fates for a government department, that of being ignored by other departments. For example, on 14 Sept 1939, an Emergency Regulation, issued by the War Office with no consultation with MOI, practically

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banned any photographs or films on the subject of war[138]. This rule was soon cancelled, but it demonstrates the low esteem in which the MOI was held. Externally, early attempts to reach out to the commercial film studios led to exasperation. Michael Balcon (Head of Ealing film studios) wrote in June 1940 'Many of us have done our best to harness ourselves to the Films Division of the MOI with, alas, very little encouragement. We all hoped that the MOI would have codified its relations as between itself and the industry to guide at least on policy, but this has not been done'.[139] This establishes that lack of direction, and the resultant confusion, within the Films Division was the key reason for the absence of communication with the industry. The next chapter will suggest that relationships between the film studios and the MOI improved subsequently.

Turning to the case study, despite the chaos at the MOI, *Target For Tonight*, was produced and successfully released. It incorporated (by accident or design) many of the ideas for film content outlined in this chapter's introduction. Sherman's ideas of stoicism became a central part of the film; in several scenes' comrades have died, but the central message is to carry on regardless. There remained class and moral barriers. Some in government held the view that the mental state of some of the Officer class lacked 'moral fibre'. RAF Chief Medical Officer Dr Reid stated that some men 'by virtue of their genes and upbringing' were unfit to be officers, who needed to be of stronger character then lower ranks.[140] None of this contemporary opinion was shown in *Target For Tonight*. Concern about the effectiveness of RAF personnel, particularly pilots, had been a much-discussed issue for the Air Ministry. In practice, any airman who showed signs of stress, would be labelled as LMF, Lack of Moral Fibre, which was generally held to be equivalent to being branded a coward. The eradication of such views would require a lot more effort. In fact, the film had a strong basis in realism, defined as following the actual operational processes of the RAF, driven by the desire from many for a documentary feel to the film. There were no big-name 'stars' in the film, although British audiences would have nevertheless recognised character actors from pre-war films.

Grandy states 'Wartime films increasingly promoted survival and perseverance as key heroic characteristics of the modern British citizen'.[141] From our 21st century viewpoint, it is hard to understand why the film was so popular. The officers with their upper-class accents seem

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[138] INF 1/180. Discussions on Censorship of media
[139] BT 64 and 60. Policy for the Film Industry.
[140] AIR 2/8591 Air crew Records
[141] Christine Grandy, *Heroes and happy Endings*, 217.

incongruous, and the cool acceptance of death is a common theme that runs through the film. However, at the time the public experience of the war would mean that acceptance of death was a daily reality. Most people had family or friends who had lost their lives and, as seen, the Officer class was respected and valued.

In my estimation, the many different ideas and groups - official or otherwise – who fed into the creation process of the MOI, at worst hampered its effectiveness, and at best slowed decision-making. There were also groups like the documentarists who were pushing their own agenda. On 25 Sept 1938: General Plan of Operations stated 'We should provide Propaganda feature films that audiences of the 30s were accustomed'.[142] As demonstrated, this guidance did not work out as hoped. Internal wars between the documentary and feature film makers meant that films would deviate from the 1930s themes and concepts. Being ignored by the MOI in those early days was not uncommon for filmmakers. Ian Dalrymple, (film director and producer), submitted a list of ideas for film content to the Films Division and received no reply. George Elvin, General Secretary of the Association of Cine-technicians, similarly sent a list of ideas on the content of films, but again received no replay. His view on the MOI was that it 'was obstructed by a Maginot Line of Whitehall bureaucracy'. Since the Maginot Line was an allegedly impregnable defence system between France and Germany, this was quite a statement. Concentration of power within government circles, ignoring outside influences, was a feature of the First World War. Those who say that Britain is 'always fighting the previous war' may have been correct in this case, at least as far as film propaganda was concerned.

As for internal processes of government, there would be some incremental improvements in the term, as discussed in the next chapter. Clark's contribution was to establish a strong rapport between the Films Division and film studio producers, in which proposals for film projects were exchanged. The crucial outcome of Clark's brief leadership of the Films Division was that the division not only considered financial support for feature film projects, but actually provided it. Clark's initial attempts at reorganising the management processes would be taken forward with new people in charge, as outlined in the next chapter. In some ways, Clark's management skills were visionary, especially in keeping all parties on board with common aims. His period of command at the Films Division demonstrated how much difference the right person at the right time can make to any organisation. I suggest that his time at the

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[142] INF 1/194: Films Division correspondence

National Gallery helped him constructing a proper team structure at the Films Division with clearer lines of communication between team.

The next chapter will continue the story of the MOI and analyse its confused state and whether it improved. Pressure would increase to bring America into the war, which meant that ways to include pro-American propaganda in film would be explored. Developing the theme of American-related propaganda became ever more important but was matched by an increased concern for public morale within the War Cabinet.

CHAPTER 2: 1940 Guidance on propaganda

Isolation, Resistance and Stoicism

Timeline of main events on this phase of the war[143]

- May: Chamberlain resigns, and Winston Churchill takes over as Prime Minister.
- May: Holland surrenders.
- May: Dunkirk evacuation.
- June: France surrenders.
- June: Italy declares war on France and Britain.
- Home guard created in Britain (by October over 1.5 million men)
- Blitz continued into 1941
- Battle of Britain: German attacks on ports, shipping and airfields. Daylight attacks on London. The RAF was under tremendous pressure to stop the attacks.
- American assistance continued, for example, Destroyers given to Britain.

Introduction

This chapter investigates the actions of the Films Division and its working relationship with other government/non-government groups during the period from late 1939 to 1941. It will piece together the many differing and conflicting opinions on film propaganda as the war developed; investigating the workings of the Films Division after Jack Beddington took over from Sir Kenneth Clark, and then include a case study examining the making of the film *Eagle Squadron* (1942). It builds on the history of the MOI covered in chapter 1, exploring how improvements in the government propaganda plans were achieved. What should be borne in mind is that all the actions described here must be seen in the context of events, such as Dunkirk, the threat of invasion and the Blitz. For each of these major events, in its propaganda operations and processes, the MOI had to make hard choices. Chapman agrees, stating 'The MOI had to adapt quickly from the tedium of a phony war to a national emergency which threatened Britain's very survival'.[144] Such events motivated some filmmakers; for example, the film *Unpublished Story* (1942), was 'inspired by Dunkirk, and was intent of creating a record of British courage and pride'.[145]

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[143] R67/44. BBC Archives: MOI paper on War events.
[144] Chapman, *The British at War*, 31
[145] *Today's Cinema*, 27 March 1942, 23.

As for the public, all cinemas were closed, by government order in 1939 prompted by fears of city bombing. Most cinemas were in city centres, the predicted targets of the Nazi bombing campaign — holding thousands of people in confined spaces and risking wide-scale death. This terrible vision had been displayed in the film *Things To Come* (1936), depicted a future war which would begin with the destruction of cities by aerial bombing. In practice though, the bombers did not come during the first year of war, and when the Blitz did start in 1940, the damage seemed so random that cinemas were not seen as dangerous places. In 1940, cinema admissions figures actually rose, to just over one billion for the year.[146] 'Cinema-going was the country's prime leisure time activity, and it proved to be an indispensable means of instructing and entertaining the nation',[147] said the influential *Picturegoer* magazine. These attendance statistics would have provided the MOI with a ready audience for propaganda messages. Henceforward, the MOI would use market research tools, such as the Mass Observation Unit, to measure public reactions to film content. Further working details of this Unit are examined in later chapters.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

Within the MOI, determined efforts centred on means of boosting morale. In 1940, a discussion paper was produced by the Policy Committee of the MOI, in which it suggested 'construction of film narratives that demonstrate common people working on the war effort'.[148] It went on to say that such films would aid wartime recruitment and should be encouraged. An example was the work of the Air Raid Patrol (ARP), depicted in hundreds of short films. More interestingly, the paper also stated the aim of convincing the population that some sacrifice was needed. The concept of sacrifice would be incorporated into many film narratives and to the characterisation and story arcs of several heroes. *Movie Magazine* admired these types of films 'Dedication to duty and self-sacrifice characterised the films of the fighting services'.[149] Examples included *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *The Way Ahead* (1944), where Naval ratings of all classes give their lives in loyalty to their ship or group.

Effectiveness of positive messages within films

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[146] UK Cinema Association Website: https://www.cinemauk.org.uk/the-industry/facts-and-figures/uk-cinema-admissions-and-box-office/annual-admissions/
[147] Mark Glancy, 'Picturegoer: The Fan Magazine and Popular Film Culture in Britain During the Second World War'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol. 31, No. 4, December 2011, 453–478
[148] INF 1/849 Policy Committee within MOI, June 1940
[149] *Movie Magazine*. April 1945. Chapter 27.

I suggest that the precarious state of the war had galvanised the MOI to be open to and to encourage more advice on propaganda as this period saw an increase of government papers from different sources on this very subject. Another illustration of official guidance on film was a memo from the Policy Committee to the Films Division in winter 1939, stating that films should illustrate 'what we are fighting for'. Some of the wartime public services that had to continue, like firefighting and civil defence, should be shown in film, in one way or another. The aim was to highlight and revere the people's work in '*carrying on*' despite the war, including recognition of women's vital contribution. This did eventually occur, with films like *The Gentle Sex* (1943), which depicted women working in diverse sectors, such as driving lorries and targeting enemy aircraft, all to help the war effort. The whole area of the portrayal of women in films will be explored in later chapters.

Due in part to the public's pessimism on the war, the MOI set up a Home Moral Emergency Committee, whose aim was 'maintaining and strengthening the morale of the civil population and to consider means by which public morale in all *classes* can be stimulated to greater confidence and energy'.[150] The committee based its recommendations on the fear that 'the disintegration of public morale' would result from 'fear, confusion, suspicion, class-feeling and defeatism'. One can see the real concern, as France had just fallen to the German invasion. The threat of Britain being next was a widespread belief among the public. The report goes on to say:

> That something must be done to diminish the present predominance of the cultured voice…every effort must be made to bring working class people…to counteract the propaganda of our enemies regarding imperialism and capitalism.[151]

These were the early days of the war, but the MOI was starting to consider the role of propaganda and the nature of characters within film. It was beginning to realise that integrating the common person into feature films would be a powerful weapon in the propaganda war. These guidelines and ideas did eventually make it into feature films, but it took several years to become common practice. A letter from Sidney Bernstein (Special advisor to the Films Division and friend of Churchill) to Beddington (Head of the Films Division) dated July 1940 suggested a policy that the Films Division should follow:

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[150] INF 1/849. Paper for Policy Committee, 19/6/1940.
[151] Paper for Policy Committee April 1940

> Films should play an essential part in wartime by instructing, exhorting and relaxing the population. Encourage the production of British feature films which illustrate the heroic, determined and humorous sides of the British character.152

This guidance reflected Oxford don Professor Frederic Bartlett's ideas on propaganda discussed in chapter 1 and would influence film content from now on. Ideas of propaganda would impact the MOI short films as well. In terms of instructing, the Films Division took on the task of promoting many short films giving guidance to the general population, from growing potatoes to building a garden shelter. Some of these 'shorts' encouraged people to do something for the war effort, either in the Home Guard or by joining one of the auxiliary groups. Chapter 1 outlined the efforts of Clark to get permission to force cinemas to include 'shorts' in their programmes. This meant that a large proportion of the public was able to see these films. MOI's shorts have been the source of many academic studies already, but for this project, they are offered as another example of the MOI's work. As for reassuring the population, encouragement came in the form of MOI posters, which were quite modern in their sharp but humorous messages:
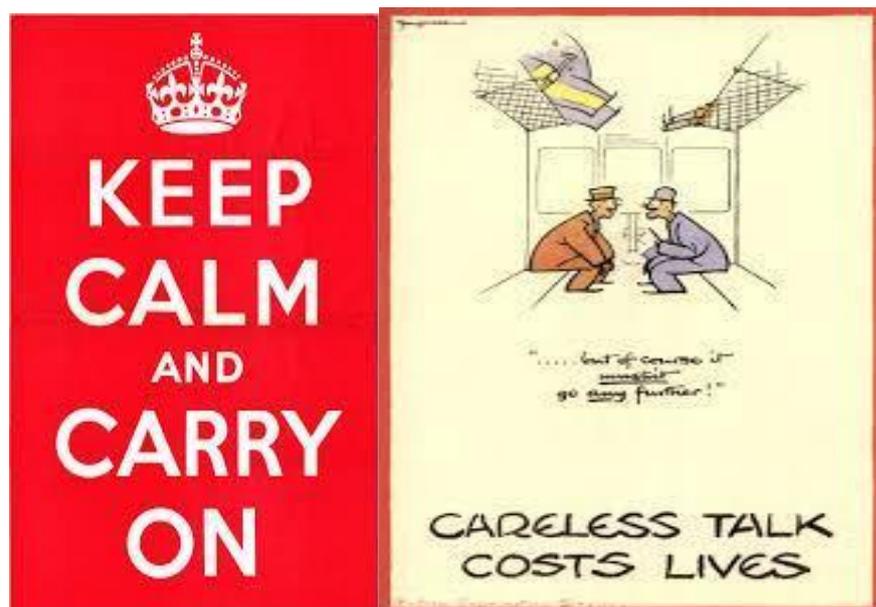
7: Example of MOI warning poster

Dr Katherine Howells has already published extensive academic research on war posters,[153] but it is worth mentioning here because the design constructs also fed into feature film posters,

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[152] Ibid

[153] Katherine Howells. '*Exploring iconic images created by the Ministry of Information and their relation to Cultural memory in Britain*'. PhD

with their dramatic styles and designs, two examples in the next figure. Note the bold colours and strong sense of movement.

8: Examples of film posters

More advice on film propaganda

From other sources came more advice on propaganda as, at this early stage of the war, the BBC and the MOI were in dialogue. In fact, at this period of the war, responsibility for the BBC

transferred from the Postmaster General's office to the MOI. A degree of independence for the BBC was established by way of the Board of Governors, which acted as a buffer zone between the two organisations. Even so, there are many examples in the archives of the MOI of a close relationship, with ideas shared. An example of this is in a memo written from the MOI director to the controller of the BBC on film ideas. In the memo, the MOI suggests using images and story lines from Britain's historic (and heroic) past.[154] Couched as a suggestion, it is not an order, but rather there is gentle encouragement to consider aspects of propaganda that could be used to Britain's advantage. When Churchill (within a week of moving into number 10), was demanding that Duff Cooper, head of the MOI, come up with ideas for 'establishing effective control over the BBC',[155] this was recognition of the organisation's significance to the war effort. Unfortunately, their working relationship deteriorated, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

One film studio that followed Bernstein's policy, described earlier in this chapter, was Ealing, where there is some evidence of the creative processes involved. Initially, there was constructive communication between the Films Division and the highly regarded head of Ealing film studios, Michael Balcon. In parallel, regular meetings with the Films Division heads and other studio executives were starting to take place. Furthermore, it is instructive to examine how and when their two operations worked together. In the climax to many 1930s British films, middle- or upper-class heroics were commonly required to rescue the nation. In films, such as *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) *The Four Feathers* (1939), and *Q Planes* (1939) heroes share common traits, always being resolute and unemotional in the face of adversity, promoting the values of stoicism and self-discipline above all others. Christine Grandy explains 'the films that were most popular in the interwar period featured a hero who had been returned to the centre of the nation…these were heroes who had been fighting against not just the odds but also the society surrounding them'.[156] In other words, the heroes depicted formed part of a common trope pre-war and would henceforth be adapted. Michael Balcon was made head of Ealing Studios in 1938. He had a view that war was unavoidable, as Murphy argues that in 1938, Balcon had attempted to alert the government to the importance of feature film production but had been ignored.[157] Balcon's memorandum outlined films directed to the national effort: fighting Fascism. 'What was needed was medium budget indigenous British

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[154] INF 196/1 Films division
[155] Edward Stourton, *Aunties War*, 97.
[156] Christine Grandy, *Heroes and happy endings*, 77.
[157] Robert Murphy. *British Cinema and WW2*, 56.

movies'.[158] In 1938 the government discounted the view that feature films could assist in the war effort, and Balcon's advice was ignored. During the pre-war period, Ealing Studios were famous for a wide repertoire of genres, ranging from the historical epic through to the working-class musical. Stars such as Gracie Fields, George Formby, and Margaret Lockwood, and directors like Carol Reed, began their careers at Ealing. The studio always made use of highly skilled technicians. Films were mainly aimed at a home audience, with around forty[159] feature length films made in the period of the Second World War. All reflect aspects of British life and culture which would appeal to home audience. Stephanie Muir agrees:[160]

> Many of the films made at Ealing […] appear as examples in studies of British national cinema. It has become a brand name representing a certain kind of practice, producing a particular kind of film…Ealing films can be considered as reflecting some common characteristics, which can be identified as 'national', conjuring up images of Britain and Britishness for a home as well as an international audience.

It is worth considering that Balcon was not deterred by the MOI's response to his 1938 film suggestions, and just got on with producing films that followed his ideas on propaganda.

In the studio's early war films, like *Ships With Wings* (1941), clipped-voiced, stiff upper-lipped officer-types dominated. However, the films later began to reflect a more complex picture. They emphasised the contribution of 'ordinary' men and women and even expressed a widespread feeling that a complacent ruling class was failing to recognise the very real risk of losing the war. One reason for the change of film constructs was the arrival in 1940 Alberto Cavalcanti from the Crown Film Unit, with Harry Watt following in 1941. The two brought with them film techniques of the documentary movement and were to have a major influence on the Ealing style.

Murphy describes Ealing's later war films[161] as 'realist cinema', due in some part to Cavalcanti's arrival at Ealing. Balcon had been influenced by Soviet propaganda films, which 'he found superior to anything Britain had produced'.[162] This is not to say that Balcon was planning to incorporate radical avant-garde techniques such as Soviet montage into his output, but rather that Ealing's film output was clearly influenced by the visual style of documentary

[158] Ibid, 13

[159] Frances Thorpe, Nicholas Pronay and Clive Coultass. *British Official Films in the Second World War, a descriptive catalogue* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1980)

[160] Stephanie Muir, *Studying Ealing Studios* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2010), 7.

[161] Ibid, 130.

[162] Chapman. *British at War*, 38.

within fiction filmmaking. In essence, these ideas were probably closer to John Grierson's notion of what a documentary should be, a combination of actuality and dramatized footage. Grierson kept up a running commentary on the work of the Films Division, mostly via the *Documentary News Letter* (DNL), which he had helped create. In countless articles and lectures, he provided the public justification for the documentary film movement. His definition of documentary film was 'the creative treatment of actuality'.[163] His manifesto, laid down in the 'First Principles of Documentary', formed the credo of the documentary film school he founded. In time, his suggestions on 'living' would become commonplace within the confines of the MOI's short films, explored in later chapters:

> We believe that the cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself, can be exploited in a new and vital art form. Documentary would photograph the living scene and the living story.164

Balcon's relationship with the MOI

Balcon's proactive nature was one reason for the initial stormy relationship with the Films Division. Part of this bad feeling was due to Balcon wanting to take control of the Crown Film Unit (known before the war as the GPO Film Unit). This unit, responsible for short instruction films was taken under the wing of the Films Division in 1940. Balcon was not happy about this decision, which led to a standoff between Ealing and the MOI. Indeed, after this decision Balcon told the Films Division that henceforth 'Ealing would accept no more commissions for MOI shorts.[165] Even the 1940 winter edition of *Sight and Sound* reported the rift with some pleasure, following the BFI's own conflict with the Films Division, covered in more detail in the next chapter. Balcon used the trade press to complain; in a full-page article in the 1941 spring edition of *Kinematograph News*, he wrote about his vision for feature films. This concluded with several paragraphs stating that the Films Division was wasting public money, had no real connection with the film studios, and had no real plans for propaganda in films. In another missive to the MOI, he complained 'that the Films Division have no plan for feature film production'.[166] The Films Division gave a dismissive response; Chapman argues in defence of Beddington[167] that Ealing asked for help in resources, but with the briefest of synopses to work with. He cites as an example the feature film *Ships With Wings* (1941), which

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[163] Hardy Forsyth, *Grierson on Documentary*, 11.
[164] Hardy Forsyth, Hardy. *Grierson on Documentary,* 62.
[165] Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 132.
[166] Chapman, *British at War* 76.
[167] Ibid, 96.

used valuable resources, but was not liked by film critics, whose main complaint was inferior special effects. However, Chapman's main point is that the narrative concerned the upper-class officers and was therefore outdated, although the film contains several scenes of 'heroic sacrifice', discussed previously.

Developments of the hero figure in films

Some hero figures were already being introduced in film, an example which can be found in the films of George Formby. Jeffrey Richards describes Formby's appeal in the 1940s as having to do with his 'optimism, cheerfulness and indomitability…and always winning against the odds'.[168] One can understand how this presentation of character went down well with audiences, as they could identify to some degree with the man on screen. As a representation of a northern working-class identity, and with people working in armament factories, he became a popular hero figure in films. In many ways, he was the forerunner of other working-class comic actors who later carried film narratives. Looking at Ealing Studios, in the period 1940-42, in films such as *Went The Day Well?* (1942) and The *Next Of Kin* (1942), films` where the hero figure started to be represented as a working man',[169] as Roger Manvell describes. I suggest that this is a key change in terms of narrative structures in feature films.

This chapter's case study, *Eagle Squadron*, takes the audience through the processes of bombing missions over Germany. It is good at emphasising both the necessary heroism required to do so and the large amount of bureaucratic work, which made it possible. Since the MOI was still findings its way, this was not surprising. A lack of MOI organisational planning and confusing responsibilities added to the mix. I suggest that these contortions could have reflected back into the script as a nearly as much screen time is devoted to officers discussing strategy as to the working-class ground crews. In many scenes, officers are socialising with lower ranks, but always with an air of superiority. Later films, such as *The Foreman Went To France* (1942) and *The Goose Steps Out* (1942), starred working-class comedians as heroes. Both were very popular films with the public and critics,[170] showing that there was a clear market for this type of film. One view is that Balcon was quick to spot and exploit this, with Ealing's subsequent films following similar narrative arrangements. At heart he was a canny businessperson, who can perhaps be compared with Hollywood moguls, such as Samuel

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[168] Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (London: Tauris, 2007),„ 259.
[169] Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War*, 102.
[170] Paul Mackenzie, *British War Films 1939-1945*, 97.

Goldwyn. In later years, discussed in the next chapter, Balcon was an active member of the MOI's Ideas Committee, giving him a platform to air his ideas and to counter conflicting views.

The MOI and the DNL

In addition to being pressurised by the services during its entire existence, the Films Division faced constant criticism from the DNL. This journal's aim was to support and promote documentary films, and it was not very keen on the policies for feature films. From the June 1940 edition, it stated the Films Division demonstrated 'the smugness of established civil servants who, by some psychological aberration, have refused to adjust themselves to the rapid tempo and urgencies of total war' and goes on 'they are overgrown, self-tormenting schoolboys, who may be middle-aged, but are really at heart so many Dead-End Kids'.[171] In the journal's next edition, July 1940, an editorial warned 'the muddle-headedness and bureaucratic stupidity' of the Films Division. 'In ten months, this Division has achieved a mere minimum ... Its lack of imagination, no less than its abysmal failure to be even competent at its job, have been the despair of all persons in the film trade'. In my view, this is quite extraordinary language to use in editorials. Part of the reason for the animosity can be traced back to the start of the war, when the first Films Division head, Sir Joseph Ball, decided that the documentary makers were not to be the focus of the government's wartime film policy. The DNL had a limited distribution, and its influence is difficult to estimate, but there is anecdotal evidence that the government took notice of its content. Basil Wright later stated, 'I was always going into government departments, and often as not you'd see a copy of the magazine on somebody's desk marked urgent, immediate attention'.[172]

There was a political aspect. As Murphy puts it, 'most of the documentary film makers were left-wing and had been ferociously critical of Chamberlain's policies, so it was not surprising that the Chamberlain-ite MOI did not rush to secure their services'.[173] I would argue that here was an element of snobbery against commercial work in its views. Under Sir Joseph Ball's command, the Films Division came under increased attack from what Frances Thorpe describes as the *literati*[174]. He goes on to say that the literati detested commercial cinema and loathed the vulgar 'Wardour Street Types' (Wardour Street in Soho being the location of the majority of film studio headquarters). DNL's journalists were a formidable opposition and dominated film

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[171] A film originated term used to describe group of young males with no jobs. Characters were famous in several Hollywood films such as *Dead End* (1938) and *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938)

[172] Paul Rotha , *BFI Dossier Number 16*: ed Paul Marris (London: BFI, 1982), 61.

[173] Robert Murphy. *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-1949.* 58.

[174] Frances Thorpe, Nicholas Pronay and Clive Coultass. *British Official Films in the Second World War, a descriptive catalogue* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1980)

reviews in the quality press. All this criticism did not make the task of the Films Division any easier. Even with the top levels of the MOI encouraging the production of films which emphasised 'British life and character',[175] surely there would be a place for documentaries? But there was even scepticism that this could be delivered through feature films. Here is one example from official files: 'of the three main kinds of film, the feature film…is the most difficult to deploy as an instrument of propaganda'.[176] Part of this confusion was due to Sir Joseph Ball (original head of the Films Division). He believed that the box office was the main driver of what should be shown at cinemas, and, in most cases, this was 'escapist' feature films. He had no interest whatsoever in documentaries, which infuriated the literati. To some extent, Clark's short tenure as head had tried to establish a middle road, but showed that a new approach under a new leader was required, and this is where Jack Beddington came in.

Beddington arrives at the Films Division

At first, Beddington had a good reception from the literati. On the announcement of Beddington taking over the Films Division, an editorial in the DNL stated 'He will bring to his new post both taste and a sense of need – two qualities only too rarely associated with commercial ability'. Unfortunately, the honeymoon period was brief, and the journal soon returned to constant criticism of the Films Division's work. In the October 1940 edition, the journal reported with glee the Parliamentary Select Committee Report on government Expenditure, which was highly critical of the Films Division. The DNL made sure it highlighted all the main points. However, as Murphy argues 'It is a measure of the growing assurance of the Films Division that it managed to subvert the rulings and continue its work without major changes'.[177] On feature films, the journal could be vindictive. *Ships With Wings* (1941) was described thus in December 1941, 'the film would be more appropriate to a Ruritanian campaign, than to the Second World War'. To nobody's surprise, Balcon was not happy with that review, Aldgate states 'Balcon viewed the comments as unfair and was upset enough to commission Tom Harrison of Mass-Observation to report on the film'.[178] Four detailed reports were made, all favourable. So, to some degree, Balcon felt absolved. With a constant stream of attacks, the Films Division was being torn in two directions. On the one hand, the film studios were quite happy to ensure feature films were made, but on the other, came demands for more

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[175] INF 1/867 'Program for Film Propaganda' paper 1 1940
[176] INF 1/59 Report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure: Films and Filming, August 1940. 4
[177] Ibid, 62.
[178] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards. *Britain can take it*, 322.

documentaries. Watson summarises one problem 'The Ministry of Information's Films Division should aim to reach the majority, rather than the knowledgeable few, but it was the minority of intellectuals who controlled the critical idiom of the film, like the writers in the DNL.[179] Some of the DNL criticism contained elements of advice that relate directly to the concept of what makes a good character or hero figure in British films. Referring to the MOI, a 1940 winter edition states: -

> Through all their productions there has been a consistent disregard of both the people they are supposed to be about and the people they are for. The films seem to have been made by an isolated few who, superior and secure in their tall white Bloomsbury castle,[180] forget that they are using our money to insult us. We do not want to see the war through Charlies[181] and floozies.[182] This time we want the real McCoy, the war is too close and too personal for it to be translated in the present terms of the MOI. We want more of *Squadron 992*, *Men of the lightships*

Changes at the top

At the top level of the MOI in 1940, moves were implemented to improve its structure and practice. Together, John Reith (MOI head) and Walter Monckton (deputy head MOI), tried to eliminate the political, organisational and structural mistakes and weaknesses of the ministry. In April 1940 the news and censorship departments were reintegrated into the Ministry and Monckton was appointed Deputy Director General. With Chamberlain's defeat and his resignation in May 1940, Reith's political protector was gone. There was no room for Reith in the coalition government under the new Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who said he could not work with or stand Reith. Chapman writes 'Churchill blamed Reith for keeping him off the air during the General Strike of 1926'.[183] So, Cooper was offered the vacant post of Minister of Information. Cooper took this opportunity to renew his efforts to restore the authority of the troubled ministry. The Cabinet was to decide whether the MOI would be entrusted with the task of conducting political warfare or whether it would be restricted to carry out the directives of other ministries. The War Cabinet instead adopted a paper attributing the 'creative function' to the MOI 'of providing a steady flow of facts and opinions calculated to further the policy of

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[179] Sheila Watson. *The Ministry of Information and the Home Front in Britain, 1939-1942*, PhD Thesis, 284.

[180] Currently London University's Senate building. As can be seen in a photo in Chapter 1, it was a very grand building which caused some jealousy and resentment from outsiders.

[181] Army man of lower rank

[182] A term for women who flaunted convention (drinking, smoking), and sometimes implied a sex worker

[183] Chapman, *The British at War*, 31.

the government in the prosecution of the war'. This was a vague instruction, which could be interpreted in many ways.

To add to the bureaucratic reorganisation at high levels, there were other important factors. The lack of skilled staff was acute, in respect of both the MOI's Planning Committee and the Films Division. This had restricted its work until around 1940, when Beddington became its head and began recruiting expert filmmakers, such as Thomas Baird, a pioneer of documentaries. Beddington was a lifelong friend of Kenneth Clark, then director of the National Gallery. Beddington enjoyed similar affinity with John Betjeman (who fondly referred to him as 'Beddioleman'), sponsoring the creation of Betjeman's popular county guides. When the poet was unemployed, he obtained a position in Shell's publicity department. This friendship was useful within their work at the Films Division, which followed Clark's successful teamwork with Betjeman, discussed in chapter 1.

This was the most demanding time to be the Films Division head, as Chapman[184] argues that the fall of France, evacuation from Dunkirk, and fear of invasion meant that official propaganda and information had to constantly take account of a changing situation. That was a tall order to contend with, without being criticised by the BFI and others. As Director for Publicity for Shell, Beddington was already familiar with the films and filmmakers of the Documentary Movement. In his new function, he had no fear of them, coming from the same social class, sharing the documentarist's origins and education, and he did not change his working style. Just as Beddington was familiar with the scale of such an organisation, he was also able to continue his 'patronage', begun in the 1930s, inspiring artists and filmmakers into his new role. Statements from employees confirmed the creative freedom he gave the filmmakers.

> He was a man interested in people and the specific things they wanted to do. If he was taken with an idea for a film, he would back it hard. He hated committees and general theories. He knew instinctively that it was no good any administrator saying, Let there be more X or Y' – instead you had to find and build up teams of film makers who felt themselves that X and Y were important and actively wanted to make films about them'.[185]

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[184] Ibid p 31

[185] Helen Forman. 'The Non-Theatrical Distribution of Films by the Ministry of Information', in *Politics, Propaganda and Film 1918-1945*, (eds) Nicholas Pronay, D.W. Spring, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 222.

This is a crucial example of one individual making a large impact within a complex government organisation and forming a vital link between policy and practice. In other developments, Beddington involved the documentarists in the work of the Films Division, whilst he succeeded in winning over the film industry as a partner, even if it was to be a long and difficult road. This alliance, strengthened by the creation of an Honorary Adviser role in the Films Division, to which Beddington was able to appoint Sidney Bernstein in June 1940.

Bernstein's important contribution

Forty-one-year-old Bernstein was a cinema entrepreneur, whose Granada group comprised more than 40 cinemas. He supported John Grierson's *World Film News*, a forerunner of the DNL. A millionaire and member of the Labour Party since 1919, Bernstein was equally accepted by the film industry and by the documentarists.[186] Bernstein's appointment as the second main man in the Films Division brought Beddington's work as head of the Films Division shared events. This aimed 'to secure the support of the entire film industry by balancing the different interest groups within it', as Chapman called it.[187] With Beddington's input, the number of employees in the Films Division grew from 20 under Joseph Ball to over 50 at the end of 1940.[188] Beddington brought some of his commercial experience into the Films Division. When the defeat of England's strongest ally France became inevitable and a German invasion of Britain seemed possible, the Policy Committee set up a Home Morale division in May 1940,[189] the function of which was:

> Maintaining and strengthening the morale of the civil population and to consider means by which
> public morale in all classes can be stimulated to greater confidence and energy.190

The committee reacted quickly, producing several reports, and by June the plan for a propaganda campaign was presented. The plan gave the film activities of the MOI a specific status for the first time, stating 'A campaign has been thought out, and is now being executed, to diminish fear and defeatism and to increase courage, anger, patriotism and pride'. Apart

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[186] Well, thank goodness for one common-sense appointment, because at least Sidney does know what it's all about, (...) it's the first appointment I have been able to chronicle with any real sense of pleasure, and I know the whole trade will endorse it', in: *Daily Film Renter*, June.1940

[187] Chapman, PhD, 80.

[188] INF 1/126. Films Division Organization.

[189] The committee included Macadam, Secretary of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Sir Kenneth Clark, former head of the Films Division, who had promoted Reith to Controller of Home Publicity, and Harold Nicolson, Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister.

[190] INF 1/849. Paper for Policy Committee, June 1940

from the wide-ranging scope of this advice, it did not define what the terms of propaganda were and was therefore a dramatized restraint with which Beddington had to work. In addition to attacks from trade journals, the mainstream newspapers embarked on a constant stream of articles complaining about the Films Division, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, Beddington got on with his work. One item of good news for him was on film resources, which in future would be tightly controlled. The manufacture of celluloid and acetate (for filmmaking) had just been classified as war materials by the War Cabinet. From Lord Bernstein's memo, this is a clear instruction: 'The Films Division now acts as a clearing house for all requests for film stock resources'.[191] This meant that their use was strictly controlled and could only be allocated with a supported sign-off from the Films Division. In practice, this meant that the Films Division controlled what could and would get made in film. Within the archives, there are many examples of Ealing Studios begging for clearance of more film stock, which were answered by the Films Division in the form of 'why, explain'.[192] This shows an example of the expanding power of Beddington's Films Division. Another way he used his powers is illustrated in a memo titled *Screen Times in UK cinemas*, he stated that 'all government Departments have agreed to put requests for screen time through the Films Division'.[193] He also adds that 'This is an entirely friendly request'. I would suggest that this example goes some way to explaining how Beddington was so successful in bringing everyone together, using a mixture of charm and official cohesion. Chapman agrees when he says 'he outlasted three ministers and that fact alone would seem to suggest that he was more successful than either of his predecessors'.[194] However, some commentators claim that he could have been even more successful, had his management style been more assertive. As seen, resources and time were short and there were times when he should have replaced charm with more authoritative demands to move things along. For example, in 1941, Lord Kemsley owner of the *Daily Sketch*, was very critical in an attack in his newspaper:

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[191] Lord Bernstein's archives, War Museum London 1941
[192] BT 64/60 : Board of Trade Correspondence 1940
[193] INF 1/196 July 1940. Films Division Correspondence
[194] Chapman, *The British at War*, 30.

> There is one department of the MOI that needs drastic reform. That is the Films Division…the deplorable fact remains that propaganda conveyed through our official films demand immediate and thorough overhauling and improving.195

This was not an isolated attack from the newspaper. One view is that the Lord Kemsley did not get on with Beddington and therefore used his paper to attack him and his actions. There were other examples of attacks from the DNL, but on balance, the view is that Beddington did a good job considering the number of players with their own agenda, ready to criticise. In addition to personnel changes to contend with, pressure on the Films Division in 1940 came from all sides, including the War Office (via the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and all the way up to Churchill. This began to affect the content of feature film including the hero character, explored in later chapters. But at this point in the war, each service had its own ideas on how its personnel should be portrayed on film and made their feelings known to the Films Division, via both official and unofficial routes. Some evidence for this was a concerted effort by the three services, via the MOI's service Divisions, to propose film subject areas. A paper suggested:

> to propose subjects which they wish to see treated filmically, and possess also the right to judge the suitability or otherwise from the point of view of the Empire or neutral country with which they deal, of any Ministry film.196

My view is that all these interested parties providing feedback could be considered as helpful to the Films Division, as it suggested other angles to consider when creating film narratives. It also provided confirmation that certain groups, in this case the services, wanted their staff portrayed as heroic figures, but within their own defined parameters. Our following case study will illustrate this and show examples of the service's views on driving film's narrative and how Beddington tried to deal with them.

Further ideas on propaganda

Setbacks in the war prompted many meetings to determine the best way forward for propaganda. One important paper from the Intelligence Division dated December 5th 1940:

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[195] *Daily Sketch*, 5 November 1941, 4.

[196] INF 1/196. First draft for minute to be signed by American, Empire and Foreign Division Directors, Director General and Minister, with copies to adviser of Foreign Publicity Deputy Secretary and Director of Films Division, 1940

states: 'Confirm that the MOI is entirely in charge of public morale, and no other department should undertake that function. Any means can be used to meet this, including drastic measures (undefined)'. My take on this is that it could mean taking over control of the media like the press, but that is speculation. It goes on to stress that 'the public must be shown examples of hope in the future'.[197] Several issues in this paper point to fundamental propaganda messages as 'affecting public morale in a bad way', such as 'Invasion means enslavement, night-time bombing, news about Britain's losses and defeats'. The report continues with suggestions that the 'Film Industry is ignoring these issues, as they are not part of a cinema narrative that is attractive to audiences'. Further, the paper goes on to advise 'that these very items should be included in feature films, if properly handled'. As with many of these archive papers, there is no record of the Films Division's response to these suggestions. Some films did not make it to completion, as there was understandable reluctance within the services to depict any narrative involving defeats, which provided a common justification to veto a film. As mentioned above, more criticism of the Films Division came from the DNL editorial from 1940 'Yet the people's army ignore the bombs and the spent shrapnel, which rains down consistently. Clerks, pedlars, merchants by day – they are heroes by night (and should be seen in film)'.[198] Further analysis in subsequent chapters will consider the idea that the film studios started to incorporate common people in their work, and the depiction of a 'National Character'.[199]

With all these conflicting inputs, Beddington's desire to get things done was evident when under pressure from the Treasury to cut costs. Aldgate states that 'he was instrumental in devising ways round Treasury strictures'.[200] By the end of the war, 'between 1940 and the end of the war, over 75 per cent of all films produced or commissioned by the Films Division were done under his leadership'.[201] He was also proactive in setting up an organisational structure that was designed to operate efficiently, his previous work role at Shell helped in this. He was used to working with artists, as he worked closely with the Shell film unit. The next Figure shows his Films Division organisational chart, following his changes:[202]

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[197] HO 262. Ealing Studios correspondence
[198] DNL: Winter edition. 1940
[199] INF 1/867. Program for Film Propaganda. 121-4
[200] Anthony Aldgate, and Jeffrey Richards. *Britain can take it*, 7.
[201] Ibid, 8.
[202] INF 1/126. Films Division correspondence

I.P.

Appendix H

FILMS DIVISION

1 Director

| 1 Assistant Director | 1 Deputy Director | 1 Honorary Adviser |

Documentaries	Feature Films +	News Reels	General (including liaison with service depts; script reading and publicity work.)	Distribution (Foreign, Empire, Home and Non-Theatrical.)
1 Specialist	1 Specialist	1 Specialist	3 Specialists	3 Specialists
3 Senior Assistant Specialists			1 Senior Assistant Specialist	1 Senior Assistant Specialist
	1 Junior Assistant Specialist		1 Junior Assistant Specialist	
		1 Research Assistant		

+ Working to Deputy Director on artistic and technical questions, but to Assistant Director on contracts and financial questions.

9: Films Division organisation: 1940

This chart is instructive, in that it shows a marked improvement over the organisation of the Films Division from the days of Clark being the head. One interesting node is that Beddington has assigned the Documentary makers their own head and team. He had worked closely with John Grierson at Shell, a very prominent figure in that movement. Clark had previously been open to anything to get the documentarists 'on board' and not to ignore them; Beddington was astute enough to follow that advice. At last, the Films Division had a proper team which embraced both commercial filmmakers and documentarists.

By taking organisational control and turning critics into allies, Jack Beddington pre-empted the course of political control endured by the entire MOI from 1941 onwards under Brendan Bracken as Minister. The attacks and insults in the press and in parliament started to be less frequent.

10. Some of Films Division staff in 1940:[203]

Notice how some of the staff are unpaid. A management technique, which continues to this day when moving to a new organisation, is to take good quality staff with you. In the list, there is one example of senior people from Shell joining Beddington at the Films Division. Other people on the list had experience in filmmaking, in either the BBC or commercial company's film groups. This staff list evidences Beddington's experience in enlisting those with requisite skills. Now he had his teams in place, there was scope to move forward in his plans for filmmaking and propaganda. The following case study has evidence of how his new organisation operated.

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[203] INF 196/5: Films Division organisation

Case Study: *Eagle Squadron*[204] (1942)

In August 1940, just a few days before the Germans started bombing London, American cinemagoers enjoyed a thriller whose story was close to real life. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, the film, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), focuses on Johnny Jones, a newspaper reporter in New York, who initially cares little about war in Europe. After being posted to London, Jones, is surrounded by Nazi spies. Within the narrative, he turns into a hero of the anti-Nazi cause. In the movie's last scene, Jones, in the middle of an air raid on London, makes a passionate radio broadcast to listeners in America, urging them to ditch their isolationism and come to the aid of Europe. His last speech declares:

> All that noise you hear…is death coming to London. You can hear the bombs falling on the streets and the homes. Don't tune me out — this is a big story and you're part of it…The lights are all out everywhere, except in America. Keep those lights burning…Hang on to your lights, they're the only lights left in the world.[205]

There is no doubt that this political statement was aimed at the anti-war groups in America. A speech that even the Reich's Joseph Goebbels, a master of propaganda, could not help but admire, he called it 'a masterpiece of propaganda, a first-class production which no doubt will make a certain impression upon the broad masses of the people in enemy countries'.[206] Neither Hitchcock nor Walter Wanger, *Foreign Correspondent*'s producer, however, was remotely sorry about the movie's message — that America must enter World War 2. Wanger, one of the American film industry's successful independent producers, made it clear that his aim in making *Foreign Correspondent* was 'to shake the U.S. into an awareness of what must threaten her if she turned her back on Europe.' It was this background that determined that *Eagle Squadron* should be the case study; it is an interesting mixture of UK and American co-production, worth exploring in detail, as it introduces some of the MOI's main protagonists with important roles covered in later chapters. It also illustrates the conflicts between departments at this stage of the war.

In November 1940, a cable from Wanger was sent to Bernstein with a general idea for a film called *Eagle Squadron* and then passed on to Beddington. He suggested Quentin Reynolds, an American journalist based in London, should gather information and write a story that could

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[204] Note that the majority of this section originates from the National Archives, where there a collection of papers covering some aspects of the films production.
[205] Enjoying the film on the *Talking Pictures* channel
[206] Patrick Humphries, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Crescent Books, 1994), 66 .

be a feature film. One of the MOI's aims in 1940 was to 'enlist the support of American journalists working in London. Such men could be of immense help, since they provided a direct output to American readers'.[207] Wagner's suggestion must have been welcomed within the MOI, as it was the very assistance that they were seeking. However, at that time, there was a very strong anti-war movement in the USA. The isolationists, led by the America First Committee, were a powerful challenge to President Roosevelt's efforts to enter the war.

Returning to the film, the term 'Eagle Squadron' was used to describe fighter squadrons of the RAF, formed with volunteer pilots from the United States, during the early days of WW2 prior to America's entry into the war. With the United States still neutral, many Americans simply crossed the border and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) to learn to fly, eventually ending up in Britain. Before the war, at the Foreign Office efforts were made to consider what propaganda would be useful in the United States. Clive Warner of the Foreign Office (FO) had been astonished that the FO's original ideas for propaganda did not have any mention of the cinema. He made sure that this was amended to include cinema before publication. Thus, the FO produced a memorandum recommending that there 'should be an ample supply of the right sort of film and ample facilities for American film companies.[208] What '*right sort*' meant can only be speculated. One interpretation is that the phrase includes anything that could hasten America joining the war, to highlight the true state of war on Britain. Taylor states 'America's second intervention in European wars in one generation rested on public opinion…if the public cannot be convinced then Congress was on full alert'.[209] This was a very important point and the evidence suggests that the MOI were working with this aim, to convince the American public using propaganda within films. There were still big issues to overcome, such as the common complaint from the Americans that Britain was 'not a real democracy, with its Empire, Kings and Queens'.[210] These misconceptions were behind some of the views of the American public and officials.

Confusion on locations

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[207] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards. *Britain can take it: British cinema in the Second World war*, 120.

[208] FO 395/656. Foreign Office News Department. Memorandum by Charles Warner

[209] K Short 'Cinematic Support for the Anglo-American Détente 1939-43'. Ed. Philip Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 121-144

[210] Ibid 135.

Eagle Squadron's director Harry Watt got on well with Wanger and considered him very useful for propaganda purposes, as far as both the American and British public were concerned, claiming that '[Wanger] is the first outsider to state that we would not be beaten'.[211] In November 1940, Bernstein responded to Watt saying that film might have to be made in the USA, because of the state of war in the UK. Certainly, he was being realistic as the threat of invasion was a real concern at that time and he knew the demands on the RAF were overwhelming due to lack of resources, including pilots. Nevertheless, attempts to provide some assistance came from Cooper (MOI Head May 1940 to July 1941) and Lord Beaverbrook (Minister of Aircraft production), who were both consulted over 'air shots' and what could be provided by the RAF.

Further delays

Wanger was not keen on being delayed and attempted to get everyone moving. In December 1940 a cable from Wanger to Bernstein stated that the Producer of the film (Merian Cooper) wanted to come over to discuss 'aviation shots' with authorities. Bernstein immediately cabled back *'don't anticipate anything but cooperation'*.[212] On our side, Bernstein attempted and failed in his initial attempts to contact Squadron Leader Williams (MOI contact in the RAF), so pushed the issue upstairs to the Director General of the MOI to take it up with the Air Ministry. Eventually, the Air Ministry responded, stating that one of the reasons for delay was that they were considering similar requests from film companies, which in turn was taking up valuable resources needed in combat missions. This was not surprising considering the war situation. With hindsight, the Films Division should have known about these competing film studio approaches and therefore organised things more efficiently. As we have seen in those early years, processes for this were not in place, so all that it did was highlight a lack of general organisation within the Films Division. In future, enemies of the MOI would use these criticisms and this area of conflict will be explored in the next chapter.

In January 1941, Air Commodore Peake responded to Bernstein on his request for RAF resources. His view was that it was too early in the war and would be better to wait until real operations. Peake also stated that back in November, the Air Attaché in Washington had requested that the Air Ministry discuss with Twentieth Century Fox making a film on the RAF.

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[211] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards. *Britain can take it:. British cinema in the Second World War*, 120.
[212] INF 1/625: Eagle Squadron, December 1940

The Air Ministry had requested a 'treatment' for consideration, which had not arrived. However, he had no objections to Cooper visiting Britain for production meetings. He also suggested using an 'American born pilot, belonging to one of the RAF squadrons'.[213] Bernstein conveyed these matters to Wanger, asking about dates and what facilities Cooper would require. Bernstein's recommendation of Ian Dalrymple as script writer, was accepted. Dalrymple was a successful writer who had worked on many British films, such as *The Lion Has Wings* (1939). He was very close to Humphrey Jennings and shared an ideological viewpoint on the British character. In 1941, he said their goal was…

> We say in film to our own people 'This is what the boys in the services, or the girls in the factories, or the men and women in Civil Defence, or the patient citizens themselves are like, and what they are doing. They are playing their part in the spirit in which you see them in this film. Be of good heart and go and do likewise'. And we say to the world, 'Here in these films are the British people at war' ... It has seen the truth and it can make up its own mind.[214]

Within this extract he is certainly outlining a form of documentary film, which was discussed earlier with Grierson's ideas on film. He was also identifying characteristics of National Identity exemplified by stars such as Leslie Howard, who was famous for his radio broadcasts that contained 'kindness, humour, keeping a cool head, and common sense '.[215] In the next figure, the officers are shown in control, which was the essential message of the film's propaganda. Examples of Dalrymple's film work were *Dark Journey* (1937), *Storm In A Teacup* (which he co-directed, 1937) and *South Riding* (1938). On the eve of the Second World War, he also contributed to Korda's propaganda film, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

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[213] 1/625: Eagle Squadron. 9th January 1940.
[214] Fires were started Richards, Jeffrey. History Today; London Vol. 45, Iss. 4, (Apr 1995): 29.
[215] Leslie Howard, 'Shopkeepers and Poets'. Broadcast 14th October 1940 on the BBC

11: Eagle Squadron still

In February 1941, Bernstein received a letter from United Artists, London. It stated that Mr Cooper was on his way and that he hoped the Air Ministry was ready. Bernstein passed this on to Air Commodore Harald Peake and requested allocation of an RAF contact for the film In March 1941, Wanger asked Bernstein how Dalrymple's script was going. Wanger also suggested Carol Reed, whose career began to develop with *The Stars Look Down* (1940), to direct the film. Bernstein replied that Reed was too busy and suggested Watt.

