

**THE PROFESSIONAL OFFICER CLASS IN POST-  
WAR CINEMA—  
OR HOW BRITISH FILMS LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE  
AFFLUENT SOCIETY**

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## ABSTRACT

My central argument is that mainstream British cinema of the 1951 – 1965 period marked the end of the paternalism, as exemplified by a professional ‘officer class’, as consumerism gradually came to be perceived as the norm as opposed to a post-war enemy. The starting point is 1951, the year of the Conservative victory in the General Election and a time which most films were still locally funded. The closing point is 1965, by which point the vast majority of British films were funded by the USA and often featured a youthful and proudly affluent hero.

Thus, this fourteen year describes how British cinema moved away from the People as Hero guided by middle class professionals in the face of consumerism. Over the course of this work, I will analyse the creation of the archetypes of post-war films and detail how the impact of consumerism and increased Hollywood involvement in the UK film industry affected their personae. However, parallel with this apparently linear process were those films that questioned or attacked the wartime consensus model. As memories of the war receded, and the Rank/ABPC studio model collapsed, there was an increasing sense of deracination across a variety of popular British cinematic genres. From the beginning of our period there is a number films that infer that the “Myth of the Blitz”, as developed in a cinematic sense, was just that and our period ends with films that convey a sense of a fragmenting society.

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## INTRODUCTION

John Mills, Richard Attenborough, John Gregson, Dirk Bogarde, Donald Sinden...are grown-up boys, trusting, vulnerable, decently worried and ready aye ready. (Durgnat 1970: 142)

The genesis of this thesis was the idea that the period of between 1951 and 1965 marked a sea change in the image of the middle class male in British cinema. This work will chart the change from the paternally minded professional whose skills guide society - a legacy of the 'People as Hero' model of Second World War cinema - to an isolated, anachronistic or even criminal figure. At the beginning of the 1950s Roy Lewis and Angus Maude described the English middle classes as providing 'most of the nation's brains, leadership and organising ability' (1950: 337). For much of the 1950s, a range of popular British cinematic genres - comedy, war and detective drama - were apparently dominated by well-spoken senior professional.

These figures would often arrive in their black Wolseley<sup>1</sup> - or who inspired their chaps to win the war. Their young subordinates would, in turn, willingly accept the verbal abuse issued by bearded curmudgeons. By the end of the 1950s in the face of consumer affluence 'the high summer of a middle class cinema' (Durgnat 1976:1) was coming to an end as seen in the mainstream of British films. In the planning and execution of this thesis I have borne in mind the wise words of Arthur Marwick - 'we think readily in decades but that is only because we count the years as we would our fingers or our toes' (1998: 5).

Thus, a 14 year period bordered by the last year of the Attlee government - and the development of the 'Swinging London myth' has been chosen with some deliberation. This period encompassed a substantial growth of consumerism, the collapse of the country's illusions in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis and the rise of 'youth culture', which I will detail in Chapter 12. I have concentrated on the genres that directly related to the topic in hand - war films, comedies, police drama and youth films - to describe how they moved from pictures constructed of 'imaginary bonds which work to hold the peoples of a nation together' (Higson 1984: 26), guided by senior professionals, to those films apparently celebrating youthful individualism. Throughout my work, I will be describing how various determinants shaped the



films discussed – government initiatives, censorship<sup>1</sup> and financial pressures. The majority of these pictures were created under the auspices of an elaborate studio system but by the end of the 1950s, the decline in cinematic audiences had resulted in Rank and ABPC scaling down their roster of in-house actors and directors. As Roy Armes observed:

Whereas in 1950 there were less than 400,000 licences, by 1959 this had grown to over 9m... During the same period, the cinema audience and the number of cinemas both fell sharply. In 1950 an audience measuring 1,396m visited 4,483 cinemas. By 1959 this had diminished to about 600m attendances and only 3,414 cinemas. (1978: 239)

From the late 1950s, there were a number of films helmed by directors previously assumed as being from the mainstream of cinema that displayed a society that was becoming neither in need of nor beyond the control of paternal control. Figures of apparent probity were often perceived as more flawed than hitherto and by the 1960s, senior professionals seemed increasingly marginalised or even corrupt as memories of the war rescinded. The increased use of external production companies and sense of increased freedom from studio control coalesced with a more liberal regime at the British Board of Film Censors introduced in 1958. That is the major thrust of my thesis but it is first essential to define my terms, not least ‘mainstream’; I use this to describe films made for commercial release during our period. This may sound excessively pedantic but a major part of my thesis is how, even within the tightest of budgetary and creative restrictions, British films could and did question the status quo –even in the form of a seemingly innocuous comedy, such as *Genevieve* (Henry Cornelius 1953). It was also mainstream cinema of this period that produced Stanley Baker, British cinema’s first young working class leading man.

The film critic Roger Manvell categorised cinema into three distinct strata. There was the ‘high film’ that enthused creative professionals and film critic alike, the ‘low film’ in the form of the ‘programme filler’ and ‘the middle film’ which was a box office staple and offered ‘sound entertainment without demanding too much or too little of the audience’s sensibilities’ (1947:10). It is the ‘middle film’, the type of picture associated with mainstream British cinema that will predominate in my thesis for, as Robert Murphy argued:

When any thought at all is given to the British film industry in the 50s then the tendency is to categorise it as a dull period between the gritty realism of the war years and the American backed 'Swinging London' films of the 60s. Ealing declined, the documentary movement disappeared and cinemas closed in their thousands as audiences turned away from the predominant fare of nostalgic war films and inane

comedies to their television sets. Looked at more closely, this dismal picture of decline dissolves to reveal British cinema as surprisingly robust, fertile and adaptable. (1997:1)

1 The British Board of Film Censors came into being in 1913 as a self-regulating body without any formal legal status in order to prevent the imposition of censorship by central government. (Robertson 1989:1)

This is why the study of ABPC or Rank studio productions, the commercially popular MGM-British comedy-thrillers and certain long-running B-film series is as valuable as the study of Woodfall Films. Towards the end of the decade it was not Free Cinema but two long established commercial filmmakers who made the most scathing and angry pictures of our period in *I'm All Right Jack* (John Boulting 1959) and *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton 1959). Part of the *raison d'être* behind my work is a reappraisal of the genres that seemingly asserted solidity and the status quo in the first half of our period – war, police and comedy. Charles Barr referred the period 1952 – 1958 as ‘an extraordinary dead one’ (1993: 146) and Jeffrey Richards described mainstream cinema of this period in terms of:

the war films that relived old glories, the Norman Wisdom comedies that trod in the footsteps of George Formby, the anemic 'international' epics which aimed futilely to break into the American market and which misused the sensitive talents of such stars as Dirk Bogarde and Peter Finch. (1997: 147)

However, as Sue Harper and Vincent Porter so appositely note, the British film of the 1950s was ‘a dynamic and often confusing period in which new and old methods fought, often to the death’(2007: 2). The war, police and comedy genres of the 1950s often contain trenchant observations on the pressure required in maintaining the guise or mask of the fatherly stiff upper lip. This was intensified by a greater sense of freedom for ‘mainstream’ filmmakers in the post- studio era. Victor Perkins famously claimed in the first edition of *Movie* magazine that ‘We are unable to find evidence of artistic sensibilities in working order’ (1962:3). But a major part of this thesis will describe how such works by Val Guest, Bryan Forbes or Basil Dearden criticize the status quo in a manner equal to or more intense than Free Cinema. Equally, British cinema, began to depict teenagers and young people as positive forces the result, towards the end of our period, but the results often evoked a sense of loss as memories of the People as Hero model retreated or mutated into a form of nostalgia.

## **Literature Review**

When describing how my work will add to the discipline of British film history I would argue that it is vital to explain how this developed as a separate and specific field of enquiry. This explains both my selection of source material and how my work will add to the field. In discussing academic work directly concerning the UK film industry one must first consider the point made by Alan Lovell in his essay *The Unknown Cinema of Britain*:

There is no general history of British cinema except for one trivial undocumented books (*Where We Came In* by Charles Oakley). The scholarly volumes by Rachel Low have not yet reached the sound period. There is only one popular biography of Sir

Alexander Korda. There is no full-scale biography of the Rank Organisation (although Alan Wood's biography of Lord Rank has some useful information), no account of the Associated British Picture Corporation. (1972: 1)

In short, Lovell concluded that British cinema was indeed unknown and so the first title that I referred to is, almost inevitably, Raymond Durnat's 1970 tome *A Mirror for England*. What makes this work so useful, and indeed so abidingly compelling, to the writer of 2015 is his seamless blend of cinephile enthusiasm with aesthetic appreciation:

If clearly marked personal style is one's criterion of interest then few British films reward the concern given to such directors as, say, Dreyer, Bunuel, Franju and Renoir. But other criteria of interest exist, whereby many of the subtlest meanings behind a personal style may be related to a collective vision of a particular tradition, period, background or "school". It is logical and usual to consider even impersonal and anonymous artworks as an expression of a general consensus. (Durnat 1970:4)

*A Mirror for England* evinced a willingness to discuss the works of Powell and Pressburger, Relph and Dearden and Rogers and Thomas on equal terms. This was vital not just in terms of spurring the growing legitimisation of British cinema as worthy of study but in doing so certain directors were indeed argued to have a 'particular style'.

Naturally there are limitations within Durnat's work - in the late 1960s it was impossible for the author to have recently seen all of the films covered in his book so he relied on a not always accurate memory as to plot details and work in some popular genres – Anglo-Amalgamated's *Scotland Yard* series for example – are lacking. However, his blend of academic rigour and wit as a writer (unlike certain a film authors past and present he is not inclined to leave the reader in a tundra of boredom) give *A Mirror for England* a sense of passion. Nor, unlike Roy Armes' *A Critical History of British Cinema* (1978), was he inclined to moralise.

Armes also complained that 'it is virtually impossible - despite the wealth of talent and occasional achievements of outstanding quality- to find a British film-making career that has the fullness of that of, say, Jean Renoir or Howard Hawks (1978: 335) although Robert Shail does note that when Armes was writing his study 'monographs on British directors were few and far between' (2007: 3). Alexander Walker's journalistic work of cinema history

*Hollywood, England* (1974) did cover in depth the careers of a variety of British-based directors, from Bryan Forbes to Richard Lester and his book proved particularly useful for its emphasis on the business aspects of British cinema. Walker also examined the debt that cinematic depictions of the 1960s owed to 'the massive American presence' (1973: i) in the industry.

The third book I wish to refer to is Charles Barr's *Ealing Studios* (1977, updated in 1993). This represented a breakthrough - in 1972 Lovell noted a lack of work about the studio - and providing another vital source, as Barr analyses the studio's output and makes a strong case for linking their output to the national mood but in how he frames the story of Ealing as just one narrative in British cinema. In doing so, he further established the sub-discipline of what I would refer to as contextual British cinematic history.

Further titles in this regard include *Best of British* (Antony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards 1983), which contended that popular feature films represented important evidence for understanding 20th century history. *All Our Yesterdays* (ed. Barr 1986), set out, in the words of Julian Petley, to explore the 'lost continent' of British cinema (1986: 98-119). In that same year John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism* (BFI) concentrated on both the 'Kitchen Sink' and the 'Social Problem' pictures made between 1956 and 1963. Of the latter, he argues that their well-meaning liberalism obstructed as much as enlighten (1986: 3), a point which I will consider in more depth in Chapter 11.

In *All Our Yesterdays*, Steve Neale and Andrew Higson argued that cinematic academe was 'still orienteering itself by a map of British cinema drawn up many years ago' (1986: 6). However, by the end of the century there was such a revival of academic interest in this subject that Alan Lovell could now claim that:

In the space of twenty- five years we have moved from scarcity to abundance. There are now solid histories of the British cinema; detailed explorations of British genre film- making; analyses of important historical 'moments'; critical examinations of important film-makers; wide-ranging anthologies; informed discussions of the economic and cultural context of current British film-making; informative accounts of Welsh and Scottish film-making. (2001:200)

This revival of interest took, as Lovell infers, several forms, all of which I have employed in the course of my research- genre, period, filmmakers and actors. *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960* (Marcia Landy 1991) covered a wide variety of cinematic genres, such as war, melodrama, comedy, and social problem, arguing that they often dramatised unresolved

cultural conflicts in a subtle manner. I also made use of Robert Murphy's re-evaluation of the 1950s war film in his *British Cinema and the Second World War* (2000) and James Chapman's *A Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (1999). Another resource in this vein is Christine Geraghty's *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (2000). This provides a view of the various responses of 1950s British films to the challenges of modernity, with an emphasis on gender roles, in the context of popular cinema going. Her book focuses on the construction of pictures of this era in terms of the expectations of audiences and commentators of that decade – as opposed to studio policies and box office returns (2000:1). Two of her contentions have proved especially interesting – the idea of safe zones to be found in the English landscape (2000: 52) and in Second World War narratives (2000:195), both of which points I consider in the course of this thesis.

A further reflection of the recent interest in British cinema is Routledge's *British Popular Cinema* series, and I have referred to *British Crime Cinema* (eds. Steve Chibnall and Robert Murphy 1999), *British Science Fiction Cinema* (ed. I Q Hunter 1999) and *British Comedy Cinema* (eds. I Q Hunter and Laraine Porter 2012). Brian McFarlane and Steve Chibnall's *The British B-Film* (2009) is a publication concerning a genre of popular film that had been extremely critically overlooked before that point. *Ealing Revisited* (Duguid, Freeman et al 2012) was of particular interest for its emphasis on disproving the view still held in some quarters that the studio's output was largely 'cosy' or 'safe' and in its consideration of Ealing's output, beyond its comedy films.

The past 25 years has also seen a number of books devoted to previously neglected periods of British cinema and I employed the resources of three notable titles. Robert Murphy's *Sixties British Cinema* (1992) was written at a time when there had been 'little attempt to chart this sea of films' (4) – albeit with the possible exception of *Hollywood, England* – and he analysed both the industry from the perspective of the economic historian and the films as an aesthete. *Sixties British Cinema* gives giving equal measure to the US backed 'Swinging London' products as he did to offerings largely overlooked by Walker: black and white offerings from Merton Park Studios and popular British comedies of the era. Indeed, one of the strengths of Murphy's work is that he treats a modest black and white comedy such as *The Night We Got The Bird* (Darcy Conyers 1960) with the same degree of scholarship as *Laurence of Arabia* (David Lean 1962), thereby allowing the reader to realise how multifaceted British films of this were. An observation he makes in his introduction has especial pertinence for my 'Swinging London' chapter – 'the idea that most films between 1965 and

1970 promoted a mindlessly optimistic view of the world is more of a myth than the myth the films are assumed to convey' (1992: 4).

Secondly, there is *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration: An Art in Peacetime* (eds. Neil Sinyard and Ian Mackillop 2000), which strongly sets out its raison d'être in the introduction:



In the recent edition of the *Journal of Popular British Cinema* (Flicks Books 2001), Roy Stafford quotes some representative views of British cinema of the 1950s: 'timid', 'complacent', 'safe', 'dim', 'anodyne' are the adjectives used, with the judgement being that this is the 'doldrums era'. British cinema at this time consists of parochial comedy— what one might compositely call the 'Carry On Doctor at St Trinian's' school of mirth — weary transpositions of West End successes, and bland World War II heroics designed to steel us against the loss of the Empire. But is this really true? (3)

If Murphy was often writing about forgotten aspects of 1960s films then *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration* was challenged the reader to perceive apparently familiar genres in a more enlightened sense. War films are seen less as pictures that were often less nostalgic than quite devastating evocations of masculinity breaking under pressure – John Mills in *Ice Cold in Alex* (J Lee Thompson 1958) is described as 'tremulous, sulky, simpering and vulnerable' (2000:3). There are also many examples of the sheer visual bravura of films of this decade. *The Long Arm* (Charles Frennd 1956) was, by 2000, an Ealing picture that was a staple of of afternoon television in the 1970 and dismissed by Charles Barr as resembling the pilot for a TV feature. Yet, Sinyard and Mackillop point out the 'teasingly deceptive flashback in the manner of Hitchcock' (2000: 5) as just of one the details that belie the 1950s British policer's stolid. reputation.

The third work that provided a great deal of inspiration is Sue Harper and Vincent Porter's *British cinema in the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (2003). This proved to be of particular interest for its research into all aspect of production policies of that period, paying equal attention to the major domestic studios and the UK arms of Hollywood majors. *British cinema in the 1950s* also provided vivid illustrations of the various governmental policies regarding cinematic funding, such as the Eady Levy extensively details the extent of US funding in UK films of that decade. Harper and Porter emphasise that Hollywood-backed pictures that dominated British cinemas by the end of our period were a logical progression from the 1950s. The book also details the work of vital members of the film production process that rarely featured in scholarly works– such as script editors – and in doing so Harper and Porter give an insight into what was at that time a major industry in the last decade of mass cinema going.

The 1990s and 2010s also saw a revaluation of previously overlooked directors, as typified by *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture* (Burton, 'Sullivan et al 1999) and *Liberal Directions; Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture* (Burton, O'Sullivan et al 2000). The Manchester University Press British Film Makers series covers the careers of J Lee Thompson (Steve Chibnall 2000), Jack Clayton (Neil Sinyard 2000) and

Lance Comfort (McFarlane 1999), all of whose films are considered by this thesis. In addition, the past two decades has seen the publication of a number of tomes that sought to

examine British film history within the context of industry politics and economics. This is valuable in itself, given that many films ‘are not so much personal works of art as, to use the term employed in the television industry, “product”’ (Aldgate and Richards 1999: 5) - but also in correcting certain myths. Geoffrey Macnab’s *J Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (1993) re-evaluates the relationship between Michael Balcon and John Davis. Vincent Porter’s work on ABPC has shed light on a previously little represented aspect of cinema despite the commercial significance of Associated British to post-war films.