A request for Carol Reed illustrates his high reputation in America, which was a major target for the MOI. Two of Reed's recent films, *The Stars Look Down* (1940) and *Night Train To Munich* (1940) were well received in both Britain and America. Bernstein responded that Carol Reed was under contract and overworked, so not available. Meanwhile, as the film's producer, Cooper had been staying at RAF bases, attempting to gain experience of their work.

In further developments, in April 1941, a letter was sent from Wanger to United Artists, London. He described the film sequences plus the use a 'Young American in the film'. This is one of the first examples of the use of an American hero figure within a British film. It would not be the last, as will be described in later chapters. The letter implies that Wanger was over optimistic, and that Bernstein would sort out all the RAF issues for the film. At that time this was a large undertaking, as the Films Division was still trying to find its role in the filmmaking process. Another crucial point in the letter is that if Britain were invaded, any footage already shot could be used on other films. This sounded like a good idea, but later this would become the basis for a conflict between the RAF and Wanger. Bernstein pointed out to Wanger that extra security checks would be needed on all shots, and everything would need to be approved by the RAF before being used. From the RAF's standpoint, they were in the process of testing a new prototype aeroplane and were keen to prevent the enemy viewing these tests. There was lots of discussion on this issue in London, but none with Wanger. If a dialogue had taken place, it is possible things might have worked out better when production began

The Films Division intervenes

In May 1941, Beddington (now head of the Films Division) became more involved. Louis Huot, a journalist before the war, joined OSS and played a key role in the propaganda effort to get America into the war. Huot sent a letter to Beddington with, at last, a 'treatment'.[216] This communication stressed that they were keen to add a documentary feel using 'real characters' and that it was important to include American protagonists. From that time the working relationships started to unravel. Squadron Leader Williams conveyed to Beddington issues with the 'treatment'. Neither was he happy with the American pilot plotline. He also reiterated that official permission was required for every stage of the film, which had not occurred.

The director Harry Watt was becoming annoyed with all this background interference. He had made his name on a mixture of documentaries and feature films, *Night Mail* (1936) and *London Can Take It* (1940) and was beginning to become frustrated with the delays. Huot found that they had lots of freedom at the RAF station but needed to have RAF approval on the script by the autumn. In parallel, Wanger stated that he was thinking of completing the film in America.[217] To add to the confusion, in June 1941, Wanger sent over Mr Ernest Schoedsack, a

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[216] INF 1/625: Eagle Squadron MOI correspondence
[217] Ibid. 22nd May 1941

trusted colleague, to help on the filming. With all this happening on set, more senior levels in government, outside of the MOI, began to get involved in the process. The discussion paper[218] shows a list of concerns and was circulated to the British Embassy in America. Some of the issues were technical (facilities impossible, point 1 of the report), but some are of a conceptual nature (propaganda value doubtful, point 3 of the report). As a result, of all the complexities of dealing with the RAF, the logistical issues were not surprising. As for propaganda value, it is difficult to agree since, at this point in the war, the services were desperate to have some depictions of their difficult tasks. It appears that the RAF was annoyed by the long-drawn-out process, and just wanted out of the project. After this Bernstein was starting to have his own concerns and stated the film 'may not be made'.

Things did not improve for Schoedsack, as he was kept waiting five weeks for the RAF to assist him. The RAF also stated that they were still waiting for a proper 'treatment'. To further complicate things, in September 1941, the Air Ministry began to ask for payment for planes with cameras. Clearly, there had been a breakdown in the whole process of dealing with the hierarchy of the RAF. Meanwhile, Beddington was working in the background, trying to resolve contractual issues, but he had no response from the Air Ministry, despite with repeated calls, on commercial agreements.

Things started to improve for the Films Division around this time. A meeting took place between Col Bromhead (Films Division), Admiralty, War Office and the Air Ministry. All agreed that that requests for film resources were coming from too many different areas of the film industry. It was agreed in future that any treatments and/or scripts must come to the services via the Films Division. As part of the meeting, it was stated that the MOI felt that it is 'important that feature films should be made here or the USA with service backgrounds'.[219] These decisions would go a long way to ensure better cooperation from all sides. It also positioned the Films Division at the heart of filmmaking in Britain. My view is that these instructions gave the film industry a clear direction to put more service heroes within films.

RAF delays

Meanwhile the film production process still had major problems. In Oct 1941 Bernstein received a very long letter of complaint from Schoedsack. He stated that he had made no

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[218] Ibid. August 1941
[219] INF 1/625. Eagle Squadron. Col Bromhead (MOI) with Service Chiefs. September 1941

progress in filming at the RAF bases. Apparently, some pilots did not want to be filmed and some even required payment for appearing in the film. Schoedsack was also annoyed at being restricted in his movements on the airfields. On a personal note, he admitted that he did not get on with Watt (Director) and found Huot 'useless'. He was also annoyed that Huot thought himself to be in complete charge of the project, when he had no experience of filmmaking. All these issues had been hidden from Wanger, as Huot did not want to admit any weakness to his boss. To add to the problems, Watt also wrote a long letter to Bernstein with a list of his complaints. Chief among them was the lack of a good script. Watt then found out that 'a second-rate American newspaper man' had written the script. Watt described the script as 'useless' and sacked him without delay. Watt goes on to call Huot 'completely ignorant of film matters and…[with] no capacity for writing'. Watt then attempted to get Balcon and Ealing studios involved in the project. He made some progress, as Balcon offered Watt his chief scriptwriter, Angus McPhail, to assist in getting the script to a good state. However, McPhail was busy on other work, so couldn't start right away. An annoyed Watt then decided to tackle the hold ups that were occurring at the RAF. When Watt returned to the RAF base, however, he found a new Commanding Officer in charge who forbade filming on his base and threatened to resign if overruled by his superiors. However, Watt remained determined and decided to wait it out, until they got permission to film once again.

If Watt expected help from Wanger he was mistaken, as Schoedsack informed him he did not like Watt's treatment for the film and that the general idea was to make the film without a script. Watt was extremely unhappy with this news, stating that he has never made a film without a script. It took five weeks for Watt, Huot and Schoedsack to be allowed back on the RAF base, but under very restricted conditions, one reason given was that the base was now 'fully operational'. Relations between the three were very bad, according to Watt, and he eventually resigned from his role as director. One final straw was that Watt had viewed the progress cables Huot had been sending to Wanger. Everyone had just good news on progress and did not own up to any of the problems that had occurred. Watt was dissuaded from resigning by Huot, who then had an idea; he would take the RAF base Commander in Chief to dinner in order to get them permission to return to the base. This turned out to be a terrible idea, as the Public Relations Department of the Air Ministry was not consulted (as protocols demanded) and was very angry when news got out. As Watt puts it, Huot's action infuriated the RAF, and from then on, he said they could get nothing done.

Reaching out to the RAF

One must admire Watt's persistence. A few weeks later he organised a round table conference at the Air Ministry to air their differences. One thing that emerged from the meeting was that the Air Ministry really wanted a script to check. It was agreed that Watt would quickly write a script and that filming could continue at the RAF base. From his long letter, one can determine that Watt was becoming disillusioned with the project. Even when getting back on track, a combination of weather and combat operations meant that tiny amounts of footage were shot over many months. In addition, even Schoedsack, who was very confident when he arrived, was becoming disillusioned and started to talk about going home soon. In fact, Watt and Schoedsack decided to write a letter listing the main problems to Wanger. In the letter, they stressed that the outstanding problems were 'insurmountable' and they could be working 'indefinitely' to finish the film: effectively ending their involvement with the project. Any message of this type must have registered with Wanger as he responded a few days later with a decision to cease expenditure.

One point of contention of this British production centred on the issue of the Americans utilising the RAF film shots done so far, primarily for newsreels. At first, Beddington was not keen on handing over the film, as he was of the view that any shots shown on newsreels could not be used on a feature film. Neither was the RAF keen, stating that they still wanted view of a script before they would authorise release of any film stock. Wanger was described as being 'very upset' and stated that a script could not be approved unless he saw some footage. As previously described, this blocking issue was promoted upstairs to the UK Air Attaché in Washington. High level contacts in America were concerned, as the Air Attaché took Wanger's side, describing him as 'one of [our] best friends in [the] USA', but noting that 'his patience has been tried'. There was also some leaking to the press, in that the *Daily Express* had a critical article stating that the 'American film makers are having difficulty with the MOI'.[220]

Nearing the end

Following pressure from Washington, the Air Ministry agreed to release some of the footage. Bernstein, in this late stage attempted to influence Wanger, to ensure that any future film could include large amounts of footage (and sound effects) of the RAF in action. Meanwhile, Watt

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[220] INF 1/625: : Eagle Squadron MOI correspondence

and Dalrymple resigned, as they were wanted on other projects. Considering their bad working relationship, it was a wonder they stayed on the project so long. They had disliked each other from their first meeting. Drazin states that whereas Dalrymple was quiet and shy, Watt was the opposite and furthermore did not really understand him.[221] At the end, Beddington tried to put a positive spin on the events described. He knew that the planned film would now be out of the Films Division remit, but still wanted to retain some influence.[222]

With the chaotic state of government and service departments at the start of war, it is not surprising that this film project stumbled along, as was typical of many film productions at that time. The central problem was a lack of clear understanding amongst all parties on whether or not resources were available. Lack of a proper script came up repeatedly, with no follow up action to address this point. Late interventions at more senior levels, to some extent, got things moving, but it was all piece meal, with no one person driving the overall agenda. Initial cooperation between the MOI and the Air Ministry meant it was planned that real aircrews would be used on the film. During filming, the squadron continued to fight actual air battles, and after three weeks, all six chosen pilots were dead. Unfortunately, the archives don't shed light on this harsh reality of war, but it must have had some effect on the people involved in the production. Technical advisor John M. Hill, on leave from the RAF due to a war injury, and an actual member of the Eagle squadron, was one of only four pilots of the 17-strong squadron to survive.[223] The six months of pre-production filming were fraught with problems, including the reluctance of the Eagle Squadron pilots to take part, as they were keen to focus on their main line of work in the war. It ended with Watt's and Dalrymple's resignations.[224]

Although the original British project did not happen, the footage shot by second unit director Schoedsack would eventually be recycled for a new film with the same title but with an American production team. Wanger subsequently relocated the production to Hollywood and had the script rewritten into a fictional story about an American volunteer learning to understand the British cause. Location shooting took place at Universal Studio's backlot outside Los Angeles, but included a large number of British actors, including Nigel Bruce and Peter Lawford. On its release in 1942, *Eagle Squadron* was a box office hit, earning a profit of

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[221] Drazin, *The Finest Years,* 145.

[222] INF 1/625: Eagle Squadron. MOI correspondence. Letter : Beddington to Bamford. 15th September 1941

[223] Notes: Eagle Squadron (1942).' Turner Classic Movies.

[224] Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 34-44.

$697,607.[225] However, the new project team did acknowledge the original British assistance…*Eagle Squadron* begins with the onscreen declaration, 'This production was made possible through the cooperation of the British Air Ministry, The Ministry of Information, The Royal Air Force [and] The Eagle Squadron of the RAF'.

Conclusions

As described, the Films Division under Beddington came under enormous pressure from many sides of government; the services needed to make their case for highlighting their war efforts, internal MOI Divisions had their own demands, and other government departments wanted to influence policy on film propaganda. Some of the enhanced pressures can be attributed to significant military disasters during this phase of the war, which had sent shockwaves through the British government. The MOI and the Films Division had to react to a fast-changing background of bad news. Against this early history of the war, Beddington managed to find a way of pleasing most, if not all, of his colleagues and critics. One of his main achievements was to find a way to combine policy and practice. Bringing the documentary makers into the Films Division, with the creation of the GPO Film Unit, was a clever move. His critics had mounted a concerted attack on his appointment (via the DNL), but this move blunted many critics' views. Following his predecessor's example, Beddington continued to maintain an open dialogue with the British film studios. His style of management, displayed in the case study, might today be called 'hands on', a democratic and consultative method of working.[226] Going further in exploring his organisational structure, represented by the following figure,[227] McChrystal argues that this type of structure fits a situation that is fast changing, where quick decisions are required.

Under Bracken's leadership, new management structures within the MOI and the Films Division were put in place. Compared to its initial setup, McChrystal's descriptions demonstrate a greater delegation of roles. This represented a major change, as team hierarchies of the MOI evolved towards a more formal structure that mirrored the film studios, as visualised below, each node is self-governing but has access to all other main committee nodes.

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[225] Nicholas Cull. '*Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American 'Neutrality'* in World War II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 181
[226] Understanding Management and Leadership Styles *Chartered Management Institute*. March 7, 2018.
[227] Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 32.

Team of Teams

The relationship among teams resembles the closeness among individuals on those teams.

15: Final team structure for film production

Furthermore, in this team structure, there is no change to the delegation of top-down authority, but each sub-team has more control over its activities. Information exchanges still happened, but in this case, only after an event had been executed by sub-teams. I would argue this provided a better setup for unpredictable events in the war, which were a daily occurrence. This approach is supported by Crosier who considers the effect of an outsider:

> Crises are important, individual initiative prevails and people come to depend on some strategic individual's arbitrary whim…personal authority supersedes rules.[228]

This description in many ways also describes the work of Clark in the Films Division, as the archive evidences his calm and considered handling of the problems he and his department faced.

Historian Philip Taylor was later impressed with the MOI's early film work: 'The MOI's films did a competent job – with the help of Hollywood distribution – of getting the British message on to American screens from 1940 onwards'.[229] As shown by the case study, that statement is

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[228] Michel Crosier. *Bureaucratic phenomenon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 196.

[229] K Short 'Cinematic Support for the Anglo-American Détente 1939-43'. Ed. Philip Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 121-144

very generous; the whole exercise of filmmaking with transatlantic partners was no easy task, certainly during wartime.

On a more general point, this case study highlights a sea change in film's narrative structure. With the involvement of the entire country in the war effort, earlier cinema genres, attitudes and depictions of all classes and sexes were rendered outmoded. No longer could studios rely upon thrillers featuring stereotypes of the rich and poor. Repeatedly, from the archives, there are examples of guidance papers stressing the importance of keeping up morale. Of course, the main aim of the MOI was to do just that, keep the British people's morale up and ensure that everyone was engaged in the war effort. The case study shows that there was already a move to project a positive image of Britain and, in this case, the RAF. Certainly, use of hero-making propaganda in this film was subtle but understood by the public; it would become common in future films. To use William Croft's definition, propaganda is 'any attempt by a government…to create, or to maintain, states of mind conductive to a required end'.[230] In this case, the RAF wanted to provide examples of systematic heroism by its pilots. As far as the MOI was concerned, its role was to provide a vehicle for this propaganda to be presented to the public. During this period of the war the MOI received many suggestions as to what would make good propaganda. In any democratic society, it is difficult to reach consensus on the right way to go, and it takes time. Jo Fox writes that 'British Propagandists were slow to recognise the immense potential of film, and in particular, the feature film, as a means of persuasion, delaying the formulation of a policy regarding suitable approaches to the use of film in the propaganda arsenal'.[231] He goes on to say that in the early years any proposed propaganda was characterised as 'gentle' and an 'open' approach to persuasion.

This case study raises important questions about the challenges of creating effective wartime propaganda within a democratic and capitalist society. Grierson put forward his ideas on that question:-

> A democracy by its very nature and by its many virtues lies wide open to division and uncertainly. It encourages discussion, it permits free criticism. In this environment, the task of the propagandist becomes ever more complex…and is complicated by the existence of multiple and overtly expressed opinions.[232]

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[230] William Croft, *Propaganda in Britain after 1945* (London, Routledge, 2014), 139.
[231] Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (London, Berg, 2006), 31.
[232] Hardy Forsyth, Hardy, ed. *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 108-9.

Grierson was clearly on the right track. With so many competing requests for attention from the MOI, the whole process of making films with propaganda values, was bound to fail. There were just too many chiefs making contradictory decisions. On the other hand, a lack of centralised control on propaganda did allow filmmakers the freedom to present the British hero character in a way quite different to the German equivalent. Jo Fox states that in German feature films 'the individual only acquires any form of heroic status when he sacrifices his life for the Fatherland. The British hero, on the other hand, was characterised by his individual identity…and plays an essential role in the people's war'.[233]

The next chapter explores how this situation could not be allowed to continue. More efficient efforts to remedy the problems affecting the making of feature films were vital. Change was needed to move the Films Division in the right direction, and to align propaganda within film narratives. My key finding from this chapter is the difficulty of creating wartime propaganda within the UK's democratic society in 1940. Another vital issue was the confusion over the need to provide two different propaganda messages to both the British and American markets. This compounded and confused discussions on what propaganda could achieve. One aim of this thesis is to examine working relationships between the government and the film studios; there is little evidence of co-ordinating efforts having been made thus far. Nevertheless, there are some examples of things starting to change, which will be explored in the following chapters.

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[233] Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain WW2*, 312.

CHAPTER 3: 1941. A new war with old heroes

Britain Will Win[234]:
American absence, British heroism and conflict…

Timeline of main events on this phase of the war: [235]

- June   Hitler begins Operation Barbarossa - the invasion of Russia.
- Sep 1940 - May 1941   Blitz continues against Britain's major cities.
- Apr - Nov   Allies take Tobruk in North Africa.
- December   Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, and America enters the war

Introduction

The previous chapter covered a great deal of historical ground to provide a comprehensive narrative of MOI's initial work and increasing interest from other government departments, especially around questions of propaganda. This chapter expands on these issues, and the claims of some historians that this was also a confused period as to what was actually required from feature films. I also explore the developing themes of film propaganda as positioned for American cinema audiences.

The War situation

The worsening state of the war between mid-1940 and the end of 1941 was certainly focusing the attention of many government departments, in all areas involving propaganda. After all, there were some successes to promote, such as the air war and Tobruk. Each service started to want a voice in film projects, with a view to advertise themselves to the public in a positive manner, which we will analyse in more detail in the next chapter. Due to this and other factors, it was unsurprising that the MOI was effectively working in the dark. It also suffered from changing roles within all departments of state, unclear delegation of responsibility within the Civil service, and lack of co-ordination and control from the top.

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[234] INF 1/121 Policy Committee, April 1941
[235] R67/44 BBC Archives: MOI paper on War events.

Difficulties of the Film studios

Michael Balcon was one of the most vehement critics of the Films Division. By the summer of 1940 he was complaining loudly to other government departments about the lack of co-operation from the MOI. In that year, he wrote to the Board of Trade 'Many of us have tried to harness ourselves to the Films Division of the MOI with, alas, very little encouragement. We hoped the MOI would have defined its relations between itself and industry, but this has not been done'. Balcon was highly regarded in all spheres of film production, so these comments would have echoed throughout Whitehall.

One crucial aspect, which would end up affecting all areas of propaganda, was pressure building from many areas of government to motivate the Americans into declaring war on Germany. Unfortunately, this aim would be hampered by high-level disinterest, until Churchill took over as Prime Minister. Before that, elements of the government still believed that Britain did not need assistance. In addition, there was a lack of interest in the MOI from the government in the initial phase of war. Some of this thinking can be traced back to old style beliefs from the First World War, which influenced the pre-war government. This is despite the then Prime Minister Chamberlain's own interest in the use of the media, especially films and newsreels, to promote his personal image to the public, and also the Conservative Party's interest in the methodology of campaign propaganda during general elections. Additionally, there was a hangover from pre-war suspicion of wartime propaganda; many senior politicians agreed with John Reith, Minister for Information at the time, when he stated in March 1940 that the Ministry was 'an exotic, it pertained to dictatorship'. Chamberlain appears to have shared the prejudice of many of his fellow MPs, who continued throughout the war to hold in contempt the idea of propaganda on the Home Front. A weary Ministry wrote:-

> Parliament and Whitehall stand today, in their attitude towards news, publicity, advertising and propaganda, where business stood twenty years ago. Ample lip service is paid to the importance of propaganda in wartime, but behind the scenes ... the spirit of scepticism is vocal. Statesmen, civil servants and leaders in the fighting services cannot openly say that news is a nuisance and propaganda is a cheap-jack charlatan game, but that is what is believed.[236]

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[236] INF 1/196. Films Division correspondence. June 1941

Churchill's reforms

In practice, these sentiments were about to change. Previous chapters gave an overview of the somewhat chaotic operations of the MOI, with little in the way of clear instructions and guidance from its superiors. Transformation was required, as the circumstances of the war were becoming increasingly urgent. The subtitle of this chapter gives a flavour of the new strategy implemented by the dynamic leadership of Churchill. One newspaper cartoon by the famous artist David Low in the *Evening Standard*[237] nicely illustrates his character and drive (Figure 1). Following Churchill, is the War Cabinet, including Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden and Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee.

ALL BEHIND YOU, WINSTON

12: A new team

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[237] David Low, *Evening Standard*. British Library Newspaper Library. 14th May 1940

Churchill and cinema

It was fortunate that Churchill also had a keen interest in feature films, having worked with Korda on screenplays before the war, and he was an enthusiastic promoter of films as a means of propaganda. Charles Drazin writes that Churchill was obsessed with storytelling. From his writings and actions on film, Churchill had a fascination with history and creating meaningful narratives in film for propaganda purposes. He also wrote many historical biographies. Drazin's views on Churchill's interest in the media 'are supported'[238] by examples of being involved with the production or marketing of a film, such as our case study *Pimpernel Smith*. Further examples of Churchill's involvement in films will be analysed in the next chapter. This is more evidence for Chomsky's view of the Propaganda Model being developed by the establishment, under pressure of the war, where the power of the state becomes even more important.

On taking office, Churchill's thoughts and actions were on higher matters. It is instructive to look at one initial achievement by Churchill at Cabinet level, affecting filmmaking. One of the first tasks of the new War Cabinet was to request that Lord Beaverbrook should draw up proposals for a reorganisation of the MOI's main functions on film.[239] The paper stated that 'All films of all ministries will be handed over to the MOI and…the Films Division will have the coordinating authority'. It continued that 'the MOI, in future, will be the Propaganda battle front'. This is the first example of high-level thinking and involvement in the area of film production. Henceforth a great deal more attention on the output of films would be the order of the day. One overriding requirement, certainly set by the new Prime Minister, was for propaganda to be directed towards getting America involved in the war.

Murphy states that 'Churchill's bull-dog-like determination to fight on crystallized a national mood, but he knew that without financial and military support from America, Britain would not be able to continue the fight'.[240] All the archival evidence supports Murphy's view of the heightened alarm in government. It can be seen in the actions of the Policy Committee of the MOI; a paper was sent to all departments with the following instructions 'the Minister says there is an <u>urgent</u> [their underline] need for our publicity towards America. Two slogans must

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[238] Charles Drazin, *Korda, Britain's Movie Mogul* (London: Tauris, 2011), 32.

[239] CAB 66/17/10. Information and Propaganda. June 1941. War Cabinet.

[240] Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000), 23

be stressed…Britain Will Win, and Britain can produce and deliver the Goods'.[241] It went on to state, 'we must convince America for support'. This is clear evidence of a new drive for actions directed at particular targets (for example, America) actions that would affect many departments of state, not only the MOI. However, no extra guidance was provided on implementing these policies. Without clear instructions, the haphazard nature of propaganda and films would continue. Further chapters will expand on these areas.

Disagreements on propaganda

Dickinson and Street have already highlighted a major problem with films: 'Questions relating to propaganda were subject of considerable disagreement throughout the war…focused on radio and the press. Films in comparison received very little attention'.[242] This study will challenge this idea, as recently released archives provide further details of interference of government in films. Furthermore, they go on to state 'the propaganda arguments declined in importance'.[243] My own findings on this issue differ as their approach did not incorporate the influence of American government bodies on the MOI. This study will address this area in subsequent chapters. As to the question of what makes good propaganda, some preached what we would now call fake news. Sir Nevile Henderson, former Ambassador to Germany, held the view that 'the aim of propaganda is to inflict certain attitudes by means which prevent critical thinking'.[244] Overall, this definition could apply to all propaganda, but it assumed the public would be mindless spectators, which was a view expressed by many at that time. Further chapters will investigate how this viewpoint did, and had to, change as the government began to realise the public was more perceptive and aware of false propaganda. There were always dissenting voices, such as George Orwell who stated was that 'all propaganda is lies, even if one is telling the truth'.[245] We come back to the issue that deciding what to put in front of the public remained an outgoing debate and would now play a pivotal role in film production.

As an aside, the MOI did use J. B. Priestley to reinforce propaganda messages such as these in his nightly radio talks and kept repeating that the true heroes of the war are the ordinary British

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[241] INF 1/56: MOI papers.
[242] Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985), 104.
[243] Ibid,105.
[244] E.H.Henderson. *Towards a definition of Propaganda*. Journal of Social Psychology, August 1943
[245] George Orwell, Diary entry March 1942. Vol 2, 465

folk.[246] In 1940 and 1941, Priestley's *The Postscript* broadcast on Sunday night, drew peak audiences of 16 million, and was very influential.

Returning to events at senior levels of government, there was also an emotional aspect to Churchill's fondness for feature films. Drazin writes 'Beddington and Churchill quite often watched a film in the MOI screening room, and by the end, tears were pouring down their cheeks'.[247] This emotive connection with film would be used by Churchill when dealing with the Americans, which we will explore in the conclusions to this chapter and later chapters.

The USA and propaganda

With political direction now being provided by the Prime Minister, the parallel task of enlisting America remained. A paper circulated by the Policy Committee to the Films Division by Professor Highet detailed ideas on how to adapt feature film content to make it appealing to an American audience. In this paper, Highet states that 'positive views of Britain must be stressed', and that 'positive propaganda must be memorable…we [film makers] could borrow techniques from the Americans, where importance is stressed on the common man and their actions'.[248] Although the archives are not clear on this, it is probable that pressure from this direction *was* exerted on the film studios, although, as with much archive material, there are conflicting views. Bernstein's archives contain a memo dated April 1940 to the American Division of the MOI stating that 'British Policy is not to tempt the USA into the war, you make up your own minds'. He goes on 'to suggest that stars of American movies would be welcome here', which implies that he was already considering 'planting' American characters in British made feature films. There were many examples of British film stars working in Hollywood and an actor exchange market between America and the UK already existed. Of course, this could be interpreted as masking Britain's true position, in relation to drawing the Americans into the war, which did seem to be recognised by several film studios.

In this chapter's case study, Leslie Howard's *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) shows an American as an important member of a heroic team rescuing people from concentration camps, as we shall explore further. Certainly, the audience would have no problem recognising what Levi-Strauss

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[246] J.B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (London: William Heinemann, 1940)

[247] Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years : British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: Tauris, 2007), 180.

[248] INF 1/848: Professor Keith Highet. *Memorandum on British counter propaganda*. Policy Committee, March 1940

labelled binary oppositions for heroes and villains. Stereotyped evil Germans would be a key ingredient of future films. My view is that this oversimplified complex moral issues, (for example, not all Germans were Hitler supporters), but was useful for framing compelling narratives.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

When the MOI reported its activities to the War Cabinet in June 1940 the control it exercised over the cinema industry was limited:

> So far as feature films are concerned, the policy of the Ministry has been to encourage private enterprise to produce films as commercial propositions, the Ministry endeavouring in every possible way to secure the required degree of emphasis and suitability of content for propaganda purposes.[249]

Here was evidence of the government transferring the issue of what makes good propaganda onto the film studios. Previous chapters have emphasized that the MOI has received many suggestions on this subject, but there were again no concerted efforts to impose these ideas on the studios.[250] Even the MOI's Home Publicity Division has one definition of propaganda, 'the dissemination of truth to attack the enemy in the public's mind',[251] but with no constructive advice for putting it into practice within films. To address these issues, Cooper had prepared a plan, as each twelve regions of the country was allocated a Films Officer, answering to the Films Division. Tasks of the Films Officers were to secure the widest distribution of any MOI sponsored productions and to assess the public reaction to film content to understand public thinking.

At the senior levels of government, there was a growing belief that someone else should take over the MOI, with a new remit to enhance and improve its effectiveness. Walter Monckton was still in position as Director General, but there were concerns about his work. When Duff Cooper's ineffectiveness as the Minister in charge of the MOI became known to Churchill, he moved firstly to establish beyond doubt the role's full function and then to appoint his own nominee, Bracken. In a memorandum, widely circulated, Churchill stated:

The main functions of the Ministry of Information are:

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[249] INF 1/62. Memorandum No.13, 21 June 1940
[250] INF 1/302: Paper 'Aims of Home publicity', Sept 1939
[251] Ibid

a. to ensure that news regarding the progress of the war shall reach the public as fully and as quickly as is consistent with the interests of our national security

b. to publicise and interpret government policy in relation to the war, to help to sustain public morale and to stimulate the war effort, and to maintain a steady flow of facts and opinions calculated to further the policy of the government in the prosecution of the war.

… It will be the duty of all Departmental Ministers…to keep the MOI fully supplied with all the news and information at their disposal. The use and exploitation of this news will be regarded as primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Information… All organised propaganda carried out on behalf of one or more Departments through the medium of the Press, films, posters or radio will be conducted through the MOI….'[252]

This is an important memo as, for the first time, it puts the MOI at the heart of propaganda control in government. One disadvantage was that henceforth, the MOI had to interpret propaganda needs from all sides and act upon it, certainly within films. Fortunately for the MOI, Bracken was already a key player in government when he was given the position as Minister of Information, having spent time as Churchill's Parliamentary Private Secretary. Being a columnist for *The Economist* and *Financial Times*, he was one of the few senior officials with journalistic background and experience. This background would benefit his future decisions on the handling the media world. Also, thanks to his friendship with Churchill,[253] Bracken now had access to the War Cabinet meetings.

Old boys' network

This was an example of old boys club' connections, mentioned in previous chapters.   One description of this term is that 'we all have to network…but being born into the right family brings substantial advantages in society and politics.[254] I argue that historically these clubs had been a vital part of British Society pre-war and would continue to play a part in decision making. Within the following chapters, I have highlighted where an old boys network comes into play on ideas for cinema, I would suggest that in many films, certainly in the first few years, there was a common theme of upper-class Officers as the hero figures, which reflected club members, such as *Target For Tonight* (1941) and *Eagle Squadron* (1940). Privileges conferred by birth, class and a public-school education was a vital part of the structural sexism and classism of British society. Bracken had this advantage, providing access to confidential information, unlike his predecessors. These communication channels were very important as

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[252] CAB 66/17/15, 26 June 1941.

[253] Churchill had a nickname for Bracken, 'Jackal'. H. Pelling, Winston Churchill, (London 1974), .415.

[254] Tom Wetfeet, Networking *Works: The Insider Guide to Networking* (Wetfeet Publishing. 2003), 10.

previously the MOI had been operating in the dark, with no clear understanding of the main aims of the government for its role, other than through informal contacts.

Armed with this formal statement of intent, Bracken did not delay and immediately moved his own people into the MOI. When Walter Monckton lost interest in his job as Director General of the MOI, probably as a result of pressure from above, Bracken made Cyril Radcliffe the sixth and last Director. I suggest that together they helped free the Ministry from the last 'gentleman amateurs', as described in the last chapter. Clark wrote later:[255]

> I belonged to the old, amateurish, ineffective, music-hall-joke Ministry, and had long been an unnecessary member of even that ramshackle body. Cyril was a friend of mine, for whom I had great admiration. He told me to leave in the kindest possible terms.

This was an important admission, which was indicative of the changes with society as a whole, where the upper classes started to realise that it was clear that everyone had to work together to win the war. My view is that undocumented decisions in London clubs was starting to cause more problems than they were worth. The archives have evidence for this in that the number of references to club decisions drop in MOI meetings after a few years of the war. As far as film was concerned, the appointment of Bracken as the new Minister of Information in July 1941 raised hopes in the film industry, that it would finally hear targeted statements about the government's film policy. An open letter to Bracken, printed in the *Kinematograph Weekly*, strongly demanded answers on film propaganda. Their concerns were divided into several areas, but these were the main issues, from the archives: -

- '*Are you satisfied that the feature films have been harnessed to the war effort?*
- *Has there been any serious general consultation with the feature producers to make their product reflect or bear on the home and overseas propaganda policy?*
- *In conclusion, are you satisfied that your Films Division has not become so closely identified with the production of the short film that they lose sight of the larger political problems and lose sight of larger scale planning?*
- *Your Films Division, having made a production machinery for films, ought it not to be thinking on longer terms and plan ahead?*
- *Are you satisfied that in your Films Division you have the personnel capable of planning for this Trade*'?[256]

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[255] Clark, *The Other Half,* 67.
[256] Planned Policy Wanted for Film Propaganda. Open Letter from Kine. To Brendan Bracken, in:
  Kinematograph Weekly, 7.8.1941

This was an influential journal, so instead of ignoring these concerns, Bracken took on board the points made. He responded with an invitation to all representatives of the film industry with the aim of finding solutions. This was certainly in direct contrast to the regime under Ball described in chapter 1. In essence, he wanted to exert his influence on all questions that affected the cooperation between the MOI and the film industry.

One problem that Bracken did not have to address was audiences. There had always been a strong domestic market, which went back to the 1930s and continued to expand into the 1940s. An obvious but important point here is that a guaranteed audience is absolutely essential for any propaganda. My view here is that Bracken knew he had to reach out to the British film studios to and engage with their views on feature film content.

Advice for British film studios

One of the big issues which did need to be tackled was: what measures could be taken to encourage home-grown film production, which would align itself to rules from the MOI. To some extent, American-made films had filled the gap in British film production, due to a mixture of political confusion and requisition of some studios, but now there was a strong desire to reactivate film production at home. After all, Britain still had a large number of well-respected film studios, such as Ealing and Gainsborough (Pinewood was closed to commercial production during the war), with workforces of highly trained technicians.[257] As we have seen there was pressure from many sources within the MOI to get propaganda ideas, such as courage in the face of adversity; sacrifice; effort for victory and the best place for that was within British made films. At that time, the film studios still were stuck in their portrayals of heroic pre-war figures, so it was critical that the MOI entered formal discussions.

Previously, the MOI had made little effort to enter any formal discussions with film studios. In practice, there had been some contact with the British Film Institute (BFI), as discussed in chapter 2, which was not on speaking terms with the Films Division. Their attitude was illustrated by a letter written by Oliver Bell, Director of the BFI, in January 1940, to the MOI. He expressed concern about the lack of guidance given to the film industry and he referred to the 'complaint of British producers that no indication whatsoever has been vouchsafed to them,

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[257] Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios*, 46. Bob McCabe. *Pinewood, the story of an Iconic Studio*, 10. Pam Cook, *Gainsborough Pictures (Rethinking British Cinema),* 74.

as to the general type of films that the government would wish to see produced, with the aim of entertaining the public and sustaining their morale in wartime'.[258]

To attempt to address these issues, Bracken initiated informal discussions and meetings with some feature film producers, but not the BFI. My view is that the previous disagreements were still raw, and needed time to calm down, which would not happen until later in the war. As a start, he promised to listen and act upon any issues that the film trade raised and pledged the MOI's support for the film studios. To some extent, this was like the ideas of Clark, discussed in the previous chapter, but had the advantage that it came from the very top of the MOI and thus carried more weight. Evidence of progress is illustrated in the plans put forward and agreed. Following these contacts, plans to produce films moved into a more structured and formal process. The joint production plan was a practical example of incremental change. At Bracken's request, the producers presented their production plans for the coming twelve months to the MOI at formal meetings, with their material and work-force requirements, in a 'Schedule of Productions'.

Bracken also required a list of the names of those actors on military service, who were to be exempted from service in order to participate in a film production. A series of meetings held with each service department, determined to sort out any issues. Here was an example of Bracken pre-empting confrontations with service departments. As we saw in the first chapter, on the making of *Target For Tonight* (1941) there was confusion with the RAF, which did not improve the reputation of the MOI. When later talking about the service departments and film, Bracken stated 'The MOI will fight their battles and give full service, but has no desire to interfere with their proper function'.[259] Meetings of this type also made clear that the MOI was the key player where feature films were concerned, yet another example of Bracken using his commercial and political skills to get people on board with his visions and concerns.

In the early stages of the war, one of the country's main concerns was the threat of invasion. The MOI under Bracken spent much time and effort attempting to ensure that bad news would be withheld from the public and in preparing them for invasion, which it was believed would occur in the summer of 1940. The MOI also played a very large role in producing posters and leaflets instructing the public what to do in case of invasion. These areas are beyond the scope of this project. However, it is instructive to supply an example, which gives a flavour of the

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[258] INF 1/615. Letter from Bell to MOI, 17 January 1940
[259] INF 1/891. Brendan Bracken. Committee of Public relations

problems the MOI faced. Searching around for a propaganda theme which might stimulate the war effort, the MOI attempted to promote the theme of British achievement in factory production achievements via film. The trouble here was to find itself prevented by other departments' refusal to issue statistics, for security reasons.[260]

Cooperation within Government

Seeing examples of film production being delayed by Government bureaucracy, Bracken decided to tackle the War Cabinet on the subject, to attempt to ensure that his MOI officials obtained co-operation from other departments. He presented a paper to the War Cabinet, outlining the proposals for Ministry publicity in Britain. At the same time, he pointed out that 'the state of the public's reaction to the war cannot any longer be taken for granted'[261] remedies were needed to maintain British commitment to total war. To this end, he proposed policies for the Cabinet's approval, one of which included the use of more explanation 'not only about the armed forces and the war situation, but also about production, labour, war-time restrictions and the big problems which affect the life of everyone today'. In dealing with news, he suggested that 'it is essential not merely to be, but to give the public the impression of being candid and objective'; 'that all forms of exhortation should be avoided, and that rumours and complaints should be dealt with competently and at once'.[262] The Cabinet accepted the recommendations Bracken put forward, all of which would, in time, affect filmmaking. Bringing government other departments on board would alleviate the problems of film production encountered by the MOI, outlined in chapters 1 and 2.

Market Research

In developing a political strategy at that time, the MOI lacked the instruments to check the effectiveness of its propaganda efforts, especially in feature film content. The Home Intelligence Division, which had provided some feedback from the public on cinema, had been abolished in October 1939. This led to a lack of consistency in the themes of films being made, which became a significant problem. Without proper guidance or market research the film studios had to 'second guess' the market and public demand. Dickinson and Street's view was that 'official interest in cinema was related to concern with the national image rather than

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[260] Ibid
[261] CAB 66/23. Cabinet Paper, W.P(42)155, presented to the War Cabinet, W.M.49(42), 15 April 1941
[262] Ibid

propaganda'.[263] Archival evidence supports this view, in that any guidance from outsiders, such as academics, was ignored at this stage of the war. I propose that the management setup was at fault, after all, the ideas of feedback from the public was a completely new idea and would take a while to be noticed as useful within the MOI and the government in general. Until this issue was resolved, the film studios would continue on their own track with MOI propaganda input.

Bracken worked with Bernstein to implement important projects. In order to be able to check the effectiveness of state propaganda, a new educational department had been created in March 1940 to evaluate public opinion and measuring the morale of the population. Named the Home Intelligence Department, its purpose was: -

> To provide a directive for Home Publicity. A continuous flow of information is required on what the public is thinking, in order that publicity measures may be formulated, and their effectiveness tested. And, to provide an assessment of home morale. For this purpose, it is necessary to study immediate reactions to specific events.[264]

This was a revolutionary move; getting information almost on a real time basis would be fed back into plans for propaganda for films, and other aspects of the MOI's work. Achieved by means of targeted surveys, these would provide an insight into what the public was thinking. Most government departments and private companies today use some form of market research to aid their work, but this was a new idea, particularly for government.

In addition to this dedicated department, an example of the type of feedback that the Films Division was supposed to be receiving is found in a *Home Intelligence Weekly Report* from late 1940. The purpose of the study was to investigate the public's reaction to film themes via a number of questions. A survey was undertaken in three centres selected for their representation of certain population profiles:

<u>Leamington</u>	A town with many evacuees from adjacent bombed industrial districts. In peacetime, Leamington has a high proportion of retired professional people.
<u>Bristol</u> .	A town much expanded by war production, and severely bombed.
<u>Glasgow</u> .	A northern and Scottish industrial centre, with a large Irish element.

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[263] Margaret Dickinson, & Sarah Street. *Cinema and State: The British Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985), 106.
[264] INF 1/848. Policy Committee, Memorandum by Mary Adams on the structure and function of a Home Intelligence Departments, 26.1.1940.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence in the archives to justify the selection of these categories. One question, put to over two thousand people, was to ascertain what percentage of film audiences was conscious of having seen MOI films. The result: Glasgow 82%, in Leamington 70%, Bristol 71%. Other questions asked whether people wanted alternative means of war information like radio, with similar percentages expressing a liking for feature films. Similar figures were supplied for the public discussing film content. It was a simplistic exercise, as there was no attempt to delve more deeply into what type of films people wanted to see; but it did at least give some quantitative feedback to the Films Division on its efforts. Feedback of this type would provide some evidence of public opinion, but there was a problem. The Films Division was not, at this time, staffed with the skilled personnel it, and Bracken, needed to highlight and solve these problems. In practice the *Home Intelligence Department* was part of the MOI, but, in articulating complaints against the authorities, it did make enemies in Whitehall, who neither liked nor understood its activities.

Teamwork is important

Fortunately, the Films Division had Beddington, who was starting to form a working relationship with Bernstein (War Cabinet's special advisor to the Films Division). Both men had strong relationships with the War Cabinet. It was no surprise that staff numbers began to increase. One of Bernstein's main tasks was to produce input for the Mass Observation Unit film questionnaires. In theory, the Films Division used the services of Mass Observation Unit, whose 'qualitative' findings were to be supplemented by the 'quantitative' survey results of a *Wartime Social Survey*.[265] Devised by Bernstein, they took the form of questionnaires to the cinema going public. After initial discussions within Bernstein's team, the results from these units would be fed back to the Films Division, thereby creating a feedback loop for deciding on future film projects. When the results were back, Bernstein wrote up an analysis for the Films Division to consider.

In one example in March 1940,[266] respondents were asked which type of film they liked or disliked. On this survey, 18% of cinemagoers said they disliked war films, but the analysis stated, 'that this number is not affected by the actual war'. It is possible that the poor standard of production of films at this stage of the war, as described in chapters 1 and 2, was the reason

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[265] INF 1/273: War time Social surveys. Paper for Policy Committee.
[266] Mass Observation Unit. National Archives.

for this percentage. Questions were based around genres that had been popular before the war, for example thrillers or spy films. One result found that spy films were the most popular, followed by any film on the armed services. Bernstein broke down all released feature films according to subject matter, allocating to 'Topical' any dealing with the conflict. Out of the total number, 60% fell into this category. 'Films about the services have become more numerous and at the same time more serious'.[267]

Bernstein's conclusion was that the 'public's best response was to the films concerning the services, whatever the subject matter'. He went on 'any type of forces film would be very well received'.[268] From now on, cinema would play its part with depictions of service life, if possible, within a comedy framework. Examples of the results of Bernstein's suggestions are considered in the next chapter. My view is that he was up to date with current trends, as conscription had reached most families; in 1941, the age of conscription was lowered to 18, and the upper limit was raised to 50. Even older men and women up to 60 were required to undertake some form of national service.[269] Far from reducing cinema going, these moves led to an increase in cinema attendances.

Special effects

One interesting observation from the Mass Observation Unit was that the public watched films with air-raid sequences with indifference.[270] Bernstein deduced that no film could do justice to a real air raid in progress, and, in some cases, the audiences laughed at the effects, which was obviously not what the film makers had intended.[271] It showed that audiences were more alert and aware than previously thought. In addition, from a practical view, and with limited technical and special effects, budgets were always under pressure, so results would be variable in any film. Today, most WW2 film special effects look very primitive, but there were notable exceptions which will be highlighted in further chapters. Bernstein's analysis also noted that 'any film with speeches had a poorer response than action shots'.[272] However, the response to

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[267] Mass Observation Unit. Film Report. National Archives. 1940, 6.

[268] Ibid, 7.

[269] From an average of 20 million weekly admissions in 1939 to over 30 million weekly admissions in 1944 and 1945. Glancy, Mark (2011). 'Picturegoer: the fan magazine and popular film culture in Britain during the Second World War'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. Vol 31, Issue 4. 453–478

[270] Mass Observation Unit: film surveys. TC 65, Box 3. 10th September, 1940

[271] Ibid, 15.

[272] Ibid, 18.

Pimpernel Smith, the case study in this chapter, contradicts this statement, in my view due to the extraordinary speech at the end of the film.

14: *Pimpernel Smith* still: End scene, unreal effect

Audience feedback

Bernstein quoted Sam Eckman, CEO of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studios, on the subject matter of films 'There are films on U-boats, but with real U-boats cropping up in the news, filmgoers wouldn't want to see more on the screen. Well, you'd be wrong…'.[273] This fed into Bernstein's conclusions, that any 'topical' film would be popular and should include all aspects of it, including air raids or scenes of actual fighting. He strongly recommended producing any film that combines the story lines with humour, as this was the most popular subject area, covered in the next chapter.[274]

Analysing customer feedback is a recent development, as many industries use this process nowadays to gauge public opinion and to adjust resources accordingly. But crucially there is no archive evidence that such information percolated down to the Films Division itself. Evidence comes from Helen Forman, who was second in charge of the distribution section of the Films Division, who specifically mentioned 'that no scientific audience reaction research

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[273] Ibid, 19.
[274] Ibid, 1.

was carried out on the effects of the films distributed by the Films Division on the British public'. Instead, the Division relied for its impact assessments of audiences on the reports of the Films Officers and on feedback from professional film critics via film reviews. However, using critics views as a guide could be very misleading.[275] Most film critics were based in London and saw the viewing habits of the wider population through a narrow London lens. James Chapman writes 'In fact, it was the critics who favoured the British products, such as the 'realist' films of Ealing Studios, whereas popular taste preferred the romantic melodramas of Hollywood'.[276] In consequence, films that were not popular with the public nevertheless received good 'write-ups' from the critics. This tended to mislead the Films Division into believing that it was producing popular and therefore influential films, from an unproven but generally accepted blueprint. The absence of archive material may be revealing, but one can trace influences in later films back to certain elements of Bernstein's reports described above.

With a greater workload, it is not surprising that in the summer of 1941 the Films Division staff increased to 93 people,[277] a substantial increase from the days of Clark. Teams were now tasked with coordinating work with the British film studios, unlike the earlier situation described in the first two chapters. Looking further ahead, with 130 employees, staffing reached its highest level in 1945,[278] when its working practices look quite different to those described in earlier chapters and covered in the final chapter of this project.