There has also been an expansion in the books dealing with British film stardom and acting - a comparative rarity until the 1990s. *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (Brian McFarlane 1997), Andrew Spicer’s *Typical Men* (2003) and *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery* (ed. Bruce Babington 2001) have all proven fascinating in their exploration of the depictions of screen image and the elements that went towards their construct. Spicer’s work was in fact the first major book-length study of masculinity in British films cinema, and was of particular interest for its careful and detailed exploration of post-war textual configurations of cinematic masculinity, of all social classes. Throughout *Typical Men*, Spicer provides a ‘cartography of varying masculinities... that tries to account for their presence and the reasons for the changes that occur’ (2003:5). In doing so, he painstakingly acknowledged the ways in which cinematic configurations of masculinity are ‘complex, mutable signifiers whose meanings change over time through their deployment in different contexts’ (2003: 1). *Typical Men* also encompassed surveys of the screen personae of actors who have often been either overlooked or virtually taken for granted such as Jack Warner or Kenneth More.

The early years of this century have been marked by the rise in publications in books devoted to one particular film or actor. Of the former, there has been I B Tauris’ *Film Guides*, and the BFI Film Classics series and of the latter there has been Gil Plain’s work on the cinema career of John Mills (2006), which uses the actor’s changing screen persona over a long career to explore constructions of British masculinity. However, the most interesting books often lie outside of film studies; prime examples include Roger Lewis’ idiosyncratic biography of Peter Sellers (Lewis 1994) and John Coldstream’s analysis of the life and career of Dirk Bogarde (2004). I have deliberately minimised references to the memoirs of actors or directors, ghosted or otherwise. The former, although sometimes containing interesting detail about certain films, were too often filtered through the patina of middle-aged nostalgia and the latter were often exercises in fiction in their own right. Bogarde’s facility as a writer make

it tempting to use his volumes of memoirs but Coldstream's recent biography casts strong doubt as to their veracity.

In order to understand both how film reflected British life during this period I have made extensive use of Angus Calder's tomes on the Second World War - *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (1992) and *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991). I have also referred to Arthur Marwick's surveys of the post-war Britain in *British Society Since 1945* and *The Sixties: The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-74* (1999). More recent sources of wisdom have included the works of David Kynaston – *Family Britain 1951 – 1957* (2009), *Modernity Britain, Opening the Box, 1957 – 1959* and *Modernity Britain: Book Two: A Shake of the Dice, 1959 – 1962* and Dominic Sandbrook's *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (2005). The views of the last three books will be considered in more depth in Chapter 2 but, as with Richard Davenport-Hines' *An English Affair: Sex, Class and Power in the Age of Profumo* (2013) they all work beautifully as studies of milieu.

In terms of how films of this period could reflect a sense of national identity – or identities, I have cited Andrew Higson's *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (1997), which questioned how a Hollywood dominated industry could be a national cinema from a historical point of view. Jeffrey Richards' *Films and British Identity: From Dickens to 'Dad's Army'* (1997) considered the ways in which films could mythify a national identity. A theme of my work is the significance of the depiction of landscape – both rural and urban – in the cinematic construct of a national identity I found Jerry White's *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001) and Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography* (2001) of particular value for their respective insights into the changing face of the capital. The histories of David Cannadine – *Class in Britain* (2000) and *In Churchill's Shadow* (2002) and Peter Hennessy's *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (2006) - allow for great insights into the social and political forces that helped to shape the society that viewed the films of this era. Cannadine's idea that 'master narrative built around a very different notion of class: class as social description, social perception, social identities, and political creation' (2000:175) was of particular worth in considering filmic depictions of the middle classes during the period in question. Hennessy's book manages a vastly difficult feat of combining insights into 1950s politics with impressions of a decade of one who experienced it; his memories of the steam express crossing the Forth Bridge on the opening credits of *Six-Five Special* are especially charming.

In addition, I have made reference to those secondary sources that afford greater insight into the genres dealt with in this thesis such as conscription – Richard Vinen's *National Service: A Generation in Uniform 1945 – 1963* (2014) and crime – Donald Thomas' *Villains' Paradise – A History of the Underworld* (2006). In terms of primary source material, I have referred to film

trade journals such as *Kine Weekly*, general overviews such as Terence Kelly's *A Competitive Cinema* (Kelly with Perry et al 1966) and Penelope Houston's *The Contemporary Cinema* (1963). I also cite relevant press reviews of the time, from *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight & Sound* to the various broadsheet newspapers of the day. My researches also encompass those works that detailed the class system of the UK during the period in question - *The English Middle Classes* (Roy Lewis and Angus Maude 1950), *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties* (Harry Hopkins 1964), *Exploring English Character* (Geoffrey Gorer 1955) and *The Uses of Literacy* (Richard Hoggart 1957) – in addition to those books exploring the impact of consumerism. These have ranged from those hostile to such developments - *The Insecure Offenders; Rebellious Youth in the Welfare State* (T R Fyvel 1961) and *The Popular Arts* (Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel 1964) - together with the more measured approach of George Melly. The latter's *Revolt into Style* (1970) is one of the first serious investigations into the development of youth culture in post-war Britain.

Of the primary source material that refers to the economic and industrial conditions of post-war Britain, I have referred to *The Car Makers* (Graham Turner 1963), *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (Michael Shanks 1961) and *Anatomy of Britain* (Anthony Sampson 1962). Therefore, given the weight of material now available to the scholar of British cinema the abundance referred to by Lovell in 2001 has grown yet further - it would be timely to briefly detail how my work will both differ and add to the body of knowledge. Andrew Spicer, in particular, has written about acting in terms of leading actors but *Typical Men* covers a range of cinematic archetypes in a work that spans over half a century of British cinematic history. By contrast my thesis covers a period of 14 years, which allows me to chart the development and marginalisation of one particular character type – the middle class professional hero or 'the chap' in greater depth within a more sharply defined historical period.

The pictures that I consider were produced within the mainstream of post-war British cinema - *Room at the Top* as a commercial picture on the cusp of the 'Kitchen Sink' movement<sup>4</sup> will be included but Woodfall Films, which largely exist outside this model, will not. In addition, the examination of this marginalisation has allowed me to take a fresh look at popular British films such as *Genevieve* and ones that are still overlooked, such as *The Comedy Man* (Alvin Rakoff 1964) and *Life at the Top* (Ted Kotcheff 1965). Furthermore, my researches have allowed me to consider the work of actors overlooked by many academics such as Laurence Harvey, James Robertson Justice and Ian Hendry, and I have attempted to re-evaluate certain films and directors, such as the works of Val Guest. In doing so, I hope to reveal more of the 'peak of a lost continent' (Petley 1986: 118) and in doing so I have tried to steer a path

between the Harper/Porter approach and *A Mirror for England* in that I believe that an economic and production framework supports but cannot entirely explain cinematic art.

In writing this thesis I have not been hubristic enough to even infer that it was intended to be a definitive work, for my *raison d'être* have been to raise further debate and to illustrate the scope for such. Manchester University Press' *British Film Makers* has yet to include Val Guest or Bryan Forbes - both examples of directors with Durgnat's 'clearly marked personal style'.

2 I will be employing this phrase for the cycle of British 'Social Realist' films that commenced with *Room at the Top*, made in 1958, and arguably finished with the release of *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson) and *Billy Liar!* (John Schlesinger) in 1963.

Similarly, there is still no work from Routledge's *Popular British Cinema Series* detailing the spy genre or police genres within the context of the UK film industry and no history of Group 3 Films. There is no entry for *I'm All Right Jack* in the BFI Film Classics series and I B Tauris' *Film Guides* have not included *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas 1954) or *Sapphire* (Basil Dearden 1959).

I will fully consider such films - and their stars and directors - within this thesis for if the pictures of this period do more than an act like a mirror for England, then the depictions of middle class life describe an arc from ideal to flawed humanity. I am also fully aware, pace Durgnat, that such commercial films are the imperfect and sometimes compromised products designed to create box office returns rather than art but 'At best, the thoroughly efficient apersonal commercial film attains the eloquence and beauties of a myth. It is the sentiments of a group crystallised into dramatic terms, and shared' (Durgnat 1962: 4). What my work seeks to do to is to analyse a particular aspect of this myth – the last days of professional officer class hero in British cinema. In doing so, I hope to join a long tradition of cinema academics who wish to start a debate and stimulate though covering a cross section of xx.



## Methodology

This work will concentrate on both the texture of the films *per se* and more upon the critical exegesis of certain currents, themes and overtones. My principles maybe summarized thus:

1) Commercial cinema can offer a great insight into hopes, dreams, and aspirations as it is ‘riddled with links to areas of behaviour that are highly fugitive’ (Alloway 1971: 34).

2) British films do not have to be masterpieces to be worth writing about; this may initially appear trite but, as I intend to prove, there are still areas of critical neglect, such as the works of Val Guest. Some of the films found within may not fall within many – or even any – existing critical canons but they do offer a complexity and a cinematic value that merited their unapologetic inclusion here.

3) My approach to history reflects that of E L Carr–

The facts of history cannot be purely objective since they become facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian. Objectivity in history - if we are still to use the conventional term - cannot be an objectivity of fact but only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present and future. (1987: 120)

Therefore, when tempted to create a meta-narrative for post-war British films, it is vital to examine the facts rather than the myths. Again I quote Carr’s argument that ‘The division of history into period is not a fact but a necessary hypothesis or tool of thought, valid in so far it is illuminating, and dependent for its validity on interpretation’ (1987:20) when considering the commercial popularity of pictures of this era.

4) No reading of a film can escape from the determinations placed on it by production. I contend that any cinematic text is firstly the product its system of production, distribution and exhibition, secondly that of the process by which ideas are generated and finally the aesthetic and social ideas of those controlling the film production. Thus, I have chosen to focus on a certain number of films that I regard, and will justify, as key texts – otherwise this ‘total history’ approach would result in a thesis of a million words.

5) Any national cinema is intrinsically interesting as a window onto the society from which it emerges – the films that ‘in some way signifies itself to its audiences as the cinema through which the country speaks’ (Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 1985: 36). However, to avoid any possibility of vague and vacuous explanations of how a film can reflect the moods or anxieties I have striven to contextualize each such claim and to work with films that are both thematically and legally ‘British’. The Board of Trade regulations describing the latter is an issue that I will discuss in Chapter 1 but this does not take into account ‘any consideration of theme or style’. (Hutchings 1993:15) To further quote Nowell-Smith:

Clearly, films do have national characteristics and they do play a part in constructing national identities, both for internal and external consumption. But they rarely do this exclusively, or in the same way. There is a huge difference between being national in an objective and mainly reflective sense, and actively pursuing a national agenda in the way, for example, that neorealism did in Italy in the 1940s or that Michael Balcon claimed to be doing in Britain at the same time. (2004: 34)

6) That auteurism can be a useful starting point for analysing films made by the same director even when they did not reflect a coherent worldview and personal vision. However, the writer should also take into account the need to consider the freedom or otherwise the director had to choose and shape his/her own films<sup>5</sup>.

7) That it is possible to discern patterns across groups of films that did not necessarily share the same director, or the same production company or even the same genre.

8) That although the camera can and does chart the changes in dress, landscape and, a sure way of denoting increased affluence, private cars on the road a film does more than merely reflect. The studio policies, directorial eye or script all help to explain actively and interpret the way in which the world is perceived and understood.

9) With the cinema of any nation, aesthetics is never enough, for they need a context, be the work of a particular studio, filmmaker or as part of a cycle of films emerging from a particular society over a particular period. Reviews also represent materials that signify the cultural hierarchies of aesthetic value reigning at particular times.

<sup>3</sup> Sue Harper and Vincent Porter give the example of Michael Relph's complaints to Michael Balcon at Ealing Studios that he and his director partner Basil Dearden were often obliged to make films at short notice and that were of no interest to them, all for the sake of studio continuity. (2007: 68)

10) Our ability to decode a text depends on our knowledge of the actual codes. This is particularly true of those films that:

start from a non-progressive standpoint, ranging from the frankly reactionary through the conciliatory to the mildly critical, they have been worked upon, and work, in such a real way that there is a noticeable gap, a dislocation, between the starting point and the finished product. (Comolli and Narboni 1969:32)

11) A tendency to take for granted the accuracy of an era of which they have no first-hand knowledge equally applies to audiences and film academic alike.

With reference to my tenth point, in Chapter 6 I write extensively about the power of nostalgia. I, therefore, believe that it is wholly appropriate for the academic to declare his or her personal interest in this regard. At the time of writing these words, I am 45 years of age, making me too young, as I have previously demonstrated, to have experienced cinema going as a regular part of my life. During my own formative years, the suburbs of almost any town contained at least one tatty bingo hall that had once been the local ABC or Odeon picture house. A handful of cinemas still existed in town centres but these were often in a highly sorry state of repair. For those of my background, a birthday visit to the pictures meant passing through peeling mock Ionic columns, buying confectionery that any discerning child would typically avoid and settling into plush red seats that exuded dust.

Of course at that time, a provincial town might boast any number of 1950s relics that were barely surviving the new world of the 1970s; Guy Arab double-deckers on the cusp between heap and collectors' piece, ageing Teds still mourning the death of Gene Vincent and neon-lit Wimpey Bars still selling milkshakes made from 1953 style ingredients. The decaying picture house was part of this world and this brings me to a further challenge, one that faces any chronicler of my age with an interest in post-war British cinema. My age means that I have not seen the films discussed in my thesis on their first release. It was thanks to the medium of television the pictures detailed in my thesis were often screened on BBC2 as serviceable time-fillers in a Saturday afternoon.

These are my childhood visions of the day just before yesterday and through British cinema the England of the then recent past – that of the 1950s and 1960s – appeared as

an almost mythical country. To quote Gavin Stamp's appreciation of the world of *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick 1955) – 'cars are always black, there are no plastic signs and Georgian terraces are properly grimy with dark-painted joinery' (1990). Such films often depicted an apparently reliable and secure celluloid environment, where police-cars were always black, actors' hair was Brylcreemed, suits were sober and telephone boxes disgorged 4d on pressing Button 'B'. All of the above is, I would strongly argue directly relevant not just to explain the factors that will inevitably affect to this work but how I approach my work – the tyro academic as a cinephile. As the latter, what I attempt to evoke is the expressive qualities of a film that emerge from the production techniques, for what draws me to cinema is the evanescence of its forms, and the interplay of consciousness between the film and the viewer.

However, in doing so I am not aiming to signal any degree of sensitivity on my part but to provide a degree of illumination of the texts that can serve as a densely packed history of Britain. Atmosphere and nuance help to define cinematic images of the British middle-class male and as David Bordwell contends:

Readers who enjoy cinephile criticism should sample the academic work that stays close to the sensuous surface of a movie. Meanwhile, academics should recognize how cinephile criticism can alert us to the movie's unique identity. Perceptive appreciation and analytical explanation can enhance one another. (no page, 2011)

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no thesis in my particular field of interest before – and I doubt whether anyone will employ my stylistic approach. The style of my thesis may not accord with conventional ideas of academic writing but as one who has worked as a professional journalist, constructing his paragraphs to a 'house style', this work allows me to speak with my own voice. Kevin Gough-Yates argues of *A Mirror for England* that Durnat's theme have been taken from *Only Connect*, E M Forster's preface to *Howard's End*, 'with its emphasis on the need for society to be interlinked as a whole and for its individuals to connect its prose and its passion' (2011:xx). And this is what I attempt to do in these pages, evoking the often powerful emotional force present in this still often uncharted, body of films.

### **Structure of the Chapters**

I will be mostly focusing on films with a post-Second World War setting, first establishing the studio system in the 1950 to 1965 period before detailing how Ealing Studios' output during the War set the template for the People as Hero mythology. I then move on to

how emphasis began, at the beginning of the 1950s, upon the middle class professional as hero and the idea of such figures working within a cinematic family. The central part of this work contains a chapter on the paradigm films; ones that signify a change in the development of the New Elizabethan archetype, including those that initiated a cycle of films, contrasted with the retreat of Ealing in the face of consumerism. The cinematic genres that principally deal with the New Elizabethan values – police dramas, WW2 drama and teenage films – will follow. By the end of the decade, we have the mainstream productions that critique this myth.

The last part of the thesis will detail the impact of *Room at the Top* and *I'm All Right Jack* before describing the liberation of 'traditional' filmmakers in the face of a changing studio system. I will then cover the retrogressive nature of the Bond films and the senses of loss and morality found in some of the Swinging London films. The final film in the thesis is *Heaven's Above!* (John Boulting 1963) the picture that, as I will argue, almost conclusively undermined the National Cinema myths of the inherent decency of the People as Hero.

## CHAPTER 1: The British Studio System and Stardom

In 1951, there were over ten studios operating in the United Kingdom. The largest British studio in our period was the Rank Organisation, founded by J. Arthur Rank in 1933, owning both Pinewood Studios and Denham – at that time the most major studio in Britain. After the Second World War, the directors gathered under the Rank umbrella included Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, David Lean and Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat. The Rank Organisation encompassed a full roster of contract artistes, newsreels, animation, newsreels, and a B-film division. There was also the ‘Company of Youth’, better known as the ‘Charm School’, a children’s film division and ownership of both Gainsborough and Ealing Studios.

In 1947, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Dalton imposed a 75 per cent duty on the value of 84 imported films because of the dollar crisis. The MPEA<sup>6</sup> retaliated with an immediate embargo on Britain, with the result that Rank launched a vastly expanded production programme. The following year saw the new President of the Board of Trade Harold Wilson, reached an agreement with MPEA, leaving some 47 Rank films suddenly in competition with almost a year’s worth of Hollywood productions. Rather than lose audiences to rival cinemas, Rank scrapped many productions, resulting in a substantial loss exacerbated by his Odeon and Gaumont chains being unable to screen American imported films.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis John Davis, a City accountant who had joined the Odeon group ten years earlier, became the MD of the Rank Organisation in 1948. Under his control the concern, in the face of £16m of debt, wound down its operations in Islington, Denham, and Lime Grove and disbanded the Company of Youth. Only those actors whom Davis believed profitable to Rank a profit remained under contract and he closed Independent Producers Ltd in 1947.

Revenue from such Hollywood screenings in Rank’s cinemas was essential in providing resources for its production strategy and the situation was partially resolved with the 1948 Anglo-American Film Agreement. This established a bar on the amount of distribution revenues Hollywood producers could take out of the UK. The result was a large amount of frozen income, which could be spent in film production - with a consequent increase in Hollywood-backed films being shot within the British Isles.