Strengths of the Ideas Committee

Bracken continued to follow up his ideas on reorganising the entire process of filmmaking. One important group he established with Beddington was an Ideas Committee, an informal discussion forum for the exchange of film project ideas. To have such a committee had been discussed for some time. Working with the Screenwriters' Association, Beddington helped get it going. Its first meeting took place in December 1940 in the office building of the MOI, the Senate House.[279] Members spanned the industry, including Leslie Howard (see case study), Michael Balcon (head of Ealing Studios), Michael Powell (film director), Sidney Gilliat (film director and writer) and Anthony Asquith (film director), a good cross section of skills from

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[275] Helen Forman, 'The non-theatrical distribution of films by the Ministry of Information'. In: *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918–45.* (eds) Nickolas Pronay, D.W.Spring, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 97
[276] James Chapman, *Official Film Propaganda during the Second World War*. PhD. 1995, 9.
[277] INF 1/126. Films Division Organization
[278] Ibid
[279] INF 1/59. Ideas Committee papers 9.11.1942

within the film industry. Interesting that no film reviewers were members, which may have been deliberate. Beddington praised the 'regular sittings of the Ideas Committee' for the good relations it established, 'a Ministry Committee consisting of representatives of Films Division and film directors and writers of commercial producing companies who meet to discuss directions which film propaganda should take'.[280] Even though the meetings were informal,[281] they functioned an arena for the exchange of information between the Films Division and the film industry, opening a dialogue on a whole range of issues that affected both organisations. Films were now discussed before going into production and the Films Division could now keep producers informed of any ministerial propaganda intentions.

Within the new management structure, Beddington continued to seek acceptance of his ideas. In June 1940, he wanted the Ministry of Supply to grant the MOI compulsory powers to order cinemas to show government films,[282] to give him total control of film propaganda output; however, the War Cabinet never agreed this idea. On the other hand, he remained open to film content suggestions from any source.

As we have seen in previous chapters, from Oxbridge dons through to internal discussion groups, a common recommendation from many advisors was the use of comedy. We can trace that back through examples discussed in chapters 1 and 2; humour within feature films was a principal requirement of the public. In the next section, we investigate this area, looking at how this came about and looking in detail at the background to one famous film comedy. The case study has been chosen to illustrate how one very determined person, with high-level contacts, could have significant influence over the ideas behind, and production of, a feature film.

Case Study: *Pimpernel Smith* (1941)

In order to understand the process by which *Pimpernel Smith* was made, it is useful to explore the context of the war. When this film was considered in early 1941, Britain was alone fighting Germany and was suffering from the after-effects of the Dunkirk retreat. The movie was released in July 1941, when the outcome of the war was far from certain, with the United States yet to enter it. For both the general population and the services these were dark days. The threat

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[280] INF 1/59 Select Committee on Expenditure: Films: Beddington to Treasury, 9th November 1942
[281] Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1975), 141
[282] INF 1/249. Planning Committee Minutes, 23 June 1940.

of invasion from France was foremost in the public's mind. It would be an understatement to say that the general population needed some distraction, which could incorporate morale boosting propaganda. The role of the media was key. One popular medium of entertainment for the general population, aside from cinema, was the radio. Most homes had a radio, with only the BBC broadcasting in Britain. Two of the most popular broadcasters were J.B Priestley and Leslie Howard.

After returning to England, having finished the films *Gone With The Wind* and *Intermezzo*, both filmed in 1939, Howard immediately contacted his acquaintances at the MOI. As already mentioned, he was a close friend of Bracken and had strong connections within the War Cabinet. At the time of his return, the country was on the threshold of war and there is evidence in his papers that Howard wanted to be there to help in any way he could. Howard asked the government to allow him to join any branch of the services. They told him to talk to Bracken, as Howard was believed to be more valuable in the propaganda area advancing the morale of the public by making films. Initially Howard worked with the British Council to create films demonstrating what it was like to live in a free society to other nations, and, in particular, the Empire. At the time, there was a lot of pressure to increase conscription from the Empire, so these films had tremendous importance as propaganda. One example in 1940 the BC produced a short film, *War Comes To London*, emphasising the point that everyone in the UK should work together.

A large problem, explained in chapter 2, was the large divide between the British Council and the MOI, which resulted in the BC playing no role in either the MOI or feature film production until very late in the war, discussed in chapter 7. It was fortunate that Howard had good contacts at powerful levels of government otherwise, he would have been unable to get his feature film ideas made. Howard was not one to delay addressing the issue. Talking to both Churchill and Clark in particular, Howard could detect a new consensus and spirit being formed;[283] many decision makers wanted ideas to be put forward and acted upon, without procrastination. This is another example of an old boy's network that still functioned, but unlike the structure described in the first two chapters. Here, the network forms a more formal structure with records of meetings kept on file. As explored in chapters 1 and 2, many suggestions from the film studios and academics, such as classics professors had been ignored by the Films Division

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[283] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards. *Britain can take it. British Cinema in the Second World War*. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 51.

without discussion. Now the evidence points to the fact that Howard and the MOI had the benefit of both the mood of the country and a new Prime Minister, driving matters forward without delay.

Bracken immediately asked Howard to join the newly created Ideas Committee of the MOI, where he suggested several treatments for consideration, including *Pimpernel Smith*.
In parallel, in another example of the old boys' network, Howard often dined with Clark at London clubs. Clark says Howard talked 'excitedly about his new film'[284] continuing the Pimpernel theme, from Howard's film *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934). Backing from Clark would be important, to gain finance and support from the MOI. Clark must have been impressed, as he passed the idea to his good friend Lewis Jackson, of British National films, who agreed to provide the financing. Access to funding had changed since the making of films such as *The Lion Has Wings*. That particular film had been financed by the MOI, but now any feature film had to secure its own financing. Once finance was agreed and the Films Division was happy with the script, there was no delay. Production started in January 1941 at Denham Studios. Again, the new procedures managed to streamline the whole agreement process. Whereas, in chapters 1 and 2, the Case Studies illustrated that a high degree of interference came from staff within the Films Division a greater degree of independence was given to Howard. He still needed the script to be approved by the MOI before filming started, but this happened early in 1941. Interestingly, Howard, managed to gain approval for scenes mocking the Foreign Office, represented by the character of the Earl of Meadowbrook, who was not engaged in the war. It would have been interesting to consider Foreign Office views on the film, but unfortunately, no such archive records exist. There were also several scenes depicting the isolationism of the Americans, conveyed by an American character, which as discussed, was a major concern of the British government.

Pimpernel revisited

Based on a famous French character he had played in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934), Howard transposed that film to a contemporary setting. In the weeks prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, an English archaeologist is responsible for a series of daring rescues of important scientists and humanitarians from Nazi-occupied territories.[285] Howard also had the services of

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[284] Harold, Nicolson, Diaries and Letters 1930-55. London, 1980, 176.
[285] BFI Online films

the film editor, Sidney Cole, who was associated with the Documentary movement in film. Impressed that Howard was starring, producing and directing, he helped in producing what he would call a realist feel to many scenes.

One of Cole's comments sums up Howard's view 'He preferred the term 'realist' to 'documentary' because this is what he felt they were: films about real life'.[286] Calder's view was that 'there was a British version of realism which followed pre-war work of Grierson. A focus on everyday people in different jobs, co-ordinated and bringing society together'.[287] In my view this was a good summation, as society was slowly changing its attitudes to more of an acceptance of film narratives that contained real life characters. For a detailed analysis of the film, refer to Jeffrey Richards's work.[288]

Influence of Grierson

Some of Grierson's work was famous for his depiction of 'images of dirty, decayed industrial Britain',[289] which would become apparent in the finished film, analysed in the concluding section of this chapter. Other aspects of Grierson's visions for film content are explored in the next chapter. Richards's and Aldgate's view is that 'Howard fulfilled almost exactly the criteria laid down by Professor F.C Barlett in 1940 for the ideal material to be broadcast…using people representative of national culture'.[290] A greater analysis of Barlett's advice was covered in chapter 2, but it is interesting to note that his suggestions and ideas were still part of an ongoing consensus driving narratives in film several years after his initial input. Why should Classical Studies academics be involved in discussions of propaganda? Daisy Dunn's view, which is convincing, was that 'Professors of classics, they possessed real authority…covers the widest areas of study…and most coveted'.[291] This was certainly the view of upper levels of government. I argue that these academics had their own official old boys' network in that they worked within the same area. Their views on what classical heroes are depicted in cinema, where Greek myths refer to persons of great courage and nobility, in films such as *Eagle Squadron* and *Pimpernel Smith*.

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[286] BFI Screen online, Ann Ogidi. Sidney Cole 1908-1998

[287] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico publishing, 1992), 236-237.

[288] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain can take (*Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 44-75.

[289] Ibid. 190.

[290] Ibid, 68

[291] Daisy Dunn, *Not far from Brideshead* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2022), 2.

Returning to the film, given the pressures from the documentary makers, specifically the *DNL,* Howard responded by including more realism in his films. A category of thriller, typical of the war period, I think can be described as semi-documentaries of espionage, fiction filmed in the style of propaganda documentaries. *Pimpernel Smith* mirrors this with scenes of documentary reality. They employed dramatic conventions and studio-settings that were accepted and understood by the viewing public.

15: Pimpernel Smith. External and internal images. Note very believable scenes with well-lit mountains and low-key lighting suggesting dark forces at work.

Screen idol

Looking at the film from an ideological point of view, it is clear that to wartime audiences Howard represented the visionary aspect of an English hero figure. He came to embody the spirit of an upper middle-class nation, a quiet thoughtful spirit roused to action by evil'.[292] In a general sense, Mackenzie has argued that the British defined 'their own unique superiority, embedded in imperialism, monarchism and militarism. These were the dominant ideology in society…and survived through WW2'.[293] Howard's views aligned with these statements, and the archive evidence seems to support this. I argue his film characterising were planned to appeal to an audience's image of what makes a real hero, one that, however fantastic, they could believe in. A further illustration of Howard thinking, was on his return from Hollywood in 1940 'I knew what it was to belong to a free nation with a noble motive…I knew the real

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[292] Estel Eforgan, *Leslie Howard, the lost actor* (London: Mitchell, 2012), xiv

[293] John McKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester*:* Manchester University Press, 1986), 22.

meaning of being an Englishman in Britain in the year 1940'.[294] Here Dyer's description sums up his character 'There is an emphasis on co-operation, sociability, good sportsmanship as against unrestrained 'emotional' behaviour'.[295] His argument is clear, but one might add further attributes, such as a stoic nature and unlimited courage, quite an attractive package for any British audience. I suggest that here is a layered heroism at play in Howard's embodiment in the film – Howard as his onscreen character, as director/writer, as filmmaker, as movie star, as British public figure returning from America.

On its release, the film was very popular with the public, and became one of the top box office successes on the year.[296] It seemed to follow a strong public feeling that a fightback was needed on all fronts. Certainly, at high levels of government, it made quite an impact. Winston Churchill showed the movie to officers and other guests on board the battleship Prince of Wales in August 1941. This was at a critical stage of the war, as the ship crossed the North Atlantic on route to Churchill's important meeting with Franklin Roosevelt in Newfoundland. This would culminate in the Atlantic Charter, an early agreement setting out American and British goals for the post-war period. From the archives, circumstantial evidence shows that this film was highly regarded by Churchill for its propaganda messages to the Americans.

However, despite all the favourable feedback, the *Documentary Newsletter* was still not happy. 'Films of this kind are bad propaganda because they present the war in absurdly romantic terms... A typical MOI film'. [297] As described earlier, this journal's complaints against the Films Division were constant and, on the subject of this film, they became more personal. 'Leslie Howard, who has recently chimed in, his contributions to the propaganda effort in *Pimpernel Smith* weren't exactly inspiring'.[298] It seems that even with the efforts of Howard's fellow team member and documentarist, Mr Cole, it still could not satisfy them.

As far as the film's hero character is concerned, Neil Rattigan summarises that:

> his was a patriotic film. Following the myth of the amateur up against professional, organized, fascism was a powerful theme. It certainly had the thrill of the chase…, above all, British heroism. The film did postulate a possible hero for the times. The MOI made use of Howard as both an actor in film and as a 'real' person who exists as a mythical ideal…British war films provided not

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[294] Leslie Ruth Howard, *A quite remarkable Father* (London: Longmans,1959), 257
[295] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Publishing, 1978), 23.
[296] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain can take it,* 64.
[297] *Documentary News Letter*, Vol 3, Number 5. May1942, 67.
[298] *Documentary News Letter*. Vol 2, Number 12. December 1941. 225

just heroes, but leaders. A key message was that members of the upper class are natural leaders; members of the lower classes are natural followers.[299]

The final big scene in the film illustrates Rattigan's points. The hero's identity has been revealed, and he faces certain death at the hands of the German general. Pimpernel Smith fearlessly addresses the general as 'Captain of Murderers', in a short but extremely effective speech. In it, Smith movingly expresses the movie's main themes, embodies its idealised heroism, and predicts the result of the war:

> All of you who have demoralised and corrupted a nation are doomed. Tonight [referring to the 1939 German invasion of Poland] you will take the first step along a dark road, from which there is no turning back. …. And still you will have to go on, because you will find no horizon, and see no dawn, until at last you are lost and destroyed.

The message reached out to the audience via a propaganda message, reflecting back to Clark's paper on 'fighting back'. *Pimpernel Smith* also raises the question of how a film affects its audience. As we have seen, the movie is about a hero. As Horatio Smith, Howard was presented as a British gentleman, a gentle academic with courage. The character was given the surname 'Smith' by Howard to illustrate that ordinary people can be heroes. With this simple title change, Howard's aim was for the audience to see themselves as a Pimpernel hero in their own lives. Within the last few scenes, Howard is talking directly to the audience, voicing the message that Britain can win the war, a very strong propaganda message.

An old-fashioned hero

The movie is about a hero, but there was a mystical quality, represented by the fact that the Pimpernel seemed to be able to appear and disappear at will. Sonya Rose[300] writes that 'Howard had roots in the ancient notions of chivalry, with fair play, tolerance and kindness- the manly code that is built within the confines of Public School'. Characteristics that would help him being a member of the old boy's network. Certainly, Howard's school experience was represented in the film, but there must have been other influences. Most of his early film work in Hollywood was playing 'stiff upper lip' Englishmen, in films such as *Outward Bound* (1930), *A Free Soul* (1933) and his most famous role in *Gone With The Wind* (1939). Therefore, like many actors, it is possible his image blended with reality, in depicting a certain

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[299] Neil Rattigan, *This is England: British film and the Peoples War 1939-1940* (New Jersey: Fairleigh University Press, 2001), 23.

[300] Sonya Rose, *Which Peoples War?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 212.

type of role or character. Dyer states that 'most stars discussed as social types, are seen as representing dominant values in society, by affirming what those values are in the hero types'.[301] I argue that Howard's deliberate focus on ordinary people as heroes led to audience members deciding their ownership for heroism in their personal lives. After all, the film-going public had to return to the real world of air raids every day. Howard's determination to reach out to the public and supply fortitude was a main driver of his work within film.

A hero for the public

Beyond that, *Pimpernel Smith* invoked patriotic feelings, as evidenced by Churchill's use of it for propaganda for the Americans. The film also provided examples of heroic deeds displayed by leading characters, including the 'token' American. Certainly, Howard's hero figure fits into Christine Grandy's definition in her work[302] stating that 'in representation, make the hero capable, honourable and moral'. In some ways this depiction by Howard, was a throwback to British films of the 1930s, but here war, the enemy (or 'other' as defined by Chomsky) was a real fact to the audiences. They did not have imaginary evil figures in black, but real everyday threats from invasion and bombs from the sky. So, Howard's heroic figure suggested hope and fighting back against the odds, but with stoicism.

It is a measure of the Nazis' respect for Howard's influence on British propaganda that they shot down a civilian airliner over neutral airspace on June 1, 1943 because the enemy knew that Howard was on the flight. Sent personally by Prime Minister Winston Churchill on a mission to keep Spain out of the war, which had proved successful, he was on his return. Howard was a great loss to both the MOI and the film-going public. His tragic death reflects back to Sherman's definition of ancient stoic heroes that are more revered in death.

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[301] Richard Dyer, *Stars*. 52.
[302] Christine Grandy. *Heroes and Happy Endings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 185.

Conclusions

The fact that the early 1940s are widely regarded as the golden period of British filmmaking could be largely due to the role the war played in the regeneration of the nation's cinema. According to Murphy:

> During the six years of the war, British film production transformed itself from a slump-ridden industry which inspired little loyalty from audiences or critics into a popular and vital element of national culture. The war seemed to provide a theme, a subject, a common cause. Continental and Hollywood cinema and the British theatrical tradition into a national style. If this manifested itself most obviously in a documentary influenced realism in films about active service or about war on the Home Front, the war seeped into everything.303

Here Murphy is suggesting that outside influences and pressures on the film industry were a very positive process, creatively, if not politically. I agree that his ideas of transformation with a common theme would be an iterative process, incorporating influences from many sources as the war progressed. A major factor was the entry of America into the war discussed in the next chapter, which explores in more detail the interaction between Hollywood and the MOI, reaching down to film narratives with greater emphasis on propaganda. Aside from Leslie Howard's propaganda value, Dyer's ideas of a star's persona are important here, as the cinema audience would recognise Howard, already being such a well-known figure. In his roles he always reflected to Dyer's idea of conformality.

Under Bracken, the MOI became a Ministry of Explanation, a function that the memorandum on the long-term policy of the Ministry had given to the MOI in 1941. Compared to the organisational confusion outlined in chapters 1 and 2, this period saw a coming together of major players in decision making, as well as filmmaking. Earlier it would not have been possible for *Pimpernel Smith* to be made, certainly not in its final form, and not with such efficiency.

Howard had the advantage of precise official policy decisions, following either a MOI policy committee or Clark's paper on depiction of the enemy in film. 'That propaganda should depict the Germans as morally damnable…and the exposure of inquisitor methods of the Gestapo'.[304] His film certainly followed those lines. These became a major development of the process of

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[303] Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000), 5.
[304] INF 1/848. MOI Policy Committee paper January 1941 by Clark:

feature filmmaking and was quite different from the disorganised history described in previous chapters. The inclusion of the service chiefs in the production process prevented the wastage of scarce time and resources. With Bracken in charge, there was grudging acceptance in some parts that things were improving. Taylor wrote 'Propaganda in the form of moral armament and admonition completely disappeared from his (Bracken) repertoire. The MOI increasingly gained confidence in the ability of the population to behave rationally and to assess their own situation. And the British public response as a whole shows a very high degree of common-sense'.[305] Taylor's view was premature, as there remained a great deal of work to be done, as the war situation changed from week to week. However, Bracken had set up a more open and focused organisation that better responded to the crisis.

A common policy for propaganda?

Summing up, by the end of 1941 there had been two phases of propaganda concepts within the MOI. In the first phase, which lasted from the beginning of the war until mid-1941, the single aim was that the morale of the population had to be maintained by patriotism and reassurances. 'Things are getting better' was the message in many feature films. A second phase, overlapping with the first, lasted from mid-1940 to mid-1941 and marked the beginning of a new concept of propaganda, away from simple patriotic messages towards effective propaganda, which explained facts through more complex story lines. In the third phase, which began in July 1941 when Brendan Bracken was appointed, propaganda was no longer aimed at the morale of the population. A propaganda depicting real, and invented, events of the war, had replaced the old ideas. These remained the driving force of MOI feature films until the end of the war, which fed into filmmaking processes, affecting the content of films henceforth. The next chapter's case study will enlarge upon these concepts.

As for the Civil Service, the practice of Bracken and Beddington to avoid confrontations with other ministries and army departments, represented a very important change. The MOI 'will fight their battles and give full service but has no desire to interfere with their proper functions'.[306] In the case of Bracken, he was well known and liked in the newspaper world and had many Fleet Street contacts he was able to use in the Ministry's service. This protected him from attacks similar to those which the previous head, Duff Cooper, had found so restrictive.[307]

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[305] INF 1/292. Stephen Taylor, Home Morale and Public Opinion, September.1942.
[306] INF 1/891 Brendan Bracken memo
[307] Lysaght, Brendan Bracken, (London 1979), p.199. Bracken cultivated not only editors but also proprietors.

This cooperation across the media, particularly the film industry, had begun to happen under Clark, as discussed in the last chapter. Here, it became an organisational process, established in order to move things quickly and efficiently forward. A Policy Committee had been set up to determine what to do to improve home morale in 1940.[308] Its function was 'maintaining and strengthening the morale of the civil population and to consider means public morale in all classes can be stimulated to greater confidence and energy'.[309] The committee had a habit of reacting quickly to events, which fitted in with the MOI's new way of working. They produced several reports and, in mid-June 1941, the plan for a propaganda campaign was presented. For the first time, the film activities of the MOI were also given a specific propaganda aim. 'A campaign has been thought out, and is now being executed, to diminish fear and defeatism and to increase courage, anger, patriotism and pride.' Also planned was a campaign against 'Rumours' and to counter 'Class-resentment': that something might be done to diminish the present predominance of the cultured voice …. Every effort should be made use the working class'.[310] To some extent, this statement was intended to cover the whole range of the MOI's output, including posters, publications, and radio, not only films made under its remit. Such directions from the policy makers fed into the overall pressures bearing down on filmmakers. *Pimpernel Smith* should this be seen against this background.

Another very important key driver at this stage was the reluctance of America to enter the War. Initial belief at senior levels that the country did not need America's assistance were disappearing, as a realistic assessment of the state of the war emerged. Certainly, there were many examples of feature films encouraging US involvement made by the British film industry; for example, *49th Parallel* (1941); 'was a concerted attempt to influence opinion in neutral America into supporting their government's entry into the war.[311] There were many examples of films made with one main American character; in addition to this chapter's case study *Pimpernel Smith*, the next chapter's case study *The Foreman Went To France* (1942) is another such example.

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[308] The committee included Ivison Macadam, Secretary of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Sir Kenneth Clark, former head of the Films Division, who had promoted Reith to Controller of Home Publicity, and Harold Nicolson, Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister. June 1940.

[309] INF 1/849. Paper for Policy Committee, 19.6.1940.

[310] INF 1/670. 1942 (part)

[311] BFI Screen online review

Further changes coming

In some ways, the story of the processes guiding the British government's film policies now becomes much more complex. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the constructs of influence from America. These would affect not only British film policy, but would also filter down to actual narratives, especially where hero figures reside. Looking at evidence examined in this chapter, it can be argued that a key constituent section of the British film industry was starting to work constructively with the MOI and other government groups. This was a positive development, as will be shown in the following chapters. The Americans becoming involved, and, not lacking in resources and direction, would start to influence the workings of the MOI.

CHAPTER 4: 1942. Americans, new heroes and humour

We have no chance against a time that needs heroes. [312]
A sense of humour is the English Secret Weapon.[313]

Timeline of main events on this phase of the War[314]

- December: Japan now at war with UK
- Blitz continues against British cities.
- February: Singapore falls to the Japanese - around 25,000 prisoners taken.
- June: USA success: Battle of Midway, in June.

Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the main driving forces, both official and unofficial, affecting feature film content for the period up to the end of 1941. By far, the most important and most influential episode was America joining the fight in Europe in December 1941. Leaving aside the advantages in military resources and logistics, the effect on the narratives of feature films would be deep-seated and wide-ranging. Within this chapter, influences and processes affecting film with this new cooperation with America will be explored from the UK government's point of view, especially, but not always, the MOI. Another very important move was the beginnings of an integration of forms of film realism, for example characters in real life situations of war, within the framework of comedy.

Although Britain entered 1942 with a new ally, a powerful enemy also joined, Japan. As a direct result of this, by 1942 resident male British subjects between the ages of 18 and 51 (up from 41 in 1939), and females between 20 and 30, were liable to be called up, with some exemptions.[315] Cinema audience demographics would be altered by these new demands on both sexes and would lead to further pressure on the MOI to keep up with these big social changes. Influence started to build on the MOI from another official source, the British Film Producers' Association (BFPA). This organisation had taken some time since the start of the

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[312] Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (London: Tauris, 2007), 87.
[313] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take it* . 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 59.
[314] BBC Archives: MOI paper on War events. R67/44
[315] Roger Broad, *Conscription in Britain 1939–64* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 63.

war to assert itself in discussions on the directions of film. The BFPA had been set up by the commercial producers themselves to represent their interests to several government departments, mainly the Board of Trade and Ministry of Labour, which had links to film production which will be discussed later. Shortly after Beddington's arrival at the MOI Films Division, the BFPA took the initiative in writing to him 'in regard to an appointment ... for the purpose of discussing any proposals the Ministry had for the making of propaganda films.[316] It was not until 1942 that, in many discussions with the MOI, some new guidance was issued from the BFPA which continued to stress that what was needed was more realism:

> Realistic films about everyday life dealing with matters not directly about the war, but featuring events in various phases of life in factory, mines, on the land etc., are advocated by the Films Division of the MOI. Special support will be given to the production of such films. A balance between war and non-war propaganda is desirable, emphasis should be given to the positive virtues of British national characteristics and the democratic way of life.[317]

In essence, BFPA's suggestions mirrored several other ideas that had been suggested to the MOI over the past few years. But here was an important group putting forward its agenda, and really could not be just ignored. Certainly, Beddington responded enthusiastically to the Association's overtures: he 'agreed to co-operate fully with the Association and ... expressed his willingness to attend any of its meetings at which his presence was desired'.[318] From then on, the BFPA joined in and contributed to the MOI discussions on directions in film, especially the Ideas Committee, which was explored in the last chapter. Since America had joined the war, their trade journals had been tracking developments in feature films and wanted to highlight their views. The *Motion Picture Daily* was certainly keen, 'the MOI uses ideas from scriptwriters and directors for film ideas'.[319] Since this was an influential newspaper and read by a large number of people working in film, it is possible that more ideas were received by the MOI from America. This area will be explored in the next two chapters.

With all the new pressures from the BFPA, it is not surprising that storylines within feature films started to move in different directions. Roger Manvell summed up that movement, writing that 'the war film discovered the common denominator of the British people'. He

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[316] British Film Producers' Association minutes. 9 May 1940.
[317] The actual instructions have not survived in the Ministry of Information records in the National Archives but are summarised in *Kinematograph Weekly* 30 July 1942.
[318] James Chapman 'Official British Film Propaganda during the Second World War,' PhD diss., (Lancaster University, 1995), 221.
[319] *Motion Picture Daily*. January 4th 1941, 2.

pointed to 1942 as the turning point in the emergence of a new populist documentary-style British cinema, to replace the out-dated and class-bound melodrama of the early war years.

> The keynote of films between 1942 and 1945 was seen to be strict accuracy in the depiction of warfare, the highlighting of personal issues of comradeship, bravery, fear, tension, endurance, skill, boredom and hard work, the absence of blatant heroics, jingoistic self-display, and the projection of a national image of reticence, wry humour and stolid determination.320

While it can be argued that this was a fair assessment, it did not apply to every film made, yet from this period of the war onwards the majority fit within his parameters. Certainly, the feature films examined within the case study section fall within these ideas and themes.

Attacks from the *Documentary News Letter* (DNL) continued into 1942:

> The Films Division could help by tidying up their house a little…Their organisation and planning seems specifically arranged to produce chaos and nothing else… Firstly, there is the old lack of policy, or guidance on policy, which has made so much of the MOI's work ineffective. Secondly, there are faults of the Films Division itself. From the point of view of US distribution, the Films Division tends to send out films, which have not been made with a real understanding of what is wanted by the USA market.321

These descriptions were unfair, as it was early days in the relationships between the MOI and parties in America, but it follows the journal's main theme to heavily criticise the MOI film plans. Chapman also has words on this subject and makes the point that 'the fault for this lack of an overall plan was laid not solely at the door of the Films Division, but also on the government as a whole. The journal was therefore broadening the scope of its targets'.[322] In one large article, the journal went on to argue that future British feature films should accurately represent real people, that the cinema-going public would believe in, and not 'plaster saints on our side'.[323] My view is that the DNL was just pushing its documentary agenda, but it is possible that alignment with other pressure groups, such as the BFPA (and in time the OWI) was enough to persuade it a new form of feature film characters were needed.

Documentary filmmaker Jiri Weiss in an article for DNL in December 1941, entitled 'An Allied Film Unit', argued that British documentary films should widen their scope beyond the home front: 'British documentary film makers have given this country the best war films in the world.

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[320] Roger Manvell, *Twenty-Five Years of British Film 1925-45* (London: Falcon Press, 1947), 84-5.
[321] BFI Library. *Documentary News Letter*. 1942
[322] James Chapman. PhD. 90.
[323] Feature Film Propaganda. *Documentary News Letter,* Vol 3. No.5 May 1942, 67.
Note that '*Plaster Saint*' means someone without human failings.

Technically extremely skilful, they have touched every subject with a breath of human feeling; they have introduced on the screen their people as the hero. We have seen in their films the real face of Britain: the miner, the seaman, the worker. We have seen people in shelters, the social services, the men and women in the Forces'.[324] Coming from a respected filmmaker, these words matched others in the field, who were arguing for a wider scope of characters within British feature films. Censorship had a role to play, one view made by Taylor and others is that 'the guardian of the establishment's icons was the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), but its role declined from the midpoint of the war'.[325] This is partly true, but my interpretation is that the BBFC took some time to redefine its role as constructs in film content were changing fast.

American influences from many sources

In my view, a very important point with America's involvement, was that the overall dynamics of politics were changing, with effects throughout the British government, not only for directions in film. If one looks at subsequent articles in the DNL, there is a pattern of not just putting blame on the MOI/Films Division, but more of a criticism of approach and logistics. A typical piece from 1942 goes on to state 'the trouble at the British end is twofold. Firstly, lack of policy…Secondly, from the view of USA distribution, are our films wanted?' The paper goes on to say that the Films Division ought to understand what the American public is looking for in British made cinema. This was an instructive view and there is strong evidence that the Films Division opened up dialogues with their partners in Washington and Hollywood, under the directions of the Office of War Information (OWI), to address these issues. Even in these early days of cooperation, the OWI wasted no time in making clear its views on film content. The OWI were concerned that American audiences in general disliked some British accents, especially the upper-class ones. Elements in the OWI were still anti-war so this concern may have been anti-British bias. Another concern was that British films lack a central propaganda message, which was an important and critical point which the MOI had already realised. On initial discussions with the OWI, these issues were considered by the MOI, and attempts were made to resolve them.

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[324] Jiri Weiss, An Allied Film Unit, *Documentary News Letter*, Vol 2, No 12, December 1941, 233.
[325] Ken Short, 'Cinematic Support for the Anglo-American Détente, 1939–43'. In: Philip Taylor (eds) *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War.* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 103

In practice, the exchange of ideas and information between the MOI and the OWI worked both ways. Discussions of film content that reflected how each country represented their society became the aim of both governments. At the London end, Mr John Elliot, a retired congressman, was put in charge of working with the MOI on film ideas. He commented 'a great deal more needs to be done to show what America is like to the British public. He hoped that the British will continue to make films that also show what real Britain is like'.[326] At the USA end, Thomas Baird from the MOI was sent to Washington to act as a liaison with the OWI.[327] This is further evidence that the USA was expanding its involvement and control, and it was not waiting for what it perceived to be the usual slow British government bureaucratic responses. From the archive evidence, my view is that the issue was resource dependent in that the US poured human resources into the process. Another factor was that the some of the US experts came from industry which provided them with experience to problem solve. This was a contrast of styles that would have far reaching consequences, explored in the next chapter.

Beyond these external influences, internally, the MOI had been having a great deal of discussion on where British films ought to be going, examined in the next section. Reeves' view is that 'the MOI wanted to promote a new realism in British cinema...the upper-middle class straight-jacket must be set aside in new narratives, that focus on the life of the people'.[328] Looking at the BBC, its view highlighted two aspects of British life that have been touched upon before in this project. 'In England, it is safe to say, two types of appeal must always be prominent: to humour and to sport.'[329] Certainly, the public needed some distraction as major setbacks, such as Singapore falling and the ongoing Blitz, were still dominant in people's minds, as detailed in the timeline of events section. All these factors helped the film studios decide to produce films that people could relate to, and also bring in the favourite theme of comedy.

Clearly defined enemy

As mentioned earlier, within British cinema before the war, film narratives were regularly based on polarised representations of good and evil. Audiences were rooting for the heroes. The central issue is that a combination of events would slowly affect these film constructs,

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[326] Film Daily. 1942. Oct, 8
[327] Film Daily. 1942 Dec, 3
[328] Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London: Cassell, 1999), 160.
[329] Marget Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State* (London: BFI, 1985), 117.

especially comedy, illustrated in the case studies. During this period of the war, Nazis now provided appropriate enemies in many movies and would be imbedded within the borders of propaganda. Pre-1942, discussed in chapter 3, there was the view of some within the MOI to use film for propaganda purposes, but not supported by other departments. Now in 1942, my view is that some parts of the government state infrastructure were working in concert. It must be stressed that there were still improvements to make, but now the powers had the ability to deduce what was working and what was not in terms of propaganda. One example is that MOI's effectiveness was initially framed by its position within the machinery of the British government. This period of the war enabled Bracken to shape the MOI and improve its ministry's operations, not only in film, but in many other areas. The MOI became a more formidable force under his leadership, which is discussed in the Institutional Analysis section.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

This would be a trying time for the MOI. Major upheavals were in progress, with more to come from outside, as well as inside. Most administrators would have been despondent under the pressure, but Bracken showed that he was the right person for the job. He faced the official challenges and continued to look at ways of making the organisation better organised and able to react to events in a faster and efficient manner. For the Films Division, after discussion with Beddington, further organisational moves occurred. In 1942 it was divided into four sections: Production, Distribution, Non-Theatrical, and Administration & General. One view is that it was his experience in private companies that influenced his desire for a more business-like structure that reflected the film studios' own organisations. He wasted no time in spreading his views. A memorandum from Bracken to the War Cabinet in April 1942 described the new policy of the ministry, which Bracken stuck to and pursued until the end of the war. It helped that the MOI had genuine public feedback from surveys (discussed below) and the Mass Observation Units.

> There must be more explanation: not only about the Armed Forces and the war situation, but also about production, labour, war-time restrictions and the big problems that affect the life of everyone to-day. When the public is bewildered by something new, a failure to explain means the risk of driving a wedge between government and public. We must stop appealing to the public or lecturing at it. One makes it furious, the other resentful.[330]

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[330] Memorandum by Minister of Information, 10.4.1942. CAB 66/23

Further discussions on film content

Bracken as the new MOI head, had long held his own opinions on film content in respect of propaganda. A flavour of his views of 'realism' in films can be seen within discussions with the MOI. A paper entitled 'A Report from the Planning Committee to the Film Division on Home Morale'.[331] One important point from the paper was 'suggestions that too much emphasis had been put on abstract modes of propaganda, like for example liberty. It went into the idea that film content should have real examples of the ordinary lives of Britons'. A focus on family life would also be a good theme. Within these constructs the films should show a focused effort from all classes, fighting back against the enemy in all ways that were possible. These statements link into many similar ideas and suggestions made by others. Again, this is firm evidence of internal discussions and agreements on a course of actions for feature films. One could argue of the creeping influence of the DNL and its promoters, but there were so many forces pushing the MOI in this direction. It would become what Calder argued was the integration of the 'People's War'[332] into feature film narratives. In the conclusions section, some evidence to support Calder's view is examined.

Bracken had influence on other matters and a long-lasting issue was settled; by February 1942 a liaison officer had been appointed to co-ordinate the policy of the Films Division with that of the Film Censorship department. Disagreements between the two had, overall, been resolved, but it had taken up valuable time and resources. While the officer's duty was 'to keep the Film Censorship Section informed on questions of Policy and Propaganda, the Films Division censors were to refer to him 'all matters of a non-censorship nature, which arise in films, commentaries, scripts etc'.[333] This and other organisational moves under the Bracken administration removed many of the reasons for criticism. As a result, the attacks from both press, the ever critical DNL and Parliament lessened. 'On the domestic side of the department, the criticism, which amounted to a hubbub in the early days of the Films Division, is now by comparison a subdued murmur', remarked a leader in *The Times* newspaper.[334] Evidence from other newspapers and media outlets supports this view. If the theories of Herman and

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[331] INF 1/849 MOI Policy Committee notes, July 1940

[332] Angus Calder, *The People's War. Britain 1939-1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 368.

[333] Sheila Watson, 'The Ministry of Information and the Home Front in Britain, 1939-1942,' PhD diss., (Queen Mary College, University of London, 1980), 310.

[334] 'Work of the MOI: Minister's view', *The Times*, 8 July 1942, 8.

Chomsky's are considered, media actions are aligned with their view on flak.[335] By this time of the war concerted efforts to manage public information was working, which conforms to the definition of *flak*. But things were changing fast as the MOI was having difficulty controlling the various media outlets, especially as the USA was now starting to cover the war in greater detail. Furthermore, Edward Herman's and Noam Chomsky's ideas on *Concentrated Corporate Ownership* was now mapped onto the MOI structure from now on in the war. They argue that usually any public interest in high level decisions is not considered, but now in the war this had been enhanced for the MOI to take the public views into account in its decisions.

The MOI and the studios now controlled most, if not, all of the British Cinema output. Likewise, with closer co-operation from the services, a collaborative relationship had been achieved. Still, the MOI did not rest. One initiative created by the Films Division, still an essential marketing technique, was to start asking the public for their feedback on feature films ahead of their release. This input would then be fed back, in order to determine the next moves on film propaganda content.[336] In order to get a 'good cross-section' of the public, the people chosen consisted of a company director, nurse, shop assistant, soldier and a few office workers. Unfortunately, the MOI archives records in this area are very fragmented and there are neither records of which film was chosen nor of the results. However, there is some evidence that future feature film narratives, reflected some of the feedback with *The Foreman Went To France* and *The Goose Steps Out* from the Home Intelligence Reports, where people surveyed said that they liked the films humour within a heroic construct.

As far as newspapers were concerned, there was some evidence of what is now called 'spin' from unnamed sources. For example, a report highlighted the concerns of the BFPA, discussed earlier in this chapter, that the MOI should be making 'films with real people'.[337] James Curran, a argued that a class element was at work:

> The control by the Film Division of the content, style and message of films was exercised by a British manner of decisions over dinner tables. ...encouraging studios to make films with culture'.[338]

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[335] Herman and Chomsky: *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London, Vintage, 1995), 121.
[336] Cassandra, *The Daily Mirror*. June 12th 1942
[337] Leader, *Daily Herald*. July 29th 1942
[338] Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft, *British Censorship and Propaganda Policy during the Second World War*. In James Curran and Vincent Porte (ed,). *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld, 1983), 153.

By progressive, one takes this to mean not including classes of society, which was a contradiction of the way society was moving. Beddington and Bracken as discussed, were becoming more and more aware of pressures such as these. With the BFPA on board, they had another direct line to the film industry. Consequently, working with them, within the Ideas Committee, was an advantage. From then on as they could inform the film producers directly about any official policy of the ministry and could be implemented through feature films. Major moves such as these meant that the organisational operation of the Films Division became a more traditional business model. All interested parties knew what the overall objectives were for feature films. From then on, there would be no excuse for lack of resources, or confusion over propaganda aims.

Beddington's plans

Furthermore, through Beddington's regular attendance at the association's monthly meetings, he was able to use the BFPA as a platform for influence. In March 1942 he took part in his first meeting, at which he gave hints about the new policy of the Films Division, describing so-called 'quality films', which didn't deal directly with war topics but were valuable for the realisation of 'Projecting Britain' and worthy of support from the Films Division. Beddington put it on record 'that it was the policy of the MOI to give all possible aid to British film production and the Ministry held the opinion that any good British production could be regarded as propaganda, even though the subject matter of the film could not in some cases be so described'.[339] One can speculate that pressure from the War Cabinet was reaching down into the MOI. Evidence of influence from this source will be examined below. Unfortunately, the archives in this area are very fragmented, but one can speculate that their input must have been considered.

At the end of July 1942, he had a paper distributed to the press and the film industry with 'Suggestions for Feature Producers', which for the first time defined the policy of the MOI on support for feature films. At the next meeting with the BFPA, Beddington explained the paper in detail.

> The Ministry considered it desirable to establish a balance between propaganda films and films without direct propaganda intent; likewise, films with and without war themes should maintain a balance. It declared its readiness, to support all types of pictures, including entertainment of a

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[339] Minutes of the British Film Producers' Association, Meeting 8, Minute 70, 19.3.1942

> dramatic or comedy kind, provided these were of the highest quality and neither maudlin, morbid
> nor purely nostalgic for the old ways and old days. 340

What Beddington was trying to do was to get the film studios to really consider the impact their films would have on a public and comedy was one key to that. He was trying to get them to think more carefully about the content of films, knowing that there was a still a large number of critics still taking aim at the MOI. He went on…

> Anti-Nazi films and/or films with 'escape stories' would not automatically benefit from the
> support of the Ministry, even if the themes had entertainment value. The depiction of enemy
> characters had to be done with great sensitivity.

The Ministry also advised against films with 'war themes, which dealt with their theme mainly out of sensation, and also against entertainment films whose stories were 'stereotyped or hackneyed' and which cast a bad light on the country and its inhabitants.' Of course, what one person finds stereotyped; another could find the opposite, so this advice only provided more confusion for filmmakers. Further advice on propaganda, following on from the guidance papers discussed in chapter 1, with the *Home Publicity Group* suggestions on propaganda themes of everyday life being portrayed on film:

> Its special support would be given to realistic films of everyday life, dealing with events not
> directly about the war, but featuring events in factories, factory hostels, workshops, mines and on
> the land, and to other serious films dealing with historical and dramatic themes, provided they
> showed the positive virtues of national British characteristics and the democratic way of life.
> These films can be first-rate as prestige propaganda, and for morale, and need not lack box office
> value.341

At last, this was concrete advice on film content related to propaganda and the start of production of films that depicted real life people, which will be discussed in this case study and in later chapters. Advice such as this was in line with the views of the new management of the MOI. This can be seen within internal correspondence within the Films Division, with discussions on how war should be depicted. Beddington outlined his requirements:

> As in the past, first class war subjects, realistically treated, would be supported. It would be against
> the national interest for these to cease or suffer in quality. But the Films Division would be less
> favourable towards B class war pictures, and A pictures inspired by mere sensationalism, even if
> little or no cooperation was required from the services. An exception to the above are comedies

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[340] Minutes of the British Film Producers' Association, Meeting 4, Minute 148, 27.7.1942
[341] INF 1/190. MOI Directors orders. July 1942

of various sorts and settings. It will be understood that taste, in handling this type of film, is particularly important'.   342

B class films had cheap production values and smaller budgets, and Beddington now had responses from the Mass Observation Unit to back up his decisions on film. To focus scant resources on main films plus comedy was a wise decision. Furthermore, he had to be looking forward as the intervention of the Americans had severely shaken up the MOI in its direction and operations. That was one part of the reason, but a large and increasing one, as Beddington himself was keen to get the British film studios reaching out to the USA. In an article he wrote 'we should be detailing our own war experiences to the people of America. As far as we know, no films on British families have adjusted their lives'.[343] He goes on to say that Mr Archibald Macleith, the US film representative of the OWI in the UK, supports these ideas and will ensure they are implemented. Again, this is additional evidence that film characters would be more representative of the public, showing their unassuming, but heroic roles in the war. A consensus was building and this time there was a large and well organised contributor, America, which could not be ignored.

Public Feedback

Further information about the public's taste in film content was starting to reach the MOI via the *Home Intelligence Special Reports*, which were discussed in the last chapter. With this feedback, the MOI had to perform a delicate balancing act, to combine the American requirements, as previously discussed, with the British public's demands. Here is an example of responses listed in a report from the Home Intelligence Unit: -

    b. 'People are inclined to regard all MOI Films as propaganda for action, and when no obvious action is indicated, they become confused. Few people realise that an MOI film may have any other object, than to produce immediate action on the part of the audience.

    c. There is often a strong suspicion that 'too rosy a picture has been painted', and that conditions of life (in the WRNS., the nursing service and the ATC) are harder and less attractive than the films show them to be.

    d. Films of action, involving men in the services, seem to be more popular than films about the women's services, or civilian life'.[344]

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[342] *DNL*, Vol. 3, No. 8, August 1942, S. 110

[343] *DNL*, vol 4, no.2 February, 1943

[344] Home Intelligence Special Report No. 11 .12th March, 1942

One important issue to emerge from the above points is that the MOI was concerned that realism was being sacrificed for entertainment. Useful public responses such as these would be fed back into the Films Division, so that film content could then be adjusted. Bracken was overseeing the process, so he would chase up any decisions, but, of course, he now had to consider the American reactions to any proposed changes.

American involvement

Examination of a Report by the British Management and Labour Delegation, following their visit to the United States of America, in October 1941, at the invitation of the Office of Production Management, reveals:

> Section D on Films. Without any intimate knowledge of the arrangements for the release and distribution of our war-time films, it has been extremely interesting to us to note that, whilst the Stars and Stripes are freely displayed in the government owned and paid-for factories of this country which we have visited, none have seen such illuminating and convincing films as 'Target For Tonight'.345

It goes on to suggest improvements, following the American example:

> The closest co-operation of the services in assisting in the production of films of interest to the war workers in the industries on this continent and possibly in other Empire countries would, we are convinced, have the effect of stimulating the individual manual, mental and financial effort'.

This is further evidence that all aspects of Britain's response to the war, taking in American ideas, to improve morale. A very large report, titled *Propaganda at Home,*[346] contained some important guidance for film content, in respect of morale. How to educate the public, as well as helping boosting confidence, would henceforth be a key driver for the MOI. The content of five-minute films would be a part of this action, but feature film narratives would also be incorporated, discussed within the Case Studies, with comedy as a prime ingredient. One key memorandum from the War Cabinet follows:

> 1. I am anxious to have the guidance of the War Cabinet upon the formulation of a propaganda policy at home. One of the main functions of the Ministry of Information was, defined by the Cabinet, to publicise and interpret government policy in relation to the war, to help to sustain public morale and to stimulate the war effort.
> 2. At this stage of the war public feeling and the public's reactions to the war cannot any longer be taken for granted. Yet this publicity cannot be wholly effective unless it interprets the considered policy of the War Cabinet as a whole.
> 3. There has been in recent months a widespread decrease in confidence…
> 6. With a view to formulating a propaganda policy, which will heal public ailments of this sort as they develop, I should like to suggest for the consideration of the War Cabinet the following procedure :— (a) The Minister of Information should circulate to the War Cabinet once a month an appreciation of the state of public morale.
> In the meantime, I suggest that approval should be given now to the following positive directions on the general lines which government publicity should follow:
> (i) There must be more explanation: not only about the armed forces and the war situation, but also about production, labour, wartime restrictions and the big problems that affect the life of everyone today...[347]

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[345] CAB 66/20: War Cabinet papers: Report by the British Management and Labour Delegation. Oct 1941
[346] CAB 66/23/35 by Brendan Bracken. April 1942
[347] CAB 65/26/10 War Cabinet Papers: April 1942. 'Propaganda at Home', Page 216,

There is a lot to consider in the above. One overriding message is that any MOI work must be integrated within the framework of the desires of the War Cabinet. Some of the remarks, particularly concerning propaganda, relate to the MOI's general publicity campaigns, but can be interpreted as guidance for film content. The most obvious question is how to raise morale. Unfortunately, the archives do not have more information linking these ideas into films, but from other evidence, any desire to improve morale is linked to the public's appetite for more comedy and more realistic characters in film narratives. Robert Murphy states that one major source of comic material was the Services, on which several films were made, such as *Laugh it off* (1940).[348] I suggest that these constructs of comedy and Service life, aligned with many of the MOI's propaganda desires. A message that comes out very strongly from the Home Intelligence reports is that these themes made people feel a little better for a sort while at least. One key point is that the actions of the MOI, and indirectly the Films Division, would be watched very closely at the highest level of government.

Another example of pressure from this area concerns the USA, titled 'British Publicity in the United States.' A paper by Mr. H. B. Butler, the new Director-General of the British Information service (BIS), the partner organisation to the MOI in the USA and under the control of the British Embassy.

> If they regard our contribution to victory as having been secondary, and second rate, they will consider our views on the peace settlement as of secondary importance. After the last war, as I learnt by personal experience in 1919, the average American had no conception of what we had done. If this happens again, the political consequences will be much more serious. During 1940 British prestige stood very high in America. In the last twelve months it has greatly declined. The Battle of Britain is forgotten.[349]

It is clear from this those views on Britain's efforts in the war needed highlighting, at least to the American public and policy makers. Results can be seen in films such as *Squadron Leader* (1942) and *The First Of The Few* (1942), both showing the RAF fightback. In both films there is no confusion about who the Americans were and their actions. Daniela Treveri Gennari has a good description, which I agree with in that 'The portrayal of Americans as being optimistic, problem solving responsible, and self-sufficient'.[350] These attributes would continue to be utilised in later films and in effect became a heroic stereotype that followed the war in film.

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[348] Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-1949,* 166.
[349] CAB 66/24 War Cabinet: April – June: May 1942
[350] Daniela Gennari, (1995). *America, the Vatican and the Catholic Church sphere of activity in Italian post war cinema 1945-1960* (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick), 276

Returning to the continuing discussions of public morale, MOI's 1942 *Report on Public Feeling*:

> Its purpose is to keep the War Cabinet informed of any major movements of public feeling ill as they can be related to questions of publicity on the home front. I recommend strongly, therefore, that it be maintained as a major publicity aim of the government to bring forward and publicise every aspect which illustrates the magnitude of our own contribution to the war effort .351

The archives do not specify how this report originated, but elements of it hint at the Mass Observation unit. A critical point here is the MOI's view would be discussed at all further meetings of the War Cabinet. This meant that from then on, the MOI would be integrated within the main decision-making process of government.

Effectiveness of propaganda

With the increasing involvement of the War Cabinet and the liaison with the USA, the UK governments concerns about cinema's contribution to the war effort increased. During this middle phase of the conflict, the MOI became increasingly keen itself and also was under pressure from above to use film for propaganda purposes. An example in a letter from the MOI to the BFPA which stated that 'a balance between war and non-war propaganda is desirable; emphasis should be given to the positive virtues of British national characters and the democratic way of life'.352 Again, further evidence of the pressures on inclusion of realistic scenarios in film content.

In other moves to further the MOI/American relationships, Mr L Brockington, advisor to the MOI's Empire Division, was sent over to give radio broadcasts on conditions in the UK, related to films.353 These areas of cooperation are explored further in chapter 5. From their side, since America had entered the war, it was keen to improve the presentation of Britain within feature films. The organisation tasked with this was the OWI. They approached Harold Butler, the US-based Director General of BIS, to discuss the issues. Ferdinand Kuhn, Deputy Director of the OWI and head of the newly formed British Division, had his views on how Britain should be portrayed on film, which he passed to Butler.

I would argue that these requirements align perfectly with Curran's analysis. Before 1942 English film propaganda had had little opportunity to gain a foothold in the USA. The USA's entry to the war changed the situation; the MOI no longer needed to take account of the

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351 CAB 66/25: War Cabinet: May to June 1942
352 *Kinematograph Weekly*, 30 July 1942, 31.
353 Broadcasting. July 1942. 33.

isolationist policies of America. Many methods of persuasion had been applied to entice the USA to join the war effort, but these are outside of the scope of this work.

Returning to Bracken's initiative to involve the BFPA with the MOI, it began to achieve some concrete results. In May 1942, a draft contract was approved for film studios and the MOI to adopt.[354] In this document, it clearly stated that a representative from the Films Division (Controlling Officer) had to clear any treatment and script before film production commenced. Furthermore, if the finished film did not match 'public policy', then it would be cancelled. All this meant that the MOI and Films Division had absolute control over what would end up on the screen, a significant step forward for the MOI.

In other developments, in May 1942 the Films Division sent Sidney Bernstein to the USA. He was to negotiate with Hollywood producers and distributors, and to establish initial contacts with those responsible for the OWI, the American counterpart to the MOI.[355] Richard Dyer McCann's argument here was clear in that this was a pivotal point where the USA and the UK film directions signified a change for both industries on both sides of the Atlantic and Bernstein would play a decisive role in these relationships. After his second trip in the autumn of 1942, he would demand that, to gain access to the American film market, greater consideration should be given to specific American needs. In that respect, he was aligning the MOI with the needs and desires of the OWI.

One of the first acts of cooperation between the two groups was, as Moorehead states, 'To force the American to digest our home consumption films is a well-nigh impossible task. Our imperative need is for films to suit their tastes, films which will command equal attention with the best American films'.[356] One film trade paper summed up his visit 'War films of the MOI will be distributed in the United States by the eight major film companies, under an agreement signed yesterday. Bernstein returned to London after five months here. Eight features and 15 shorts are in the initial program'.[357] In essence, a successful trip with many useful contacts had been made, which would enhance further co-operation between the two organisations. Mr George Archibald, a labour politician was also a key leader within the Films Division, took over the role of working closely with the OWI and the MOI. Under him in 1942, the first two

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[354]INF 1/616. MOI Film Production rules. May 1942.
[355] Ricard Dyer McCann. *The People's Films – A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Picture* (New York: Hastings House Publishing, 1973), 118-172.
[356] Caroline Moorehead, *Sidney Bernstein* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 146.
[357] *The Film Daily*. Oct 28th. 1942. Front page

feature films to be distributed under the new arrangement were *Coastal Command* and *Next Of Kin,*[358] each were documentary in style and showing working people involved in the war. The first two short films to be supplied were *Dover* and *Night Shift.* Both shorts emphasised how the women kept war production going, while the men went off to war. One can surmise that it was no accident that these films were the first to be handed to the Americans. Their content and narrative structure was meant to firmly define ordinary people's involvement in the war in Europe. As discussed, the OWI was keen for its population to learn about what life was really like in Britain; these films went some way to address that issue.

Castles and Class

There was real concern in the OWI that pre and early war films coming out of Britain were misleading to the American public. In early 1943 Kuhn thanked all writers and directors 'for their cooperation in helping to portray authentically present-day English life…presenting Castles and Class'.[359] As part of these changes, Kuhn arranged for a representative of the Films Division of British MOI, Marjorie Russell, to work as a script advisor at the British Consulate in Los Angeles. Russell's function was to advise the Hollywood studios on their portrayal of Britain. She would read film scripts in her Hollywood office and write critiques on any films with British content, referring any major points of contention, then liaise with the MOI in London. The film studios were on board now with a formal working relationship with the OWI and thus the office received any film scripts that dealt with British war subjects. It then had to review the content and advise on additions and changes. The British officials tried to get the American studios to avoid the clichéd Hollywood image of a Britain of quaint villages and 'palaces and peers'.[360] Instead, they should present the country 'as it really has become during the war,' with an emphasis on the development of British society, as the war progressed. Budiansky continues his analysis discussing films and demonstrating the legendary British tendency for understatement. Examples in film of a classic English upper-class accent, which, as one Foreign Office official had noted, 'tended to sound pansy and 'affected to Americans', were actively discouraged. This belief does not match the actual truth that one of the biggest British stars was David Niven, who was very well spoken. It is possible that they were referring to the context in which the hero was placed within a particular film. For Niven, his films were

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[358] *Motion Picture Herald*. December 1942, 40.
[359] *The Hollywood Reporter*. 15 March 1943, 2.
[360] Stephen Budiansky. *Britain's Propaganda War on America*. History Net. . https://www.historynet.com/britains-propaganda-war-on-america/, June 2010

very much a mixture of him as an officer working with, and not against his more working-class team. For example, *The Way Ahead* (1944), which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The heads of Warner Bros, 20th Century Fox, MGM, Paramount and Columbia (the main Hollywood film studios) all quickly agreed to distribute MOI documentaries to American film theatres. In parallel, this period coincides in the UK with the creation of more MOI-sponsored documentary short features. For once, the American public would start to observe real people as heroes, in war roles, such as firefighters or medics.

In other moves, but not without internal discussions, the unadventurous BBC was convinced by the government to drop the Oxbridge upper-class accents in programs for America. At this time, the BBC on the radio started a weekly serial, as part of the effort to bring the propaganda messages to the UK audience as well as the Americans. *Front Line Family[361]* was presented as a working-class family, 'the adventures of an ordinary family in wartime conditions'.

Hollywood ideas on film content

At this stage of the war, the Americans did not hesitate to initiate production of films for propaganda purposes. Schatz explores these ideas, 'From 1942 to 1945, Hollywood created a parallel universe for a nation at war, an odd amalgam of information and entertainment, of fact and propaganda, of realism and collective national fantasy'.[362] This would match some British film content but was quite different to the American approach as films were ready to depict actual war events in the most advantageous light, in terms of public appeal. Yet neither the OWI nor the MOI had any established power over the American film industry. The OWI operated in Hollywood only as an advisory service, and it brought in the MOI only to support its opinions. The OWI found that filmmakers were initially reluctant, or even refused, to drop their highly profitable British formulas, such as good-natured mixing of classes. In their defence, the American film studios could point to the popularity of their older films' portrayal of Britain, on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the OWI feared that such films were likely to reinforce American doubts about British society and the portrayal of class distinctions did not accord with the OWI's idea of the people's war. What he would prefer to see is: 'the real

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[361] BBC history website. 'Front Line Family 1941', January 22, 2024, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07jwrnd

[362] Thomas Schatz, *World War II and the War Film*, Berkeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 124.

people of England, the workers and miners, those who keepers and live in the great provincial cities that Americans know so little about, and those who were the backbone of England in its 'darkest days'.[363] Cull's work goes into great detail on the overall plan to get America into the war, but he is correct in this key point of the portrayal of the UK at war.

Following on from these conflicting views on propaganda, and with a view to gaining more control, Bracken took the decision to replace the head of the MOI American division, Douglas Williams with Robin Cruickshank from the US press corps. This arrangement began a 'golden age of cooperation of film'.[364] Unfortunately, this did not work as planned and will be explored in the next chapter.

Revisiting propaganda demands

Within the MOI, at start of 1942, the MOI and the Film Division were still attempting to follow Clark's suggestions, discussed in chapter 1, stating that each feature film must serve the three main propaganda aims, 'what Britain is fighting for, how Britain fights and the need for sacrifice'. To assess the most popular films each year after 1940 against the template of these objectives, Reeves states that he finds a remarkable correlation.[365] These themes would be tested by events; American involvement with the MOI was growing, plus a more intense scrutiny by the War Cabinet would be filtered down to the MOI. Now no longer working alone, these interactions came at the right time for Bracken and Beddington, as they had completed their internal changes to their processes and needed further external guidance. They had come a long way from the confusion described in earlier chapters. Now, external influences challenged the very way of internal working of the MOI processes with the film studios. However, the impact was positive. Further investigations of these areas will be outlined in the next chapter.

It can be argued that, at last, the propaganda uses of humour had finally been accepted by the MOI. A combination of this with a narrative of a hero figure would be significant for the viewing public, in terms of enjoyment and morale. Humour in film had predated the war, but from then on would be seen as an important weapon in propaganda. This would be no mean feat, as Pugh's view is that 'much of the population became indifferent or cynical towards the

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[363] Ferdinand Kuhn to Ulric Bell, 17 February 1943; box 566/3509, OWI Files.
[364] Nicholas Cull, *Selling War: The British campaign against American Neutrality in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158.
[365] Nicholas Reeves, *The power of film propaganda* : *Myth or Reality?* (London: Cassell, 1999) 178.

massive propaganda efforts of the MOI'.[366] It is not the aim of this work to evaluate MOI's work in general propaganda, but, in respect of cinema, it had the advantage of hiding the message within the confines of the narrative. With America's involvement with the MOI, any emphasis on types of heroes would be enhanced. As discussed in chapter 3, there were already moves to include a 'typical' American in British feature films, particularly in minor roles, like *Pimpernel Smith.* From this point on, there would be major roles taken by American Hollywood stars. For example, the American made *International Squadron* (1942) featured Ronald Reagan in a major role, as a member of an RAF team fighting the Nazis.

American influence within films

The year 1942 saw great steps towards improving Anglo-American relations. In mid-1942, most people in the UK had never met an American, except on the film screens.[367] As concern developed about the reception that the arrival of US troops might cause in Britain, therefore responsibility was passed to the MOI for what was classes as 'smoothing and enhancing relations'.[368] These concerns influenced feature films, as more transatlantic discussions between the MOI and the OWI took place. Short's view was that the MOI's education campaign on these areas was highlighted to the public as replacing 'the film version' with the 'real facts'.[369] This was a two-way process, as there was a concerted effort to change the content of films, to avoid narrow depictions of negative American stereotypes, such as gangsters. A separate project is needed to give justice to that area of research and is beyond the scope of this thesis. Chapman suggests, 'from about 1942, it is possible to identify a broad consensus between the MOI and the commercial filmmakers over the nature of film propaganda'.[370] This was true, as it was fortunate that many important elements came together in this period. America's work with the MOI really galvanized filmmaking in many ways, as discussed above, with the involvement of the OWI. Beddington's organisational skills had certainly got the measure of the bureaucratic obstructions impeding the work of the Films Division.

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[366] Martin Pugh, *State and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 330

[367] David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: the American occupation of Britain, 1942–1945* (London: Random House, 1995), 36–37.

[368] Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: home front morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 263.

[369] Ken Short: *Cinematic support for Anglo-American detente, 1939–43* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1988), 135

[370] Chapman, *The British at War*, 81.

Certainly, newspapers were more content with the improvement in the MOI's work. One report stated that 'It has become an efficient and well-run industry. Bracken has brought both wisdom and courage to the job'.[371] Roger Manvell wrote that 'the war film discovered the common denominator of the British people'. Because everyone knew of the war at first hand, film producers were dealing with a 'psychologically aware audience'. He pointed to 1942 as the start in the initial stages of a populist documentary-style British cinema, to replace the out-dated melodrama of the early war years. He notes that films between 1942 and 1945 was seen highlighting of personal issues of 'comradeship, bravery, fear, tension, endurance, skill, boredom and hard work, the absence of blatant heroics, and the projection of a national image of reticence, wry humour and stolid determination'.[372] Manvell's list is a good summation of the traits that described films during the war, picked form a multitude of opinions. Some of these traits are discussed within the two films in the case study section.

Baker in the *Kinematograph Weekly*, wrote that 'I keep hearing that film audiences don't want to be reminded of the war when they go to the cinema.' In agreement, Mannock in June 1942 stated that 'the alleged demand for war subjects is largely fictitious.' Making a 'plea for more escapism' and arguing for fewer war features, Mannock argued:

> Entertainment considered as a relief from the strains and stresses of life is surely much more important today, than at any time in human history; it is hardly surprising that it should be regarded as a means of temporary escape from the trials and toils of civilisation's fight for existence, which affect every one of us in different degrees.[373]

Mannock's above description was supported on June 25th 1942, when the President of the BFPA, at their AGM made the case for a reduction in the production of films with a war theme. The MOI became involved in the discussions and a *Kinematograph Weekly* picked up the case with their headline in July 1942 stating that 'Fewer War Films is MOI policy'.[374]

The MOI was keener now to utilise film for propaganda purposes. A policy change was confirmed in a memo from the MOI to the BFPA, which laid out their views that 'a balance between war and non-war propaganda is desirable… instead emphasis should be given to the

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[371] 'Leader', The Guardian. July 8, 1942
[372] Roger Manvell, *Twenty Five Years of British Film 1925-45* (London: Falcon Press, 1947), 84-5.
[373] P.L. Mannock . *Kinematograph Weekly*. June 1942
[374] Headline in *Kinematograph Weekly*. July 30th

positive virtues of British national characters and the democratic way of life'.[375] This area will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The next section investigates and illustrates some examples of realism and comedy in feature films. Previous chapters, including this one, mentioned that humour was a fundamental asset in feature film propaganda. Exploring the background and making of two comedy films released in 1942, *The Goose Steps Out* and *The Foreman Went to France.* In some ways both films follow in an old tradition of British comedies, using key figures from the music hall, but linkage and commonality between these examples will be explored. Therefore, the case study will differ in structure from previous chapters in that it illustrates, via these film examples, the importance of the convergence of realism and comedy. Previous chapters have provided examples of government directives on improving moral via comedy and at this point in the war marked an important move to implementing propaganda with a comic framework using realistic characters.

Case Study: Examples of Comedy films

Feature films made in this period of the war confirm that some of the new concepts and ideas of realism, especially around the idea of using working class characters in important roles had been taken up by the British film studios. Alberto Cavalcanti's *Went The Day Well* (1942) has the story of an English village being invaded by Germans, with the aim of a national invasion. Within the film, the lower classes are shown as heroes, where the only upper-class character is depicted as the traitor. British audiences would have enjoyed the spectacle of seeing the Germans portrayed as evil, and the film contained plenty of positive scenes showing that resistance works.

The terrible experience of night-time bombing had been depicted in several short films but was starting to be incorporated in feature films. A prime example is *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942), which was advertised as 'This time *we* are the invaders.' With a plot involving the mixed class British crew of a bomber, it illustrated that Britain was fighting back, using the same night-time bombing tactic as the Germans. Supporting this theme of night bombing, a memo from the head of the Policy Committee on 3rd April 1941 stated that 'we must produce a film depicting a British bombing raid over Germany',[376] increasing the pressure on the MOI

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[375] INF 210/2. MOI records BFPA
[376] INF 1/196. Films Division correspondence

to do so. Looking at the film's publicity, without doubt, the aim here was to influence America, showing the heroic resistance of Britain.[377] Britain's many defeats so far in the war were a problem area for film makers, as they were under pressure to display positive images. The subject of defeats was a difficult one for the MOI to deal with and the solution was to let time elapse before presenting things in a more positive light in later war films, which will be explored in later chapters. Certainly, major defeats, such as the fall of Singapore, would be ignored by film makers until after the war.

On the other hand, *Western Approaches* (1944) bucks the trend in showing the sinking of a merchant ship. It redeems itself by then by then focusing on the heroics of the survivors. This was one of many examples where, in film, a defeat had been shown in a positive light. Within this period a film example is *In Which We Serve* (1942), where there are depicted deaths of the crew and sinking of their ship. Captain Kinross (Coward) lectures to the survivors that they lost their ship and friends, who now 'lie together in fifteen-hundred fathoms' and that these experiences should inspire them to fight even harder in future battles. A very popular film in the UK and America (in the UK the most popular film.[378] In the USA, it earnt two and a half million dollars).[379] *The First Of The Few* (1942) follows the development of the famous Spitfire for the RAF. Optimistic propaganda shows scenes of German warplanes being defeated by Spitfires, which would have been popular with the viewing public. The idea of sacrifice will be revisited later, looking at Ealing Studios' efforts in feature films. Here the scenes would reflect realism that many in the country has experienced already with the air war being won by the RAF.

In the last chapter, the important role of Leslie Howard was examined, with reference to his 1941 film, *Pimpernel Smith* (British National, 1941). At the end of 1941, in terms of British box-office success, this film was only second to *49th Parallel*, in which Howard also starred. *The First Of The Few*, which Howard both directed and starred in, was the top British film of 1942. Playing the gentlemanly idealist hero, as Howard does in this film, was still popular with British audiences. As for humour, one scene in *Pimpernel Smith* has Howard stating that humour was Britain's secret weapon. In the film, after wading through Lewis Carroll and *Punch* magazine, the Nazi General does not agree and concludes that the weapon did not, as such, exist. It was fortunate that the MOI and the British Film industry *did* agree and exploited

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[377] Publicity for the film. As a by-product, impressing the USA was very important aim.
[378] *Kinematograph Weekly* December 1943
[379] *Variety*. 26 February 1947, 20.

comedy within many feature films and shorts. As seen in earlier chapters, there had been many academic and government papers, advising that humour should be employed, within the context of keeping the public entertained, and integrated, if possible, into propaganda messages through film. This might have been a case of too much advice, from too many different places, to act upon initially.

Humour as propaganda weapon

Humour was a significant move in the area of short films.[380] This study's focus is on feature film, but, nevertheless, it is instructive to spend some time on this important area of film history. It is important in that some of the ideas that developed within short films found their way into feature films. It is hard to generalise about the content of the five-minute series, principally because the films were made to address many different short-term propaganda requirements from the MOI, and humour was an important part. Films such as *Dai Jones Lends A Hand* (1941) suggested a new direction, by showing cases of individual heroism on the home front. In this case, it was the story of an unemployed Welsh miner, who put his expertise to use by joining an air-raid rescue squad. The same formula was applied for *Shunter Black's Night Off* (1941), based on the true story of a railway worker, whose quick action during an air raid saved an ammunition train from being blown up. The documentarist critics seem to have approved of them because their treatment was realistic, and they centred on working-class people as heroes. Most of the five-minute films, however, continued to be used for putting across a specific message, often within the context of propaganda campaigns across the many different government ministries. For example, *The Nose Has It* (1942) illustrated on film the Ministry of Health's 'Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases' campaign. This film was also an example of the way in which popular comedians (in this case, Arthur Askey) were applied to convey a specific message with humour. Another example of this trend would be famous music hall comedian, Tommy Trinder, promoting the Ministry of Food's (MOF) British Restaurants in *Eating Out With Tommy Trinder* (1941). Ricard's Farmers book examines in great detail efforts by the MOF in the war effort, including films.[381]

One opinion, held by Clive Coultass, highlights that the MOI had struggled administratively under Macmillan and Reith and that it had produced 'clumsy and unconvincing' films, that

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[381] Richard Farmer, *The Food Companions: Cinema and Consumption in Wartime Britian 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 57.

'often depicted working-class citizens as halfwits, who threatened to jeopardize the war effort'.[382] In my view this is partly true, as before the war this was a common theme in films, but even in early war films the characterisation of working class stereotypes was changing. In the 1940 short film *Now You're Talking*, for example, German agents listen secretly to a pair of British factory workers in a pub, who recklessly talk about their work. The Germans think that the workers' place of employment would be the perfect place for planting a bomb.[383] This is a good example in that the narratives of this type of film, characters of middle-class origins bring heroics to the rescue. From the evidence of initial dealings with the Americans, discussed earlier in the chapter, this could not be allowed to continue, as times were changing. As with feature films, the MOI had an enormous amount of information to convey the public, assisted by the incorporation of humour within the message. Rather than demonstrating how to put out an incendiary bomb in *Go to Blazes* (1942), Will Hay (another music hall personality) showed how <u>not</u> to do it. Here we see a crossover into feature films, as both Hay and Trinder were the main heroes of the two films discussed later.

All these short films mentioned, plus quite a few more, represented a major change in presentation of the war to the public. Anyone watching these films would have no doubt that they were seeing recognisable characters and roles from their experiences of everyday life. True to their documentary roots, they usually did not include romantic subplots and concentrated on their stories in as straightforward a manner as possible. 'Although their stories were scripted, they nevertheless exhibited a documentary approach, illustrating the contribution of quietly heroic British people to the war effort (whether servicemen or civilians)'.[384] By accident or design, these constructs of realism fused with humour found their way into feature films.

The influence of Ealing and comedy in films

Beddington wanted to reorganise the GPO film unit into a something he had control of.[385] However, Michael Balcon, a key player in film productions, wanted to integrate the GPO film unit into his Ealing Studios, but Beddington rejected this proposal. From then on, Balcon

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[382] Clive Coultass. *Images for Battle: British Feature Films and the Second World War* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 7-22.
[383] Chapman, *The British at War,* 91.
[384] James Chapman 'Official British Film Propaganda during the Second World War,' PhD diss., (Lancaster University, 1995), 286
[385] INF 1/57 MOI, reorganisation of the film's unit. 20.8.1940.

started to make his own films and in general would follow the same depiction of realism in subject matter and with a very recognisable visual style. Some film examples of these traits can be seen in *Went The Day Well?* (1942). This so-called documentary-realist tradition can also be traced to other, generally smaller, independent production companies, producing relatively low-budget films with an appeal for the domestic market.[386] The mixture of realist scenes, that is an accurate depiction of home life, mixed with an understated humour was to be a common theme followed in later films (see next figure). In my view the most exponents of this policy have been ATP (Associated Talking Pictures) in the 1930s and its successor, Ealing Studios, in the 1940s.[387]

16: *Went The Day Well* stills

Impact of Music Hall

As mentioned in the discussion on short films, British film comedy was primary modelled on the music hall acts.[388] Will Hay and Tommy Trinder, who were now well known in cinema, were all performers in music-hall before the war and an easy source of talent. A modern description would be that these actors and comedians already had a fanbase. Dyer writes of stars that people recognise and whose personality the audience identifies with. When looking at film comedy in this era, Will Hay stands out as a principal resource for Ealing comedies.

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[386] The comments of Simon Rowson, a leading figure in the British film trade: 'Besides the world market…there is the purely domestic market...These pictures aim to attract British audiences by dealing with a background or subject whose appeal is limited to the British public.'
Minutes of Evidence, Committee on Cinematograph Films, HMSO, 1936, para.23, 1121.
[387] Charles Barr, Ealing *Studios*, London: Newton Abbott, Cameron and Taylor/David and Charles, 1977, 41.
[388] Medhurst, A: 'Music Hall and British Cinema', in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 years of British Cinema,* ed. Charles Barr (London, BFI, 1986)

Dacre was correct with Hay writing about himself 'he always saw himself as a comic character actor and can be seen as a steppingstone between music-hall comedies, and comedies populated by character actors playing comic roles'.[389]

Following protracted discussions since the beginning of the war, some form of consolidation was reached between Ealing and the MOI; Balcon wrote that old arguments with the MOI over film policy had been solved. Throughout government, as discussed, there was a realisation that, as the war continued, feature films were starting to play an important role in the war effort, improving morale as well as spreading propaganda. 'We were allowed to apply for actors and others to be returned to us temporarily for a particular film and were rarely refused. In such cases, of course, we had to be engaged on a project, which had the approval of the Ministry of Information or an appropriate service department'.[390]

The production plans at Ealing Studios continued to evolve, and had started to reject the hero figures within films like *Ships With Wings* (1941). A more inclusive portrayal of servicemen would be followed as in *The Foreman Went To France* (1942).[391] This film is considered to have been one of the first films to show Ealing Studios ignoring films of pre-war which were a quite often a narrative of pure melodrama, in favour of a more realistic film content. One consequence was the film's use of a working-class protagonist, played by Tommy Trinder. In fact, with help from an American hero, a clear message of this film is that this is a people's war, shared with America. A clear propaganda message to educate the British public rather than appealing to the American public. This film's story concerned a team sent to France to rescue their company's factory goods before the Germans arrived. Balcon was now working closely with the MOI, as Calder advances, 'a propaganda theme of celebrating wartime teamwork…it was significant that the heroes depicted in *The Foreman Went To France* were a Welshman, Scottish and a Cockney'.[392] Calder goes on to describe the team as 'pan-British and class-free'. Interestingly, there is a link here back to Grierson, with Balcon employing one of Grierson's disciples, Harry Watt, as a director. With Alberto Cavalcanti as the studio's artistic director, some scenes have a documentary treatment, for example, the attack on French refugees. From then on, Ealing treated the working class more seriously in film, with fewer

[389] Richard Dacre, 'Traditions of British Comedy'*,* in *The British Cinema Book* ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI, 2019) 108.
[390] Michael Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents…A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 129.
[391] James Chapman, PhD, 224.
[392] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Cape, 1991), 264.

comic portrayals...Reeve states '*The Foreman Went To France*, a clear departure from class bound conventions of pre-war cinema'.[393] I suggest going further in that a concatenation of realism and comedy was becoming more entrenched in feature films. The next figure I think illustrates one of the most popular comic characters from the music halls, Mr Tommy Trinder.

17: A trademark comic expression from Tommy Trinder

Comedians as heroes

Ealing's The *Goose Steps Out* (1942) deploys Will Hay against Nazism, this time as a master of German in an English public school. Given his resemblance to a Nazi agent, Hay is parachuted into the heart of Germany, to masquerade as a trainer of spies, while seeking to locate and steal a new bomb. The film has much fun at the expense of German dictatorship and the leadership cult of Hitler. It is worth mentioning one scene, where Hay illustrates to the young Hitler followers the correct way to salute their leader, with two fingers!

Some critics were beginning to tire of comedians making easy fun of a stupid enemy, an approach based on the 'threadbare and insupportable supposition that the Nazis are easily gulled'. As the reviewer concluded, 'Experience has, unhappily, proved that it takes more than an exuberant application of the ridiculous to kill Nazis'.[394] But the public still enjoyed the comedy aspects and the MOI was happy to portray working-class heroes in realist and, to some extent, believable roles. Both *The Foreman Went to France* and *The Goose Steps Out* illustrate working within a class system, but each increase their heroic status by going against their upper-class superiors. Barr sums up the state of affairs:

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[393] Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of film Propaganda* (London: Cassell, 1999), 181-182
[394] *Kinematograph Weekly*, 20 August 1942

these mid-war films mark a decisive point in a process of change at many levels: in the official conduct of the war, in the place found for commercial cinema within this, in the whole war experience of the nation - as well as in the workings of Ealing itself. : it is closely bound up with them and is part of them. The broad congruency between the Ealing community and the 'national community' both come together in time of war.[395]

Barr is correct in stating the full integration and reflection of a national mood within films, but the same argument could be applied for many other film studios both here and in America not only Ealing. He also highlights the move from music-all comedy to more character-based storylines with a greater mix of classes portrayed in films.

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[395] Charles Barr, Ealing Studios (Exeter: David and Charles, 1977), 13.

Conclusions

To summarise, this period of the war produced a step change in the way heroes were portrayed in film. As discussed in the case study, sympathetic and realistic characters, and situations were being portrayed in ways the general public could relate to, using the framework of class-based comedy. There was a return to historical heroes in some film productions, such as *The Young Mr Pitt* (1942) and the *Prime Minister* (1942), but these were in the minority. The use of comedy in feature films was a major change of emphasis, allowing the MOI to seamlessly incorporate propaganda messages within the text. The two feature films discussed in the case study illustrate how certain heroic characteristics, such as survival and perseverance, were represented to the public. Addition of humour enhanced the narrative and improved audience enjoyment. Dyer's Star theory talks of hegemony, in which an audience can relate to a star; this is in evidence in these films the characters would have been easy to relate to. It is also interesting to note that comic scenes still contained evidence of stoic resistance, which would be a recurring theme in film comedy.

One view was that henceforth cinema had great success presenting the everyday role of people in daily life. Spicer was certain that these were step changes: '…role of the hero underwent noteworthy changes as a result of expanded heroic ideals'.[396] Some of the feature films released in this period had a good reception from the American public. Trade papers reported 'in the past year the short film is appreciated incalculably, both in its artistic and entertainment value…have been unqualified box office successes'.[397] Certainly there were signs that films started to think about and use more realistic story lines, defined as those involving working class characters, with whom the viewing public could identify. This was slow progress, which will be discussed in the next two chapters. Previously, examples have shown the introduction of realism to setting and characters, a deliberate plan agreed for the industry by the MOI, encouraged by many opinion-formers, both internal political moves, and external US pressures. All this provides evidence that the joint working relationship between the MOI and the OWI was working to align many differing requirements for propaganda. Pressure from others such as the BFPA and the War Cabinet also helped driving changes in film genres, and in part changed the nature of characters within feature films on both sides of the Atlantic. The next chapter explores the expanding relationship with the Americans and the MOI.

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[396] Spicer, *Typical Men.* 45.
[397] Motion Picture Herald. 1942 Jan,160

CHAPTER 5: 1943 Reality, optimism, and heroines

The people are soldiers with different weapons but the same courage.[398]

Timeline of main events on this phase of the war

- February: German defeat at Stalingrad.
- May: Allied victory in North Africa.
- September: Invasion of Italy.

Introduction

The previous chapter identified and explained initial co-operations between the USA and British government involving feature films. Following on from that, this year marked a point in the war when the tide was turning in favour of the allies' forces. Operations by the Americans and other Empire service personnel were succeeding in many regions of the world, as seen from the timeline above. This chapter will explore these events and evaluate how these directly and indirectly impacted feature films. Also, it will highlight and explore the integration of ideas and concepts, which evolve from the state of warfare which impacted films in a more fundamental way. A merging of war facts and real-life deprivations could not be no longer ignored by film makers. Distinctions between fact and fiction would become compounded, and this will be explored in the case studies. As the war situation became more complex, so would the creation and production of feature films. American influence via the OWI and other agencies was beginning to make its impact on film narratives. In addition, other agencies and departments within the British government were becoming involved in the filmmaking process. It is useful here to turn to the theorist Louis Althusser, who has a good overall interpretation of American films made at this time, 'Hollywood has forged a product that is based on naturalisation in both form and narrative'. The ideological development of the product was also included; '…film uses the standardized Hollywood form of coherent chronology, internal logic, and overall naturalism, to tell the story of its heroes'. Althusser goes on to include another important construct in that film is 'not an ideology itself but that it has a …particular and

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[398] Charles Eade, *Churchill, War Speeches*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1953), 233.

specific relationship with ideology'.[399] What he means is that imbedded in most, but not all, American movies is the central core that an audience can really believe the characters and what they are achieving. Quite often the hero character is effectively displayed in film, as a combination of the old western hero and a WW2 American soldier.

Steven Cohan writes about 'masculinity as spectacle'[400] historically displayed in westerns. My view is that the American film studios could not ignore the popularity and impact of westerns on audiences, and so continued using the common narratives, whereas British films focused on the more fundamental binary opposites of good and evil, as outlined by Levi-Strauss, with a linkage to classical mythical narrative structures involving heroes.[401]

Embodied masculine heroism,[402] a common factor in many pre-1943 British films, was giving way to, what could be described as, an American concept of heroic populism. Instead of one man in control and being the goal-oriented driver of the narrative, a group would act. Norman Mailer describes the specifically existential element of American heroism as 'a consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations'.[403] One can see now how this would appeal to the British film audiences, who had already become aware of a difference in the depiction of heroes in American films, compared to the British variety. But here was the contrast, as these influences would henceforth form part of the reframing of the hero within British films,. a potentially liberating viewpoint to those wishing to create a new future after the war, rather than recalling the unhappy recent past. Previous cinema depictions of British stoicism[404] would still be important, but these would give way to more realistic[405] representations of the hero, in some features following, the American model of the hero figure. Ealing's *The Bells Go Down* (1943) is a story of the war on the home front, focusing on the lives of the Auxiliary Fire service (AFS) at the height of the German Blitz on London. This feature film was filmed in Ealing's documentary realist style and used real footage of the Blitz. The contents would have been familiar to the audience through cinema newsreels. Produced at a time when the war had not

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[399] Louis Althusser, *On ideology*, 173.

[400] Steven Cohan, *Screening the Male*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

[401] Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, 21-35.

[402] Andrew Spicer, *Typical men*. 77.

[403] Norman Mailer, *The Presidential Papers*, 98.

[404] Oxford University Dictionary

[405] There was no definition as to exactly what constituted a 'realist film 'For a discussion of the term, see John Ellis, *Art, culture, and Quality: Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies'*, Screen, Autumn, 1978: 9-49. The term is necessarily used in this thesis: phrases such as social comment film, and social realism are interchangeable

yet turned Britain's way, but when the worst of the Blitz was over, there were signs of hope. My view is that the hero's death had to carry a military propaganda message to the public. In the film, the fire team volunteers were leaving their nice home life to face possible death.

A great deal of historical ground was covered in the last chapter, to provide a coherent narrative account of the impact of the OWI and its relationship to the MOI. As for the British film audience, evidence illustrates that the resultant films from this era were popular; an investigation of wartime cinema audiences was conducted by the Wartime Social Survey[406] in 1943. It found that 70% of adults said they sometimes went to the cinema and that 32 % of the population went at least once a week. The fact that a third of the population visited the cinema on a regular basis is confirmation of its popular interest. Furthermore, the Wartime Social Survey confirmed that cinema-going was a common habit, and that a significant number of people, particularly among the working classes, relied on the cinema newsreels for their news and information. The survey concluded that 'the larger groups of the population are relatively better represented in the cinema audience than they are in the publics reached by other visual publicity media such as newspapers and books'.[407] Further evidence of cinema's popularity was the numbers going to the commercial cinema every week.[408] One key point is that, as discussed before, comedy was the most popular theme, with high cinema attendance for films such as *Millions Like Us* and *The Gentle Sex*, both released in 1943. This was further evidence that the inclusion of real-life characters and comedy was a successful move from the film studios and the MOI, an area of film investigated in the last chapter. Additionally, these figures provide evidence for the government, that the cinema had a key role to perform in providing both entertainment, information, and, by default propaganda messages for the British public. Tolman's view was that the vast number of American servicemen arriving in the UK meant cinema audiences increased. 'Cinema, by some distance, was the most popular medium of public enjoyment during the war'.[409] He goes on to say 'audiences increased from 19 million in 1939 to over 30 million in 1945.

Strengths and weaknesses

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[406] BT 64/4747. Wartime social survey 1943
[407] J. P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences: Sociological Studies* (London: Dobson, 1948), 275.
[408] By 1943-4 25 million tickets were sold each week. Jacob Mayer. *British Cinema's and their Audiences*, 371.
[409] Daniel Todman. *Britain's War 1942-1947*. (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 495.

Such surveys would provide the MOI with evidence that their work was indeed reaching the public. Its one drawback was that it did not involve a large sample, but the MOI began to rely on it more and more, as a trustworthy tool for interpretation of its film practices. Today, it would have been called a market research survey, which has proven to be a very useful tool in tracking an organisation's efforts on publicity. Further metrics followed, as a wartime social survey found 70% of the British went to the cinema once a week. It was also true that the average age of audiences was falling, as most of the older generation was involved in war work, which would have provided more corroboration that their film plans were working. As for the industry, by the beginning of 1943, only nine studios were still in operation, compared with twenty-two when the war started.[410] To some extent this was due to a shortage of materials and staff. It can be argued that the remaining studios, being smaller in number, could be better controlled by the MOI. Control as an important weapon of propaganda meant that henceforth the MOI would have more say in film content.

Turning to some actual film examples, in 1943 the success of British war films continued. There was, after all, more to present in terms of military action and, in some cases, successes. In 1942 one of the first documentary compilation films *30,000* was released, which presented the story of General Wavell's campaign in Egypt. So, in 1943 films similar in structure, *Fires Were Started* and *The Bells Go Down*, looked retrospectively at the blitz. The example of *In Which We Serve*, discussed in the previous chapter, encouraged a trend towards ambitious big-budget film production. Powell and Pressburger made *The Life And Death Of Colonel Blimp* (1943) under the umbrella of the Rank-backed Independent Producers Company. Two Cities joined forces with Leslie Howard to produce *The Gentle Sex* (1943), which was popular and successful. Two Cities also had backing from Joseph Arthur Rank, who was evolving as the most powerful force in the film industry. Controlling two major cinema circuits (Odeon and Gaumont-British), Rank benefited from the increase in cinema-going, and the extra profits were put into film production.

As already discussed in chapter 4, one of the most profound influences on wartime cinema was the documentary school of filmmaking, founded in the 1930s by John Grierson. Another view is that the American influence had made some impact, due to their many requests for film content to contain what they called 'common people,' discussed in the last chapter. Thus, in

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[410] Clive Coultass. 'British Feature Films and the Second World War'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Jan, 1984, Vol. 19, No. 1, (Jan, 1984), 7-22

this year, the impact of the documentary school eventually worked its way into the mainstream of the feature film; *San Demetrio, London* (1943), *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *Waterloo Road* (1944). All these films focused on the experiences of ordinary soldiers and civilians. I would argue that to some extent, these films' narratives agreed with the MOI's Films Division ideas back in 1942, pointing to the positive value of British characteristics, and showing the democratic way of life.

Merging of ideas on propaganda

By this period of the war, the cross-fertilisation between feature films and documentary had become evident (for example, *Desert Victory* and *The Gentle Sex* discussed in the Case Studies section). Roger Manvell later identified 1942 as the year when 'the 'war story' with a patriotic slant began to give way to what he called a war documentary, 'which derived the action and, to a greater extent, the characterisation from real events and real people'.[411] This conclusion aligns with the resultant films from this period of the war, as discussed in the case studies. Looking more closely at the overall direction in films, certain trends can be identified from this time, as demonstrated within my reference tables of films in the Appendix. There was a marked move away from films about the armed services in a fictional setting, and a greater emphasis instead on the home front, for example, *Millions Like Us*. Few films in the early years of the war had focused exclusively on the home front, and those which did tended to be comedies containing music hall entertainers. Furthermore, as the end of the war was approaching, films that illustrated the ideals, discussed in chapter 1, of 'What are we fighting for?' regained importance. It is interesting to note that the USA produced a series of short films, *Why We Fight* (1942 onwards). Unlike the British leaflet suggestions, the American films were released to the public, in order to promote a just cause, via film propaganda.

Evaluating the films made, a clear change in the direction of propaganda is noticeable. It was no longer a question of the morale of the British population, which had to be supported by feature films, but rather the effect which the films had outside Great Britain, especially in the USA. In practice, this meant that an exchange of ideas worked both ways. Colin Shindler sums up an American hero figure 'battle hardened, weary whose only concern was to stay alive'.[412] One example was *The Story Of GI Joe* (1945), which included those characteristics of a hero.

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[411] Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War*, (London, Barnes, 1975), 101.
[412] Colin Shindler, *Hollywood goes to War: Films and American Society 1939-1952* (London: Routledge, 1979), 79.

As mentioned, the American ideal of a hero, who is always one of the people, is a common thread, and would filter back to British productions, such as *The Bells Go Down* (1943) and *Millions Like Us*. In both examples, the theme of actions by a group, for the common good, is a strong idea. Chomsky stresses this is part of 'Otherness', the 'dominant ideology'; 'it's the idea that grave enemies are about to attack us, and we need to huddle together'.[413] Certainly, there is no confusion in either film as to the wicked, and almost non-human, qualities of evil portrayed by the Nazis.

Following the success in liberating countries, the Films Division started to consider the non-British audiences. This memorandum summed up the current situation with ideas for the future:

> The attitude of the Ministry towards feature films remains basically the same; for home morale…however, less vital than the projection of Britain to the world; this means an approach to designing films, technically for world circulation, and in theme, films of both Britain alone, and of Britain as a member of the United Nations.[414]

This paper marked the peak of the Film Division's commitment (between the MOI and British filmmakers) to influencing the film industry on the nature and the direction of film propaganda. It can be seen from the archives that thereafter the film industry had no more major criticism of the Films Division, and its allegedly disjointed policy towards commercial film production. Chapman agrees that there was no longer any contradiction between the wishes of the ministry and the production ideology of the leading film producers.[415] The MOI paper went to further advise, when casting a film with male and female heroes, special attention should be paid to the fact that 'the world will form its opinion of us by the characters we portray in our films.' Even if the films should highlight the British way of life, the Films Division recommends 'to think generously and to speak in our films not only of Britain's contribution, but of that of the United Nations.', another example of advice for the direction of feature films from influential sources, which aligned with the government's desire for future relationships with other countries. This, in itself, was not surprising, as the British Empire was heavily involved in all aspects of the war. Thoughts of their own independence in some countries of the Empire, observed by government, were becoming a cause for concern. One could argue that such advice was arriving rather late in the day, but by this time the Empire troops were getting further

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[413] Noam Chomsky. *The Hollywood Propaganda Model,* 132.
[414] Feature Films – MOI. Policy, March, 1943, in: Minutes of the British Film Producers'
  Association, Meeting 14, Minute 249, 7.4.1943.
[415]: Chapman, *The British at war*, 80

publicity via films, both short and feature length. The case study of *Desert Victory* will show examples of how these very concerns were addressed.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

The last chapter highlighted the relationship between the BFPA and the MOI. From these initial discussions some guidelines for film content were agreed and, to a degree, incorporated into the contract between the MOI and the film studios.[416] Further clarifications were discussed in April 1942 concerning the content of films, in particular, feature films.[417] Looking at the key points from these meetings, what was stated as desirable were 'realistic films of everyday life, and war subjects realistically treated'. These were their words, but one can infer that 'realism' in their eyes meant showing activities of work, that the cinema audience would easily recognise and be drawn to. It goes on to suggest that 'care must be taken in choosing types, both male and female, as the world will form its opinion of us by the characters we portray in film'. This is a very interesting and important point, as it is one of the first instances of an official guidance referring to women as an important part of film narrative. When the film *The Gentle Sex* is examined within the case studies, this suggestion will be investigated within the context of the making of the film.

Other government departments were beginning to see the advantage of cinema as an aid to propaganda. By the summer of 1943 the ideas and inspiration for many films came from other Ministries beyond the MOI. Helen Forman, who worked in MOI distribution, estimated that '50% of Films Division's budget was spent in close collaboration with other ministries'.[418] I contend that this improved the scope of film content, to make it more aligned with overall government propaganda. Chapter 2 had described a similar enterprise back in 1941, which then just caused confusion and delay. Here, at last, were real examples of many levers of government starting to work together in an efficient manner. The films within the case studies give examples of this close cooperation.

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[416] INF 1/616. Contract governing Production of films for the MOI.
[417] Feature film policy. BFPA minutes 1942, Meeting 14. 7th April.
[418] Letter from Helen Fornan to Nicholas Pronay, Imperial War Museum (IWM) Film and Video Archive

Beddington's ideas on film

In these new working relationships, in particular with the BFPA, Beddington, from within the Films Division, was starting to use his influence, to persuade commercial producers to move away from the patriotic type of war films, which had typified the early years of the war. Instead, Beddington wanted them to concentrate on less sensational and more realistic stories. He had experience of seeing agreed protocols being ignored in the past, so my view is that he wanted to reiterate recent agreements on film. In March 1943 he issued a policy statement to the trade press, through the channel of the BFPA, declaring that the MOI wanted 'first class war subjects realistically treated; realistic films of everyday life; high quality entertainment films', and that it did not want 'war subjects exploited for mere cheap sensationalism; the morbid and the maudlin; entertainment stories which are stereotyped or hackneyed and unlikely because of their theme or general character to reflect well upon this country at home and abroad'.[419] In essence, this repeated a similar agreement made in 1942 which had been largely ignored, probably because of a lack of interest within the BFPA. Looking at some examples of films, in this respect, official policy reflected a trend which was already evident across British cinema as a whole. This trend is best represented by the production policy of Ealing Studios, which had abandoned the melodramatic heroics of *Ships With Wings* (1941) for the realism of films like *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), *Nine Men* (1943) and *San Demetrio, London* (1943). Ealing's production policy, according to studio head Michael Balcon, was 'first and foremost, to make a good film, a film that people would want to see, and at the same time to carry a message, or an example, which would be good propaganda for morale and the war effort'.[420] Here is another example of a film maker taking the initiative, but abiding by, rather than evading, government propaganda guidance.