In the following year, the Cinematograph Film Production (Special Loans) Act established the National Film Finance Corporation or NFFC, which had the power to fund films via the resources of the Board of Trade. Rank initially set a guarantee of an annual fixed fee, partially financed by the NFFC, for each of its producer/director teams. Such a scheme offered its filmmakers a measure of independence, although, as Harper and Porter note the NFFC did act as a preproduction censor for subjects or scripts deemed unsuitable (Harper and Porter 2003: 12-13), the NFFC tended to avoid controversial scripts and by 1952 John Davis took more control over the choice of film.

<sup>6</sup> Motion Pictures Export Association.



At the beginning of our period, the sole subsidiary retained by Rank was Ealing Studios, which we will subsequently encounter in the creation of the People as Hero myth. This came into being in 1938 and six years later Ealing's director and production chief Michael Balcon decided that a partnership with Rank Organisation was necessary to safeguard the studio's future. Vincent Porter makes the point that 'Balcon's scope for creative freedom at Ealing depended on the extremely favourable financing and distribution deal which he negotiated with J. Arthur Rank' (2012: 8). Michael Balcon reflected in his memoirs that 'the Rank Organisation provided a 50 per cent contribution (subsequently 75 per cent) and other fringe benefits, altogether a unique contract' (1969: 154).

The deal, in theory, enabled Ealing to avail itself of the larger organisation's rental facilities whilst enjoying a high measure of independence. With the Rank contract Ealing did not have to face major distribution problems - the film magnate controlled two of the three major British cinema circuits. Rank needed a stream of low to medium budget British films for the domestic market and the agreement guaranteed an Ealing presence in their picture houses. However, one result was a loss of autonomy for Ealing – the studio cast Dirk Bogarde in *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden 1950) because the director had to use a Rank player. 'I need a weedy type...Moreover, you're a Contract Artist' (1979: 160).

By the early 1950s, Ealing was incurring the parent company heavy losses. Despite funding from the NFFC in 1952 and Ealing extending the agreement with Rank for a further five years in 1953, the relationship between Davis and had broken down completely. During 1954 and 1955, Balcon terminated Ealing's distribution and finance arrangement with Rank and the studio buildings were sold to the BBC in 1955. For the last four years of its life, Ealing became a production unit within the Borehamwood studio of MGM-British, who themselves had only been making films since 1947.

Rank's nearest rival in terms of size was the Associated British Picture Corporation, based at Elstree Studios and controlled by Robert Clark as essentially an operation for production, with film-making as an adjunct. British International Pictures (BIP) was formed in 1927 and when its founder John Maxwell died in 1940, Warner Brothers became a major shareholder. After the Second World War, Associated British made a deal with Warner to distribute BIP films in their 800 American cinemas when the company was renamed ABPC. Britain's third largest film producer was British Lion, formed in 1927, but unlike Rank and ABPC it owned no cinemas. In 1946, Alexander Korda's London Films bought the controlling

interest in British Lion and then went on to acquire Shepperton Studios. Financial problems resulted in £3-million loan from the NFFC and the government appointed the City's Harold

Drayton as Chairman while Korda become Production Advisor and Arthur Jaratt became the new MD.

Under the new regime, the concern backed some 60 pictures made by independent producers, some of them former Rank employees who had left ‘for the apparent haven of British Lion, where they hoped to receive the encouragement of Alexander Korda, a *real* film man’ (Drazin 2007:52). Unfortunately, this did not prevent the NFFC and the Board of Trade calling in the receivers in June 1954 resulting in British Lion’s bankruptcy in 1955. The result was a new concern, British Lion Films Ltd., which served chiefly as a distribution company with the Boulting Brothers, Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat as directors, allowing Shepperton to bill itself as ‘a studio run *by* film-makers *for* film-makers’ (Worker 1962:114).

In terms of casting, the period 1950 to 1959 saw the last flowering of the studio repertory of stars. Bruce Babington makes the very valuable point that in comparison with the American film industry ‘the number of British organisations that developed and exploited stars in the systematic Hollywood way is rather small’ (2001:5). Until 1959, Rank and Associated British retained US style studio rosters of stars, actors typically signed to a seven-year contract. The former’s leading artistes came from a variety of sources – former ‘Charm School’ Students – Diana Dors or Anthony Steel or provincial theatre – Tony Wright or Michael Craig. Some actors hailed from within and outside of the studio empire – Dirk Bogarde was from Wessex Films and Rank inherited Stanley Baker’s contract with Alexander Korda in 1956. One of Rank’s most commercially successful artists, Norman Wisdom was a comedian and some ambitious actors were inclined to mutiny towards the end of the 1950s. Patrick McGoohan completed only four films of his Rank contract before departing in some dudgeon and Peter Finch always looked somewhat ill at ease wearing chunky V-neck pullovers in studio PR shots.

Harper and Porter observe that ‘although in theory it was the producer-director teams who decided which stories to film, ultimately it was Rank and Davis who decided which projects to back’ (2003: 38). Each artiste in the Rank Organisation had the right to turn down two scripts per year and as John Davis required a studio production to use a contracted leading player this further ensured a uniformity of casting. As for at Associated British, a smaller group of actors would appear in the 4-8 films ABPC releases made per year, where the critical creative decisions were usually taken by the management. Robert Clark charged his casting director Robert Lennard with creating a studio roster of stars to appear in ‘some eight films per year that which were designed to fulfil the quota of British films for the company’s chain of ABC cinemas’ (Porter 2000:152).

Reinforcing a studio's image was the personal appearance of a bona fida star at your

local picture house or garden fete. Such events emphasised the gulf between film stars and well-known performers of radio and television; the latter were domestic property but the former had deigned to descend for one evening only, to a suburban cinema. These promotional stunts were not restricted to the United Kingdom - in 1955 Rank's publicity chief Theo Cowan led a delegation of British stars in an assault on the Venice Film Festival. Newsreel footage of the event has Rank contract players advancing towards the camera in a manner that somewhat anticipates *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino 1992).

These PR events were important considerations for Rank or ABPC at the time of declining sales. By March 1953, the figures for combined sound and television licences was as 2,142,452, compared with 1,457,000 of the previous year. A 14-inch GEC set a cost of 60 guineas, but your local dealer might be able to offer the chance to rent a receiver to view the Coronation from the comfort of your front parlour. 20 million viewers (or around 56% of the population) saw BBC Television's coverage of the event and the GPO estimated that there were some 7.8 million people watching in their own homes. As compared with the cinematic documentary *A Queen is Crowned* (1953) the BBC coverage offered the sensation of immediacy and as Joe Moran observes:

the coming of mass television was a continuum, not something sparked by one event. The number of new television licences rose from 400,000 in 1950 to 700,000 in 1951 and 1952, to 1,100,000, suggesting that the sales hike for the Coronation was part of a steady, inexorable rise. (2013: 73)

The Coronation was arguably pivotal in establishing the medium's popularity - the coverage of national events - and the broadcast took place when television was already creating its own stars. By 1953, Norman Wisdom, Terry-Thomas and Benny Hill were all comics whose respective personae flourished via the small screen. BBC TV had developed its first dramatic star in the form of Peter Cushing, a respected film and stage character actor who became the leading man of *Sunday Night Theatre*.

By the early 1950s some of television's stars, such as the rather tragic figure of the *What's My Line* panelist Gilbert Harding, were making film appearances. *The Gentle Gunman* (d Basil Dearden 1952) used Harding as a character actor but more often he appeared as 'himself'. In 1954 the BBC screened *Fabian of the Yard*, a filmed police procedural series made by Trinity Productions - the series was mainly intended to be shown in the USA on the CBS channel as *Patrol Car* - thereby narrowing the gap between cinema and television. Hammer/Exclusive had bought the rights to the science fiction series *The Quatermass*

*Experiment* and in 1955 the BBC revived PC George Dixon from *The Blue Lamp* in *Dixon of Dock Green*. That same year saw ITV commence broadcasting on 22nd September and in his survey of the British film industry John Spraos argued that:

The important factors through which television has damaged the cinema must therefore be presumed to be (1) the convenience of home entertainment rather than the specific type of entertainment: (2) the pre-emption of a certain part of the weekly income for HP payments or rent on the set: (3) the fact that each visit to the cinema has a price whereas “switching on” is virtually costless. (1962:29)

In 1956 alone the Rank Organisation closed 49 picture houses. That same year saw Lord Rank announce that he would henceforward only make films that had international entertainment appeal – ‘Only the most popular low-budget Rank films could recover their production costs in the UK’ (Rank quoted in Harper and Porter 2003: 52). The studio contracted West German leads such as Hardy Kruger and Curt Jurgens in order to appeal to European markets and in an attempt to sell to the US markets, there was a greater use of colour and overseas locations. However, this was also the year that John Davis co-founded with the American Haloid Corporation the Rank-Xerox organisation for the non-US rights to the photocopying machine.