Bracken's developing involvement

Bracken liked to work in a manner combining delegation and control, and this way of working continued with the new MOI team structures, with the Americans and the BFPA. Certainly, he always had a very positive view of the film studios and what they could deliver. Bracken wrote that 'the majority of film producers and directors in Britain, indeed one might almost say all, were patriotic and had no desire to cause alarm and despondency amongst the civil populace;

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[419] 'Feature Films – MOI Policy', minutes of the British Film Producers' Association, 23 March 1943.
[420] Michael Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents…A Lifetime of Films*, (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 148.

indeed, they saw their films as an integral part of Britain's war effort and were proud to make them'.[421] This positivity found its way into many of his films, which indirectly would add to the morale message within their narratives. Films such as *My Learned Friend* (1943) and *Nine Men* (1943) contained humour and optimism, and in addition were popular with the public. On a higher political level, one instance where he achieved a major success was with the USA. With the Americans becoming more involved in all aspects of war planning, Bracken had gained a very high-level endorsement. had had Referring to initial discussions between the MOI and American film makers, Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, stated, 'our principal collaborator was Mr Bracken, head of the MOI…always helpful to us and, equally important, he was decisive and energetic'.[422] Eisenhower was particularly referring to the MOI's work in educating the arriving American forces and preparing them for life in Britain. In that very work, Bracken had gained more power and influence, as America's arrival was making inroads into all manner of war planning. Politically, this was a major boost for Bracken and would aid him in future dealings with other opinion makers. In the next chapter his continued work and influence in film content will be further investigated. As mentioned earlier, military successes in 1943 had done much to raise spirits within each service (refer to the Timeline section), but still there was evidence of poor relations between officer and lower ranks, as within the Services there were still elements of class divisions. Within the RAF, for example, there were separate living quarters for officers. This issue was sufficiently serious, that a committee report attempted to define the issue:

> An attitude of antagonism to an impersonal 'they' …with the officers or even the Army generally, which militates against solidarity, cooperation and esprit de corps in the Army as a whole. It makes the soldier think of the Army as an institution of which he is not fully a member, administered by those who do not in a real sense lead or represent him.[423]

So, this was further evidence that old traditions still prevailed and that some old-style cinema, with its depiction of strong divisions of class, was still alive. Certainly, films such as *The Way Ahead* (1944) went some way towards addressing the problem of presentation of class in films and will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[421] INF1/178, Part C. Memorandum by Bracken to T.L. Dugdale, 28 May 1943.
[422] Dwight Eisenhower. *Crusade in Europe*. (London: Heinemann, 1948), 69.
[423] WO 163/162, Public morale committee report, August-October 1943

Pressures from the War Cabinet

The Films Division was always under pressure, but now there was added urgency to provide guidelines and political objectives, from new sources, including the War Cabinet. These should be mainly aimed at supporting feature film productions, which the film industry had been demanding for so long. In March 1943, the Films Division modified its 'Suggestions for Feature Producers' in a paper, 'Feature Films - MOI. Policy',[424] which considered the changed war circumstances at the beginning of 1943, namely, that the Allies had landed in North Africa, and it became clear that more occupied countries would be liberated. One of these themes would be incorporated into *Desert Victory* and will be analysed later in this chapter, in the case study section. In its introduction, the paper reaffirmed all the points made in the previous memorandum; no special attention should be paid to the presentation and treatment of enemy characters; common sense 'should strike a balance between overly large contempt for the enemy and exaggerated sympathy', a theme 'that lends itself to drama and realistic adventure'. The MOI also warned producers against a 'patronising attitude' towards peoples and groups, who supported the fight against Nazism on the basis of the Atlantic Charter of the United Nations, , 'we may be benefactors of the human race, but to rub it in can easily cause irritation'. Feature films about the different countries of the British Empire would be desirable; they could create sympathy and mutual understanding, 'to create the new emotional attitude to the Empire which is necessary if we are to make a success of it in the post-war world'. It is clear that this guidance eventually became integrated within film narratives and, in turn, into the hero characters portrayed, in films such as *Desert Victory.*

A clear change in the direction of propaganda was noticeable, where the War Cabinet was seriously considering films effect on people within the British Empire, rather than the USA. This point would become important in the discussion of the making of *Desert Victory*. In summary, the memorandum 'Suggestions for Feature Producers' ended:

> The attitude of the Ministry towards feature films remains basically the same; for home morale, four themes will grow in importance – the conception of the United Nations, the Empire, the participation of the liberated peoples in the final victory over Fascism, and the Far East. Home morale is, however, less vital than the projection of Britain to the world; this means an approach to designing films, technically for world circulation, and in theme, films of both Britain alone, and of Britain as a member of the United Nations.[425]

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[424] INF 1/196 Films Division 1943

[425] Feature Films – MOI. Policy, March, 1943, in: Minutes of the British Film Producers'
  Association, Meeting 14, Minute 249, 7.4.1943

Henceforth, the film studios and the MOI had to ensure not to alienate Empire troops, as illustrate in the making of *Desert Victory*. As Balcon has pointed out, there was no longer any contradiction between the wishes of the ministry and the production ideology of the leading film producers.[426] This is not to say there were not still differences to be solved. Here Balcon is reacting with confidence that, in his view, his film studios were aligned in a logistical and progressive relationship with the MOI. As chapter 4 covered, he had been invited back into the MOI's folds with his reinstatement to the Ideas Committee. There the archives show that 'ideals' of the 'What are we fighting for?' were regaining significance. To sum up, this paper marked the climax of the Film Division's commitment to, on the one hand, shaping the film industry and, on the other, achieving a consensus between the MOI and commercial film studios on the direction of film propaganda,. The film industry voiced no more criticism of the Films Division and its allegedly non-existent policy towards commercial film production.

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, with the Ideas Committee and the direct contacts through the BFPA, the MOI possessed the best information channels to the film industry since the start of the war. The control it exercised was informal and voluntary for the filmmakers; it was enough initially but did not work well. Now, at this stage of the war, a much-improved working relationship was developing, as further groups were involved. The end of Bracken's paper neatly sums up the consensus at the time: -

> to ensure that British film production in general, and not just 'official' films, followed precisely the line that the Ministry wished it to follow in mobilising support for the war effort and in constructing the essential wartime ideology of popular national unity.[427]

In moves to find a consensus on using film as a war time weapon, a MOI team, including Bracken, was sent to New York following the Roosevelt-Churchill conferences at Quebec in August 1943. At this meeting the wartime use of film was discussed with leaders of the American motion picture industry. Bracken stated to the assembled audience:

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[426] Michael Balcon 'The aim in making films during the war (...) was, first and foremost, to make a good film, a film that people would want to see, and at the same time to make it honest and truthful and to carry a message, or an example, which would be good propaganda for morale and the war effort.' In: Michael Balcon, Michael Balcon Presents ... A Lifetime of Films, London 1969, 148

[427] Anthony Aldgate and Jeffery Richards, *Britain Can Take It,* 10.

> …The motion picture industries of both countries have played a significant part in the dissemination of important wartime information. In my own country the Minister of Information has received generous support from all sections of the motion picture industry. I know that in the United States, the home of the motion picture industry, you have been equally generous in your effort to fulfil to best advantage your function as one of the great media of communication to the public428.

Bracken thanked American exhibitors and distributors for showing official British features and short subjects. He went on 'You have been appreciative of the value of films such as *'Desert Victory,' 'Next Of Kin'* and *'Coastal Command'* and it has been a source of pride to us in London to know that these pictures are to have wide distribution to the people of America. On the other hand, we have welcomed American pictures in Britain'.[429] This was clearly an attempt to reach out, and to embrace a new working relationship, that he knew would be needed. With his strong political experience, Bracken was aware that the MOI had to take on board any suggestions made by the American side, not just to OWI, but to canvas views across a wide spectrum of policy makers.

Input from the services on film

In other developments, the military did not let the initiative of filmmaking be taken out of their hands. Under pressure from all the services, the influence of the Films Division was slightly reduced, when a Joint Anglo-American Film Planning Committee was established in 1943, coordinating the national film activities of the units with the Americans and the OWI. (See overall diagram for 1944 in the Appendix.) However, there was still concern about the American public's view on Britain. One important voice was the opinion of Hollywood OWI as late as March 1943 that:

> One of the major information problems of the United Nations is to dissolve American mistrust of the English… Much of the American mistrust is based on misconceptions of British snobbery and the feeling that Britain is not genuinely democratic. They admire and respect the fact that the sons of the British aristocracy, go off to British wars, but this does not convince Americans that Britain will do her part in working out the democratic world.430

Their concerns were too late, as decisions on America's involvement has already been taken, but this general belief, that British films were not representative, carried on throughout the war.

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[428] INF 1/196 Films Division papers

[429] Bracken Cites 'Film Value for War messages. *Motion Picture Herald.* 4th September 1943.

[430] 'The White Cliffs--MGM, Hollywood Office, Motion Picture Bureau OWI', dated 2 March 1943 in *American National Archive: Feature Films and OWI campaigns and reports. Bureau of Intelligence, Media division.* Records of the OWI 208.3.8

One can see this from script reviews, as late as 1944; in OWI's review of the initial script for *The White Cliffs* (1944) they went on:

> OWI's Overseas Branch view was that the film script portrayed an English Social system that is now being modified and changed, if it ever existed in that form at all.., the caste system is a diminishing survival rather than an all-pervasive condition of present-day English life.., we have no business to perpetrate a stereotype in which the caste system is England and England is the caste system in American minds.

In some ways this quote contradicts the previous one, with its concern about too much of 'noblesse oblige'. It illustrates that the OWI was still findings it way, representing Britain in film. This is further evidence of American involvement and planting of its beliefs within British film narratives, and it would not be the last time, as will be explored in the next chapter. Other considerations by the OWI were followed up, as the OWI was quite convinced that the people in Hollywood, who understood the current social situation in Britain the least, were the Hollywood English exiles. One example in their sights was the respected script writer, James Hilton, who scripted *Mrs Miniver* (1942) and *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and many other popular films. As part of the OWI effort to 'educate this expatriate community, it imported Harold Butler of the MOI, who met with the British film writers, artists and directors in mid-March 1943'.[431] At the meeting Butler stressed that they should follow the lead from the OWI, in cooperating with the MOI's film division. Here was a strong example that the MOI was following the lead of the OWI, in getting its ideas of film and propaganda agreed at an early stage in the arrangements.

Further censorship demands

Returning to censorship and the impact it had on film narratives, the MOI Films Division in January 1943 wrote to the BFPA giving a list of ten subjects[432] which were prohibited. It highlighted that the Films Division approval of a film or theme did not, of itself, necessarily mean that it had already passed censorship. The letter recommended producers consult the MOI Film Censorship Division in advance, if they intended to make a film touching upon any of the

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[431] BT 190/1. Agenda and Minutes. Ulrich Bell to Ferdinand Kuhn, 15 March 1943: 'Kuhn file' The activities of the British expatriate community was coordinated by the British Consulate War Services Advisory Board/British War Services Advisory Board.
[432] INF 1/196 Films Division memos

prohibited ten subjects.[433] Unfortunately, the archive records in this area are very fragmented and this paper is one of the few that survived the war:

> the Film Division should make it clear in a letter to the Film Companies that approval of the theme leaves out of account any Censorship objection and that film producers should study the defence Notices carefully and submit the film at an early stage if it deals with any subject mentioned in the Defence Notices, with particular reference to the following items, reference to which is prohibited: - Spies and counter espionage, Delayed action bombs, Bomb disposal units, Parachute mines, Escapes of serving personnel from enemy occupied territory, Treatment of prisoners-of-war, Use of gas, Parachutists, Commando raids (except as approved by the Censorship), Secret equipment.[434]

These ten points complemented the 98 pre-war prohibition points of the British Board of Film Censors. Since most consultations with the MOI took place prior to or during the production of a feature film, often over lunch, there is hardly any archive material on the arranged cut editions,[435] or on censorship reports.[436] The first point relating to espionage is interesting, as one of the most popular films of 1943 was *The Adventures Of Tartu* with the well-liked British actor, Robert Donat, playing an espionage agent.[437] However, the film had started production before these rules were agreed.

Yet, cooperation between Films Division, the Censorship Department and the BBFC didn't always go smoothly. If the Films Division advised a production company on a subject and approved the plot, this did not automatically mean that the Censorship Division would approve all scenes in the finished film. In order to prevent film producers from benefiting in the future from contradictory decisions within the MOI, film producers were informed at the beginning of 1943 which topics, as discussed above, they were generally to avoid or which they were only allowed to implement under the guidance of the Censorship Division. This is some proof that the censorship division was in line with the MOI's mandates, particularly on subjects that related to the war, which by then was the subject of most films.

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[433] INF 1/178, CN/4, part 3, A. Nunn May (Assistant Director, Films Division) to W.G. Hall (Vice-President British Film Makers' Association), 20 January 1943.

[434] INF 1/178. Admiral Thomson to Francis Williams, 13.10.1942. CN 4 Part III

[435] In addition, almost the entire files of the Ministry of Information's censorship department were destroyed after the war. For the period from 1941 to 1944

[436] Only 140 censorship reports exist; the materials of 1940 were destroyed by bombing raids

[437] K*inematograph Weekly* listed a series of films that were 'runners up' in its survey of the most popular films in Britain in 1943

The developing war also brought a relaxation of existing regulations for feature film production, especially with regard to the selection of themes for the films; the ban on depicting British officers and troops in a 'disgraceful, reprehensible or equivocal light' was loosened, so that a nuanced portrayal of the army could take place. Chapter 6 will discuss these areas in *The Way Ahead* (1944). Furthermore, the ban on fictional representation of public figures was withdrawn, 'our rule against representation of living persons does not extend to enemy aliens'.[438] It had been the case that in earlier films the enemy could be portrayed as slightly cartoon characters. From now on, there would be a theme of realistic representations in films, such as *Underground Guerrillas* (1943), where even children are executed and *San Demetrio, London* (1943), where the audience would be in no doubt of the cruelty of the Nazis. In fact, both films would follow a now common trend, emphasising the noble qualities of heroism and stoicism. In the latter film, the ship's crew could be seen to represent all of Britain, especially the common people, damaged, but refusing to accept defeat.

Assessments from outside government

Criticism of the MOI was starting to come from famous writers of fiction. Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1943) had its hero working within the MOI. One of the passages describes a typical working day 'one afternoon, a film was shown depicting otter-hunting and was designed to impress neutral countries with the pastoral beauty of English life'.[439] Another extract has his boss stating that 'his day is spent sending people who want to see me to someone they don't want to see'.[440] Looking for positive feedback, at the end of 1943, where an editorial in the DNL says 'The MOI Films Division has done much for British feature film prestige, both here and overseas.' Taking a cynical view, the end of the war was in sight, and the whole arrangement of filmmaking post-war was being considered. It might be possible that the *DNL* was trying to build bridges with the MOI again. It is out of the scope of this project, but further detailed research could find answers to that question.

As the end of the war was approaching, films that illustrated the ideals of the 'What are we fighting for?', discussed back in chapter 1, regained importance. From this it can be interpreted that a clear change in the direction of propaganda had been decided. It was no longer a question

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[438] Nicholas Pronay, 'The Political Censorship of films in Britain during the Wars', in *Propaganda, Politics and Film 1918-1945*. Ed. Nicholas Pronay and D.W.Spring (London: Macmillan, 1982), 105.
[439] Evelyn Waugh. *Put out more flags* (London: Penguin, 1942), 189.
[440] Ibid, 62.

of the morale of the population, which had to be supported by feature films, but of the effect which the films had outside Great Britain.

Two case studies have been chosen to track the processes and work of the Films Division, and to illustrate changes in the presentation of the hero figure. Accordingly, I follow and analyse the making of two films, *Desert Victory* and *The Gentle Sex*.

Case Study 1: *Desert Victory* (1943)

This documentary styled feature film recounts the famous World War 2 battle of El Alamein, considered one of the main turning points in the war. It is useful to study, as it illustrates how the services and the MOI eventually started to work together in a successful manner. Actual footage taken during the battle, including film captured from the Nazis, was applied to explain the battle tactics and their implementation within the narrative. It is one of the first British films to make use of large segments of live footage of action. With a comprehensive breadth, it also showcases the men and women at home working in the factories, who helped make the victory possible. The archive documentation on *Desert Victory* also reveals much with respect to the working relationships within the Army Film Unit (AFU), which produced it, and the problems which arose between it and the MOI. It also reveals the rivalry which developed between the agencies of film production in Britain and America.[441]

Work began on *The Battle Of Egypt* (as *Desert Victory* was initially titled) in parallel with the campaign, which began in October 1942, when Allied forces went on the offensive against Rommel's forces. Captain Roy Boulting,[442] the director, was well into production at Pinewood Studios when he was removed from the project: 'the reason given to me by Major Bryce was that as Commanding Officer of the AFU he should be responsible for making the film'[443]. Bryce had already made two films for the AFU on the war in the desert (*The Siege Of Tobruk* and *Tobruk*, both 1942) and had decided he was the man for the job. As Bryce was his superior, Boulting felt he had no choice but to agree to the takeover. In the event, however, Bryce's draft construction for the film made little impression. Unfortunately, things did not work out, as when a draft script was sent to Jack Beddington, head of the MOI's Films Division, the reply was that 'the draft was 'very thin' and needed a large amount of work. Beddington felt that the

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[441] INF 1/221 'Desert Victory' film production correspondence
[442] Later was famous as one of the Boulting Brothers team
[443] Ibid

draft did not capture 'the scope of the actual operations'.[444] One of the main concerns was the focus on the initial retreat and holding operation. This was deemed to be out of line with the MOI's propaganda advice. Beddington suggested more emphasis on the fight back and eventual success. With this, the MOI had one eye on the War Cabinet. As discussed in the last chapter, they were allocating more time to studying film portrayals as propaganda weapons. Also, and more importantly, Churchill was providing parliament with, on the whole, positive updates on the campaign. In fact, Beddington's reply stated that 'Churchill's account revealed a broadness of vision which is entirely lacking in the AFU treatment'. The MOI felt that essentially the deficiencies boiled down to one thing, the direction of the movie: the AFU script proposed a defensive-minded film, whereas the country needed an offensive-minded film, which 'justly celebrated a British victory'. [445]As a result of these criticisms, Bryce did not keep his job and Major David Macdonald took charge of the film. Boulting was reinstated as director. A broader treatment was prepared, to everyone's liking, as the Eighth Army continued its victorious advance.

Disagreements

One other facet of the AFU's willingness to accede to Films Division requests manifested itself at this time in its adherence to building the film around Churchill's speech. The AFU wanted to end its film with material of Churchill, on that occasion reviewing the troops in a victory parade, and to put some lines of his speech praising the men on the soundtrack. The AFU had the footage, but not the speech. The production was already running beyond its original completion date of 15 February 1943, when the idea was hit upon of asking Churchill to re-record it, especially for their purposes. Churchill consented and a recording session was hastily arranged. 'The film was finally completed by the end of February. It was first shown to an invited audience at the War Office's private cinema in Curzon Street House in March 1943. *Desert Victory* was immediately deemed a success by this audience, which was attended by high ranks of service chiefs. For once, the MOI was pleased, as Beddington wrote to Macdonald expressing his 'very deep admiration and many thanks' to all concerned at the AFU for a film, which projected 'a strong, virile, confident and victorious people - that is what I have always

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[444] Ibid
[445] INF 1/196 Films Division

wanted to see in one of our pictures and I can assure you that it is worth many, many munitions of war'.[446]

Immediately after the film's general release on 15 March, Lord Beaverbrook wrote to Sidney Bernstein at the MOI, extending his congratulations for 'the extraordinary fine record which has been made of the Eighth Army' and expressing full confidence that 'the film, I know, will have an immense success throughout the country'.[447]

18: Heroic British troops showing mercy: *Desert Victory* still

Churchill saw the film just prior to its general release and suggested two alterations: that footage of the march past by the 52nd Division be inserted at the film's climax, and that a line or two be added to the commentary pointing out that New Zealand troops were seen on parade; both were incorporated. Aldgate states that 'the film proved to be far and away the biggest box-office winner of all the 'official' British documentaries produced and released during the war'.[448]

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[446] Ibid
[447] INF 1/221. R. Tritton to J. Beddington, 25 November 1942
[448] Anthony Aldgate, A. (1988). Creative Tensions: *Desert Victory*, the Army Film Unit and Anglo-American Rivalry, 1943–5. In: Taylor, P.M. (eds) Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War. Palgrave Macmillan, London 144

In the rush to promote the film, much of the publicity had inadvertently highlighted the number of casualties taken by the Army Film and Photographic Service (AFPS) in the course the work. Figures as high as 40% of AFPS personnel - either killed, wounded or taken prisoner - were cited in some accounts.[449] One result of this was that the MOI head, Bracken, was requested to investigate the matter and to write to next of kin. Another very important issue for the government was complaints to Bracken that, although Indian troops had taken part in the campaign, there were no scenes of them in action during the film. In this instance, urgent telegrams were hastily despatched to MOI film officers in India, suggesting that the film be carefully studied before any public showing. It was essential to avoid giving offence and so Jack Beddington had no objection, if they wished to insert footage of Indian troops in action, for a global release.[450] In many ways this is related to the MOI guidance discussed earlier, in that post war considerations should be considered, especially where the Empire countries were involved. The similar issue, with the non-inclusion of New Zealand troops in the film, had been resolved, at Churchill's behest.

Feedback from America

The endorsement of the 'powers that be' of the effectiveness of the film guaranteed further publicity of the film. *Desert Victory* was heavily promoted in the United States from the outset. Even before the film had been released in Britain, Beddington stated that he was 'very anxious for producer Macdonald to get to America at the earliest possible moment, to help in the exploitation of *Desert Victory'*. 'The Minister is entirely with us in this', he continued, and 'is doing all he can to help in this and other ways'.[451] So, Macdonald was present at the private screening in New York to address the Americans 'and answer questions on the campaign'. The film was shown to the Foreign Press Association at the Twentieth Century Fox Building on 31 March 1943. Everyone there agreed it was a success.[452] Some typical comments from this presentation, 'Some very highly placed person in the USA has sent a message to our government saying that the film has done more for us than any other piece of propaganda in America'. 'You know, you've revolutionised war films with this picture. We shall have to revise our ideas.' 'President Roosevelt, I believe, said it was the best war film seen in the White House

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[449] Annette Kuhn, 'Desert Victory and the People's War', in *Screen* Volume 22, Issue 2, July 1981, 54.
[450] INF 1/221. Sir I. Fraser to Bracken, 30 April 1943, and Beddington to Gates, 3 May 1943
[451] INF 1/221. Beddington to Brigadier W. A. S. Turner, 3 March 1943
[452] Ibid

this war'. It is certain that publicity and high-level interest played a large part in the selling of *Desert Victory* to America, and, from the evidence, it seemed to have worked.

Desert Victory continued to be cited for some time as a film to emulate, Robert Sherwood stated, 'All of the great documentary pictures were made by the British - *Desert Victory* and *Target For Tonight*, for example, are excellent pictures of the British war effort'.[453] A difficult feat to achieve, but this film succeeded at all levels. Certainly, with the involvement and endorsements of Churchill and Beaverbrook, this type of - what could be described as - documentary feature, would become more common. Aldgate described the film as a documentary, and in fact it did win an Oscar within that category. My view is that it was a mixture of MOI desires to promote optimistic propaganda within a feature film narrative, which just happened to have a documentary feel to it. Today we might describe it as infotainment. Together with positive box office figures, it represented a step change in film production, emulated around the world, and not just in the USA. See the next chapter for consideration of a common theme in the film.

Annette Kuhn sums up *Desert Victory's* overall propaganda aim distinctly, 'to acknowledge and spotlight the film's ideological significance in constructing a nationalist and populist position in relation to the conduct of World War 2'.[454] One argument suggests this process was already under way before the war, but, that the pressures from many sides for propaganda, helped promote these ideas on both sides of the Atlantic.

One final note, the film received good reviews from the critics in both Britain and the United States, culminating in the award of its 'Oscar' from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the best documentary film of 1943.

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[453] Richard Dyer McCann. *The People's Films. A political history of the US government motion pictures* (New York: Hastings House Publishing, 1973), 140. The remark was made on Sherwood's appearance before a Congressional hearing.
[454] Annette Kuhn, 'Desert Victory and the People's War', in *Screen*, Volume 22, Issue 2, July 1981. 68.

Case Study 2: *The Gentle Sex* (1943)

The next film studied in this section falls into a completely different category to *Desert Victory*. Nevertheless, in many respects, *The Gentle Sex* shares many similar traits, with a strong emphasis on documentary detail without any scenes of fighting. In terms of propaganda, both films show the characters coming from many sections of British society. This film gets close to how people looked and spoke in wartime Britain, what their home life was like and what they did for entertainment. Some of these themes are in *Desert Victory*, but it was centred within the theatre of war. *The Gentle Sex* takes place in the south east and its time setting is between the Blitz and invasion scares of 1940, and the fightback of D-Day. The propaganda purpose was to target women, in particular, to convince them to work in factories and to enlist in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's branch of the British Army (ATS), to help the war effort. Their service life is shown in a documentary style, where the cinema audience would have no doubt that the women on screen were real people. In essence, this is a story of seven women from different social classes, following their journey within distinct parts of the ATS. Themes of loss and sacrifice are portrayed, but the central propaganda message is that many more women will continue the fight.

Themes involving realistic scenes can also be found in *Millions Like Us* (produced by Edward Black, directed by Frank Lauder and Sidney Gilliat for Gainsborough Pictures 1943), where work and home life are shown in minute detail, for women of differing classes and backgrounds. It was quite a revolutionary film, that both announces and welcomes the changing social status of women in Britain. I suggest that these examples illustrate that some film narratives were aimed at women in the audience. In previous chapters, a number of propaganda suggestions were presented, which eventually meant that women found their way into films.

Millions Like Us had, in fact, started out as a documentary. According to Launder, Roger Burford, a scriptwriter and advisor in the Films Division at the MOI, had suggested to them a film covering the entire war effort on the home front:

> With this object we toured the country, visiting docks, farms and coastal areas, and went to war factories and works all over Britain. We came to the conclusion that the best way to attract a wide public to a subject of this nature, which was what the Ministry wanted, was to cloak it in a simple fictional story.[455]

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[455] Geoff Brown, *Launder and Gilliat* (London, British Film Institute, 1977), 108.

Millions Like Us was commissioned by the Films Division, from an idea by the Ideas Committee. It was then sold at cost price to a feature production company, in this case Gainsborough.[456]

The notion of a film covering the entire British war effort on the home front explains the genesis of *The Gentle Sex*, which can be traced back to the Mass Observation Unit responses. Similar examples have been highlighted in previous chapters, but no direct connection has been made. In this instance, in their surveys hostility towards the ATS was found, with objections from women ranging from the belief that 'it's all peeling potatoes' and 'they just do all the dirty work for everybody', to a widely held objection to female military service from men in the army.[457] With this information the MOI launched a recruiting drive in 1941, aimed primarily at enlisting more women for the ATS. Although the ATS had formed the backdrop to earlier films, ranging from comedies such as *Old Mother Riley Joins Up* (1941) to romances like *Somewhere On Leave* (1942). *The Gentle Sex,* produced by Derrick de Marney and directed by Leslie Howard, was the first dramatized narrative to specifically follow the lives of ATS recruits, using elements of documentary realism to represent the ATS as ordinary women, thus identifiable to the women in the cinema audience. Howard, in particular, already had a reputation for providing powerful symbols of wartime resolution and courage, in films such as *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) and *The First of the Few* (1942). They intended the film to act as a recruitment aid to the ATS, commenting that 'women's wartime role' was 'so far reaching and important that the least a mere maker of films' could do was to 'express on the screen the ATS in the Second World War and the significance of their work'.[458] I suggest that the tone of the film, humorous and quietly heroic, was quite different from anything the USA might produce and so was unique to Britain. It was given a warm critical reception after release. *The Daily Express* newspaper, for example, liked the true to life characterisations of the women, who were no longer the comic relief of pre-war films. Their film critic Ernest Betts wrote:

> It is a film that will give men a new respect for women at war .459

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[456] INF 1/947, report entitled 'Government Film Production and Distribution', 1946.
[457] Hansard, Vol. 435, March–April 1947, col. 1727.
[458] Ronald Howard, *In Search of My Father: A Portrait of Leslie Howard*, (London, St Martins, 1984), 125.
[459] *The Daily Express*, 10th April 1943, 2

Lucy Noakes writes extensively on the changing roles of women in society.[460] The earlier film examples show that the film studios were ready and able to embrace these changes in film narratives.

Considering all the discussions within government about what makes good propaganda, at last, here was a film that fulfilled many of the ideas proposed in the earlier war years, and endorsed within audience surveys, outlined in chapters 1 to 4. In some part, the influence of the Americans had helped the British film industry to reconsider its subject matter and to reassess what the public wanted to see on film, particularly with regards to the representation of working-class people.

Class was no impediment to representation in the film; all backgrounds were depicted.

19: Women ready for war duty: The Gentle Sex still

Reaction from Women

Roy Whitley of the very popular newspaper The *Daily Mirror* thought it 'real and convincing'.[461] It was not only the critics who were moved by its realism, for the remarks of Mass Observation's respondents suggest that audiences responded in the same way. 'I enjoyed because it was true to its title,' one woman remarked. 'These were real people, people one

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[460] Lucy Noakes, Women in the British Army (London: Routledge, 2006), 166.
[461] *The Daily Mirror*, Film Reviews, 7th April 1943. 5

knew and liked, not film actors and actresses'.[462] Over a hundred women who replied to a Mass-Observation Directive, named it as their favourite film of 1943, evidence that the propaganda had reached out to the planned audience.

To conclude, the characters in this film were presented as just ordinary women, but in understated heroic roles. The narrative aimed at displaying the qualities of Britishness, with propaganda messages that the country was winning, with everyone displaying everyday heroics.

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[462] Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1987), 227.

Conclusions

The findings of this chapter illustrate a fundamental change in the operations of the MOI, in relation to film production. It was true that there were fewer complaints about the MOI's work, as described in previous chapters, and this manifested in a smoother and more efficient process, as the MOI did not have to spend time and effort on defending itself. Evidence of an improved process of film production goes some way to addressing one of the research questions of this whole project, '*Did they work in practice and were they efficient? And was the relationship collaborative or conflicted*? A coming together of high-level oversight, from the War Cabinet and service heads, filtering downwards, assisted and enhanced, rather than hindered, film projects. A keen interest overall in keeping the Americans involved in decisions and propaganda content was another major step forward. Evidence suggests that Churchill found the use of feature films an advantage when dealing with the American president. All these factors meant that film production garnered more resources, as seen in the case study of *Desert Victory*, in which the services were heavily involved. The eventual success that *Desert Victory* enjoyed at the box office clearly had an impact upon the films being produced by service units in the United States, as they started to emulate the cinematic techniques employed in the film. An important point here is there was an exchange of ideas and techniques in a two-way process between the USA and Britain. Within Britain, there was now a large degree of co-operation between most departments, centred on the MOI, and a real feeling that the BFTA and the film studios actively working together had become the norm.

It is clear that Britain was experiencing extensive social change during this period of the war. *The Gentle Sex* goes some way to providing a snapshot of what type of life women were leading. Call ups being extended to women meant that they would start to play a more prominent role in the war, as illustrated in the film and the discourse around it. Here was an example of pressure from many places, to not only include women heroes in films, but also to depict women as 'real' people. There would be no more depictions characteristic of the 1930s, with women predominantly depicted as wives, mothers and mere love interests. A coming together of traditional feature film and documentary styles can be said to have converged in these two films. One of Sherman's definitions of a stoic hero is how service members carry the burden of care for one another, in the face of impossible odds. This is a strong component of *The Gentle Sex,* where the women eventually band and work together.

By the beginning of 1943 the last remains of the MOI's policies, intended as gatekeeper of British morale, were rendered redundant by military victories, as mentioned in the timeline section. External pressures from America, via the working relationship between the OWI and the MOI, meant that any proposed new film had to be analysed as to whether it would be fit for purpose. In this, many new themes had to considered: What would the American public like? Does the film suggest a positive view of Britain? This is not to say that these issues had not been considered before, but they now had a greater resonance. Just the basic fact that cinema audiences in Britain would be swelled by the influx of American troops would be another factor to consider. For these reasons, the hero figure within British films would undergo some fundamental changes. Both case studies provide evidence that a move towards more realistic depictions was under way, indeed, *Desert Victory* incorporated actual war footage showing the common soldier in a heroic light. Another example which used actual footage of combatants at war, also released in 1943, was *We Dive At Dawn.* Similar to *The Gentle Sex*, it included credible representations of real people, as in *Millions Like Us,* and *The Bells Go Down.* Another film example that included the concepts of both real war scenes and a focus on women was *The Lamp Still Burns.*

It is evident that the British role of the stoic hero in film was undergoing significant changes, because of social, political, and official pressures. This chapter has illustrated that the former role of the masculine hero was starting to undergo significate changes, with the expansion of the heroic ideal. Ideology, once just an afterthought, was becoming more important with film narratives. It always had been there, but it was now more integrated with a film's central story line, an increasing depiction of British public fighting back displaying heroic characteristics, but bound up within a British way of life, as in *Went The Day Well*.

Certainly this period of the war was the start of a convergence of documentary and feature films. Elements of documentary realism, either using real footage from the war, or in the portrayal of actual and imagined events in a realistic manner, became more common. Improved co-operation between the MOI and film makers would continue and the next phase of the war will be investigated in the coming chapter. In some ways, a backlash was coming, to the newer type of hero, but in practice the British public still valued stoicism, specifically the practical everyday endurance of loss or pain, without the display of feelings and without complaint.

CHAPTER 6: 1944 Dreams, fantasy and stoicism: Projections of Britain

Give the public a film about ordinary people; we do get so tired of our heroines with Oxford accents.[463]

Timeline of major events on this phase of the war

- May: British forces take Monte Cassino, Italy
- June: D-Day - Invasion of France by Allied forces
- August: France liberated
- September: Belgium liberated
- September: Luxemburg liberated
- September: Operation Market Garden - invasion of Netherlands
- Sept to Dec: Netherlands liberated
- December: Battle of the Bulge - Failed German offensive

Introduction

The previous two chapters considered the ever-changing political constructs that influenced film ideas and production. Now that America was fully involved, the policymakers of the MOI and other departments were under greater pressure to improve their working practices. Some of the reasons for this were commercial, but others certainly political. One thing both the USA and the British government were very keen on was cooperation in all areas. This chapter aims to explore the nature of this cooperation, by presenting a view of a more consolidated effort between the MOI, the services and film studios.

At this stage of the war, the national mood was becoming more optimistic, mainly as a result of successful campaigns in Europe. Like other major events in British history, the film world reflected the national mood. The official embrace of the cinema's contribution to the war effort had become more entrenched by this point in the conflict. Rather than concentrating on censorship, with somewhat lax control of cinema, the MOI was increasingly keen to use film for propaganda purposes. As shown in the previous chapter, these processes had been initiated earlier in the war, but henceforth they would be augmented, especially with American involvement.

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[463] Picture Going Weekly 1941

British cinemagoers' declining interest in war themes was finally confirmed at a 1944 BFI conference,[464] when W.J. Speakman compared the success of the earlier British war films to the apparent 'failures' of the latter period. In his address, Speakman explained that the 'public are war-weary, and in reaction from the war itself infinitely prefer to see something escapist.' Coming from such a respected source, these words would have carried weight with both the MOI and the film studios.

A major factor here is that the American involvement at many levels of filmmaking policy and propaganda was having an impact. Within the constructs of film production in this period, Chomsky's Hollywood model has a strong claim. Chomsky describes a framework outlining policies and propaganda within certain traits of filmmaking. He argued that the USA has a 'system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces…but without coercion'.[465] Some of this had been happening in the UK, led by the MOI using its closer ties with the War Cabinet, but as shown, it was a long hard journey. In previous chapters it has been demonstrated that the UK was, at last, 'getting its act together', insofar as the direction of filmmaking goes, a reflection of the USA film production processes, which happened in the course of their mutual work since 1942. As usual in the UK, there were exceptions to the close working relationships with the USA, but these were in the minority. As far as the hero figure was concerned, Levi-Strauss is useful here for his notions of the 'social environment'. He states that 'myth elements', such as heroes, change in accordance with that very 'social environment'. Examples, in the reworking of the family drama in films of this period, suggest this is not random, but a reflection of changes in social values.[466]

British movie stars

In 1944 only 35 British films were released, partly due to the newer production processes put in place the previous year, both practical and political, involving the Americans. The previous chapters have outlined the pressure on the MOI from the OWI, to increasingly engage with working-class characters within a realist setting, explored in the case study. Furthermore, the British cinema's wartime fascination with the depiction of 'the people as stars',[467] was described by Peter Stead as a new theme of British film narratives, starting around 1944.

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[464] Quoted in |J. Richards, 'Class and Nation', 340. Note: Speakman was President of the BFI.
[465] Noam Chomsky, 'The Hollywood Propaganda Model' in *The Essential Chomsky*. 86.
[466] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*
[467] Peter Stead, *The People as Stars: Feature Films as National Expression* (Oxford: Routledge, 1989) 62-83.

Famous stage actors, such as Laurence Olivier and James Mason, were big box office draws and film production companies started to really consider how best to use their popularity within the constructs of propaganda requirements. One of the most obvious developments of this year was the number of what might be described as fantasy films. In many films, studios depicted war as something fantastic, strange, and resistant to logical analysis. There were supernatural fantasies such as *Dead Of Night* (1945), musical fantasies such as *Fiddlers Three* (1944) and a very popular sub-comic group, the daydream fantasy, *Let George Do It* (1940). Other examples (from the Table - 1944 British Film releases) would be *Champagne Charlie*, harking back to a celebration of 'the good old days' of the English music hall, the utopian fantasy, *They Came To A City*, a throwback to the pre-war *Things to Come* (1936), and *Half-Way House* exploiting interest in the supernatural. Representing the brave new world of the future is *Heaven Is Round The Corner*. Pure filmed fantasy is found in *Dreaming*, a collection of strange comedic dream sequences. Comedies also moved into what could be described as fantasy locations. *Bees In Paradise* saw the music hall comedian, Arthur Askey, stranded on a desert island ruled by women. *Fiddlers Three* cast the popular Tommy Trinder as a time traveller. This film, in its construction and presentation, is a good example of a new way of working within the film industry. It attempted to match story lines to a framework of propaganda, but with a desire to reflect the changing state of society, and what was expected from the cinema.

The last chapter demonstrated that there was a common thread in film narratives to provide examples of teamwork, by illustrating male and female bonding. Taking Ealing as an example, the common Ealing trope, of an outsider transformed within a team environment, can be traced back to the studio's 1944 output of comedies, represented by Preston in *San Demetrio, London,* and Tommy Trinder in *The Bells Go Down.* Both attempt 'to portray the maverick not as a lone rebel but as someone who finds himself when he becomes part of the team.[468] In my view, this was a big step in the notion of the hero figure, no longer the upper-class amateur. In practice, other film studios adopted the same theme, as they recognised the box-office appeal and copied the concept. Other genres also adapted. Comedies made at Ealing in this period of the war relied more on narrative, than mere physicality or slapstick, and began to move away from the single star comic performer, to involve ensemble casts. Examples in 1944 would be *Fiddler's Three* and *Johnny Frenchman*. According to Dacre:

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[468] George Perry, *Forever Ealing: A Celebration of the Great British Film studio* (London: Pavilion Books, 1981) 111.

About two-thirds of the comedies made during the war were from the slapstick music hall tradition..…. Ealing comedy brought the literary comedy tradition to the fore, demanding actors with a gift for comedy who could flesh out well-constructed scripts. [469]

Strengths of comedy

As discussed in previous chapters, comedy on film was very popular. Dacre is correct in highlighting how comedy would develop and be enhanced in later years. Part of this change could be credited to a more educated and aware audience. With the slow decline in the music halls, public tastes evolved into wanting coverage of more complex areas of society. There were some efforts in film to return to the old days, as an interest in nostalgia for pre-war films was still around. Stanley Holloway played a music hall star in Ealing's *Champagne Charlie*, a film that is set in the late 19th century, which acknowledges the importance of the music hall tradition to the studio. As already mentioned, the influence exerted by music hall on British comedy cinema began to wane during the war years. One description is that it was replaced by a less physical, more literary form of comedy. As Marcia Landy explains, to some extent agreeing with the aforementioned Dacre:

> cinema's emphasis on the chase, on gags, on bodily movement, can be traced back to music hall humour […] The films of music hall stars such as Gracie Fields and George Formby were tailored to suit their particular personalities and talents. Thus, the narratives that were subordinated to their performances have been denigrated as episodic, lacking in the narrative unity and coherence associated with classic cinema. 470

Landy highlights an important point, that these restrictions held back the film narrative, and eventually, the audience would tire of those constructions. This, in turn, would lead into new areas of filmmaking, not often found in the mainstream before, films with a social conscience, with a subtext of political commentary. Documentary makers had always explored aspects of real life, including the role of trade unions, in particular. To merge these ideas within the structure of a feature film, even to include political satire, was a step change, with consequences on cinema down the years. However, the higher echelons of government had anticipated this movement, and harboured concerns. Stead explains how 'the British film industry was carefully guided away from the streets and in through the studio gates. The Cabinet papers, Home Office and Metropolitan Police files, all indicate the view of various governments that

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[469] Richard Dacre, *Traditions of British Comedy* (London: Pavilion Books, 1981) 109.
[470] Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society 1930-1960* (London: Pavilion Books, 1991), 331.

political dissent should not be filmed'.[471] In 1940, the film *The Stars Look Down* had attempted to show the working classes displaying undertones of political dissent. In truth, this depiction was only a minor story line, as the film's narrative quickly focused on the background life of the protagonist. This is further evidence that the MOI loved propaganda, which suited their own interests, but were concerned about a leftist agenda.

Politicians and government officials, not only within the MOI, were aware of the forces driving films towards realistic subjects. Experience from Germany and Russia showed that cinema, if used in the correct way, could influence the masses. They were determined that films should not be permitted to expose their impressionable audiences to political ideas, that they did not explicitly and directly approve of, without the censorship of official guidance. As discussed in the previous chapter, changing demographics were transforming cinema audiences and the guidance needed to keep up. From the film studios' viewpoint, box-office appeal was the major factor in film producers' choice of new projects. Fortunately, as discussed, by this stage of the war, the MOI had developed a strong relationship with the film studios. This enabled officials to reach out to those directors and writers wanting to create a more mature, realistic cinema to persuade studios to continue to adhere to the MOI's rules. Gradual iterations became the norm, as the film studios took advantage of the defined rules, which were open to interpretation.

In fact, the reality of war did not so much create an entirely new set of conditions, but offered new opportunities, which became more relevant and urgent. For the first time politicians started to become aware of the positive, rather than negative, potential of greater realism in films. Here, Samantha Lay's definition of realism is used, where she describes it as a kind of representational convention, usually called on 'in order to explore some aspect of contemporary life in a similar way to naturalism'.[472] From looking at the archive evidence, I don't think that the propaganda experts at the MOI defined things down to that level of detail. Certainly, as we have seen, the MOI wanted many more strata of society represented in feature films, but they only supplied top level guidance on what this would mean for film content. It was to credit of the film studios and producers, that they sensed that the public wanted change, but co-operation with the MOI remained the prime directive. Following the line of British patriotism would also bring respect, from both the public and the authorities. Some studios took risks; one film even

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[471] Peter Stead. *Film and the Working Class : The Feature Film in British and American society*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 102.
[472] Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism*: *From Documentary to Brit Grit* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 8-9.

introduced the ideals of socialism, a subject not popular with the government in the early years of the war, embedded within a fantasy narrative, *They Came To A City* (1944), which was made by Ealing Studios. On the other hand, within the government and media at this time, there was much discussion on what society would be like after the war. This film attempted to present some ideas that were gaining ground with the population at the time, about the future of Britain after the war. However, the public stayed away, although *The Monthly Film Bulletin* praises the text's 'worthwhile motive', but claims the film 'gives little help as to how Utopia is to be achieved'.[473] Further pressure came from other sources, as Home Intelligence reported in the spring of 1944, waning public interest in promotional efforts, such as the annual 'Salute the Soldier' campaign, was matched by concern about heavy casualties in the imminent D-Day.[474]

Services in films

Many war films before 1945, exhibited characters with stoicism as a natural British characteristic. Nancy Sherman argues that stoicism is a fundamental part of military identity, which she defines as 'control, endurance and discipline'.[475] Certainly, there had been a move away from these stereotypes since 1942, but even in 1944 there were still examples in popular films.

Looking at the services' work on producing films, there were now more examples of their ideas and suggestions on film being taken into consideration by the MOI. One example is *School For Secrets*, an account of the development of radar. The idea for a 'radar film' dated back to early 1944, at a point when technical advances and the coming end to the war in Europe made the early history of radar less of a secret, hence the working title *Now It Can Be Told*. The initial plan was for the RAF Film Production Unit to produce a documentary, but this was refused in favour of a more commercial product. A 'little laughter, a little pathos, a lot of hard facts and rip-roaring adventure' was what Sir Robert Renwick, Director of Communications, wanted to see on screen. Filippo del Giudice of Two Cities expressed enthusiasm when consulted by Renwick and, with the backing of J. Arthur Rank, commissioned Peter Ustinov to write a

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[473] Monthly Film Bulletin, September 1944, 100
[474] INF 1/292, weekly reports, 14 April 1944
[475] Nancy Sherman, Stoic *Warriors* (London: Pavilion Books, 1981), 57.

treatment. Ustinov was known as one of the main men responsible for the success of *The Way Ahead* ,[476] as will be discussed in the case study section.

In my view, part of the success of most war films can be attributed to the depiction of the services matching the public's need to believe in their strength in the air, the sea and on the ground, and suggesting victory. Beresford states that 'The much-admired realism present in many of them - the depiction of quite ordinary people from all classes and backgrounds coming together, with stoic humour and quiet courage to defeat the enemy - was in fact a somewhat artificial and period-specific ideal; but an ideal which added to the appeal for both critics and much of the public'.[477] Previous chapters illustrated that this combination of film content was popular, but gradually changing. Aldgate points out 'conversely, somewhat unrealistic working-class accents and manners could still be appreciated by lower-class audiences as long as characters were portrayed in a positive light'.[478] The films in the case study interrogate these traits.

Returning to the MOI's fluctuating policy towards the cinema industry, which has been analysed in previous chapters, another major concern came from the BFI. In the early war years, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, the MOI had kept the BFI at arm's length. However, the BFI were utilising their contacts to become more involved in film policy. Differing cinema tastes was a subject on which they could connect and exert influence.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

It is a challenge to unravel the many British government re-organisations from this point in the war, without some word on the USA's involvement. All activities revolving around the war would be impacted by the American collaboration, to a greater or lesser degree. In late 1943 the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was created, with overall control over allied forces based in the UK. Although film was not SHAEF's highest priority, it still had an important propaganda role in the fight back. The 1944 organisational diagram in the Appendix gives an overview of the main groups that were involved in film and/or propaganda. Comparing this chart with the organisation in 1939 onwards (see Appendix), it is quite clear that inter-departmental workings had become overly complex. In fact, the whole

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[476] *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 April 1939, p. 58; PRO, AIR 2/4038, Publicity Committee progress report no. 27, 31 March 1939, p. 7

[477] See M. Beresford, 'Realism and Emotion', *Sight and Sound*, 14 (1945), 13-14.

[478] Anthony Aldgate, and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War*. 78.

field of institutions and inter-relationships between the MOI and the American film-related groups is an area for further study. However, in this study, as in the last chapter, a focus on Britain's efforts is the priority, with some investigation of American influence and co-operation forming a part.

As part of this new international organisational set-up, in April 1944 Bernstein officially became head of the Film Department, and thus responsible for propaganda in the film section of the Psychological Warfare Division (PWD).[479] In this function, he created the framework, conditions and structures for the distribution of British and Allied films in the liberated countries. However, Bernstein maintained his links to the War Cabinet and the Films Division, discussed in previous chapters. One of his responsibilities was the opening of cinemas in the previously occupied territories, expanding feature film distribution, broadly focused on British productions. He was also responsible for censorship, including controlling which films could be shown in the liberated areas. Under Bernstein at the PWD was the American born Alexander Mackendrick, who later went on to enjoy great success at Ealing Studios, directing *The Lady Killers* (1955) and *The Man In The White Suit* (1951), some of his earliest experience of working in film having been with the Films Division. This was a useful addition, as Mackendrick was well respected in America and could provide a non-British viewpoint on decisions.

The PWD was tasked with working closely with the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), represented by Bracken, the MOI head, discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, the MOI held an important role within both organisations. One advantage of Bernstein 'wearing two hats' was that he had largely been immune to the hierarchy of the Films Division, through his double function as head of the Film Department and of the PWD. The two organisations did communicate, but officially the MOI had no influence on the work of the PWD. Formally, Bernstein was still under Jack Beddington, but as the *Documentary News Letter* (DNL) wrote, 'it is no secret that he is reluctant to accept the discipline of his director'.[480] Even this late in the war, the DNL still had strong influence and exerted power over film policy. I think that it was simply further evidence that Bernstein was his own man, determined to follow his own path. The Establishment Division of the MOI could only state that the 'Enemy Occupied Territories Section works entirely on its own and has little connection with the other Sections

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[479] According to Moorehead, Bernstein had only unofficially taken over the post out of consideration for Anglo-American film relations.

[480] *Documentary News Letter*. 'Our Backs to the Future', Vol. 5, No. 6, 1945, 62.

of the Division.' Thus, Bernstein could often ignore the concerns and objections of the MOI and, the Films Division in particular, in his own decisions. One example that caused concern at the MOI was his decision to deploy colleagues from the film industry as liaison officers in the liberated countries. The view was that the MOI should have been consulted before involving the film studios. In practice, this move would go on to assist the British film studios, as their representative supplied feedback on which films would be popular. This aspect will be explored further in the next chapter.

Films Division strengths

As mentioned in the last chapter, at this period of the war the MOI and the Films Division had managed to mitigate attacks from their critics, particularly in the press, with their successful policies on film. Even their fiercest critics, the DNL, whose attacks were backed up by insider knowledge from close personal contacts with the Films Division, had to amend their views in 1944:[481] This is another example of an old boy's network that had not disappeared but was still operating within British society.