This enterprise soon provided more profit for Lord Rank than Pinewood Studios – when Davis retired from Rank he remarked that the contract was worth ‘£1,000 million per year’ (Davis quoted in Wakelin 1996: 126). In 1958, Rank’s Odeon and Gaumont cinema chains merged and the company became a shareholder in Southern Television, the Southampton-based ITV franchise that served Hampshire, Dorset and Sussex. According to Geoffrey Macnab, although Lord Rank and Davis both

protested that their fortunes were ‘inescapably bound up with the film industry’...they were doing their utmost to reduce their commitment to film. As they saw it, shorter working weeks and increased spending power were bound to lead to an increased demand for ‘leisure’, even in fields outside of cinema. (1993: 228)

John Davis himself saw the future of film-going in the UK in terms of being ‘no longer ... a routine weekly visit but an event like going to the theatre’ (Davis quoted in Davenport 1958: 29). By the end of the 1950s, all studios except for Pinewood and Shepperton were sharing their facilities between television and feature film production. Directors such as Val Guest, Basil Dearden, Charles Crichton and Roy Ward Baker would move between working for cinema and making filmed TV series for ITC<sup>7</sup>. ABPC augmented its film production by becoming the franchisee to ITV’s Midlands and North of England regions for the weekends. ABC Television’ broadcasts commenced on 18th February 1956. The new channel’s managing director Howard Thomas somewhat disingenuously told the trade press that Associated British had ‘gone into television to boost cinema admissions’ (Thomas cited in Holmes 2005: 32) but, in the words of Bill Ballieu and John Goodchild the senior figures of Rank and ABPC had

4 The export wing of the commercial television franchisee ATV. They specialised in making dramas concerning international men of mystery chasing fez-wearing villains across the studio car park.



‘read the runes and acted appropriately – as shrewd businessmen’ (2002: 67). By 1958, Robert Clark had been succeeded by as Executive in Charge of Production at ABPC, by C J Latta, the firm’s managing director. Under his stewardship, Associated British was to concentrate on comedies and musicals; in 1962, the studio boasted of its ‘forward-looking youthful approach to film-making’ (Wallis 1962: 100).

At the beginning of our period, the Rank/ABPC duopoly had interests in every stage of film production but the end 1950s marked the increased diversification of both organisations into other markets. Sarah Street notes how, during this decade, there were already some small studios such as Beaconsfield or Twickenham with no ties to the major combines that offered good terms to independent producers (1997:30). By 1959, Rank did not employ any permanent production staff and during the 1960s it would be freelance filmmakers who mainly used the UK’s major studios. Sally Dux points out that the decline in film-making from ABPC and Rank ‘allowed several small and independent companies to take advantage of the creative space which this left’ (2012: 199).

Such groups included Allied Film Makers, formed by Dearden, Bryan Forbes and Jack Hawkins. Michael Balcon was instrumental in creating the Bryanston Group, which made films for British Lion between 1959 and 1964 (Murphy 1992: 46-47) and included such filmmakers as Ronald Neame and Woodfall Films. Terence Kelly noted of Associated British that ‘In 1960-1963, though its production unit made only five films the group provided finance - usually 70 per cent or more of the budget – for another 36 films by outside producers’ (Kelly et al 1966:51).

Another change was the demise of the studio roster of actors. Pinewood’s 21st anniversary brochure, issued in 1957, still lists 31 stars under contract to the Rank Organisation but ABPC hired its last contract actors in 1958 and its chief rival’s contract artistes were disbanded in 1960. Five years later star actors would either be freelance or under contract to major individual producers (Macnab 2000:203). As if in anticipation of this new world *Picturegoer*<sup>8</sup> finally magazine ceased production on 23rd April 1960 and in the previous year Margaret Hinxman, the magazine’s review editor, wrote somewhat irately that:

The dictionary defines a ‘fan’ as an enthusiastic devotee and an ardent admirer. And if there were a few more such picture going ‘devotees’ and ‘admirers’, the Rank Organisation wouldn’t be turning cinemas into bowling alleys and Laurence Olivier probably wouldn’t have to shelve *Macbeth* for lack of funding. (Hinxman quoted in

5 *Picturegoer* was published between 1921 and 1960. By the 1950s, it was facing a declining number of cinemas plus rivalry from ABPC and Rank's in-house titles.

Slide 2010:183)

The future was of independent actors and directors, some previously associated with Rank or ABPC, using the facilities of Pinewood or Elstree making films for an ever-decreasing number of picture houses. The Rank-Xerox subsidiary merged with the Organisation proper in 1963 and the closed ABCs or Odeons would often be transformed into bowling alleys. By 1965, the Rank logo was as much be associated with neon-lit motorway service stations as picture houses. James Park argues how Rank and ABPC failed to tempt consumers away from their television sets in their increasingly comfortable homes. A lack of investment in the surviving cinemas ensured 'their fleapits would remain forever fleapits, until the time came for them to close' (1990: 105).

Just as the decline of cinema admissions resulted in tatty suburban bingo halls that had once been the local picture house by 1965, the impact of US investment would inevitably alter the nature of a British film. Between 1951 and 1965 films made in the UK would increasingly be funded by Hollywood for, as Johnathan Stubbs explains, the aftermath of the 1948 film crisis lead to a situation where:

A maximum \$17 million of the total money earned by American film companies in Britain could be remitted to America per year, plus a sum in dollars equal to the earnings of British films in America. The remaining earnings, which the Board estimated to be around \$20 million a year, were 'blocked' or 'frozen': they remained the property of the companies who earned them, but they could not be converted into dollars and removed from the country. The Board of Trade's intention was that the money would be invested in the film industry of Britain and its Dominions. (2009:2)

At the beginning of our period, the Board of Trade set the quota of locally made films to being exhibited in the UK at 30% (Harper and Porter 2003: 6). 'Locally made' also encompassed a growing amount of US-backed films shot in the United Kingdom, following an increased Hollywood trend to shoot on location. The Board of Trade stipulated that:

A British film had to be produced by a British company shot in a studio situated in the British Dominions (later the British Commonwealth) or the Republic of Ireland, and had to pay the requisite proportion of labour costs to British workers...This allowed a Hollywood company to make an international film in Britain, for which the producer, the director and possibly as many as two of its stars were American and still have it classified as British for quota purposes. (Harper and Porter 2003:114)

A film classed as 'British' would qualify the production for the Eady Levy<sup>9</sup>, which had been introduced in 1950 as a production fund derived from a cinema ticket levy - 50% for the

exhibitor and 50% for British-based filmmakers. The 1957 Cinematograph Films Act made the Levy compulsory in the form of the establishment of the

<sup>9</sup>Named for Sir Wilfred Eady, the then Second Secretary of the Treasury.

British Film Fund Agency although Baillieu and Goodchild make the point that since 1950 ‘it had raised a total of only £18 million, below the annual target figure of £3.5 million’ (2002: 74). Stubbs observes that because the Board of Trade’s definition of a British film was so liberal, ‘American producers were also able to benefit from the revenues it (the Eady Levy) raised, as long as their films were made in Britain’ (2009: 5). Vincent Canby noted in 1962 that ‘American investment in British production has made it almost impossible to define a “British film”’ (Canby quoted in Balio 2010: 229). Three years later the NFFC estimated 64% of films made in the UK were part or wholly funded from American sources. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith notes:

Films have nationality in order to benefit from tax and customs and excise concessions. At one level it really is as simple as that. So whenever the words ‘British cinema’ are uttered, it is in obeisance to this rule: register a film as wholly or partly British and certain consequences will follow for its tradeability in the world market. Involve an American major in the package and certain other consequences will also follow, which are probably more important than the fact of national registration. These two industrial facts shape the notion of what British cinema can be. (2004: 53)

The UK was an important export territory for the US-film industry and the increased Hollywood funding saw the use of American leading men in British genre pictures – William Holden in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean 1957). Such US monies also proved instrumental in shaping the image of indigenous screen heroes towards the end of our period such as the James Bond series. Stubbs makes the very valid point that ‘because the Eady Levy offered the highest rewards to the most commercially successful films, it was in the interest of Hollywood producers to make their British films as appealing as possible to British audiences’ (2009: 7).

As I have already argued, any film text is the result of its system of production, distribution and exhibition - in addition to the creative process and of the aesthetic and social ideas of those controlling the film production. Charles Drazin contends that ‘If in the 1950s British cinema largely meant a diet of stilted drama and inane comedy, it was because John Davis had wanted it that way’ (2007: 44). However, aside from that over-simplistic observation of the nature of the quality of the product, what is noticeable is that not just the myriad of excellent performances in our period that may be found in the final products of such corporate politics but also the often deceptively complex nature of British identity that is conveyed.

## CHAPTER 2: Historical Overview 1951 – 1965

The thesis is largely concerned with the post-war incarnation of ‘the chap’ and his changing role in British cinema from 1951 to 1965. As Andrew Spicer argues, the meritocratic professional officer, a type that had emerged in the Second World War, had become the dominant image of 1950s masculinity (2001: 33). Wartime films had forged an image of the chap as the officer who leads a group by dint of professional abilities and dint of character rather than by accident of birth. Films such *San Demetrio, London* (Charles Frend 1943) and *The Way Ahead* (Carol Reed 1944) established the ideal officer as the natural leader of his surrogate family, with their skills and approachable sense of discipline being respected by members of the group and junior officers accepting the guidance of their seniors.