> The DNL has never hesitated at any time to criticise the MOI when criticism seemed necessary; and we believe much of our criticism has been useful and constructive. But one thing is clear. To begin with, criticism could only be directed at the MOI's failure to do anything at all. Later, criticism fell on its doing things the wrong way. But finally, and recently, the criticism has been aimed only at what seemed to be errors or mishandlings of schemes and plans which are essentially good and practical.

Part of this reversal from the DNL harked back to Beddington. His efforts in the previous year, as described in the last two chapters, meant that documentary filmmakers had been included under the overall remit, if not control, of the Films Division. Their work can be seen in films such as *Desert Victory*, which is definitely a mixture of documentary style filmmaking. High-ranking officials in government still held the DNL in high esteem, so it retained influence on film policy, as described in chapter 3.

Further progress was made by the MOI on the matter of human resources required for filmmaking. For some years, the MOI had tried suggesting conscription deferral for film personnel. In 1944, it gained the power to second people from each service for film projects. In reality, the film studios were dependent on the assistance of the Films Division to organise the support and endorsement of an exemption for specific actors or technicians. This gave the

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[481] *Documentary News Letter*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1944, 6.

Films Division a further advantage over the producers, who needed stars as crowd-pullers in their films. Applications were made via the Films Division, ultimately responsible for obtaining an exemption through negotiations with the War Office.[482] As an example of the type of correspondence illustrating the high level sign off required: -

> The Company (Two Cities Films) shall employ in the production of the said film the following Way Office personnel: Actor Major David Niven, Writer Private Peter Ustinov, Director Captain Eric Ambler. Signed secretary of State for War.

One important point here is that, in practice, the Films Division had a strong hand to play, when promoting any propaganda ideas towards the film studios. Another related problem is that some of the British actors, including Niven, were becoming international stars in their own right. Indirectly, this meant that there would be American pressure for their services for their own film projects. Another aspect was that younger British actors were coming from live theatre to film, emerging as new stars, such as Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness. As Dyer argues, the most significant reason for an audience to identify with British stars is typicality,[483] 'identified with middle-class British masculinity, embodying 'important beliefs about power, authority, nationality and class', as well as reflecting the 'changing construction of masculinity'.[484] Dyer's ideas can certainly be applied to both films in the case study section, as the films contained well known and respected actors.

The situation of the Ideas Committee

Another success story was the continued meetings of the Ideas Committee of the MOI, extensively discussed in previous chapters. It continued to bring together a variety of film production personnel, scriptwriters, and directors, from both documentary and commercial sectors, and, as a new addition, civil servants from other government departments. In the words of film historians Vincent Porter and Chaim Litewski 'the Ideas Committee was the fount of feature film production ideology.' Here subjects and themes were discussed and checked against the MOI's information and propaganda policy.[485]

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[482]INF 1/203/F242/5. MOI Standard form of agreement for films

[483] Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 53.

[484] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The representation of Masculinity in popular British Cinema* (London: I. B Tauris, 1999), 93.

[485] Vincent Porter and Chaim Litewski, 'Case History of a Propaganda film' *Sight and Sound*, 50:2 (Spring 1981), 110, 90.

Even with the end of the war some way off, at high levels of government, there were ideas on the future of the MOI and the Films Division. From the House of Lords:

> Lord Strabolgi urged that the Ministry of Information Film Division should be maintained after the war… I would like to point out to your Lordships something that may not have struck you about films. From the point of view of domestic propaganda, everyday-life propaganda, it seems to me they are the most important medium of propaganda that exists. I agree with the noble Lord that that division has produced some very notable films during the war.[486]

This certainly suggests a high degree of acceptance that films had achieved a great deal during the war thus far. Such support would not be sufficient to save the Films Division beyond the war, as will be examined in the next chapter. However, the high praise was very welcome at the MOI, as there had been many complaints over the years, as previously discussed. Within the MOI, the Ideas Committee continued its work. Its reputation had been enhanced since its creation at the end of 1941.[487] Beddington had always stated his willingness to work with both the commercial companies and the documentarists, but he also encouraged the cross fertilization of ideas and techniques between the two. To quote Rotha: 'The MOI's Films Division, under Beddington, must be given credit for intermixing the documentary and studio film techniques, as well as interchanging their respective exponents.[488]

Beddington always had one eye on the main propaganda line of the government and, by default, the MOI. He commissioned scripts on specific topics, engaged famous actors, but with an agenda. 'I want you to consider that our relations with the Americans were very good while we were losing the war, but now we're winning it, they're getting very bad. Will you write a story which plays up American/English relationships?'.[489] is one example of him attempting to pitch a story line to the film studios. Over the years, the film studios had got to know his way of working and knew that he frequently offered scripts commissioned by the Films Division to commercial production companies. One of the most famous actors, Laurence Olivier recalls in his autobiography that Beddington asked him to be involved in two films, which would support the English cause. Olivier played in *The Demi Paradise* (1943), directed and starred in *Henry*

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[486] Hansard: The British Film Industry. 23 February 1944 vol 130 21-55.
[487] Vincent Porter and Chaim Litewski, 'The Way Ahead: Case History of a Propaganda Film', *Sight and Sound*, 50:2 (Spring 1981), 110.
[488] Paul Rotha, Richard Griffith, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* (London, Vision Press, 1949, 314.
[489] David Badder, Powell and Pressburger – The War Years, in: *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Winter 1978/79

V (1945), whose battle scenes were shot in Ireland, with the approval of the MOI.[490] Projects like this can be traced back to 1940, when the Policy Committee of the MOI had argued that they should produce films glorifying 'histories of national heroes'.[491] In those distant days, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, this suggestion was made without either discussion with the film studios, or market research on consumer demand.

Further decisions on propaganda

Focusing on another aspect of changing film content, one question keeps arising. How did the MOI and the Films Division plan its film policies on the issue of gender? Early in the war, Ministry personnel were drawn by the findings of the International Propaganda and Broadcasting Enquiry; this argued that propaganda bodies should 'in a stratified society, persuade the dominant group'.[492] At the time, this meant men only, but by 1944 the whole British landscape had changed, as had the MOI. Sue Harper proposes that changes in this policy were due to outside pressures on the Films Division,[493] which has been discussed in previous chapters. For example, her last chapter highlighted *The Gentle Sex* as being a game changer, depicting women, of all classes, working in arms production and actively engaged in fighting. In 1944 *Two Thousand Women* fulfilled the same role, using female hero figures. Furthermore, after 1942 the MOI film policy changed drastically; filmmakers were encouraged to concentrate on purely contemporary issues. In 1942, *Kinematograph* noted that the MOI now wanted only films 'which were not nostalgic about the old ways and old days ... but realistic films of everyday life'. Thus, modernity and everyday life were spaces where women were working, and integral to the war effort. The journal warned that if the Ministry had its way, the changing recreational needs of the mass audience would not be met. As the war progressed, the MOI vetoed support for any non-realist films.[494] As discussed in the last chapter, the early-war practice of making films to appeal to the American public had been transformed. Certainly, the American public was important, but not to the same extent, as the US entry into the war had downgraded their significance. Film studios, with the MOI, could now put into practice considerations of consumer demand.

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[490] Laurence Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 78.
[491] INF 1/867, Policy Committee document, undated
[492] INF 1/724, 1 June 1939, recommendations 28.
[493] Sue Harper, *Women in British Cinema* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1982)**,** 62.
[494] INF 1/867, Feature Films Policy, March 1943.

Decisions about the empire

One very important element in the state of the war in 1944 was that areas of Europe, and beyond, had been liberated by the Allied forces (see Timeline at front of chapter). This would be yet another factor for film content, as both commercial and propaganda interests would come into play. It was at this point that Bernstein's work with the PWE came into significant play for the film industry. The previous chapter described the inter-departmental organisation, but new pressures from propaganda requirements would form part of a new consensus. Initially, Bernstein's considerations were based on the concern to limit the influence of the Americans in the liberated countries. He wanted to project British values, but with an eye on economic interests. It was forecast that the new liberated territories and countries would mean the opening of new markets for British films. This is where Bernstein's background in business and his connections to the commercial film industry were useful. The recommendation that he made for the establishment of a dedicated section of the Films Division for 'liberated territories' was implemented, and Bernstein was its director. There was no time to delay, as the tide of war was changing on a weekly basis. One aim was for this 'liberated territories' section to harmonise propaganda schemes for the occupied countries, so that the same material, adapted to different requirements, could satisfy all propaganda needs. In this matter, the 'liberated territories' section would act largely as agents for PWE, who were interested in seeing the right films - features, shorts and newsreels, dubbed or subtitled in the appropriate languages - shown wherever they were required.

In order to underpin and justify the desired production practice,[495] the MOI together with the PWE developed a memorandum on 'The Projection of Britain', which outlined the image Great Britain wanted to project abroad. When presenting the image of Britain, the 'cultural aspect' should be emphasized more strongly 'and by cultural in this context it meant much more than the contents of our art galleries, museums and old country houses'.[496] It stated that culture should reflect 'daily life and thought, whether in war or peace'. One argument here, post-war, is that these ideas lead to the establishment of post-war arts institutions, such as the Arts Council. In addition to an analysis of the current political situation in Europe, in which Britain saw itself as competing with the USA, especially for cultural influence, the memorandum

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[495] INF 1/128. Paper No. 1778, Films Division, April 1943
[496] INF 1/128. Sub-committee of the British Film Producers Association who are working on the same subject from an entertainment angle.

provided concrete instructions for the implementation of this cultural aim. Film activities were given special priority. The important role, assigned to the British Council for the period after the war, was initially to be played by the MOI with its Films Division and the film industry, actively supported by the Board of Trade. The Films Division used the 'Projection of Britain' memorandum, as a means of distinguishing which films met the criteria for the liberated countries. Unlike the Americans, more inclined towards escapism, though partly due to a lack of suitable films of a different nature, the MOI focused on gravitas and a national educational mission for country and Empire, reflected in subordinate feature films. Arthur Elton formulated the policy of the Films Division in an internal memorandum:

> We must fill the gap of history which exists between occupation and liberation, and we must explain ourselves and our culture (...) we should look on each of our films, not as an entity in itself, but as part of a pattern, and we should use every available technique at our disposal. (...) It will remain the job of the commercial film industry to entertain and amuse, though their films can and must do a propaganda job at the same time.[497]

He mentions a pattern, and this describes what was happening in film, a coming together of many ideas of propaganda to consolidate into mainstream film. The MOI had always stressed that it did not intend to compete with the commercial film industry. Nevertheless, the Ministry's ownership of its own production company, the Crown Film Unit, housed in its own studio in Pinewood, meant that the fear of many feature film producers, of a state production rival was not entirely unwarranted. Yet the Crown Unit only produced short films and had neither plans nor desire to expand this portfolio.

In representing the ever-changing social and political framework, two films have been selected as case studies. One was the most successful British film of the year, *The Way Ahead*, showing a cross-section of British society being organised into an efficient, fighting force, and the second is *The Happy Breed,* which demonstrates and reflects some of the social pressures to portray more realism in film.

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[497]: Caroline Moorehead, *Sidney Bernstein*, 160.

Case Study 1: *The Way Ahead* (1944)

Two films, *The Way Ahead* and *This Happy Breed*, both made by Two Cities Film studios, were among the most successful British features at the box office during the war years.[498]

The Way Ahead had been created, with encouragement from the MOI, as a propagandist production about the concept of the ordinary citizens turning into soldiers. As discussed in the last chapter, the concept of a national identity had become a popular direction for feature films. How to include such a vague idea had long been a problem for the MOI and the film studios. One official view was that in wartime, evidence of a nation's unity was one of the most important propaganda messages. With this film, an effort to meet this requirement succeeded in part, within its documentary-like approach. An evaluation will consider whether other pressures contributed to a move towards a form inspired by documentary realism. The previous chapter studied *Desert Victory,* which had contained elements of real war footage. However, *The Way Ahead* was a much more complex creation, bringing together aspects of pre-war feature films and documentary films. Elements of its style would be found in later films, such as *Waterloo Road* and *Brief Encounter*, both released in 1945.

Attempting a more realist approach, whilst incorporating a commentary on the state of the nation, was not an easy task. Although a remake of a training short called *The New Lot* (1943), *The Way Ahead* came ready made with a commercially feasible story structure. Lt. Jim Perry (David Niven) is given an inexperienced bunch of recruits, who eventually unite into a fighting force. The Army Film Unit (AFU) was responsible for the production of all educational films for the army, which were mainly used during basic training. Within the AFU, there was a smaller unit tasked with looking at making actual feature films (AK3), though none had been made. The directors Thorold Dickinson and Carol Reed were already working with this department at times. Carol Reed shot for *The New Lot*, a film about the difficulties of integrating civilians into the army. The film, which served as a 'template' for *The Way Ahead*.

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[498] Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939–48*, 207.

More suggestions

There were other pressures to get this type of film made. A 'little laughter, a little pathos, a lot of hard facts and rip-roaring adventure' was what Sir Robert Renwick, Director of Communications, wanted to see portrayed within a popular feature film.[499] Filippo del Giudice of Two Cities expressed enthusiasm when approached by Renwick and, with the backing of J. Arthur Rank, commissioned Peter Ustinov to write a treatment. Ustinov, known as an actor, was recognised as one of those responsible for the success of the film. His script followed one overall directive from the Films Division: 'it would encourage enlistment in the infantry and show scepticism giving way to admiration'.[500] This looks like a conventional Hollywood narrative, model, green recruits into heroes, but there are no archive records to support any involvement by the OWI. From the archive record, there is evidence that Two Cities was very careful to ensure that the MOI was happy before starting production. In November 1942 Giudice wrote to Beddington, pitching the idea of the film, but requested discussions with the Films Division on 'this delicate subject'.[501] What is implied here is that, considering the British army's dire state in 1942, one main concern was not to antagonise, but to gain their assistance.

Influences of the war situation

Of course, by the time the film was in production in 1943/4 the war situation had changed for the better. The issue did not impede, but in fact enhanced, the Army's engagement with the film. The memo went on to state that this was the right time to produce an inspiring film advertising the work of the army. Several other influences were at work. In 1942, Churchill had contacted Niven about the possibility of a film paying homage to the British army, as *In Which We Serve* (1942) had done for the Royal Navy. Niven then approached Carol Reed with a proposal for expanding *The New Lot* (1943). This is yet another example of parallel activities converging to produce the same result, in this case a film about army life. Niven's involvement should not be underestimated. Niven certainly fitted Dyer's definition of a movie star, with his screen persona representing a recognised construct, always in charge, never flustered. He always portrayed a character that people would identify with as a hero. To give credit to the MOI, it quickly recognised him as a propaganda tool, as well as a well-known actor.

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[499] *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 April 1939, 58.
[500] Eric Rhode, *A History of the Cinema from its origins to 1970s*, 42.
[501] INF 1/224. MOI Correspondence of the film

A memo to the army brigadier tasked with overseeing the film shows some intelligent insights.[502] Niven highlighted that 'everyone who sees it, either says 'That's what our Bert is doing, isn't it wonderful?' or with American audiences thinking 'The British Army is OK'.' Niven was keen to avoid explicit propaganda; he wanted a more nuanced approach, but one that carried the right message of fighting back.

Niven suggested highlighting 'heroes' but within the context of a real-life storyline. The memo ends with Niven stating that he had already talked to the Films Division about his ideas, which must have made a difference later, when the film was given the green light by the MOI. In 1943, Beddington had decided that the MOI should not itself produce the film, even though as he puts it 'the film will be successful and make lots of money'.[503] Since Niven was under contract to MGM at the time, the American War office became involved and his release to work with Two Cities was agreed. 'The US government attaches great importance to this film' said a memo from MGM to the MOI in 1943.[504] The still below shows David Niven as the very centre of attraction with the lower ranks:

20: David Niven as an officer: *The Way Ahead* still

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[502] INF 1/224. November 1942. Brigadier O'Connell from David Niven.
[503] INF 1/224. Beddington to Major David Niven and Two Cities Films
[504] INF 1/224: Mr Nunn May MSM to MOI

A real hero

By 1944, films such as this were starting to explore larger social issues, such as the war's effect on family life and on conscripts. Niven was, in effect, representing the character of Churchill, as the tide of the war had turned, and the public could see the parallel in the competent heroic leader. As with *We Dive At Dawn* (1943), *The Way Ahead* places the resolution of conflict—both in plot terms, and in relation to the ideological positioning of the military—on the heroism of the exceptional male hero. Special heroic characters such as Lt Perry would become very common in the war films of the 1950s, a period beyond the scope of this study, but a field for future investigation. Manvell considered that films such as *The Way Ahead*, 'showed people in whom we could believe and whose experience was as genuine as our own'.[505] Certainly, early scenes illustrating the army training roles could have been actual footage; it is feasible that it had been left over from the original training film. What Carol Reed and his writers Eric Ambler and Peter Ustinov had attempted to portray in *The Way Ahead* was summarized in the press-book's statement that wars were not won by strategy alone, but also by 'men and women'. It continued that this was going to be 'a plain tale of typical Britons of this generation who were called from the plough, the bench, the office: the man with the white collar, the man without a collar'.[506] Specifically the press-book made very clear the film was intended to be a story that reflected the times. It was 'a plain tale of typical Britons of this generation' - 'your husband, my son, their brother, the man next door, the chap over the way' - the story of 'the Tommy of To-day'.[507]

I would suggest that Dyer is correct in that he recognises that the film's approach to depicting the classes very much follows old ideas of masculinity. Niven's officer embodies the middle-class ethos of authority, but with a subtle shift towards being one of the men.

Film critics were also fascinated; Lejeune thought that the film had 'a real script', that the dialogue had a 'cutting edge', and she found the whole thing extraordinary. She knew of 'few films that can bring the audience on such close human terms with the people on the screen ...*The Way Ahead* actually plays and talks like life'.[508] This marriage of the fictional feature

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[505] Rogar Manvell, '*The British Feature Film from 1925 to 1945*', in *Twenty Years of British Film 1925–1945*, eds M. Balcon, E. Lindgren, F. Hardy and R. Manvell (London, The Falcon Press, 1947), 85.
[506] *The Way Ahead*, Press-book, BFI Library.
[507] BFI Special Collections, Carol Reed Papers, box 12, pressbook for *The Way Ahead*
[508] C.A. Lejeune, *Chestnuts in her Lap* (London: Phoenix, 1947), 136.

film with an authentic representation of everyday life in the war contributed to the trend towards realism in British cinema, which met with approval from contemporary film critics.

American audiences

Like Andrew Higson, I think that in 1944 a genuinely British national cinema could be seen to have emerged, which had both critical and popular acclaim. Evidence of this was expressed, for example, in a post-war survey by the Arts Enquiry, entitled *The Factual Film* (1947), whose authors included a number of leading documentarists. Rather than trying to copy Hollywood films, the authors suggested instead that the success of films, such as *Millions Like Us, The Way Ahead, Waterloo Road* and *The Way to the Stars,* during the war has shown that there is another way of overcoming Hollywood domination, 'by producing films which reflect the British scene realistically, in a way that would be impossible for Hollywood'.[509] One argument is that the American studios were not interested in this area, since it lacked local box office appeal. Evidence suggests that several factors came into play in discussions between the political groups on both sides of the Atlantic, as to what direction films should take. Like the MOI for Britain, the USA film studios were encouraged to promote American values. Quite often, this resulted in British films being encouraged to have at least one American character, such as *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) and *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

It is worth exploring the overall plot, which supplies clues to the propaganda values that framed the movie. Overall, the working-class characters are shown as honest and patriotic. Several scenes show them hard at work on training tasks, with the officer character, played by David Niven. Prior to the film, the top generals of the Army wanted the officer character to be portrayed as team leader, fully integrated with the squad. A series of scenes illustrate the officer's emotional journey with the squad, and their eventual acceptance of his authority, tempered by humanity. Furthermore, the studios were aiming at a female audience, as there are several scenes showing wives and girlfriends in important war time positions, along the lines of propaganda described in the last chapter with *Millions Like Us*. *The Way Ahead* certainly succeeds in showing women involved in the war effort, although not as the singular driving force of a narrative, or in the position of hero of the story.

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[509] The Arts Enquiry. The Factual Film: A Survey Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees (London, Geoffrey Cumberlege and Oxford UP, 1947), 201.

These changes were leading into other areas of film content. John Ellis states that the 1944 period was characterised by a coherent view of what he calls a 'quality film',[510] 'a restrained tone of understatement and sincerity; and with a sense of realism - either duplicating the real, being true to life, or appealing at an expressive level of emotional truth'.[511] In previous years, these attributes could have been used to describe any given film, with a few exceptions, such as *In Which We Serve* (1942). With the close involvement of MOI and the services, the film's production went smoothly.

(As an aside, it is worth highlighting one example of the type of issue the MOI had to contend with in filmmaking. In a memo dated August 1943, the Films Division received a request to sort out a lack of '5000 copper rivets', needed for one scene involving a model boat. The MOI had to chase up the Industrial section to obtain the goods, which were subject to restricted access).[512]

The Services have their view

As far as reaction to the film goes, Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was reported to have said that it was one of the best films he had ever seen. Since the service Chiefs were notoriously difficult to satisfy with most cinematic efforts, these were rare words of praise. Arthur Marshall of the Films Division stated that 'it gives a true sense of the Army and keeps the social values right'.[513] Within the Films Division there were similar endorsements. 'I think it is magnificent', wrote Jack Beddington, 'and I'm not inclined to use such words.' The MOI head Bracken was equally impressed. 'It is a superb film, the best I have seen about the war'.[514] By the time of its official premiere on 6th June 1944, D-Day was under way. The film's publicity clearly aimed to reflect events of the time, targeting national interest and 'all pulling together'. Box office returns certainly demonstrated its attraction to the public, as the MOI reported 'Solid Business at the Box Office.'[515] Mackenzie's analysis of the critical responses highlighted, in the main, very good reviews from newspapers.[516] For once, the general staff were also happy, and one general was quoted as saying 'one of the best films' he had seen.

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[510] John Ellis *Quality Film Adventure*, 86.

[511] John Ellis *Quality Film Adventure*, 78-85.

[512] INF 1/196: Ivor Smith (MOI) from John Sutro (film production assistant)

[513] INF 1/196 : Memo to Carol Reed June 1944.

[514] INF 1/196, Bracken to Niven, 14 July 1944; BFI Special Collections, Carol Reed Papers, box 12,

[515] INF/224, royalty's statement.

[516] Paul Mackenzie, *British War Films 1939-1945* (London: Hambledon, 2006), 124-125.

Long term effectiveness of the film

Looking at wider influences on the film, one cannot ignore the work of the services involved. When the Films Division procured military facilities from a production company, it was able to influence the actual production, by providing a technical consultant, who served as a liaison between the Films Division and the army department.[517] This was accomplished with tacit agreement from all sides, to ensure a good working relationship. In the case of this film, it was obviously successful and added value to the finished product. An example of the co-operation can be seen here: 'Two Cities Films Ltd. will be pleased and even anxious to have an officer detailed by the War Office attached to them while the film is being shot, to ensure that everything said and done is perfectly correct'.[518] The depiction of ordinary people converted to soldiers was so successful that, for many years after the war, the film was shown to new recruits at the main British army training site at Sandhurst.[519] Plans were made to show it in Army camps all over Europe for 'morale' purposes, which is evidence that it had met Niven's original demands, that content should be popular and relevant. Some hesitation in America was resolved by Bracken, who wrote to the OWI pushing the distribution. Released in the USA in 1944 with the title *Immortal Battalion*.

A similar film was Ealing's *San Demetrio London* (1943), made as a tribute to the merchant navy, perhaps one of the most interesting films made during the war, as it incorporated a realistic factory based working environment and focused on the actual workers lives. It is a drama based almost entirely on the experiences of working-class people. The film is certainly formative, as it quite clearly suggests that ordinary people could be heroic and that they could take initiative without official prompting. Another was *Waterloo Road* (1944), a film that was very much about 'the people' and in particular, 'the little people', as Alistair Sim refers to them in the opening shots. This quote is interesting, in that it encapsulated some film makers view of the involvement of working-class people, for better or worse. Sim plays the part of a doctor, who doubles up as narrator, and his belief is that in the war 'the little people' had their own battles too. In both films, the appealing freshness and spirit of the stories was, in no small part, due to the convincing depiction of working-class living conditions.

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[517] INF 1/258: Home planning memos
[518] Kine Memo from Niven to Beddington. 1944 July
[519] David Niven, *The Moon's a Balloon* (London: Penguin, 1994), 178.

Case Study 2: *This Happy Breed* (1944)

From the previous two chapters, pressure from the OWI was on the MOI to really consider the important aspect of the portrayal of ordinary people in feature films. This propaganda message had finally convinced the Ideas Committee of the MOI to consider more subjects that would match these requirements. Fortunately, there was one thing that made the task easier, the large number of stage productions around the country that could be utilised. From his stage play, the writer Noel Coward had played the main character of *This Happy Breed*, the father figure, Frank Gibbons. After discussions with the director, David Lean, it was decided that cinema audiences would not accept Coward playing anything but an upper-class character, for which he was famous. Lean also forced the MOI to agree to use of Technicolor, which was a very limited resource in the UK. *This Happy Breed* celebrates the stoicism, humour and resilience of ordinary British people. The arrival of films emphasising the ordinariness of family life represented a major change at this stage of the war. Previously, in popular British films, notions of the ideal family were primarily characterised in one of two ways, either as a background storyline in patriotic films, or restricted to the conservative narrative of films with a more pessimistic perspective on family life. *This Happy Breed* (1944) departs from those two constructs, emphasising ordinariness, over and above military service, as characteristic examples of national experiences. In this year there was another similar film, highlighting the nuclear family, *Madonna Of The Seven Moons* (1944), but it did not get as big a popular reception from the public. In *This Happy Breed* the extended family is central to the overall message, underlining that the family endures over time, overcoming change and difficulty. From the title to its use of realistic detail, the film suggests the typical nature of the family household, and links it to the nation's role in the war. The family members are working, coping and surviving, and the emphasis is upon endurance. *This Happy Breed* is a film without a traditional hero, where several family characters feature as part of a saga spanning a twenty-year period. 'The household, rather than any individual character, were considered 'the heroes of this new story,[520] which is further evidence of the evolving nature of the British hero figure. It was certainly popular with the public, as it was amongst the largest box office successes of 1944.[521] The next figure frames the whole family in a suggested stoic mood.

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[520] 'Publicity', micro jacket for *This Happy Breed.* BFI Library
[521] Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel, Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48* (London: Routledge, 1989. 2003), 207.

21: Family life goes on: *This Happy Breed* still

British audiences would have no problem in recognising the scene as it matched many household living rooms. Andrew Higson has described what he calls documentary-narrative melodramas in *This Happy Breed*. He suggests it has its roots in the 1930s story-documentaries like *Night Mail* (1936) and *North Sea* (1938). Higson's analysis shows that they are 'key texts in the formation of a relatively distinct British film genre, the melodrama of everyday life'.[522] The main features of this genre were a tendency to focus on varied groups of characters – often representing different classes, generations and regions – rather than on individuals. Certainly, all these are fulfilled within this film. The narrative of *This Happy Breed* includes generational and class differences, within the context of a home life. Within a naturalistic framework, it emphasises childbirth and deaths in the family. The heroes are just ordinary people getting on with life, but all of whom do their duty. The Gibbons family is meant to project decency and endurance.

Society is changing.

An important point here is that, in several scenes, there are examples of anti-war comments and discussions, which would have not been part of previous family films. At the same time, it still puts a woman's place within the domestic environment, with her role as a housewife, which is exactly how we see Mrs. Gibbons and the other women throughout the film, reverting back to a common trait in films such as *Love Story* (1942) and *Two Thousand Women* (1944), as explored in the last chapter on women's role in films. Then women were both portrayed as

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[522] Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22-28 and 262

heroes and as role models, aimed at boosting morale. Now in *The Happy Breed*, the film presented to cinema audiences a greater degree of realism. Taken from Noel Coward's screenplay, the film's acceptance by the Films Division may have been influenced by Lean's work on *Failure Of A Strategy*, a short film made in 1944. He managed to work part-time on the short, while shooting the main feature. Lean had always considered expanding that original work, to include his ideas of propaganda, using family life. This might have come from his meetings at the Ideas Committee of the Films Division. Unfortunately, there are no archive records to confirm this, but themes in films of ordinary life do reflect some of the ideas described by this Committee in previous chapters.

These films are particularly useful in representing both the male group and the class differences within that group. Margaret Butler characterizes the film as an example of 'emotional restraint' and British stoicism.[523] In *This Happy Breed*, a dutiful stoicism, where people just got on with life and never let setbacks affect them, shows how limiting the role of housewife could be, with many British women reluctant to return to their restrictive lives at the end of the war. Lucy Noakes analyses the post-war role of women in her book.[524] Her conclusion is that there was a small majority of women wanting to return to domestic duties after the war, but a sizable minority wanted change, with more scope for women to have careers beyond their home life.

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[523] Margaret Butler, *Film and Community: Britain and France* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 21.
[524] Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army* (London: Routledge, 2006), Chapter 7.

Conclusions

For the MOI, this period of the war marked a period of relative calm from a political point of view. Improved relationships between the MOI and American government departments assisted the more efficient plans for feature films (see overall diagram). There was closer co-operation between the newly formed services committees, including the Film Publicity, and the Joint Anglo-American Planning committees, which streamlined the logistics of filmmaking, such as freeing up actors from service duty, and resource requests. Since the MOI's communication links with the War Cabinet had been reinstated, as discussed in the last chapter, the overall aims of propaganda had filtered down into film in a more formal manner. The PWE expanded its working relationship with the MOI by promoting further ideas for film content, from its plans for black and white propaganda.[525] Addressing one of the research questions of this whole project, the working relationship between government and film production, '*Did they work in practice and were they efficient? And was the relationship collaborative or conflicted*? This chapter contains clear evidence that the introduction of the American involvement assisted the British side of filmmaking. Improving this relationship was the clear connection with the MOI, as Bracken, head of the MOI, was also on the governing body of the PWE.[526] A common thread of the discussions between these disparate groups was the need to show characters in film as real people, in realistic situations but still retaining a heroic aspect. Considering the complexity of the overall network of working groups, outlined in the 1944 diagram, it was a major achievement to get agreement on the content of any given feature film. By no means all groups were consulted, but the Americans were now instrumental in many decisions on propaganda within films.

By 1944, there were real signs that at least some directors appreciated the need for British cinema to move towards this idea of realism, and to become more inventive in cinematic terms. Even more important to the government was the central message conveyed in *The Way Ahead,* the need for co-operation and teamwork, rather than individual heroics, to win the war and to make such a victory matter in a very real, lived way. Another example of the desire to depict teamwork was *For Those In Peril,* which combined authenticity with commercial potential. Containing a similar mix of class and regional variation as *The Way Ahead* in the crash-boat

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[525] Howard Becker. 'The Nature and Consequences of Black Propaganda.' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1949, 221–235.

[526] David Garnett, *The Secret History of PWE - Political Warfare Executive 1939-1945* (London: St Ermin's Press, 2002), 56.

crew, it had many references to the importance of cooperation, which had become one of the MOI's overriding themes of propaganda. Dyer's ideas of a star's persona are important here. The cinema audience would recognise Niven, as he was such a well-known figure. In his roles he obeyed Dyer's idea of conformality, in that he very often played the officer, as he was indeed, in real life.

Another significant influence at this stage of the war were the changing dynamics of film audiences. Feature films had to this point, to some degree, provided an avenue for communicating social experiences. Moreover, with 1940s cinema audiences consisting disproportionately of young adults and women, films were often made and marketed to these groups. Courting and romance were subjects considered to have a special appeal for younger adults, and especially for female viewers. Press releases indicate which particular audiences distributors aimed to capture. For example, in the case of the romantic film, *Love Story* (1944), the Eagle-Lion studios were keen to involve 'young women'.

Dilys Powell wrote high praise in her influential pamphlet, 'the new movement in the British cinema: the movement towards documentary truth in the entertainment film'.[527] Whatever movement there was, it was iterative. Over the war years, there were increasingly diverse influences, as analysed in previous chapters. Part of the public's reaction and delight in these films, could be explained by watching heroes in the same mould as themselves. Herbert Gans thought of *The Way Ahead,* as having been crucial, in the way in which this popular action film had illustrated the need for heroes with qualities and characteristics, occurring in characters from an underprivileged background and class. He went on to describe 'a largely working-class audience was far happier with heroes who succeeded because of charm, courage, and strength, rather than wealth, education, and privilege'.[528] I suggest here that in 1944 British cinema had made its most powerful statement about the working class. By discovering a new kind of hero, giving exposure to a new generation of working-class heroes, this would be emulated and enhanced in subsequent feature films. This new form of realism was encroaching on British cinema. Looking back at what were, in effect, dramatized documentaries, like *Target For Tonight*, discussed in chapter 1, compilation films like *Desert Victory,* discussed in chapter 5, these were films heavily influenced by documentary ideas and attitudes. These too, like *The Way Ahead*, were popular with the public. After the passage of so many years, their realism

[527] Dilys Powell, *Films Since 1939* (London: Longmans, 1947), 22.
[528] Herbert J. Gans, '*Hollywood films on British screens: an analysis of the functions of American popular culture abroad*', Social Problems, spring 1962, vol. 9, no. 4, 325.

now seems rather staged and simplistic, but they did introduce new themes, broke with old stereotypes of heroes, and used more natural/less stylised dialogue. Filmmakers were encouraged by the success of these films to look for the raw materials of future films, beyond pure stage-play adaptations, and to consider more complex social issues within the framework of feature films. One argument, on which I and other academics[529] agree, is that these films contributed towards the British New Wave of the 1950s. In the next and last chapter, these areas will be further explored, as Britain was at last finding a way out of the nightmare of world war.

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[529] Guy, Stephen. After victory: Projections of the second world war in feature films. PhD.

CHAPTER 7: 1945 Truth, myths and the future

How the British people held the fort alone till those who hitherto had been half blind were half ready.[530]

Timeline of major events on this phase of the war

- January: Auschwitz liberated by Soviet troops
- May: Russians reach Berlin: Hitler commits suicide and Germany surrenders
- April: Truman becomes President of the US on Roosevelt's death
- August: Atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- July: Labour wins majority in the British Parliament
- September: End of War with Japan

Introduction

> We British are apt to consider ourselves the yardstick upon which everything else should be
> based. We must not delude ourselves. We have plenty to learn . . . We want to see our country
> remain as great as it is today - forever. It all depends on the people, their common sense and
> their memory.[531]

The last chapter demonstrated a revitalised film industry with American involvement. However, 1944 was a year of underachievement for British films, with 45 films released; 1945 was slightly better with 46 British feature films on general release.[532] A major factor for film production was that the whole process of government intervention in filmmaking had become more streamlined and efficient. The previous chapter highlighted the improved allocation of resources for film production in all aspects, including the loan of actors from the services, which was ongoing. For the film studios a major consideration was that the target audience for war films was changing; they had to address this and adapt. The studios' surveys had provided useful insights from box office returns and they realised that audience dynamics were changing. A growing trend in 1945 revealed mid-teens to mid-twenties were starting to form an emerging youth culture, which represented a significant portion of British cinema-going audiences, with a more optimistic outlook as the end of the war was in sight. War stories, adventure and imperial heroism became popular subjects in film. Evidence for this is found in the filmmakers' press books and publicity packs, whose messages constantly show the involvement of schools, military recruitment agencies and the war's heroes - local and national. This would later be

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[530] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Their finest hour* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 15

[531] Guy Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead* (London: Michael Joseph, 1951), 300-301

[532] BFI WW2 British films list

reflected in 1946 viewing figures, when 69% of 16-19-year-olds attended the cinema at least once a week.[533] This new audience segment drove up weekly average number of visitors from 19 million in 1939 to over 30 million in 1945.[534] Note that the UK population was around 46 million in 1945,[535] with 4.7 million in the services. Other factors in this rise in attendance were the reduced fear of aerial attacks while in a cinema, and the desire for some much needed entertainment, as an alternate from home life. With these viewing figures, it was not surprising that film studios started to consider alternative story lines in their films. In practice, the propaganda pressure, as outlined in previous chapters, had not disappeared but, as businesses, they had to start looking ahead to the future.

This chapter is organised around four major topics: future MOI plans for post war films, concerns about representing Britain to liberated territories, using film heroes as propaganda for around the British Empire, and further moves for greater diversity, and integration of American ideas and styles of film.

The Seventh Veil was the top film of the year and 20 films released were judged by the box office returns as successful.[536] A shift towards serious fantasy increased in 1945. Ealing made a popular and critically acclaimed collection of ghost stories, *Dead Of Night*, and the costume drama *Pink String And Sealing Wax.* Gainsborough provided *They Were Sisters* and *A Place Of One's Own. The Wicked Lady*, released at the end of the year, was the top box-office film of 1946. British National Films studios, while showing concern for problems of post-war society in *The Agitator*, also began to recognise the possibilities of the wartime underworld and the black-market, in *Murder in Reverse*, and *Don Chicago*. These and other films linked wartime realism with the post-war 'spiv' cycle in film. (Note that the term 'spiv' refers to essentially anyone involved in the black market in wartime.) Within these films the spiv was presented as an anti-hero, as a foil to the hero figure.

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[533] Kathleen Box, *The Cinema and the Public, Social Survey, NS. 106*, 3.

[534] Philip M. Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 6.

[535] UK Office of National Statistics

[536] Kine Year book 1945

Changes in comedy

Comedy was still popular with the film studios and audiences in 1945, but a major shift in the type of comedies made was emerging. The music hall-based characters, Flanagan and Allen, George Formby, and Old Mother Riley films, began to appear outdated with cinema audiences, evidencing a shift from working-class to middle-class tastes. As a result, there were productions of newer types of 'cultured' comedy - *29 Acacia Avenue, Perfect Strangers,* and *Blithe Spirit* - which became more popular with the public.

In another development, the film studios started to reconsider how they would frame their war films. Documentary compilation films in 1945, such as *The True Glory* and *Burma Victory,* proved popular and there was a strong trend in content towards illustrating Anglo-American co-operation: *Great Day*, and *Journey Together,* and two of the most popular films of the year, *The Way To The Stars* and *I Live In Grosvenor Square.* All these examples illustrate the tremendous diversity of films made in wartime Britain and, considering the very challenging production conditions, the quality of these films is remarkable. The war provided opportunities for filmmakers to explore new subjects. The drive towards more claims and conventions of realism within the framework of the war became a driving force. Certainly, commercial pressures mixed with propaganda requirements were a difficult combination, but after many setbacks, described in previous chapters, the film studios were now working more efficiently, and considering subject matter in many varied forms, compared with previous years.

With the relief resulting from the liberation of countries by the Allies, the MOI faced a dilemma. These new markets in Europe and the British Empire forced a rethink; how best to depict all that Britain had to offer via the film medium? One old, but powerful icon in the public's mind was the officer class portrayed as the hero. Therefore, in 1945 a national identity symbolised by the officer class could be seen as helpful, to maintain international reputation and respect. An old idea, but with the Empire starting to fragment, the War Cabinet needed to determine what type of propaganda would address this very important issue.

Michael Balcon set the criteria for depiction of the war in his article, 'Let British Films Be Ambassadors to the World' (1945).[537] In this article he was clear in his ambitions: to combat German anti-British propaganda. He wanted Britain to be portrayed as a 'leader in social reform, a defender of injustices, a champion of civil liberties, an exploring adventurer and

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[537] Michael Balcon, 'Let British Films Be Ambassadors to the World', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 1945, 135.

trader, as the home of great industry and craftwork, and a mighty power who stood alone against a terrible aggressor'. Quite an admirable list from a highly respected film maker, but his visions would become entwined with MOI plans for propaganda, promoting the Empire and Britain's standing within it. It was quite a task for the administrators, as there were many unknowns; each part of the Empire had differing needs and desires. One contemporary viewpoint is that it is difficult to understand the impact of loss of an Empire, except perhaps from a financial viewpoint. Post-colonial history and theory has been extensively explored by Nilina Persram.[538] Yet, for the MOI the argument was clear in 1945, it was a matter of keeping up British prestige and control, hence the discussions on the best films to illustrate those beliefs. It is arguable that this requirement goes some way towards explaining the rebirth of the officer construct in films of this time, discussed in the case studies. Levi-Strauss states that 'if a given mythology confers prominence on a certain figure…that mythology reflects the social structure and social relations'.[539] In practice, the re-invention of the officer hero figure was a direct response to changing times. I would argue that there were subtle differences from the pre-war versions, in their depiction of dealing with the lower ranks, with many more examples of cooperation and discussion. Levi-Strauss states that wide-ranging social and political pressures within Britain, as well as the world, would have affected film content, and that this is reflected in that depiction of officers in film.

Disagreement between the MOI and the BC

Relations between the British Council (BC) and the MOI were still strained, which was discussed in chapter 1. Improvements had come about, partly due to the connections between the Americans and BC personnel. In June 1945, the BC announced that they would not distribute their non-theatrical films in the USA, due to pressure from the MOI.[540] Some of this was purely political, as the MOI was not keen for another group to invade its territory. On a practical front, the Films Division had real concerns about the quality of BC films, that it perceived did not match its own high standards. The BC was unhappy with the withdrawal of MOI's consent, as it had always owned the distribution of BC films in America. A memo from the BC to the MOI outlined the situation.[541] The BC described the MOI's attitude as imbecilic and idiotic, strong words indeed between government departments. The MOI suggested that

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[538] Nilini Persram. *Postcolonialism and Political Theory* (Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2007), 56.

[539] Claude Levi-Strauss. 1955 *The Structural Study of Myth*: Journal of American folklore

[540] BW 63/5 Commercial films: British Information Services

[541] INF 1/599 British Council and MOI correspondence. June 1945

the contents of BC films were unsatisfactory in many areas; 'the tempo of the films are too slow…dialogue is dull and lifeless…' are some examples of the MOI's criticism. The MOI's main concern, however, that was the films did not portray life in Britain during the war.

The usefulness of British film stars

The idea of developing new young British stars was previously discussed in the last chapter, but the process would be enhanced during 1945. One example is John Mills; when he first appeared in films during the war, a large number highlighted the heroic integrity of a group, rather than one individual, as demonstrated by *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *We Dive At Dawn* (1943). In later films, it was Mills' 'star quality to appear be a normal part of any group that promoted his success'.[542] His roles in film represented a particularly British mode of hero, when cinema was beginning to seek recognisable representatives of the everyday common man in a team or group setting. This process had begun two years earlier and has been discussed in chapter 4 onwards. With Mills having achieved star status by 1945, he was then typecast as the modern English hero: male, white, and middle-class, but always playing a true-to-life character. Playing characters that Dyer would describe as 'heroes of social respectability',[543] an easy image for the public of a real person mixing in society. It helped that Mills had already starred in a number of popular films, five in 1944/45, so would have been a familiar face to cinema audiences. Andrew Spicer has identified Mills as the role model of post-war English masculinity, a figure who could, crucially, 'be associated with gradual change': He goes on to say it was not a revolutionary new image of the hero figure, but a 'renegotiation of the debonair ideal, a democratised version of the same values'.[544] These arguments seem to contradict one another, but there is room for both to be partially true.

Britain's decline

Colls argues that, at some point in the 1940s, Englishness began to change and the nation's intuitive belief in progress was gradually replaced by an expectation of decline.[545] I contend that decline is the wrong word, and that 'transformation' is more appropriate, reflecting society

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[542] Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 16.
[543] Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 47.
[544] Andrew Spicer, 'Misfits and the Marginalised: Gender in the Boultings Feature Films ' in *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture*. (eds.) Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 68–80.
[545] Robert Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143-144.

changing for the better. It was certainly true that the war had worn down industry, and pressures of decolonisation were added to the mix. For the population, I think that there was a general feeling of being worn down, but with an end of the war in sight, there was both nostalgia for what had been lost, and optimism for a more democratic future.

Transformation in society is seen in the successful move away from Gainsborough studios' costume drama films, such as, *Madonna Of The Seven Moons* (1944) and *The Wicked Lady* (1945), to more realistic representations such as *Waterloo Road*. Its hero would definitely please both middle-class critics and working-class audiences. Images of ordinary lives on the screen are combined with John Mills playing the returning hero (familiar to many of the audience), showing the life of every unhappy serviceman, separated from home and family. Another example, with the middle-class characters of *The Way To The Stars,* suggests that already in 1945, elements of British film culture were contradictory. Nonetheless it is the case that *Waterloo Road* makes a hero out of a working-class man, transformed into a type of everyman figure, who would appeal to all film audiences.

Changes in public taste in film

Other film-related media can shed light on the public's attitude at that time to the war's depiction in film. Very popular with the public was *Picturegoer* magazine, Britain's primary film journal of 'stargazing'. In 1944 it had announced itself mainly done with the war. Articles from 1944 and 1945 constantly argued for feature films with escapism as a prime requirement. The magazine had little coverage of the war film, *The Way To The Stars*. It was not a case of bad publicity; indeed, the magazine gave the film a good review. Instead, it was clearly uninterested in that type of film. By 1945, the magazine's pages were devoid of service uniforms, a common sight during the war, and its editorials were demanding a different sort of entertainment. This is where Gainsborough studio came in with its melodramas, for example, *I'll be Your Sweetheart,* and, showing the return of a 'demobbed' serviceman, *Waterloo Road*.

In 1945, the MOI's influence again was overtaken by events. The British Film studios' constituency remained largely unchanged throughout the war, but now American interest in British film studios was boosted by the general view that end of the war was imminent. MGM, the American film studio giant, had started to make films in the UK, through a British

subsidiary in 1937, operating out of Denham Studios.[546] During the early part of the war MGM struggled to make films in the UK, while American films made huge profits from wartime British audiences – revenues, which were not allowed out of the country. In 1944 MGM announced that film mogul, Korda, had joined the company, and would be in charge of their British productions. The company moved into Pinewood Studios in late 1945. The buildings were dilapidated, having been used mainly for storage, with little maintenance. A big incentive was that the British government had high expectations of the British film industry, to earn much need export dollars, and therefore treated the re-building of the studio as a priority. The roofs of three of the studio blocks had been raised to allow space for powerful Technicolor lighting, and other buildings were restored. This would eventually lead indirectly to storylines following Hollywood themes, with more American actors and staff involved.

An institutional analysis of the MOI

From a resource viewpoint, the Films Division, at 130 employees, reached its highest level in 1945.[547] Of this number, 26 people worked in the production department, which included the script department; the liberated territories section consisted of 16 employees; the rental department had 24 employees; 13 people worked in the administration and finance department, and the non-theatrical department, including technical maintenance, had 51 employees. These sections demonstrated the broad scope of work undertaken since the division's inception. Previous chapters have outlined the new responsibilities assigned to the division, so it is unsurprising that the division's workforce had expanded.

Conversely, from many viewpoints the war would end soon; new work was initiated within the Film Division to explore post-war film plans. Extra administrative work came through closer co-operation with the Office of War Information and the Psychological Warfare Division. A more integrated working environment with the services was in place and the consensus was that it was working well. The establishment of the Joint Anglo-American Planning Committee meant even more logistical challenges needed to be met, as far as film was concerned. With so many diverse groups involved in the process of film production, inevitably, there were still areas of conflict and confusion. Yet at least now there were established processes to solve

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[546] Patricia Warren. *British Film studios: An Illustrated History* (London: Batsford, 2001), 82.
[547] INF 1/126. 1945, Films Division Organization,

problems, that in the recent past would have delayed a film's production. Examples of these can be found in previous chapters and within the case study in this chapter.

Strengths of British films

Whereas large sections of the public had earlier been attracted to a Hollywood film, rather than a British one, in 1945 they went to the cinema because the film was British.[548] I believe this to be accurate, because the quality of British films had improved; they were more of a match for the Hollywood-imported films. Another factor, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, was that the concept of a leading British star was now established with the viewing public. Dyer's definition of a star in film suggested a stereotype, a 'character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognisable traits, which do not change or develop through the course of the narrative',[549] a good general definition, which certainly applied to British stars. Spicer explores in detail the changing nature of the dominant male cultural types in film: the debonair gentleman to the more everyman hero represented by Niven or Howard.

Future direction of the MOI

In early 1945, a new committee was established within the MOI to consider what further steps the British government should take with film, as the war neared its end. The group would be called 'Post-War Government Film Organisation (PWGFO).[550] Its first meeting, chaired by the Director General of the MOI, discussed what form the Films Division should take after the war. Some suggestions were made, such as reducing involvement in films for home distribution and focusing instead on films about the Far East war, which would continue long after the war in Europe. Consideration was given to the idea of the Director General of the MOI being the sole source for a film's approval for production, a proposal that seems to stem from concern over money, rather than just the needs of propaganda. Pressure from the Treasury was self-evident, as several discussions involved the possibility of reducing the staffing levels of the Films Division, though a decision was delayed. Further evidence points to a request by the Director General of the MOI to put together a memorandum for the Treasury on post war work for the Films Division. This is evidence of the Treasury starting to assert its authority, which until 1945 had been only a light touch.

By inference, there was a consensus that the end of the War was approaching. Thus, it was appropriate that the role of the MOI and the Films Division should be debated and reassessed, in light of these developments. These discussions were focused primarily on government

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[548] M. Epstein (Ed.), The Annual Register, 1945, London, 1946, 341.
[549] Richard Dyer, *Stars.* 123.
[550] INF 1/634 Post War MOI film production ideas

information films, but feature films were also considered part of their remit. Since there were representatives from the British Film studios, any views would have been collated and discussed by them. One idea from the meeting, but not attributed to any one individual, was the Films Division should follow the organisational structure of the BBC. This meant that it would not be under direct government control, but financed by Treasury, in the form of a grant. It could then take orders from any government department wishing to get a political or social message out to the public via film. Since BBC television broadcasting was in its infancy there was no real model to follow. It was not surprising that this was considered unrealistic and was rejected out of hand.

The report also noted that each government department had its own completely differing criteria for film requirements, a point made during several chapters of this study, adding too much complexity to any proposed idea. The committee also agreed that the whole area of multi-government departments had not functioned well during the war, which was probably an understatement. A major point considered was that co-ordinating would be very difficult for a non-Films Division department. Evidence here suggests that some lessons had been learned, when previous film projects had been delayed and tangled up by differing requirements, be it propaganda or lack of resources. However, the report does not go into details of the problems that had occurred. A major point considered was that 'whatever set-up were decided…it should include members from the film trade'. They were deemed to be the experts and 'if left out, large amounts of criticism would be expected'. This could be a reflection of the DNL's earlier attacks on the Films Division, described in several of the previous chapters. The DNL still had a large readership, and influence amongst the senior members of government. One interpretation of this is that the MOI and other departments had learned lessons from recent history, and with a more involved treasury, it was possible that financial considerations provided a major motivation by to forcing people to work together.

Further concerns about the Empire and liberated Europe

Meanwhile, as the war continued, liberated countries, both in Europe and the Empire, were now an important factor to be considered by the MOI. Within that initial meeting of the PWGFO, a major concern was the value of any representation of the British Empire within British films.[551] Evidence from the archives of the time show that there was the beginning of a shift from anti-Nazi propaganda towards a more pro-Empire stance. With factions in many countries in the Empire wanting independence, this was a serious, and highly complex issue.[552] During the war, the MOI created the Colonial Film Unit, whose main purpose was creation of films that would influence cooperation between countries in the Empire. An example of their influence was seen in chapter 7, with *Western Approaches* and the involvement of troops from India. This area of film history is analysed by Marcia Landy; she demonstrates that British films were under enormous pressures to change their propaganda directions post-war.[553] One can see from the meeting's minutes that there was some confusion on how best to deal with this problem. It was noted that too many British films have a home bias, ideas and concepts primary related to Britain, and less understood within other countries. Unfortunately, few examples were offered in the meeting minutes, but one can see that films such as *This Happy Breed* (1944) would give cause for concern, as such films were very parochial, with decolonisation issues neither mentioned nor considered. An alternative view was put at the meeting that these types of films might be popular within the Empire, illustrating and encouraging a view of Britain as a safe society. So, without any agreement, ideas for film content were requested from the Empire Division of the MOI.

Unfortunately, there are no records in the archives that cover the Empire division's activities in this area. Certainly, wanting to reflect the 'prestige' of Britain within the Empire was a key concern, showing Britain 'in a bad light' was discouraged, as was any film dealing with 'social problems'. The group liked the idea of always showing solutions to the depicted events. One idea proposed was to present cinema films with storylines illustrating the reintegration of 'men and women from the services back into civilian life'. This would prove an interesting area for post-war film studies, but even in 1945, several films would already comply with this narrative construct. Working relationships between the Films Division and the film studios were

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[551] INF 1/634. MOI film policy meeting: Chair Controller of Overseas Publicity. April 1945
[552] George Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775–1997* (London, Bloomsbury, 1999), chapter 5
[553] Marcia, Landy *British Genres: Cinema and Society 1930-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 98-99.

highlighted as working well. A simplistic assessment, considering the entire timeline since the 1939 birth of the Films Division, described in previous chapters, would be no simple matter. It might be that, for political reasons, these recommendations needed to paint an optimistic picture, since future funding could be dependent on it.

The PWGFO committee did discuss two films, *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *The Way Ahead* (1944), which were highlighted as prime examples of successful cooperation between government and the film studios. As discussed in chapter 6, this was an optimistic assessment, as *The Way Ahead* did encounter problems similar to those of other feature films, being pulled in opposing directions by differing demands of propaganda.

Another discussion centred around the question of which feature films the MOI should choose to distribute in the newly liberated countries of Europe. One suggestion, which was taken up, was that Films Division staff would be present in the country in question, to handle the logistics, under command of the SHAEF and the PWD. On film content, one critical aim was to have British films that presented a 'positive view of the UK'. Of the films chosen, three have been case studies within this work, *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) in chapter 3, *Desert Victory* (1943) in chapter 5 and *Western Approaches* (1945) in chapter 7. These represent a diverse range of films, but, when examined more closely, each had a particular propaganda value to British and wider audiences. All illustrate a certain type of British hero figure, as discussed in the relevant chapters, but from different perspectives. Apart from the realism in the latter two films, one can speculate that *Pimpernel Smith* was chosen for its star, Leslie Howard, and its British sense of humour, which I would describe as the ability to laugh at ourselves. If one focuses on the countries of Europe, a large selection of films was chosen (see the next table, which is a subset, for examples). Unfortunately, there is no information in the archives as to why these films were chosen, which would make an engaging project for future work, assuming such archives were to come to light. However, one common theme is that the majority are comedies (*The Goose Steps Out* and *The Foreman Went To France,* both discussed in chapter 4) or semi-documentary films as in *Millions Like Us*. Again, one can speculate that Britain's secret weapon, to some in power, and discussed in chapter 4, was humour. In one country, Holland, more details were provided; *Target For Tonight* (1939), discussed in chapter 1, was one of the most popular films, in terms of film distribution and days shown in that country. Also popular was *Desert Victory* and *The Gentle Sex* (1943), both discussed in chapter 5.

Film	BULGARIA	FRANCE	GREECE	HOLLAND	HUNGARY	ITALY	POLAND	Genre
Convoy	x		x					Drama
Foreman Went To France			x		x	x	x	Comedy
The Goose Steps Out								Comedy
The Gentle Sex		x	x	x	x	x	x	Drama
In Which We Serve	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Drama
Millions Like Us	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Drama
One Of Our Aircraft	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Drama

SHAEF was also involved in attempting to bring together British and American film makers. In March 1945 an Anglo-American film planning committee was formed with that in mind, but the results of that alignment are beyond the scope of this study, because it was after the end of the war.[554] An earlier attempt at joint cooperation is demonstrated by a memo from Beddington stating that all ranks within services should be shown as working together.[555] Again no more archives exist for the proposed film, *Left Of The Line,* which never got off the drawing board.

A major point described as national regeneration has been identified as a key theme running through a number of British WW2 films made from 1945 onwards. Yet filmmakers' chief concern was the favourable presentation of Britain on the international stage. Initial film attempts at tackling class and gender problems were important, but there was still the view that a prime example was British leadership the product of centuries of commanding a vast Empire, should be lauded. A key decision of PWGFO was that films should still reinforce this perception. These moves to target British films for overseas territories led to some changes in future content, influenced by the documentary tradition. In Beddington's document, terms such as 'national treatment', 'propaganda importance' and 'documentary tradition' are used, that were neither known nor desirable during the early days of the war. This, in turn, gave later films a propaganda role as well as high entertainment value.[556]

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[554] WO 219/4624 SHAEF PWD meetings minutes. March 1945
[555] INF 1/130 Films Division correspondence
[556] INF 1/927. Political & Economic Planning, The British Film Industry, 85

Further work for Bernstein

As covered in the last chapter, in 1945 Bernstein officially became head of the Film Department of the PWD in SHAEF, whilst keeping in touch with the British Films Division. By default, this meant that he was responsible for propaganda and film production within his section of the PWD. At the beginning of 1945 Bernstein had already been attacked in print, which had been standard practice by the DNL since the start of the war, because of his politics, which had always been left leaning. All this would be overshadowed by subsequent events. As already mentioned, in 1945, the work of the OWI and the MOI expanded into areas of the war that would become notorious. In the newly liberated countries, evidence of concentration camps had been discovered.[557] These areas are beyond of the scope of this work, apart from the involvement of one of the major players, Bernstein. Within these top-secret memos, film crews were commissioned to produce films of the camps by SHAEF, under Bernstein. As early as April 1945, Bernstein had agreement from OWI and the MOI to show a portion of the film to the British public. He also obtained agreement from the MOI to proceed with planning and production of a feature length film of the camps. Altogether, this formed a combined operation, between the MOI and the OWI for SHAEF, that was well organised and successful. By the end of May, Bernstein had circulated the finished work to critical acclaim. In this project, he was supported by the OWI's production chief, Phillip Dunne, who stated 'in the broadest sense, the documentary film is always an instrument of propaganda'.[558] In this example, this is certainly the case, as the public had never seen such scenes before.

Difficulties between the MOI and the BC on films, covered in earlier chapters, continued even at this late stage of the war. Censorship until this period had been exclusively handled by the British Board of Film Censors. However, the British security services, in particular MI5, was increasingly concerned that some films needed more consideration by them. Therefore, a special W division was created within the MOI staffed by MI5 officers.[559] They would vet films and suggest removal of any sections considered of help to the enemy. Archives suggest there was a close working relationship between W and the MOI staff, but unfortunately no records have survived the war, whether deliberately destroyed or by enemy action. This is unfortunate, as it would have been interesting to examine film narratives subject to censorship.

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[557] INF 1/636: Factual films on Concentration camps
[558] Philip Dunne, 'The Documentary and Hollywood', *Hollywood Quarterly* Jan 1946, 167.
[559] KV 1/479 MI5 and MI12 archives

For the case study, a film has been chosen to illustrate the enhanced processes created for filmmaking at this stage of the war. The film demonstrates that the integration of conflicting interest groups had influenced feature film production. No longer was the MOI being pushed aside, when decisions were made, but it became an integrated part of a concentrated force to push forward ideas in film, especially that of the hero figure.

Case Study: *Western Approaches* (1945)

The evolution of this film from its origins is well documented in the archives. Aims were clearly stated: 'To show how closely the Royal and Merchant navies worked together' and to emphasise how Britain could not have survived without them, running out of food and other supplies. Also highlighted was the 'Great Naval Fleet of Britain'.[560] A very noble list, however, the production had a long history, having been discussed as early as December 1941.[561] It started with a letter to Beddington in the Films Division from Captain Brooking, Press Division of the Admiralty, about depicting the shipping convoy system between the USA and the UK carrying much needed supplies. Brooking was very keen to show realistic details of the complexity and the 'heroism of the endeavours'. Beddington had some concern that Security (MI5) might not like so much detail and requested clearance from the Security Services to discuss further. Unfortunately, no archive records survived of these conversations. From Beddington's files, he made the point that the subject matter would be 'valuable propaganda value'. There must have been some agreement, as Ian Dalrymple, the film's producer and a famous scriptwriter, proceeded to suggest a script be prepared. Dalrymple made the point that earlier in the war the Navy had not been very cooperative, citing a shortage of ships, but that circumstances would suggest this might be a better time and place to proceed.

In Jan 1942, Beddington arranged to send the script treatment to the Admiralty. Coincidentally, the Admiralty had a film proposal for a similar production, *They Sail Again*. After discussion, it was decided to proceed only with *Western Approaches,* as its production was more advanced. The film's production was assigned to the Crown Film Unit, under the control of the MOI. A key factor was that using an in-house resource, the MOI did not require any private finance, simplifying the whole process, thereby minimising potential security leaks which was a significant concern for the Navy, whether in the film or otherwise. One major sticking point was whether to use colour or not, and from March 1942, there were long discussions with the

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[560] INF 6/370 General Ideas for film
[561] INF 1/213 Western Approaches, Films Division correspondence

Navy. Colonel Bromhead from the War Office wanted colour as 'sea pictures lend themselves to colour', as previous films in black and white resulted in 'disappointing poor images'. He was enthusiastic and went on to say, 'this is the type of film the Films Division should be undertaking'. By June 1942 there was still confusion and no decision over use of colour. The argument seems to have been resolved, when a memo from the Films Division (unsigned) suggested that the Americans would greatly admire the film, if made in colour. Since pleasing the Americans was an important factor, this settled the argument. Beddington also added that this was an important factor as it greatly increased revenues. He also mentioned that it would 'add prestige to Britain's and American war efforts'. One downside he did point out was that costs would have to be examined, as each colour print would cost four times a black and white print. Operating Technicolor cameras was a very complex job at that time; several shots had to be reshot, as the Monopack[562] film became fogged and unusable. Another significant issue was that completed shots had to be developed in the USA, as no facilities existed in the UK. Due to the extra costs of colour prints, Colonel Bromhead suggested to Beddington that fewer copies should be produced, compared to *Target For Tonight*, discussed in chapter 1. There is no evidence in the archives that this suggestion was taken up, as looking at the film's popular reception in the UK and America, there must have been many copies made. By August 1942, Dalrymple was writing to Beddington to complain about the delay in assistance from the Admiralty. After many discussions, resources were sorted out, with the Navy and RAF supplying most of the cast. It had always been the intention to use actual sailors to project a 'documentary feel' to the film. As outlined in previous chapters, many examples have been discussed where it was considered desirable for propaganda purposes to include Americans. This remained the case; two of the many leads in this film were American RAF pilots.

Production difficulties

Shooting took place over the entire year of 1943 and into 1944. Several scenes were shot just outside New York, within an actual convoy. In fact, one film unit crossed the Atlantic twice on convoys, under great danger to all on board, which proved the need for close cooperation between MOI and Admiralty before filming. An old naval ship, whose main job was transporting coal, was used for reproductions of the ship's four-inch guns. Real ammunition was used to illustrate the recoil, as they discovered that firing blanks did not produce the same effect. For the scenes involving U-boats, the Navy supplied one of their submarines. In the

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[562] Joseph Friedman, *History of Colour Photography* (Boston: Boston Publishing, 1947), 125.

archives, there are many references to the help and advice that a Captain Packenham supplied throughout the whole film. With such an eye for detail, the director wanted each man's background detailed, as an aid to authenticity. As an example, see the next figure.

22: Realist scenes within the U-boat: *Western Approaches* still

Realism on exterior shots

The exterior shots with the lifeboat were taken at the beginning of March 1943. Planned further outdoor shots were wasted, because the Admiralty had made an unsuitable ship available to the film unit. The seven-week studio shootings were brought forward. Contrary to expectations, they progressed faster than planned, 'A new record for Technicolor shooting was established with 27 Camera Set-Ups in a day'.[563] But this success could not outweigh the countless other obstacles encountered in production, such as additional studio filming became necessary and considerable delays in shooting, because no convoy could be arranged to accompany the filming at the desired time. Two months of filming during the crossing of the convoy to the USA, with scenes in the New York port, were not covered by the original budget. An additional, £30,000, compared to the £70,000, originally budgeted by Treasury had been applied for and

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[563] INF 1/58. Crown Film Unit, Board of Management, Third Meeting, Producer's Report, 27.5.43.

approved. The Treasury were not happy, as one memo stated, 'It is distressing that the original budget and time schedule have been so far exceeded'.[564] Involvement of the Treasury was to become more routine in filmmaking, either via directives or via the PWE, discussed in the previous chapter. It was not until the end of 1943 that the last re-shoots of scenes were finished. Technical errors, only seen after copying, had made them necessary. It was not until the end of 1943, that Pat Jackson and his sister, Jocelyn, were able to begin editing the film; the rough cut was available at the end of January 1944.

One important factor here was the increased importance of the services' Film units. Before 1945, these units had been restricted to short training films, not intended for the general public. Indirectly, this meant that the content and form of the films was the responsibility of the military staff, with the Films Division performing only a minor role. In fact, the Films Division should have had an opportunity to exert influence and control during the production process of this film but was left in a largely supervisory role. This may have been down to a lack of staff, as they were taking on a large amount of responsibility with liberation efforts elsewhere, already discussed.

Public reaction to the film

At last, in June 1944, the final film was passed to the censors. Mr Wilkinson of the British Board of Film Censors called it 'a fine film and a magnificent tribute to the Navy'.[565] His main concern was the use of the swear word, 'bloody', in the screenplay, of which twelve were removed, leaving only three. The justification for the three was the severe danger of the seamen's situation.

Mr Griggs, of the Films Division Press office, secured advance publicity for the film in *Picture Post*, a popular magazine, and requested that the BBC publicise it on the radio. One important issue Mr Griggs highlighted was the lengthy gestation period of the film. He noted that the Atlantic battle, a central theme of the film, was now more or less over. So, the publicity should focus on the tremendous work of the merchant Navy, without which the UK would have lost the war. In his formal statement, Griggs called it 'the most important film made by this Ministry (MOI)'. He also managed to ensure the *Picturegoer* magazine had a big article lined up, including stills from the film. Publicity material remarked that the film 'told the heroic story

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[564] INF 1/213. Bamford to Welch, 6.7.1943.
[565] Ibid

of the Merchant and Royal Navy against the U-boats, up to the same high standards of *Target For Tonight* and *Desert Victory'*.

In late 1944 London was ruled out for the film's premiere, because of the danger of 'flying bombs', a period when London was attacked by V1 and V2 rockets. So, Liverpool was chosen for the film's December 1944 premiere, under guidance from Beddington, over the other suggested major ports of Glasgow and Cardiff. It seems the importance of the film overruled the danger of being bombed; for the films premiere, high-level services staff were invited, Marshall of the RAF, Sir Charles Portal and Air Marshal Sir Douglas Evill. Even the previous hostile relationships between the Films Division and the British Council were eased by this film. In a letter dated February 1945, the BC thanked the Films Division for a copy of the film, which they said they enjoyed. Letters came from Ministers in War Transport, who loved the film and congratulated Beddington and the rest of his team. In December, a copy was supplied to the BFI for its library. Beddington did encounter some trouble with the circulation of the film. British Lion was an independent distributor and keen to have access to the film. After much effort and pressure from the MOI, Beddington managed to get agreement on multiple releases through several distributors. *Western Approaches* eventually went on general release in London on 15th January 1945, and, in Liverpool, a few months later.

The heroes depicted in *Western Approaches* could not have been more different to those depicted in the early parts of the war. Real sailors were used, instead of professional actors, with a strong aim to show, what I would call, technical realism. With a story that effectively shows a British defeat, but also illustrates the characters of the enemy, not as monsters, but real people with a job to do, there was no doubt that working class audiences would identify with the British characters shown. As propaganda, it was important to highlight the heroics of the merchant seamen, whose exploits were covered every day in the media. Several MOI memos talk about the film being a 'tribute' to both Navies, and certainly both services were depicted in a positive light.

Conclusions

With the end of the war in Europe in 1945, it is useful here to sum up the state of British film production. A common theme, since the start of the war, was to create what has been described as a national cinema, which would appeal to all facets of society, as discussed in previous chapters. In some ways the British film studios, with or without guidance from the MOI, succeeded. However, a new style of realism was becoming a major guiding factor in film narratives and was popular with the public, a pressure being felt at the box office. Highly praised, key British war films made between 1939-45, such as *In Which We Serve* (1942), *Millions Like Us* (1943), and *The Way Ahead*, explored in chapter 6, offered emotional and very familiar images of British communities and working life. All the services had been represented; for example, in films the crew of *Target For Tonight* (1941), explored in chapter 1, would be copied in later films with some enhancement, as they presented popular heroes to admire during the war in the air over Britain's cities. A new market for films came with the advent of the liberated countries in Europe and the war film genre, through characterisation and stereotyping, started to resurrect films depicting British values within characters. These virtues are demonstrated within the film discussed in the case study; service, heroism, fairness and leadership – mostly, but not all demonstrated by the middle classes and fostered through a public-school education. In addition, service-inspired films always included comradeship, duty and, very importantly, humour as part of their plots.

Feature length documentaries such as *Target For Tonight, Desert Victory and Western Approaches* were popular with the public and this was recognised by the MOI. As an internal MOI document pointed out, 'for a film to be good propaganda, it must also be good entertainment'.[566] It can be seen this was certainly the case with these films, as audience numbers were high. In short, the *Western Approaches* film is the fictional account of British Merchant Navy sailors adrift in a lifeboat. Following the Crown Films studio habits, its director Pat Jackson made the film almost entirely with real sailors, in effect, amateur actors playing themselves, but it was unusual for its time in being filmed in Technicolor. It had one other innovative feature for a British wartime film: Germans in the U-boat (actually Dutch naval ratings and officers) spoke in German, with translated subtitles. The film would have convinced any viewing public of the sacrifices being made for them, by a group of civilians at sea; just

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[566] INF 1/867. 'Programme for film propaganda' 1940

ordinary people from all walks of life, quite different from the formal naval upper-class officers' characters of films like *Convoy* (1940) and *In Which We Serve* (1941).

Looking back, it is debatable whether the British film industry would have reached the sort of critical and trade success it achieved in 1945 without the Second World War. Severely limited by wartime restrictions, the advance of patriotism, either with or without propaganda, and of interest in Britain's heritage, meant that audiences wanted to see British films about British subjects. There is no doubt that British filmmakers did grasp the opportunities, in terms of subject matter, within the frame of reference of the war. Referring back to the discussion of John Mills, James Cagney's tough, warm-hearted qualities are by comparison, the essence of the American, in the way that 'Mills's modest, enduringly cheery courage is the backbone of the British hero'.[567] This heroic depiction was a very common trait in many British films, as there was a drive for insertion of some light relief even into even the most serious of war films. One could argue that this was an easy option, but it would be always popular with the viewing public. It could be considered that the tone of many British films, humorous but quietly heroic, was unique, and quite removed from American efforts in feature film.

Late 1940s feature films were a curious mixture between the two contexts of war and peace, with aims to resurrect the past glories of Britain, via Gainsborough melodramas. In terms of popular demand, signs of change had been evident since at least 1943, with audiences turning their backs on realism and seeking release from the pressures of wartime, in the escapism of Hollywood films. By 1945, Robert Murphy states that 'it is possible to observe the beginnings of a bleak, consciously 'anti-heroic 'spiv' cycle in British screen drama'. In post war films it would be more complex heroic figures'.[568] Murphy goes on to cite *Waterloo Road* (1945) as the beginning of a trend that would go on to encompass such box-office successes as *They Made Me A Fugitive* (1947) and *Brighton Rock* (1947).

Although there was a movement towards what some would call the 'fairy tale' world of Hollywood, the individual hero did not go away in wartime. Rather, the type sometimes coexisted with a common man hero of realist war narrative, as described in the case study. It also had the advantage of depicting the services, which had always been impressed upon the film-going public as truly believable heroes, ever since *Target for Tonight,* discussed in chapter 1. It is interesting to note that at this late stage of the war, Britain was flying thousand bomber

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[567] Lieut. G. Rowell, 'My Man Mills', Picturegoer, 29 September 1945
[568] Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel* (London: Routledge, 1989) 76.

raids in Germany. Details such as these were not highlighted in any films, but the general public would have been aware of these actual events, as they were receiving a lot of publicity in the press. It is likely that, at the time, the general feeling was that Germany deserved the punishment, with an essential message of ordinary people working together, which would be a powerful one, that audiences could understand. Newspaper headlines were common at the time highlighting what could be called revenge attacks, '1200 RAF attack on Cologne, all in flames'.[569] At this stage of the war, every person was involved in war efforts in some capacity, and the story, showing each crew member in action sequences, portrays a heroic but understated strand. Some of the crew in the film had volunteered for front-line duty, which was a major change from the recruits in the chapter 6 case study, *The Way Ahead*. Darlow and Hodson's view is that wartime script writing explores further, the way in which the war 'made people from different backgrounds mix and grow dependent on each other and *Western Approaches* was its most realistic expression'.[570] Heroes, as the common men and women were becoming, were the main content of films at this latter stage of the war. Rather, the type coexisted with the more respectable group hero of realist war narrative, as described in the case study.

As discussed in previous chapters many, if not all, British feature films represented a national ideal. From now on, details of family life, which had not been covered in this way previously, would become part of film narratives. Scenes emphasising ordinariness, integrated with themes of national experience of the war, had become commonplace in feature films. Post war films would build on these ideas and new sub genres would be developed, such as 'kitchen sink' dramas.

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[569] 'The Fall of Cologne', *The Times*, 8th March 1945, 5

[570] Michael Darlow & Gillian Hodson, *Terence Rattigan: The man and his work* (London: Quartet, 1979), 29.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This Conclusion begins by offering a summary of the research I conducted and my methodology. Each chapter's main findings will be outlined. Thereafter, I will consider the main themes of the thesis. Finally, suggestions for further research are presented for future scholars.

Having researched and uncovered the processes and relationships between the government, represented by the Ministry of Information (MOI), and the film studios, in relation to feature film content and production during WW2, this thesis posed these questions:

a. **How did the relationship between the MOI and the film studios affect film content and production during WW2?**

The answers are wide ranging, both from empirical studies and archival research. In the early war years, relationships between the government and the film studios were confused. Eventually, these evolved into a collaborative relationship, leading to an improvement in the whole process of filmmaking. The central contention of this thesis is that the reality was a history of muddled management decisions and continual reviews of propaganda needs to be incorporated within films. What complicates things is that all this was entangled in 'old boys networks', where decisions were made, in some cases, without key partners being informed. This study traced the fragmentary, and incomplete, key archival resources at the National Archives, the Imperial War Museum, the University of London, Tate Britain and elsewhere. Where film studio records exist, these have been incorporated into the analysis of the production history via case studies of films. Thomas Elsaesser's work gave guidance on how and where to work on historical research, suggesting other sources like journals and newspapers. Using secondary sources, I built on Richards and Aldgate's books on contextual cinematic history, which supplied advice on how to explore the social and political background to films. With the above in mind, the case studies were specifically chosen to illustrate and advance the research, because, almost inevitably, the case studies threw up as many questions as answers. Notwithstanding these caveats, some conclusions are possible:

- The studies have illustrated key developments in political propaganda, which became an essential aspect of film production during the war.

- Despite a desire to get all interested parties working together, directions from the MOI were on occasion either confused or entirely missing. Nevertheless, it was possible to track ideas for films and map them on to the MOI organisational reviews at each stage of the war.

- The involvement of certain individuals from both the MOI and the entertainment field, on occasion, working together, were crucial to film production.

b. **How did propaganda actually work on a day-to-day basis for filmmakers during WW2?**

This thesis has disentangled the politics and pressure of the war on the film industry and traced its effects on film. It has demonstrated, through extensive research into archival sources, that policies and political decisions via propaganda did have an impact on heroic roles within films. I have applied political economy theory[571] and, sparingly, some textual analysis of films to answer these questions, but this is largely an industrial history and archival project.

c. **Did the changing role of the hero in wartime films correlate with government and film studios evolving policies on propaganda?**

All the archival evidence assessed points to a clear correlation between government decisions and discussions with the film studios and the presentation of the heroic figure in feature films. As part of this study, all wartime British made feature films have been examined and analysed to determine the types of hero depicted, considering underlying characteristics, trends and patterns in the WW2 film body as a whole. As highlighted throughout this thesis, heroic figures were a fundamental feature in narrative film, and as they also became a key component of propaganda directives, they make a fascinating subject to research.

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[571] Toby Miller and| Robert Stam, *A Companion to Film Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Janet Wasko's chapter 13.

Main findings

In the early war years, the MOI was not operating in a professional and efficient manner, as outlined in chapter 1. From archival evidence, at the outset of the war the political and organisational leadership in the MOI was inept. Due to a lack of preparedness for war, 'muddle through' was the order of the day, which meant that film studios' interactions were in a confused state. An initial aim to channel all film production to systematically produce national propaganda failed, because it was neither supported nor organised by the War Cabinet. There were many other examples of inexperienced leadership in government practice. Other critical issues included an artificial separation from the BFI, and initially adversarial relationships to documentarians. Other civil service departments' dealings with the MOI could be described as shambolic, as there was no pre-existing structure to direct the content of films at this momentous time. Pre-war ideas of what make a hero figure in films were still predominant.

Chapter 2 argued that the introduction of strong leadership in the MOI began to make a difference with film makers, in comparison to the dysfunctional bureaucracy at the outset of the war, described in chapter 1. It evaluates in detail the claims of some historians, such as Chapman and Aldgate, that this period saw a confused interplay between the government and the film industry. High level government pressure meant that ways were explored to include more pro-American propaganda within feature films, in order to bring America into the war.

Chapter 3 focuses on the strong influence of an auteur (a film director whose filmmaking style is so personal, that the director is likened to the 'author' of the film), on feature film policy. It also explores the idea that the urgent need to bring America into the war was driving the MOI's work. The MOI was specifically tasked with adding pressure, in any way possible, to meet that challenge. It wasn't long before the Americans were heavily involved with the MOI, and American dominance of film and propaganda policy became explicit, which is elaborated in later chapters. Also explored is the association of British film stars within war narratives, a device previously found more commonly in American cinema.

Chapter 4 argued that the Americans were beginning to have greater influence over UK filmmaking, which began to mirror some of Hollywood's practices of propaganda. The chapter considers the role of humour within a class base, integrated within the film hero theme, as one of the most significant and effective elements of propaganda in maintaining public morale.

Chapter 5 discusses changing fictional narratives in feature films, as the distinction between fiction and fact was diminishing within story lines. A focus on documentary-style realism, and new roles for women, as involved participants in the war effort became the norm for some film studios. MOI propaganda needs inspired films about people from different cultures and classes, working together successfully for the war effort, but set against a real background. British 'stars' were developed and promoted by the film studios, following the lead of Hollywood movies. Merged with these ideas were trends in narratives, with the hero being presented as an ordinary member of the public. Nevertheless, there is evidence from high-level government discussion that there were concerns about the effects of presenting propaganda themes on communism and socialism, and their representation in films.

Chapter 6 explored the improved American networking with MOI, expanding on the work highlighted in chapters 4 and 5. New processes were established, so that the film studios' productions could work more efficiently with the MOI and other government departments, including the armed services. Within films, there was a return to the stoic hero figure outlined in earlier chapters. After 1943 there was a convergence between film narratives of the USA and the UK, in relation to masculine heroism of the hero figure.

Chapter 7, the final chapter of this research, demonstrated how the notion of the hero figure eventually became an important structuring device within feature films. As the end of the war was approaching, it was a common theme to propose films that showed a 'good' war, in respect of national achievements. Improvements in the film creation process continued. New censorship guidelines were implemented, and previously secret wartime activities could now be shown within films, even if the operations had been unsuccessful. There was a return to the depiction of the upper-class gentleman heroes presented at the start of the war, outlined in chapters 1 and 2. Furthermore, films were still imbued with the idealistic idea of the 'People's War', with its display of collective effort and patriotic messages. Finally, chapter 7 noted grave concerns about the break-up of the British Empire, and measures of addressing this through film propaganda were proposed.

The MOI, a period of reform and consolidation

In answer to question **a,** conclusions reached about the MOI and the government's influence on wartime feature films may be summarised as follows:

- Within the MOI and the film studios, well-connected individuals (via class privilege) did make the difference, in terms of decision making. In some instances, their membership of the same gentlemen's club provided direct or indirect connections with the War Cabinet.

- The existence of 'old boys networks' played a key part in many ideas on cinema and propaganda. In many ways this continued throughout the war, but eventually more formal management structures within Government would be introduced, which meant older ways of doing things became redundant.

- Throughout my study, I have concluded that there was a gradual alignment between propaganda and popular narrative filmmaking (through complex negotiation following conflicts between all parties). It was in fact an iterative process, which took time to be fully operational.

- Some MOI meetings were just 'talking shops', with little or no influence over events.

- In both the MOI and elsewhere in government, there was a lack of ownership and responsibility. Although this improved in later years, it remained a hindrance.

- Later in the war, the American Hollywood influence had some effect on film narratives. The OWI also pushed forward their own agenda on propaganda elements in British films.

- The MOI was always sensitive to criticism from all sides, including the press, and especially the DNL, so that this impacted some film decisions.

- For films, cooperation with the services improved only later in the war. A common problem early on was a lack of ownership, specifically in the services, which were called on to assist on many films.

- In the later years of the war, social change exerted a considerable influence on film narratives. With almost the entire population involved in the war effort, the film studios eventually realised this had to be reflected within films.

Developments in propaganda

In answer to question **b,** conclusions reached on the workings of day-to-day propaganda are as follows:-

- British film studios largely retained ownership and control of a wide range of film styles and genres, but never ignored market research into the public's response, as indicated in the MOI surveys, *Home Intelligence Reports*.

- One recurring issue was the difficulty of balancing factual detail with popular presentation. This was examined in the production histories found in my two case studies, *Western Approaches* (1945) and *Desert Victory* (1943).

- The MOI was under constant pressure to overcome the general indifference of the British people to propaganda. This was never completely resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, due to the lack of both a systematic policy and clear political objectives. What occurred instead were short-term propaganda campaigns, in response to political demands, sometimes prompted by audience feedback via surveys.

- This study found a system in which state control of the film industry was exercised through the goodwill and cooperation of all parties. In what could be described as the 'British' way, with collaboration and negotiation based on the model of Parliamentary democracy, good relations were considered more important than confrontation. The government side acknowledged the role that feature films could play in the delivery of national propaganda without the need, in most cases, to explicitly order film producers to do so. In practice the film industry was entirely dependent on the support of the government.

- The officials of the MOI and the Films Division had no political mandate to either set or propagate ideological goals, neither did they initially have the necessary instruments to control film production and distribution of British films. Yet within these constraints, certain individuals, such as Clark and Bernstein (discussed in chapters 1 and 4 respectively) did make a difference and were able to use their strength of character, combined with their social and political connections, to instigate change.

- I suggest that the notion of a 'British Way' also included the old boys networks. These clubs were the foundations on which relations were built, informally maintained and structured, the power dynamics of war resources and propaganda. What first began as a collection of ad-hoc unofficial meetings transformed into a useful conduit to decision makers, where formal government links became the norm.

Heroes and propaganda desires

In answer to question **c,** conclusions reached about the MOI and propaganda on wartime feature films involving a hero figure are as follows:

- Popular British cinema was characterised by varied representation of the heroic figure, in terms of class and gender, particularly as the war progressed.

- Heroes, in some shape or form, were a pervasive vehicle of British cinema to deliver propaganda during the 1940s. Of course, the construct of a protagonist as a hero had always been around in cinema and storytelling. However, this was the first time that British government leadership had explicitly promoted the exploitation of heroes for propaganda messages, whether overt or covert. A hero's integration within cinematic reconstructed events in the war had only been attempted in a few WW1 films but during WW2 it became a significant propaganda strategy.

- Heroic representations were characterised by changing presentations of morality, as the war progressed. Distinction between what was right or wrong in film was a continued area of conflict within the MOI.

- Eventually women were presented on screen as leading heroic characters, mainly due to enormous societal change, resulting from the requirements of the war.

- When the war in the air had been won by the RAF, films concerned with the risk of invasion moved on to themes of fighting back, giving some degree of hope to the population. The final case study celebrated the merchant mariners as heroes, which I maintain would not have happened earlier in the war.

Taken as a whole, this study demonstrated that between 1939 and 1945 overall propaganda plans evolved on an ad-hoc basis. Initially, with a lack of overall control, the MOI attempted to set a framework where cinema would be a conduit for propaganda messages. Later, there was improvement, as a more centralised control of propaganda was implemented, but it was a slow process, with many failures and periods of confusion. It did not help that many commentators, both within and beyond government circles, demanded changes to specific propaganda messages.

The hero figure was a significant feature of popular British feature films. Discussions on the nature of that hero were a recurring theme within both the MOI and beyond. It was a long process, where the shaping of the British hero as film construct went through many iterations,

to some extent mirroring discussions as to the type of propaganda to be directed at the general public. Furthermore, influence from America did eventually change the depiction of heroes within films, as investigated from chapter 4 onwards. This specific dimension had not previously been explored, so this thesis pioneers the systematic analysis of British film policy and its influence on the hero figure.

In the later stages of the war, films about its impact and consequences on ordinary people were popular. I am suggesting that cinema remained popular with audiences, because story lines kept pace with the changing circumstances of the cinema-going public. Covert propaganda was one motive driving the elevation of British Documentary realism during the war, explored in chapters 6 and 7. Orthodox feature film storylines based on every-day life in wartime Britain often concealed government messages.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated how feature films of WW2 were shaped by layers of cultural and political interference, despite the lack of an initial overall plan for propaganda from the MOI. Furthermore, it has discovered that the MOI had a pragmatic approach to events, and that propaganda messaging was the key driver of many films. British films of the war were popular precisely because they related, or were perceived as such, to the concerns and topical issues of the war, be they battles overseas or on the home front. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the hero figure during the 1940s evolved, reshaped as a building block of narrative film.

Propaganda and realism

There is no doubt that films came increasingly to use realistic settings and to show ordinary people in later war films. Realism in a film's narrative was a deliberate policy designed by the MOI for the film industry, encouraged by the influential critics and opinion-formers of the press. These approaches were tentatively promoted through comedy, investigated in chapters 4 and 5. Film studios' investments in realist techniques were evaluated in chapters 6 and 7, as measured by their popularity with audiences. Here was another example of the MOI taking a pragmatic approach, by responding to events of the war. Finally, ideas from the documentary movement were integrated with film narratives, backed by strong advocates, as demonstrated in chapters 1 and 2, and willingly adopted by patriotic filmmakers like Balcon. For the MOI, it had been an iterative process. However, eventually, the MOI did work out which story lines motivated and encouraged the population. It just took time for the organisation, and others in leadership, to acknowledge that such key motivations via film could help the war effort.

This study has found that films cemented self-images of the nation, centring on the hero figure. For the cinema-going public, hero figures demonstrated evidence of a strengthening of the British identity in the war. Empathy with a film character, considered by Strauss to be hero prototypes, became an important factor for the public. Pre-war British feature film heroes had been inspired by the outlook and values of the public-school system. With a growing propaganda need to push the 'People's War', designed to encourage public participation in the war effort, a reinvention of the hero figure was needed within a range of films. However, this journey would be a complex one, as the MOI lacked a defined agenda and strategy, with ever-changing instructions issued by senior leadership.

Early in the conflict, the MOI decided that the British public needed to be convinced that the government's propaganda policy was appropriate. However, this study has shown that the MOI involvement in propaganda was not uniformly successful. Throughout the war, there was never a consensus on which propaganda was most effective for the country. Ideas of British stoicism were recognised by the MOI as useful to raise morale. Whenever possible, they promoted this national characteristic in films. The myth of the 'People's War' is often described as idealistic, but the MOI incorporated critical events, such as Dunkirk and the Blitz, into film propaganda, focusing on working together for victory, including ordinary people on the home front. This study proves that propaganda requirements were the main driving force for films, never precisely defined beyond a general need to improve morale and encourage the USA into the war. Thus, a sequence of ad-hoc decision-making led to film productions being pulled from pillar to post. Exacerbating this was the initial amateurish structure of the MOI and Films Division. It took several years, with a series of departmental heads, to create a proper management hierarchy, which reflected industry and aligned with political decisions on propaganda.

Britain's place in the world

Other pressures on the MOI came from global change (as discussed in chapters 6 and 7), with social and political forces starting to question the whole rationale of the British Empire. However, while accommodating MOI requirements, film studios retained popular themes, as described in this work. Flaws in a hero's story would become more commonplace, though supported by examples of leadership, as more nuanced presentations took centre stage in feature films. There was always a place for the figure of the soldier-hero, providing a role model for young men, built on nostalgic notions of the stability of Britain and, in some cases,

its empire. Later war films included more intimate details of people's experiences, which had to be integrated with the propaganda demands of the MOI, which succeeded in some films, demonstrated in chapter 5 onwards with *The Gentle Sex*, and *The Happy Breed*. Of course, during the war, countless people from all walks of life performed heroic deeds every single day. It took some time for the MOI to realise that incorporating such heroism into film narratives also fulfilled propaganda needs. By the end of the war, British cinema had started the process of moving into what some academics called, a realist aesthetic.[572] For the British cinema audience who, for the first time, were able to see themselves portrayed on screen with seriousness and respect, this must have been an uplifting and exciting experience.

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[572] John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism* (London: BFI, 1986), Chapter 3

Methodological conclusions

This research has demonstrated the effectiveness of using archival research to investigate *both* the overarching production context *and* to create detailed production histories which form the case studies.

A chronological structure was chosen as a framework for the study, using each year of the war to delineate events. In practice this arrangement worked well, as it meant the research could focus on a set time period, when sifting through the many events that directly or indirectly affected feature films. A case study within each chapter meant that any general findings could be mapped through specific films. There is limited textual analysis in the methodology, apart from the table of types of heroes in films. The case studies are focussed on original detailed production histories.

Althusser and Chomsky's ideas on ideology and his propaganda model helped frame the hero figure, in relationship to the infrastructure of influence from government and others. Elements such as social change within the UK were a contributing factor, and their work on ownership of resources helped determine which government sources to access. Within the complexity of general concerns about the effects of the war on the British Empire, Levi-Strauss's work on myths within story lines was useful. None of these theoretical frameworks, however, considers British social constructs, and therefore this study is original, in terms of its more local applications of socio-political context. Dyer's work on stardom influenced my discussion of the representations of movie stars, which became an important element of government propaganda, as explored in chapter 4 onwards. In the example of Leslie Howard, the MOI had the advantage of established stardom, together with strong propaganda and heroic qualities.

Althusser's theory of ideology and the ideological state apparatus provided a viewpoint from which to study different layers of film studios and government, one driven by making money, but interlinked ideology through propaganda, which became more important as the war progressed.

Richards and Aldgate's 'contextual cinematic history' was employed for an empirically based examination of films, within the social and political context of their overall production history. However, in many cases, the records of all or part of a film's production history have been lost. This restricted the choice of case studies, but work by Elsaesser, with suggestions on seeking

out background information of film history, was a useful guide. One useful source was Arksey and Knight's 'triangulation' ideas, which were utilised for finding alternative sources.

Case studies were a useful means of illustrating and mapping films onto MOI organisational developments and propaganda needs. Grandy's definitions of the representation of hero figures, merged with the case study model, helped an understanding of common themes adopted in film. For some films, Allen and Gomery's empiricist approach of content analysis was useful in avoiding subjective judgements. This study also adds to Rose's work on WW2 propaganda. She writes 'pressure exerted by the MOI on studios is difficult to reconstruct…making stark pronouncements on the exact processes of a particular film difficult'.[573] By means of the chosen case studies, linkage between different propaganda strategies has been illustrated at each stage of the war.

As a framework for analysing the hero character, this study followed the statistical work of Shafer. This worked well, as the majority of WW2 feature films could be viewed at the BFI, however, some of the films listed in the BFI's database have been lost. The analysis of such films was instead dependent on a written synopsis of the film. With Allen and Gomery's ideas on an aesthetic analysis of film, these have provided a background for the table of results.

Organisational network analysis was utilised for analysing and mapping the communication and socio-technical networks within the MOI and beyond, including interactions with the film studios. There were problems with this approach, as fragmented archival records meant that only a subset of the government hierarchy could be evaluated.

This mixture of methodologies forms a framework, by which I have navigated the complex interactions of Government departments and film studio staff, as well as exploring the processes behind propaganda decisions affecting films.

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[573] Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 206

Limitations of the project

A major challenge was to narrow the scope of this ambitious project, selecting from countless examples of events and decision making, whilst keeping it within the timeframe of the war. Many government and non-governmental groups were involved in filmmaking decisions, but this study attempts to limit consideration to the main influencers. Certain of the war's major events had a large impact on film content, and the key elements are outlined in each chapter. Distinguishing what was, and was not, important was not a trivial task. Since the focus of this study is feature films, short films produced by the MOI have largely been excluded. It must be acknowledged that short films did have a higher status and visibility during this period, due to the exhibition of a continuous programme of films, with the MOI in the centre.

The decision to focus on one or two films within each case study is a limitation of this study, when drawing more general conclusions on the interactions of the MOI and the film studios, relating to propaganda and public information. Nevertheless, findings from these case studies have been useful in suggesting areas for further study, in the field of entertainment and government policy. However, focussing on fewer films enables richer detail to be provided, which a broader approach would render impractical.

As already mentioned, public archive records are very extensive, but fragmented. Quite often a 'paper trail' ends when further records are either missing or incomplete. Alternative sources were sparse. A major source of frustration was the scarcity of film studio archives in the UK. The only accessible records were 'press books' held at the BFI. Suggestions to address this shortfall are outlined later in 'Areas for future research'.

Interpretation of archival documents can be difficult, as some terms used are either confusing and/or carry different connotations today. For example, records covering the British Empire contain what today would be deemed racist insults, which complicates their interpretation. On reviewing the archives, one important thing stands out; most of the main players had been brought up to believe in the absolute power and supremacy of the British Empire. These men (and a few woman) were 'born to rule' the Empire and, as such, were conditioned to think in a certain way. It was a challenge to put oneself 'in their shoes', to interpret the underlying meaning of discussions on the future of the British Empire for chapter 7.

With US involvement, the hierarchy of control of propaganda became more complex. This meant that the concepts and ideas flowing from senior levels became more difficult to track,

especially with the fragmented archives described above. Certainly, access to US archives would provide a potentially rich area for further research.

Dealing with WW2, one major challenge was to identify and isolate the world events, which had direct effects on aspects of film. Some were obvious, such as the Americans joining the war, which could be tracked via the archives, and shown to have galvanised the work of the MOI, rather than hindering it. However, many smaller events might have impacted films, but this cannot be supported by the archives, due to missing or only partial evidence.

Areas for future research

As a result of my study, more research could be conducted in the following areas:

- Further work and analysis of the working relationship between the American OWI and the British MOI are required. This will assist in the understanding of the main drivers and motivations of both parties. Winkler's *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information 1942-1945* tackles the subject from an American perspective, so a British viewpoint is missing and would make an interesting area of study. Major archives exist in this area; therefore, it is a significant area of study.

- The MOI and short films: where did the ideas for these films originate, and what were the processes behind their production? There is a very large amount of archive material on this subject, which could be the basis of a completely new thesis, in itself.

- Explore further British film directors' views/input on propaganda in more detail. Leslie Howard's contribution to the MOI Ideas Committee has been included in chapter 4, but others in positions of authority held strong views. What were their stories and were their ideas taken seriously enough to implement in films?

- The archived records of Bernstein require further investigation. There are still twenty-four boxes of non-indexed material on his work as a senior film advisor to the War Cabinet, some of which could add to understanding the background processes by which films were made.

- Further research is needed on the plans presented in 1945 for the post-war British film industry. The archives show major concerns, including worries about depicting social problems and the influence of communism. It would be interesting to follow this strand of work and interpret any influence on the films.

- Further research can be performed on the Royal Air Force Film Production Unit (RAFFPU), which was formed in 1941. With many stars and directors working there, it would be a useful area for further analysis of films such as *Target For Tonight* and *Journey Together.*

- The W Division (MI5 officers) was involved in film censorship. No archives exist in the UK but might perhaps be in the USA. This research would add to existing extensive academic work on Censorship. In 2022 additional MI5 records were released by the National Archives, some of which cover WW2. Since there are further planned releases, this could be a primary source for examining the influence of intelligence on films. Following on from the last point, the archives of INF/178 *Film Censorship* supply an enormous number of papers from all sides of government, some of which have been referenced within this study, but because of its scope, this could be a complete thesis project.