In British cinema of the immediate post-war period, the chap would be seen as the civilian professional figure, bringing his expertise to benefit the community, such as Alan Kern (James Donald) in *Cage of Gold* (Basil Dearden 1950), a hard working GP who eschews a Harley Street career. To understand the gradual marginalisation of such figures during the 1951 – 65 period, with their sense of masculine authority progressively challenged or undermined by increasingly apparent weaknesses, it is important to understand the historical background to a film. As Justin Smith notes in his online article *FilmHistory*:

At its most sophisticated, a historical reading can recapture a sense of the structures of feeling of a particular period, its predilections and its anxieties – but only if rigorous contextual research supports a sensitive reading of the text itself. (2008)

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is not to attempt a sweeping assessment of British culture and society from 1951 to 1965 but rather to give a contextual illumination to the central theme of how masculine authority, in the form of the chap, altered during this period. As with any era, it is multifaceted. David Cannadine saw the 1950s and 1960s as a time when the middle classes felt embattled and alienated by the failure of post-war Conservative administrations to ‘reduce taxes and roll back the Welfare State’ (2000: 152).

Arthur Marwick, in his *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-74*, argues that events that occurred during this period ‘transformed social and cultural developments for the rest of the century’ (1998: 5). He further contends that ‘minor and rather insignificant movements in the fifties became major and highly significant ones in the sixties’ (1998: 7) whilst Harry Hopkins saw the earlier decade as a time when scientific progress meant that ‘ground that had been familiar for centuries was being cut away, it seemed, within weeks’ (1964: 388). However, Dominic Sandbrook argues that ‘there were plenty of changes, as there are in most periods of modern history, but they were often painful, sluggish and controversial’ (2005: xxii).

British films of the 1951 – 1965 period reflect differing aspects of rates of change, all dependent upon production policies, intended market, artistic vision or lack of budget. Kynaston describes a middle class family in 1957 Manchester where father drove a Humber Hawk and where a ‘mangle on wash day’ (2013: 61) was used alongside a new Hotpoint washing machine. Harry Hopkins refers to how the 1950s ‘often seemed to resemble an endless ride on a rollercoaster’ (1964: 392) whilst in 1960 ‘a youth club leader in Huddersfield with six years’ experience was dismissed for allowing his charges to play billiards, table tennis and darts and listen to rock and roll music’ (Sandbrook 2005: 128).

‘Modernity’ could mean a new home where ‘there are light and air, and the shrieks of children, instead of echoing against brick walls, are dispersed in open space’ (John Betjeman quoted in Kynaston 2013: 79). But Henry Fairlie warned how ‘modernisation’ could be used ‘to justify, in the alleged interests of society, the deliberate and callous neglect of the interests of any minority: especially, so it seems, the weak and the aged’ (1963: 10). Car ownership vastly increased during this era but the decline of the railway service resulted in a ‘vast change

in the British quality of life with crumbling railway embankments shorn of rails and sleepers and overcrowded roads' (Horne 1989:252).

Indeed, David Kynaston describes how 'modernity' as having different meanings for different people and notes that 'the change of pace varied considerably from place to place



but by 1957 it was unmistakably becoming the dominant (if top-down) zeitgeist' (2013: 46). This is one of the dominant themes of my work – of how 'the chap' negotiated modernity and changing views of tradition in a time when varying rates of change resulted in various forms of Britain co- existing. As Penelope Houston noted, the *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz 1960) public was also the *Carry On* public (1963: 119). Arthur Marwick refers to the 1960s the decade characterised by 'massive improvements in material life' (1998: 18) whereas Richard Davenport-Hines' description of Britain circa 1963 verges on the vituperative – 'clinics did not dare to give contraceptive advice to the unmarried<sup>10</sup>; every foreigner had to register with their local police station, and report there regularly' (2013:34).

In my preparation for this chapter, I was struck by one particular image dating from 1960. To sell the new estate version of Mini, then the most advanced small car in the world, the British Motor Corporation parked one at a rural railway station, with a steam train in the background and a decent looking type in the foreground. This seemingly innocuous PR encapsulates how the Britain of the early 1950s to the mid-1960 is one where the chap would increasingly have to negotiate tradition' and 'modernity'.

As this thesis will be devoted to charting the changes in middle class professionalism in terms of cinematic heroes, it is essential to define this term. At the beginning of our period, the 1951 census, in the words of Kynaston, defined middle class as:

The professional class and the self-employed petty bourgeoisie (typified by small shop keepers) that had emerged strongly in the nineteenth century, as well as the managerial class that had begun to flourish during the inter-war rise of the large corporations, not to mention the ever expanding army of clerks salesmen, insurance agents and shop assistants. There were also, in terms of specific occupational trends, two rapidly growing sectors within the middle class; first, in the science/technology/engineering fields, in part driven by the increasing number of non-arts university students (doubling between the 1930s and late 1940s) and second, in the public sector especially social services and the nationalised industries. (2009: 144)

This echoes Arthur Marwick's description of 'not one middle class but a range of middle classes, amazingly aggregated in educational backgrounds, in burdens and privileges' (1998: 14). During the 1950s one frequently expressed viewpoint was the pressures on these strata of society and Kynaston also notes that if any sector of the middle classes had cause to complain it was the lower-middle – 'their salaries were increasing by appreciably less than the wages of

<sup>10</sup>The contraceptive pill was introduced into the UK in 1962 but until 1964 was only available to married women via Family Planning Clinics.

manual workers in a full-employment economy' (2009:148). Lewis and Maude noted that 'the middle classes are beset with worries' and went on to state that:

It is one thing to elevate increasing numbers of working class folk into lower- middle class company: this, after all, is a kind of compliment, and if the new- comers can stand the strain and establish themselves they - or their children--will be accepted. But to a process of levelling *down* - of forcibly merging the lower- middle class with the proletariat - resistance must be expected. (1950:358)

Respectable appearances mattered – in *The Big City or the New Mayhew* Alex Atkinson described the professional life of 'business executives' – low paid sales representatives whose sole pleasure is a nightclub dinner 'on expenses' consisting of:

a pound of cheese, two ounces of butter, one ten-inch cigar, thirty- seven American cigarettes, half a pint of coffee, six tablets of acetylsalicylic acid, one brandy, and three square inches of marshmallow. (1959: 18)

Against such claims of lower-middle class deprivation, the 1950s and 1960s did see an improvement in blue-collar wages - £6 8s in 1950 as opposed to £11 2s 6d by 1959 (Sandbrook 2005: 109). By 1966, the average weekly wage was £20.6s (Marwick 1982: 123). The beginning of our period is marked by the return to power of the Conservatives after six years of Labour government and Pam Cook contends:

it does seem that 1951 can be seen as a pivotal year for British society, marking a shift from post-war austerity, presided over by a Labour government dedicated to welfare capitalism, to the consumer boom of the 50s managed by a tough new breed of Conservatives. (1986:355)

One of the major challenges for the Conservative party was to demonstrate that they could govern without dismantling the Welfare State and returning the UK to the 1930s of unemployment and poverty. Yet, despite an election slogan of 'Set The People Free' Winston Churchill made 'little effort to roll back the Welfare State or even to return nationalised industries to private hands' (Sandbrook 2005: 59) and the end of 1951 saw further reductions in the meat ration and a cut in imports of un-rationed foods (Kynaston 2009: 49). It would not be until 1952 that the Government passed the Hire Purchase Act, which repealed wartime credit restrictions, and in 1953 R A Butler, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced a budget on the 14th April designed to stimulate consumer spending. The last vestiges of rationing ceased in 1954 and six years later Mark Abrams noted that:

Between early 1956 and the autumn of 1959, this prosperous half of the working class (i.e. skilled or semi-skilled) acquired durable consumer goods at a speed that far exceeded that of the population as a whole. Between those two dates the proportion who owned refrigerators almost trebled (from 6 per cent to 16 per cent)-their car ownership almost doubled (from 18 per cent to 32 per cent) - their ownership of washing- machines grew at roughly the same pace (from 25 per cent to 44 per cent) - admittedly the number of their television sets increased by only half, but this was sufficient to bring them almost to saturation point (by the end of 1959, 85 per cent of these households had a set) - and over these three years, in this sector of the working class, house-ownership rose by ~5 per cent, so that by the time the 1959 Election came round well over one- third of them lived in houses which they either owned or were in the course of buying.(1960:58)

Meanwhile, despite the appearances of being under siege, the middle classes, as David Cannadine notes, ‘did very well out of the Welfare State, not least because of the universal nature of the benefit it bestowed’ (2000: 154). Health care relieved the financial burden of private health insurance; grammar school places saved on school fees and there were such corporate benefits as company cars (Kynaston 2009: 147). Furthermore, Arthur Marwick observes that the period between 1955 and 1969 saw a rise of 127% of the average middle class professional wage (1982: 124).

The fourteen year period between 1951 and 1965 saw seismic changes in the physical appearance of both urban and rural landscapes. Gavin Stamp refers to the capital of the mid-1950s of being ‘shabby and ravage, full of bomb sites and dereliction, and yet which is somehow authentic’ (*The Times* November 3rd. 1990). However, by 1954 there was a relaxation of building regulations and this ‘ignited a London property boom which thundered on until 1964’ (Davenport-Hines 2013: 15). But even if the proportion of owner-occupiers in the UK had risen from 31% to 43% between 1951 and 1961 (Hennessy 2006: 494) this still left large swages of the population dependent upon rented accommodation.