- Since 2021 a new project, Studio Tec (Bristol and Southampton universities), is collecting fragments of archives from any source to tell the history of British film studios. A recent entry has been research on studio tours for services during WW2. This, and other entries, will be a key source for future research on the MOI/Film studio interactions:- https://studiotec.info/.

- On the specific area of the Films Division; recent extensive additions have been made at the Kew Archives to INF 1/129 *Reorganisation documents*. Further work could be applied in this area for analysis following MOI's ideas on cinema.

Original Contribution

This thesis is an original contribution to knowledge in two key ways: in its unpublished source material, and its interdisciplinary approach. Throughout this work, documentary material from many archives has been analysed. Some of these archives are already institutions well-trawled by Second World War scholars, but seldom examined within a single project combining government processes and films. Therefore, this project contributes to the literature, by expanding on academic texts, where they touch upon government control and influence on feature films. These texts would include Chapman's *The British at War* (1998), Aldgate's and Richard's *Britain Can Take It* (Revised edition 2007), Taylor's *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (1988) and Dickinson's *Cinema and State, the Film Industry and the British government 1927-84* (1985). This research does confirm the view of these authors, that British film content evolved as the war progressed, and was influenced by edicts on propaganda from many government sources. *Britain Can Take It,* tackles this period of historiography from a slightly different viewpoint, although he follows Chapman's broad approach. For selected films, he considers script, reviews and box office returns, and places each in its social and political context. My study builds on these ideas, and expands on the sources' material, especially the political influences on film content.

While much excellent scholarship exists on media studies, cinema and urban history, political science, public administration, management science, propaganda studies, war and social history, this thesis breaks new ground in its demonstration of how approaches and concepts from these fields can be fruitfully combined, to produce new insights as to how and why films were made. This project adds to the empiricist school, which arose through the collaborative efforts of Richards and Aldgate, in *Britain Can Take It*. They provide case studies of wartime British feature films, with an abundance of textual analysis, including some background on the MOI sources for the films in question. This work expands on the development of propaganda policy by the Films Division of the MOI during the same period.

With regard to the hero figure, this work expands on several academic works, including Rose's book, *Which People's War.* She outlines the journey of British films' depiction of the hero character, but with little analysis of how and why the films had been made. Her focus does not delve into the background of MOI policy decisions, so my work supplements her analysis. In Grandy's book, *Heroes and Happy Endings,* her focus is on the inter-war years, but the research has important insights, that this project has further advanced, in its analysis of the portrayal of

hero figures during WW2. She explores the form and function of the inter-war archetypes of this construct and argues that fictional heroes of the period were easily recognisable by their masculine characteristics. Extending her work into the war years contributes to our understanding of the hero figure presentation in films.

For star studies, in Dyer's book *Stars*, he discusses film heroes within the framework of not only propaganda requirements, but also social constructs. His work helps by distinguishing between stereotypes and identifying new hero figures. This study builds on and expands on his work, by looking at the political pressures behind these constructs.

The task of examining the working processes of the government departments in this period is described by Theakston's book *Civil Service since 1945*. To that end, this study builds on his work, focusing not only on the MOI but interactions with other departments.

Wartime films, this study has ascertained, have common themes, idealised hero figures, combined with the portrayal of wartime Britain, as universally patriotic and self-sacrificing. These depictions were dominant forces in shaping the meaning of the war for their film audiences, even though more diverse transformative hero figures were seen later in the war. The introduction of realism, which offered cinemagoers a less benign view, still included these original themes, but within differing frameworks. One overall theme that stands out is that government propaganda required heroes, to convey its message. Britain's history has always contained noble champions of the Empire, and these constructs continued in feature films throughout the war.

My research has established that the MOI developed an approach to cinema that was, on occasion, and under the right leadership, inspired. It was sometimes confused, if pragmatic, seldom proactive. Crisis management was always a necessary part of the filmmaking processes. Starting from a very disorganised state, the government apparatus eventually and gradually, with the help of key people, improved the filmmaking process. Further complexity was a result of each division within the MOI having differing views, as to how to present Britain to the world. This study fills in some of the gaps, to disentangle the complex internal structures of government control. Throughout the war a projection of a national self-image was a key component presented in film. In most feature films, there was the framework of a class-based system, and contained with that narrative was the hero figure.

My research indicates that close investigation of a small number of case studies of individual feature films was a fruitful method for investigating the variation of British film narratives. The research involved the successful and original use of quantitative and qualitative methods, to provide both numerical data to illuminate broad trends and detailed, subjective data on film content. By considering these different forms of data together, aligned with government bureaucracy, this thesis provides an exhaustive insight into propaganda in British films and demonstrates the value of this multi-method approach. Ultimately, this thesis is offered in the belief that it adds to our understanding of the workings of the MOI and other areas of government. By focusing on its interaction with propaganda needs and the hero character, a previously unexplored association has been investigated. One thing is certain; heroic cinematic images of a wartime flight deck, the bridge of Navy ships, the operations room, the submarine, the POW camp, D-Day - and the very British officers who manned them - endure even now, which is clear evidence of their continued ideological and emotional potency.

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'*The Civil service welcomes outsiders: recruitment of private sector experts driving film propaganda forward during WW2'* was accepted by the *Society for the History of War.*[574]

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[574] University of Reims, March 2020. https://9dea449b-87b6-46dc-b7c4-f4062763df17.filesusr.com/ugd/cb43ba_a4148e302f804df68e8209025205c1f6.docx?dn=List%20of%20Abstracts%20-%20v1%20(2).docx

[575] IAMHIST Blog. A Day at the Archives. 2019

Home Office Files

Reference	Description
HO45	Some information about anti-war activities. Passed to MOI
HO186	Reports from MOI Regional Information Officers relating to morale.
HO192	Investigations into morale by Ministry of Home Security
HO199	Records of the Intelligence Branch of Home Security, including records of morale and public reaction to air raids, news etc., many of which produced by MOI and Mass-Observation; correspondence between MOI and the Ministry of Home Security; and papers relating to liaison between the two departments.
HO207	Ministry of Home Security, Regional Commissioners' files.
HO 262	Ealing Studios correspondence

Ministry of Information files (Kew): INF prefix

1	General correspondence and minutes of the MOI, including the Films Division
1/2	MOI Administration division
1/56	MOI Correspondence
1/57	Crown films: Staff records
1/58	Crown film unit: Progress reports
1/59	Report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure
1/62	Home Defence services
1/81	Crown films
1/126	Films Division reorganisation
1/130	Films Division: Staff records
1/180	Censorship of media
1/194	Government policy towards newsreels
1/210	Target for Tonight (1941): MOI correspondence
1/213	Western Approaches (1945): MOI correspondence
1/221	Desert Victory (1943): MOI correspondence
1/224	The Way Ahead (1944): MOI correspondence
1/258	Home planning division
1/599	British Council and USA discussions
1/625	Eagle Squadron (1942)
1/634	Post War film production
1/626	Films for liberated territories
1/670	Messages to the people from the Prime Minister

1/712	Annex to the Report of the Home Publicity Sub-Committee of 27.9.1938
1/724	Pre-war Publicity Division MOI
1/867	MOI Coordinating committees
1/927	Post war activities of the MOI in films

Prime Ministers' files (from Cambridge Archive centre)

PREM 1	Churchill's correspondence and papers
PREM 2	Churchill's correspondence including files on propaganda and films.

Other archives

BT 64,70,190	Board of Trade: Policy in Film Industry
BW 4 and 63	British Council papers on Film Production
6/370	Film Production documents for the Films Division
FO 371	Correspondence on British Publicity abroad
PREM 4	Churchill's correspondence on propaganda and film
WO 163	War Office: Public morale committee
WO 165	Records and minutes of the War Office
WO 219	War Office: SHAEF
FO 395/656	Foreign Office News Department
FO 954	Anthony Eden Private Papers
FO 898	Political Warfare Executive
R67/44	BBC Archives. Paper on War Events
AIR 2/8591	RAF Aircrew Records
Hansard	Online records on Parliamentary debates

War Cabinet Papers

CAB65	War Cabinet Minutes.
CAB66	War Cabinet Memoranda.
CAB67	War Cabinet Memoranda.
CAB68	War Cabinet Memoranda.
CAB71	War Cabinet, Lord President's Committees.
CAB73	War Cabinet Committees on Civil Defence. Civil Defence Committee Minutes dealt with specific problems on the Home Front. The MOI was usually present and attempted to co-ordinate propaganda policies with other ministers.
CAB75	War Cabinet Home Policy Committee, minutes, and memoranda. This committee dealt with general problems on the Home Front. The MOI was a member. Propaganda definitions and information policies were discussed.
CAB76	Contains records of the Standing Interdepartmental Committee on Censorship.
CAB79	War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, minutes of meetings.
CAB80	War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, memoranda.
CAB82	War Cabinet, Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee and Sub-Committees.
CAB84	War Cabinet Planning Committee minutes, where attempts were made to co-ordinate propaganda with strategy and planning operations.
CAB88	War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, memoranda.

Security Service Papers

KV4/121	Liaison with the BBC. Papers from before and during the Second World War relating to consultations between the BBC and the Security service
KV4/179	Organisation and functions of W Branch (MI5 Censorship of films). All records destroyed in UK.
Freedom of Information Request	Documents planned for release on SIS involvement in feature films Question. Response: None exist! (in UK)

Other Manuscript Sources

Mass-Observation Archives (University of Sussex).

Memoirs of Sir Kenneth Clark (Tate Britain Archives)

Monckton Papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford).

Neville Chamberlain Papers (Birmingham University Library).

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MOI Digital Project   http://www.moidigital.ac.uk
National Archives: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

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Filmography

This filmography includes information about all the British feature films cited in the text as Case Studies. Credits and release dates are from Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1985*.

Abbreviations used: pc production company, d director, sc screenplay

1939: *Target for Tonight*: pc Crown Film Unit, d Harry Watt, sc Peter Ustinov

1940: *Eagle Squadron*: pc Walter Wanger Productions, d Arthur Lubin, sc John Cobb and Percy Picard

1941: *Pimpernel Smith*: pc British National, d Leslie Howard, sc Anatole de Grunwald, Roland Pertwee, Ian Dalrymple.

1942: *The Goose Steps Out*: pc Ealing Studios, d Basil Dearden, sc Reg Groves

1942: *The Foreman Went to France*: pc Ealing Studios, d Charles Frend, sc John Dighton, Angus Macphail.

1943: *Desert Victory*: pc Royal Air Force Production Unit, d Roy Boulting and David Macdonald, sc J Hodson

1943: *The Gentle Sex*: pc Two Cities Films, d Leslie Howard, sc Moie Charles

1944: *The Way Ahead*: pc Two Cities Films, d Carol Reed, sc Peter Ustinov

1944: *This Happy Breed:* pc Two Cities Films, d David Lean, sc David Lean and Ronald Neame

1945: *Western Approaches:* pc Crown Film Unit, d Pat Jackson, sc Pat Jackson

Appendix

Abbreviations

AFS	Auxiliary Fire service
AFU	Army Film Unit for educational films
AK3	Army Film Unit for feature films
ATP	Associated Talking Pictures
ATC	Air transport command
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial service
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BBFC	British Board of Film Censors
BC	British Council
BFI	British Film Institute
BFPA	British Film Producers Association
BIS	British Information service (MOI in USA)
CEO	Company Executive Officer
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
COI	Central Office of Information
D-Day	Allied invasion of France
DNL	Documentary News Letter
FD	Films Division
FO	Foreign Office
GPO	General Post Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum
INF	National Archives prefix for archive material
LMF	Lack of Morale Fibre
	(RAF term for pilots who refused to fly)
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
	American film production company
MI5	Military Intelligence UK
MI6	Military Intelligence Overseas

MI7	Military Intelligence Propaganda (absorbed into MOI 1940)
MOI	Ministry of Information
OSS	Office of Strategic services. Intelligence Agency of USA
OWI	Office of War Information (USA+UK)
PWD	Psychological Warfare Division (part of SHAEF)
PWE	Political Warfare Executive (Black and White propaganda)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RAFFFU	RAF Production Unit
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SIS	Secret Intelligence service
SOE	Special Overseas Executive
U-Boat	U-Boat German submarine
WRNS	Women's branch of the United Kingdom's Royal Navy.

Important officials in the MOI

Minister	Date Appointed
Lord Macmillan, GCVO, KC.	September 1939
Sir J.C.W. Reith, GCVO, MP	January 1940
A. Duff Cooper, DSO, MP.	May 1940
Brendan Bracken, MP.	July 1941

Parliamentary Secretary	
Sir E.W.M. Grigg	September 1939
Ernest Thurtle, MP.	July 1941

Director General and Secretary	
Sir Kenneth Lee	September 1939

Director General	
F. Pick	August 1940
Sir Walter Monckton, KCVO, MC, KC.	December 1940
C.J. Radcliffe, KC.	1941-1945
E.St.J. Bamford, CB, CMG.	1945

Deputy Director-General	
Sir Walter Monckton	April-December 1940
Lt. Colonel N.G. Scorgie	December 1940
C.J. Radcliffe	December 1940-September 1941
A. P. Waterfield	September-December 1941
E. St. J. Bamford, CB, CMG	January 1942-1945

John Reith	WW1 Head of MOI

Other MOI Staff

Mr Forbes	Deputy Director
Mary Adams	Home Intelligence Division, seconded from the BBC.
Julienne Aisner	Ex SOE, then worked in the Films Division
George Archibald	Advisor to the Films Division. Labour politician.
Thomas Baird	Head of Non-Theatrical Distribution of films at MOI
Major Sir Joseph Ball	Head Designate of Films Division, Head 1939-40.
L Brockington	Advisor to the MOI's Empire Division
Michael Balfour	Secretary to MOI Planning Committee. Lecturer in politics at Oxford University.
J. L. Beddington	Head of Films Division 1942. (Replaced K. Clark)
Lord Sidney Bernstein	Senior Advisor to War Cabinet and the Films Division. 1940-1945

John Betjeman	Films Division. Script checker 1940-42
Lt Colonel A C Bromhead	Honorary Adviser to Films Division, MOI, 1939-45. Checked *Target for Tonight*
Roger Burford	Films Division script expert
Kenneth Clark	Director of Films Division, MOI, art critic and historian, previously director of the National Gallery, London.
Lord Cranborne	MOI's Home Morale Committee member, 1940.
Robin Cruickshank	MOI American Division
Ian Dalrymple	Director - Crown Film Unit, 1940-43.
Lord Davidson	Controller of Production, MOI & Honorary adviser on commercial relations
Sir Arthur Elton	Head of Production 1941-44, Films Division. Film Advisor to Bernstein
Professor Ifor Evans	Member of the Intelligence Unit, MOI. University of London
Helen Forman	Films Division MOI June 1940 Deputy in non-theatrical distribution.
Sir E.W.M. Grigg	Parliamentary Secretary MOI September 1939-April 1940.
Tom Harrisson	Co-founder of Mass-Observation Unit, social research organisation
Professor John Hilton	Director of Home Publicity, MOI. Professor of Industrial Relations at Cambridge.
Sir Samuel Hoare	Responsible for overseeing the planning of the MOI.
Humphrey Jennings	Cinema Propaganda Department of the MOI Worked for a time for Mass-Observation Unit
Ivor Lamb	Films Division. Worked with Clark.
Sir Kenneth Lee	Director General and Secretary MOI 1937-40.
C.A. Lejeune	Film Critic of Observer. Helped supply and decide films for Churchill
Sir Ivison Macadam	Director - Home Publicity Division. June 1940
Charles Madge	Co-founder of Mass-Observation with Torn Harrisson.
E. L. Mercier	Films Division, Deputy Director. Involved in *Target for Tonight*
Sir Walter Turner Monckton	Director General, MOI, 1940-41
Louis Moss	Home Intelligence Division of the MOI. Supervised the Social Survey
Harold Nicolson	Under Sec to MOI: Kept diary of time at MOI
Frank Pick	Director General MOI August-December 1941.
Professor Arnold Plant	Planned Wartime Social Survey for MOI 1938 Professor of Commerce, University of London, planned the.
Sir Joseph Reeves	Films Division and Secretary of the Workers' Film Association
Simon Rowson	Specialist Film Advisor, Board of Trade
Marjorie Russell	Films Division. Script advisor in America
Lt-General W.H.L. Tripp	Naval Adviser to MOI 1939-1945. Censor.

Sir Edward Villiers	Director of New World Pictures Ltd. Appointed to oversee the Newsreel Section of MOI, when war broke out.
Harry Watt	British film director, joined Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, later the Crown Film Unit.
Douglas Williams	MOI American Division

Non-MOI people

Film-related

Eric Ambler	British Film director
Arthur Askey	Actor and Comedian from Music Halls
Anthony Asquith	Film Director
Margot Asquith	Member of Association of Cine Technicians
Michael Balcon	Head of Ealing Studios
Roy Boulting	British director
Alberto Cavalcanti	Art Director, Ealing Studios
Sidney Cole	Film Editor
Stephen Collins	Guardian film writer
Marian Cooper	American film producer. (*Eagle Squadron*)
Robin Cruickshank	US Press corps in London
Robert Donat	Film actor
Gracie Fields	Actor and Comedian from Music Hall
Flanagan and Allen	Actor and Comedian from Music Hall
George Formby	Actor and Comedian from Music Hall
Sidney Gilliat	Film Director and writer
Filippo del Giudice	Film Producer
Joseph Goebbels	German Propaganda chief
Geoff Grant	Writer in the US magazine *Variety*
John Grierson	British and Canadian documentary film maker
Alec Guinness	Actor
Will Hay	Actor and Comedian from Music Halls
James Hilton	Script writer
Stanley Holloway	Actor and Comedian from Music Hall
Leslie Howard	Actor and director.
C. A. Jejune	Film critic
Alexandra Korda	Founder of London Films. Director, Producer and Screenwriter
Alexander Mackendrick	American film director
Archibald Macleith the	US film representative of the OWI in the UK
Norman Mailer	American Writer
P.L. Mannock	Writer in *Kinematograph Weekly*
James Mason	Actor
Angus McPhail	British scriptwriter at Ealing studios

John Mills	Actor
Henry Moore	Sculpture and writer
David Niven	Soldier, Actor and advisor on films
Lawrence Olivier	Actor and director
Michael Powell	Film Director
Emeric Pressburger	Screenwriter
J. B. Priestly	Author and Broadcaster
Joseph Arthur Rank	Film producer and founder of the Rank organisation
Michael Redgrave	Actor
Carol Reed	Film Director
Quentin Reynolds	American journalist based in London (*Eagle Squadron*)
Ernest Schoedsack	American Director (*Eagle Squadron*)
Tommy Trinder	Actor and Comedian from Music Hall
Peter Ustinov	Actor and Writer
Walter Wanger	American film producer. (*Eagle Squadron*)
Jiri Weiss	Documentary filmmaker
Douglas Williams	US Press corps in London

Military and Government

Lord Alanbrooke	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
Clement Attlee	Deputy Prime Minister
Professor Fredric Bartlett	Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge. Expert on propaganda
Lord Beaverbrook	Minister of Aircraft production
Captain Brooking	Press Division of the Admiralty
H. B. Butler	Director-General of the British Information Service
Chamberlain	Prime Minister until November 1940
Winston Churchill	Prime Minister 1940 to 1945
Professor Gilbert Highet	Classics scholar. Colonel in British Intelligence
Sir Nevil Henderson	Ex German Ambassador
Louis Huot	OSS Officer
Ferdinand Kuhn	Deputy Director of the OWI
Wing-Commander Lawrence	RAF
George Orwell	Writer
Air Commodore Harold Peake	RAF. (*Eagle Squadron*)
Squadron Leader 'Percy' Pickard	RAF. Worked on the film *Target for Tonight*
Chief medical officer Dr Reid	RAF. As above
Sir Robert Renwick	Director of Communications AFU
Franklin D Roosevelt	President of the USA, 1933 to 1945
W.J. Speakman	President of the BFI
Clive Warner	Foreign Office (*Eagle Squadron*)
Squadron Leader Williams	RAF. (*Eagle Squadron*)

PROTAGONISTS AS HEROES
BRITISH FEATURE FILMS RELEASED BY YEAR

1939	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
A Gentleman's Gentleman		X		
A Girl Must Live		X		
Ask a Policeman	X			
Blind Folly		X		
Cheer Boys Cheer	X			
Clouds Over Europe		X	X	
Come on George!	X			
Dangerous Cargo		X		
Dangerous Masquerade		X		
Down Our Alley	X			
Flying Fifty-Five		X		
Home from Home	X			
Inquest		X	X	
Inspector Hornleigh		X		
Inspector Hornleigh on Holiday		X		
Let's Be Famous	X	X		
Lucky to Me		X		
Me and My Girl	X	X		
Me and My Pal	X	X		
Men Without Honour			X	

1939	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
Murder in the Night		X		
Murder Will Out		X		
Music Hall Parade	X			
Old Mother Riley Joins Up	X	X		
Old Mother Riley M.P.	X	X		
Poison Pen		X		
Remember When				
Shadows of the Underworld		X		
Shipyard Sally	X			
Sword of Honour		X	X	
The Arsenal Stadium Mystery	X	X		
The Body Vanished		X		
The Four Feathers		X	X	
The Frozen Limits	X			
The Lion Has Wings		X		
The Mikado				X
The Missing People		X	X	
The Mysterious Mr. Davis		X		
The Mysterious Mr. Reeder		X		
The Nursemaid Who Disappeared		X	X	
The Outsider		X	X	
The Saint in London		X	X	
The Secret Four		X	X	
The Spy in Black			X	

1939	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
The Torso Murder Mystery		X		
There Ain't No Justice	X			
Too Dangerous to Live		X		
Trouble Brewing	X			
Wanted by Scotland Yard		X		
What Would You Do, Chums?	X			
Where's That Fire?	X	X		
Who Is Guilty?		X	X	
Yes, Madam?		X		
Young Man's Fancy		X	X	

1940	**Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists**	**Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters**	**Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists**	**N/A**
All at Sea	X	X		
Band Waggon	X			
Blackout			X	
Bulldog Sees It Through		X		
Cavalcade of Variety	X			
Chamber of Horrors		X		
Charley's (Big-Hearted) Aunt	X	X		
Confidential Lady			X	
Contraband				X
Convoy	X	X		
Crimes at the Dark House			X	
Crook's Tour			X	
Dead Man's Shoes			X	
Dr. O'Dowd	X	X		
Fingers	X	X		
For Freedom	X	X		
Full Speed Ahead	X	X		
Garrison Follies	X	X		
Gaslight			X	
Gasbags	X			
George and Margaret	X	X		
Girl in the News			X	
Haunted Honeymoon			X	
Henry Steps Out	X			
His Brother's Keeper	X			

1940	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
Hoots Mon	X			
House of Mystery			X	
It Happened to One Man			X	
Jail Birds	X			
Just William			X	
Lady in Distress			X	
Laugh It Off	X			
Law and Disorder				X
Let George do it	X			
Mrs. Pym of Scotland Yard			X	
Neutral Port	X			
Night Train to Munich			X	
Old Bill and Son	X			
Old Mother Riley in Society	X			
Old Mother Riley in Business	X			
Olympic Honeymoon				
Pack Up Your Troubles	X			
Pastor Hall				X
Return to Yesterday	X	X		
Room for Two			X	
Sailors Don't Care	X			
Saloon Bar	X			
Shadowed Eyes			X	
She Couldn't Say No	X			
Somewhere in England	X			

1940	**Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists**	**Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters**	**Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists**	**N/A**
Spare a Copper	X			
Spy for a Day				X
Ten Days in Paris			X	
That's the Ticket	X			
The Briggs Family	X			
The Chinese Den			X	
The Flying Squad			X	
The Frightened Lady			X	
The Girl Who Forgot	X	X		
The Good Old Days	X	X		
The Midas Touch			X	
The Middle Watch	X	X		
The Proud Valley	X			
The Second Mr. Bush			X	
The Spider		X		
The Stars Look Down	X	X		
The Thief of Bagdad				X
They Came by Night	X			
Three Cockeyed Sailors	X			
Three Silent Men			X	
Tilly of Bloomsbury	X	X		
To Hell with Hitler	X			
Two for Danger		X		
Two Smart Men	X			
Under Your Hat	X			

1941	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
49th Parallel	X	X		
Banana Ridge	X	X		
Black sheep of Whitehall	X			
Bobs your uncle	X			
Breach of promise			X	
Danny Boy	X			
Facing the Music	X	X		
Gert and Daisy's weekend	X			
He Found a Star	X	X		
Hi Gang!	X	X		
I Thank You	X	X		
Jeannie			X	
Love on the Dole	X	X		
Mail Train	X	X		
Major Barbara	X	X		
My Wife's Family	X	X		
Old Mother Riley's Circus	X			
Old Mother Riley's Ghosts	X			
Once a Crook	X			
Penn of Pennsylvania				X
'Pimpernel' Smith			X	
Quiet Wedding	X	X		
Sheepdog of the Hills	X	X		
Ships with Wings	X	X		
South American George	X			

1941	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
The Common Touch	X	X		
The Farmer's Wife	X	X		
The Ghost of St. Michael's	X			
The Ghost Train	X			
The Patient Vanishes	X	X		
The Prime Minister			X	
The Seventh Survivor	X	X		
The Remarkable Mr. Kipps	X	X		
This England			X	
Tower of Terror	X	X		
Turned Out Nice Again	X			
You Will Remember	X	X		
You're telling me	X	X		

1942	**Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists**	**Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters**	**Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists**	**N/A**
Alibi	X	X	X	
Asking for Trouble	X			
Back-Room Boy	X	X		
Banana Ridge			X	
Courageous Mr. Penn				X
Flying Fortress	X	X		
Front Line Kids	X			
Gert and Daisy Clean Up	X			
Hard Steel		X	X	
In Which We Serve		X	X	
King Arthur Was a Gentleman	X			
Lady from Lisbon		X	X	
Let the People Sing	X	X		
Much Too Shy				
One of Our Aircraft Is Missing		X	X	
Rose of Tralee				X
Sabotage at Sea	X	X		
Salute John Citizen	X			
Secret Mission			X	
Somewhere in Camp	X	X		
Somewhere on Leave	X	X		
Squadron Leader	X	X		
Suspected Person	X			
Talk About Jacqueline			X	

1942	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
The Balloon Goes Up	X	X		
The Big Blockade	X	X		
The First of the Few	X	X		
The Foreman Went to France	X	X		
The Goose Steps Out	X			
The Great Mr. Handel				X
The Missing Million	X	X		
The Next of Kin	X	X		
The Night Has Eyes				
The Seventh Survivor	X	X		
The Young Mr. Pitt				X
This Was Paris			X	
Those Kids from Town	X	X		
Thunder Rock	X	X		
Uncensored	X	X		
Unpublished Story	X	X		
We'll Meet Again	X	X		
We'll Smile Again	X	X		
Went the Day Well?	X	X		
Women aren't Angels	X	X		

1943	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
Adventure for Two	X	X		
Bell Bottom George	X			
Deadlock				
Dear Octopus	X	X		
Escape to Danger			X	
Get Cracking	X			
Headline			X	
Hippodrome				
I'll Walk Beside You		X	X	
It Started at Midnight				X
Its in the Bag	X			
It's That Man Again	X			
Millions Like Us	X	X		
Miss London Ltd	X			
My Learned Friend	X	X		
Nine Men	X	X		
Old Mother Riley Detective	X	X		
Old Mother Riley Overseas	X	X		
Playtime for Workers	X			
Rhythm Serenade	X	X		
San Demetrio London	X	X		
Somewhere in Civvies	X			
Somewhere on Leave	X	X		
The Adventures of Tartu			X	
The Bells Go Down	X	X		

1943	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
The Butler's Dilemma	X	X		
The Dark Tower	X	X		
The Dummy Talks	X			
The Flemish Farm	X	X		
The Gentle Sex	X	X		
The Hundred Pound Window	X	X		
The Lamp Still Burns	X	X		
The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp			X	
The Man in Grey			X	
The Night Invader			X	
The Shipbuilders	X			
The Silver Fleet				X
Theatre Royal	X			
They Met in the Dark			X	
Thursday's Child	X	X		
Underground Guerrillas	X			
Up with the Lark	X			
Variety Jubilee	X			
Warn That Man	X			
We Dive at Dawn		X	X	
We'll Meet Again	X	X		
When We Are Married	X	X		
Women Aren't Angels	X	X		
Yellow Canary			X	

1944	**Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists**	**Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters**	**Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists**	**N/A**
A Canterbury Tale	X	X		
A Lady Surrenders	X	X		
A Night of Magic			X	
Bees in Paradise				X
Candlelight in Algeria				X
Candles at Nine				
Champagne Charlie	X			
Demobbed				X
Don't Take it to Heart				X
Dreaming				X
Fiddlers Three				X
For Those in Peril	X	X		
Give Me the Stars				
Give Us the Moon	X	X		
He Stoops to Conquer				
Heaven Is Round the Corner	X	X		
Her Man Gilbey			X	
Hotel Reserve	X			
It Happened One Sunday	X	X		
It's in the Bag	X	X		
Kiss the Bride Goodnight				X
Love Story		X		
Man of Evil		X		
Meet Sexton Blake	X	X		
Mr. Emmanuel	X	X		

| 1944	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
My Ain Folk	X	X		
Now It Can Be Told				X
On Approval			X	
Rainbow Round the Corner	X			
Starlight Serenade	X	X		
Tawny Pipit	X	X		
The Gay Intruders OR Medal for the General				
The Halfway House	X	X		
The Hundred Pound Window	X	X		
The Way Ahead	X	X		
They Came to a City	X	X		
This Happy Breed	X	X		
Time Flies	X	X		
Twilight Hour			X	
Two Thousand Women	X	X		
Welcome, Mr. Washington	X	X		

1945	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
A Place of One's Own		X	X	
A Yank in London		X	X	
Blithe Spirit			X	
Brief Encounter		X	X	
Caesar and Cleopatra				X
Dead of Night		X	X	
Don Chicago	X	X		
Flight from Folly	X	X		
For You Alone	X	X		
Frenzy		X	X	
Give Me the Stars	X	X		
Great Day		X	X	
He Snoops to Conquer	X	X		
Home Sweet Home	X			
I Didn't Do It	X			
I Know Where I'm Going!		X	X	
I'll Be Your Sweetheart	X	X		
Johnny Frenchman	X	X		
Johnny in the Clouds		X	X	
Journey Together	X	X		
Kiss the Bride Goodbye	X	X		
Madonna of the Seven Moons				X
Meet Sexton Blake!		X	X	
My Ain Folk	X	X		
Notorious Gentleman				X

1945	Features in which members of the working classes are protagonists	Clear interaction in plot between working-class characters and middle or upper-class characters	Features in which only members of the middle/upper classes are protagonists	N/A
Old Mother Riley at Home	X			
Pink String and Sealing Wax	X	X		
Query	X	X		
The Agitator	X	X		
The Echo Murders		X		
The Facts of Love		X		
The Girl of the Canal		X		
The Man from Morocco		X		
The Man with the Magnetic Eyes	X	X		
The Seventh Veil		X	X	
The Wicked Lady		X	X	
The World Owes Me a Living		X	X	
They Were Sisters (		X		
Twilight Hour		X		
Vacation from Marriage			X	
Waltz Time	X			
Waterloo Road	X			
What Do We Do Now?	X			

MOI Diagrams: Key departments involving film and propaganda

Organisation 1939 (From the Archives)

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
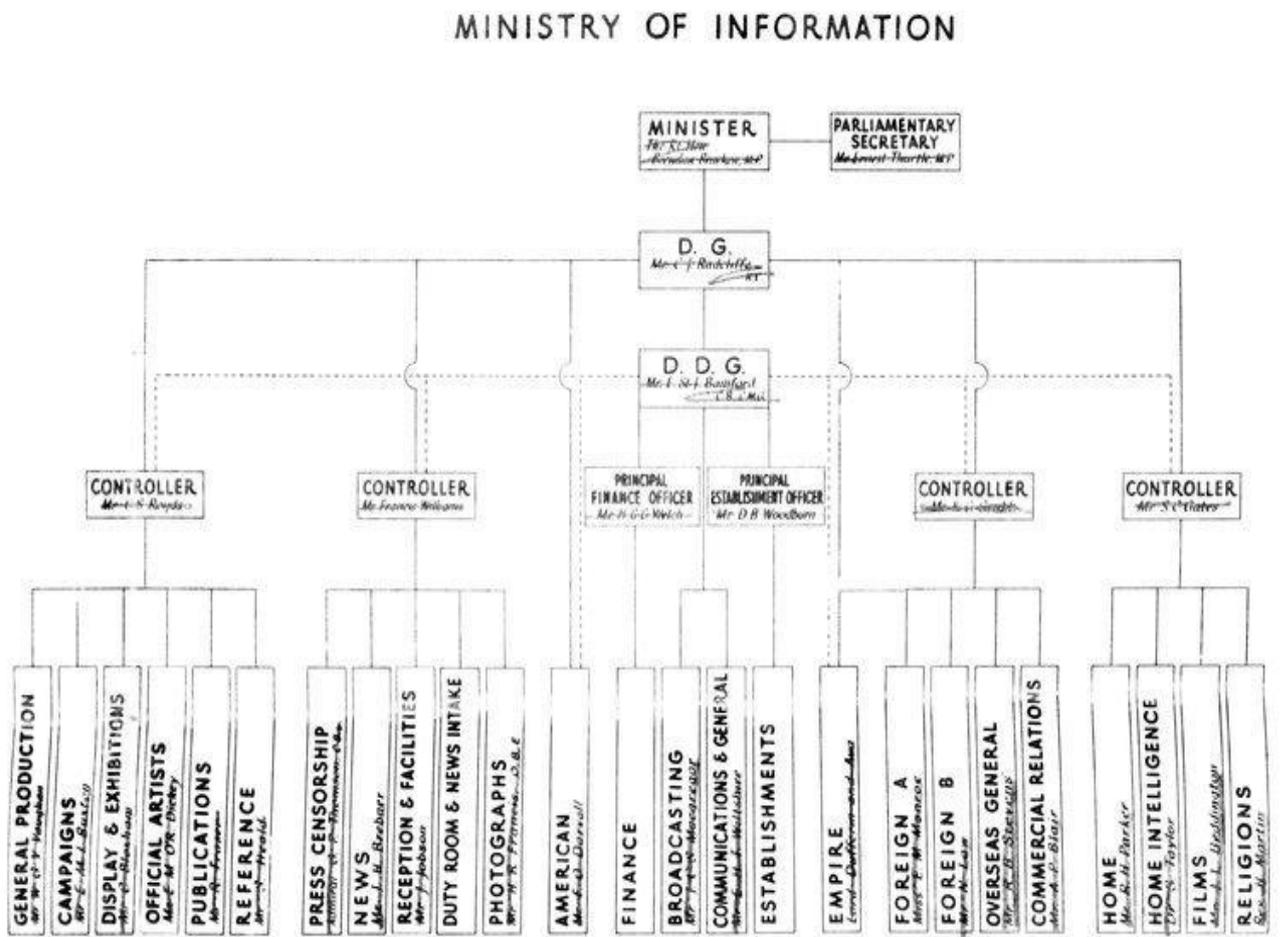
Ministry Of Information Hierarchy 1939
(Structure on initial setup)

Ministry Of Information

Planning Committee

Policy Committee

Documentary News Letter

Film Division

Press and Censorship Bureau

Intelligence Division

Film Studios

Information and control :   Critical Comment:
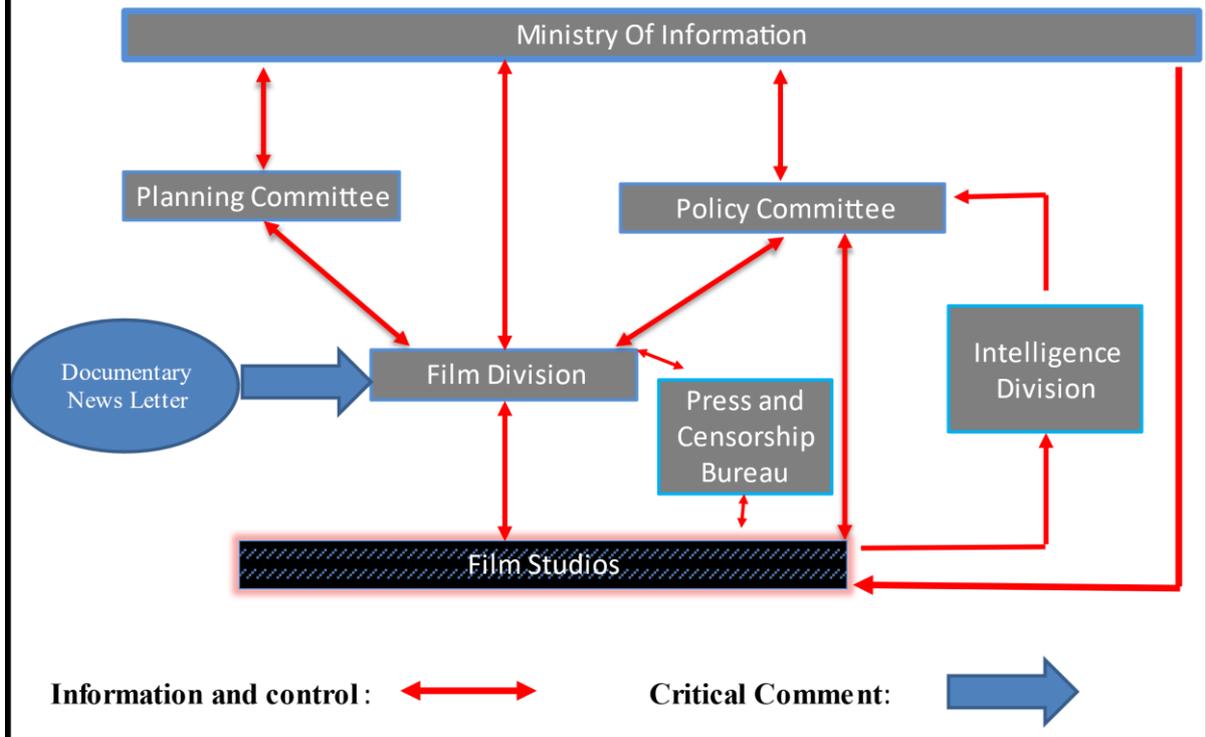
Ministry Of Information Hierarchy 1940

(Addition of Crown Film Unit but loss of Intelligence and Press groups)

Ministry Of Information

| Planning Committee | | Policy Committee |

| Documentary News Letter | → | Film Division | Crown Film Unit |

Film Studios
Ealing	Rank	Gainsborough

Information and control: ←→   **Critical Comment:** ⟹
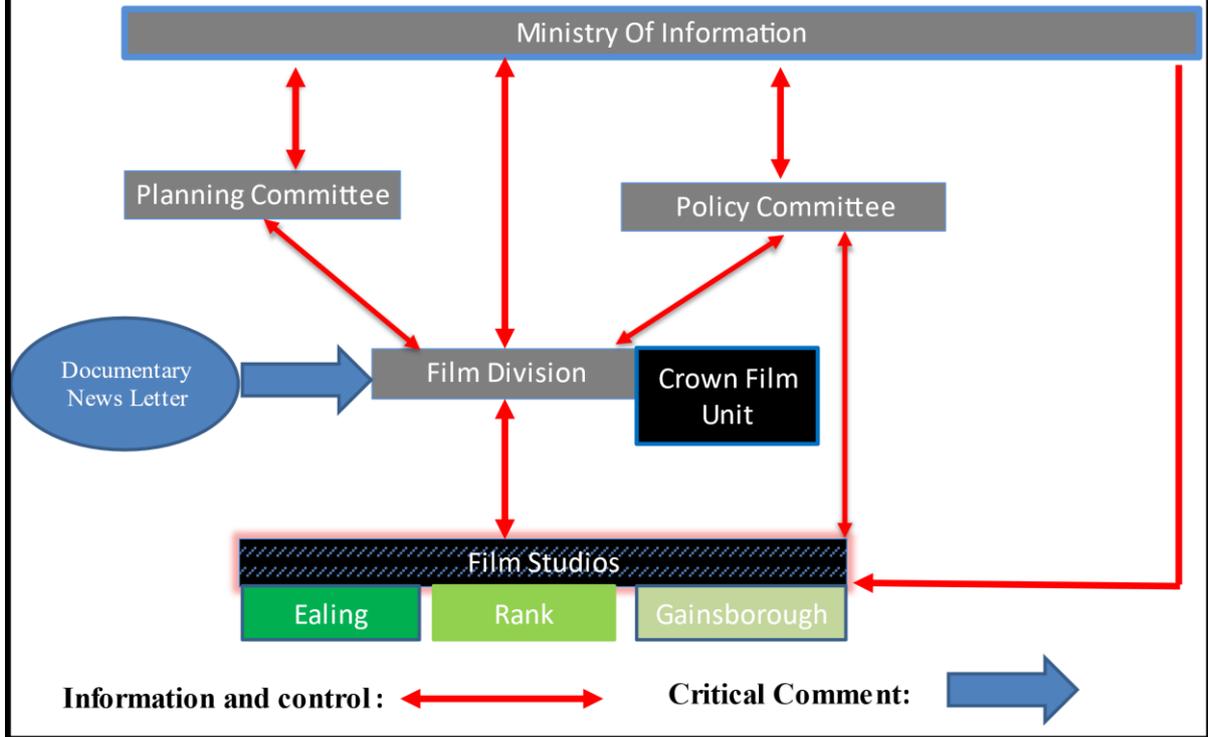
Ministry Of Information Hierarchy 1941

(Addition of Ideas Committee)

Ministry Of Information

Planning Committee

Policy Committee

Documentary News Letter

Film Division

Crown Film Unit

Ideas Committee

Film Studios

Ealing

Rank

Gainsborough

Information and control :

Critical Comment:
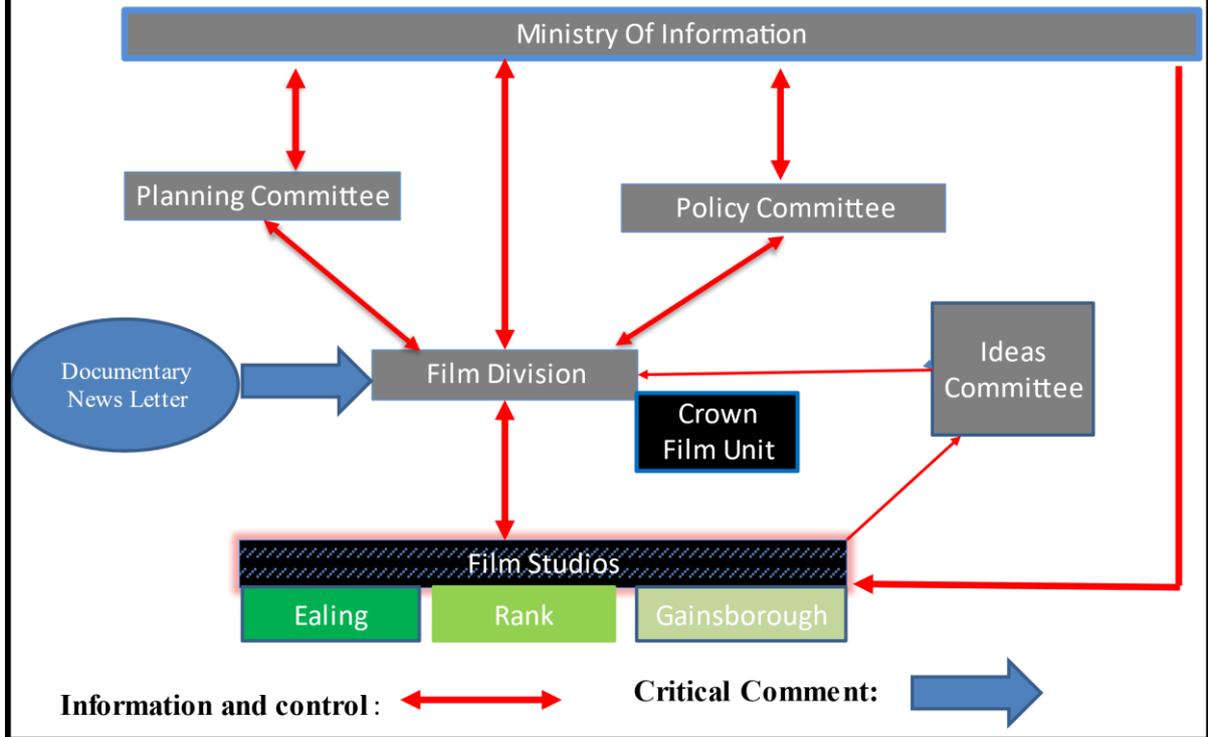
Ministry Of Information Hierarchy 1942
(The Americans Division gets involved)

Ministry Of Information

Planning Committee

Policy Committee

American Division

Film Division

Ideas Committee

Crown Film Unit

Film Studios

Ealing

Rank

Gainsborough

Information and control
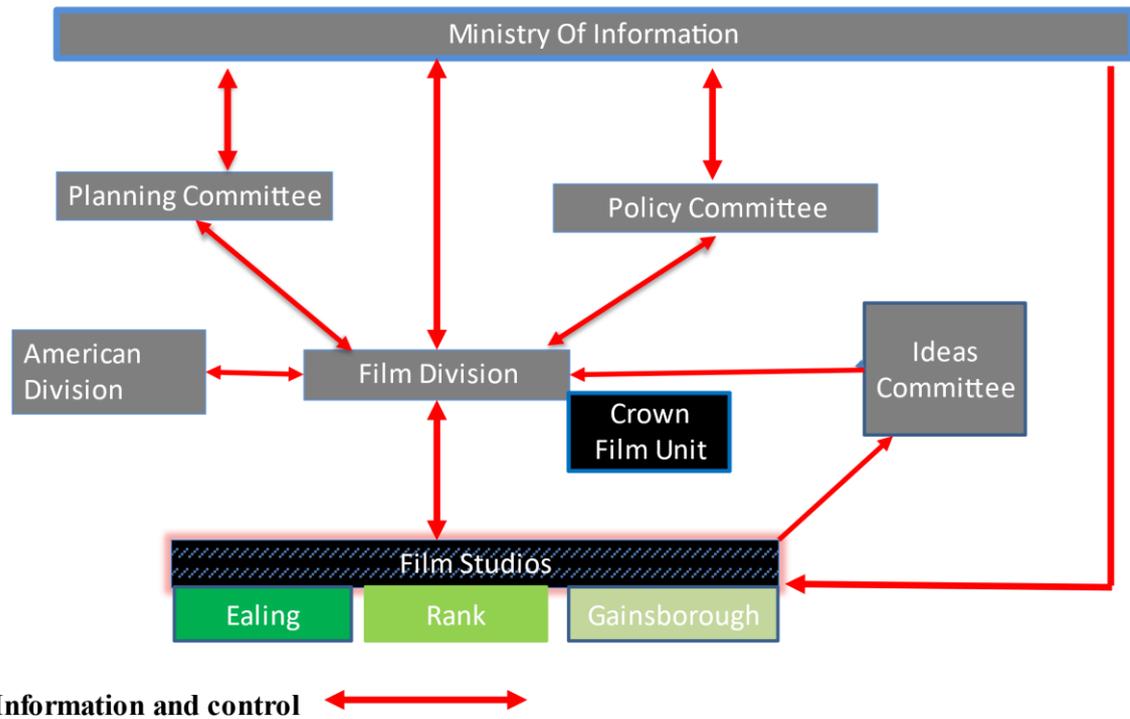
1944: Main military and political groups involved in film making displaying main lines of communication

Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF)
Psychological Warfare Division (PWD)

War Cabinet

Ministry of Information (MOI)
Films Division

Office of War Information (OWI)

British Film Producers Association (BFPA)

Political Warfare Executive (PWE)

Service Film Publicity Planning Committees

Joint Anglo-American Planning Committee