Municipal buildings across the UK increasingly adopted a Modernist form, a development that inevitably received a mixed reception. Ian Nairn observed of the new developments such as the Alton Estate in Roehampton that ‘There is no build-up or progression, no chance of heightening the emotional effect of the city by surprise or contrast or holding back. Inevitably it defeats its own ends’ (1959: 55). However, as Sandbrook observes, in the mid-1950s ‘many of the poor lived in houses barely fit for human habitation, a legacy of the shattering destruction of the Second World War that, even a decade later, still cast a shadow over British housing’ (2005: 179). When escaping a home with crumbling walls and rodent

infestation, aesthetic considerations were often low on a tenant's list of priorities. Marwick remarks that 'those who rallied and railed against the consumer society of the 1960s forget how

welcome it was to those who only in the process of joining it' (1998: 18).

A further factor shaping Britain was the increase in road transport's importance and a consequent decrease in the use of railway network. The numbers of car and vans registered in the UK grew from 2, 307,000 in 1951 to 9,131,000 in 1965 (Marwick 1982: 234) the first post-war London highway, Route 11 – aka 'the London Wall' - opened in 1958 and November of that year traffic used Preston by Pass, the country's first motorway. *The Reshaping of British Railways*, commissioned by the government and written by the former ICI director Dr. Richard Beeching, was published on 27th March 1963. The report identified some 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles of track for closure and by 1975, the amount of track mileage in the UK had been reduced from 17,500 to 11,000 miles (Wilson 2009: 96-97).

The period of 1951 to 1965 saw a significant change in the demographic of London and other cities in the UK. The British Nationality Act 1948 entitled all citizens of the Commonwealth to freely to enter the UK to reside although the labour intensive economic boom of the 1950s attracted 'a large number of workers from Ireland, an immigration flow far greater than from the Old and New Commonwealth<sup>11</sup> combined' (Hennessy 2006:269). But on 20th August 1958, crowds of 400 men began to attack houses occupied by West Indians in the West London district of Notting Hill. The main perpetrators were given long sentences, the judge Mr. Justice Salmon stating that 'by your conduct you have put the clock back 300 years' (quoted in Ackroyd 2001: 352) - but the illusion that all citizens of the Commonwealth could live together harmoniously in the UK had been shattered.

Newsreels of the Coronation showed people of many races celebrating but five years later, as Peter Hennessy notes 'The comfortable shared notion within a nation that prided itself on its tolerance and civility, that race riots were a blemish on other societies such as South Africa or the USA were gone forever' (2006: 729). Towards the end of our period the terms of the 1948 Act were superseded by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants' Act the purpose of which, was to 'preserve non-discrimination while not closing the door on the "White" Commonwealth' (Horne 1989: 422). It would not be until 1965 that the Race Relations Act would forbid discrimination on the 'grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins' in public places.

The 1950s and early 1960s showed a changing reaction to officialdom and quasi-officialdom during this period, with particular regard to the Armed Forces and the Police. The National Service Act 1948 set down the conditions for applying to post-war conscription as applying to men aged between 17 and 21 who would serve in one of the armed forces for a

period of 18 months. This was extended by a further six months in October 1950 in response to the Korean War and the final call-up took place in December 1960. The last National Servicemen left the Armed Forces in May 1963, the Cuba Missile Crisis further extending due their time in uniform.

The increasing affluence of the late 1950s was making recruitment into the regular forces a difficult task for the War Office - there were too many attractive positions available in civilian life (Vinen 2014: 101). Furthermore, National Service was not universally popular - even the War Office's *A Guide for the National Service Man* dating from 1953 stating that 'in this country it (conscription) is still regarded as an innovation and interruption the normal course of life' (quoted in Weight 2002: 108). Meanwhile, the press of the early part of our period was much excited about a post-war youth cult. By 1953, the phenomenon of British working class teenagers spending over £20 on a garish parody of an Edwardian masher's suit had hit the headlines, especially when associated with violence. When Michael Davies was on trial for the murder of John Bentley, *The Daily Express* headline of September 23rd 1953 who took the word 'Edwardian' and shortened it to 'Teddy'.

The phrase Teddy Boy had come into being and was still employed by the popular press as late as 1963 (Cohen 1980 217). It also fast became a term of general abuse<sup>12</sup>. The origins of the cult actually date back to the late 1940s, with a South London working class interpretation of the Edwardian frock coats briefly affected by Mayfair dandies. Sandbrook notes that the phenomenon reached its height in the early 1950s - 'the years of austerity rather than the affluence of the Macmillan era' (2005: 445). This echoes a point made by Christopher Brooker, that in order to pay for their elaborate dress, the Teddy Boys 'had to resort to petty larceny' (1969: 36). Italianate suits known as the 'college boy look' began to replace the drape jackets around 1957 by which point the Teddy Boys were associated with rock and roll.

As for those charged with protecting society from drape jacketed hooligans the British press of the 1950s often showcased the actions of maverick detectives. As Leishman and Mason note 'These were still the days when, in the event of murders and other serious crimes, provincial forces, which were (then) more numerous and smaller<sup>13</sup>, called in "the Yard" to

<sup>11</sup> The popular press described John Osborne as 'an intellectual Teddy Boy'. (Cohen 1980:38)

<sup>13</sup> Until 1967 most medium sized towns had their own force, complete with CID department

assist in investigations' (2012: 36 ). The American sociologist Geoffrey Gorer noted an enthusiasm for the force that was 'peculiarly English and an important part of the contemporary English character' (1955: 238). By the end of the decade the press coverage of the Podolda Affair<sup>14</sup> led to the Royal Commission on Police 1961-1962 which 'deplored the practice of linking an officer's promotion prospects to the number of convictions obtained' (quoted in Thomas 459: 2006). 1963 saw a number of press allegations of police brutality across the UK ranging from the 'Sheffield Rhino Whip' case<sup>15</sup> to the 'Challenor Affair', in which a London Detective-Sergeant was accused of brutality and framing over 10 suspects.

Finally, we arrive at the changing attitudes to those in power – often known as 'The Establishment' following a 1955 essay by Henry Fairlie<sup>16</sup> – and marked by two events worn smooth by their sheer repetition in countless articles – the Suez Crisis and the Profumo Affair. By 1951, India and Pakistan were independent members of the Commonwealth but the UK still controlled colonies across the globe in addition to having a controlling interest in other states, such as Egypt. 1922 saw the Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence but the British troops remained to guard the Suez Canal – the UK's conduit to India – and Whitehall installed its own monarch of Egypt, King Feud.

In 1952, a group of The 'Free Officers' ousted Feud's son Farouk' and four years later the country's President, Gamel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. The British and French governments saw this as a threat to accessing their Persian oil interests: in 1955 'petroleum accounted for half of the canal's traffic, and, in turn, two-thirds of Europe's oil passed through it and Far East territories' (Yergin 2008: 480). The Anglo-French 'Operation Musketeer', backed with a secret deal with the Israeli Government, commenced on 30th October but without the support of the US administration.

But, by the 28th of November the Foreign Secretary told the Cabinet that he believed economic judgements now out-weighed the political and that 'if we withdrew the Anglo-French force as quickly as possible we should regain the sympathy of the United States government' (Gorst and Johnman 2013: 142). On 3rd December Selwyn Lloyd announced Britain's withdrawal from the Canal Zone and 'American coffers were now opened to the financially embarrassed British; Britain could draw \$561 million from the IMF (International

<sup>14</sup> Involving a murder suspect receiving severe, much publicised, injuries as a result of eight hours of questioning in a London police station' (Kynaston 2014:724-725).



<sup>15</sup> CID officers working for Sheffield's newly formed Serious Crime Division beat two suspects with Rhino whips during interrogation. In the resulting Home Office enquiry, it was decreed that the detectives would not have carried out such assaults 'without the prior authority or the presence or the consent of their senior officer' (Thomas 2006:455).

<sup>16</sup>.By the 'Establishment' I do not mean only the centres of official power—though they are certainly part of it—but rather the whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised. The exercise of power in Britain (more specifically, in England) cannot be understood unless it is recognised that it is exercised socially (1955: 6).

Monetary Fund), with the possibility of further credit of \$738 million in future, to replenish the depleted dollar reserves' (Gorst and Johnman 2013 144-145). Anthony Eden resigned as Prime Minister in January 1957, being replaced by Harold Macmillan, and in Dominic Sandbrook's rather moving words:

It was as though a cord between the realities of the present and the glories of the past had been snapped. He was the last of the statesmen of the thirties to occupy 10 Downing Street and the last of the political heroes of the war to lead his party. His resignation was a powerful signal that the era of the world wars was over. The British people would have new leadership to carry them into the challenges of the 1960s. (2005: 50)

The former senior civil servant Lord Franks regarded the Suez Crisis as akin to 'a flash of lightning on a dark night. What it did was to light up an unfamiliar landscape. It was a landscape in which the two superpowers, and principally the United States, had told us to stop and we had to stop' (Lord Franks quoted in Hennessy 2006: 665).

The 1950s also saw an increasing number of reports of atrocities committed by British servicemen in colonial territories. In June of 1957 the colonial government in Cyprus published a Government White Paper in response entitled *Allegations of Brutality in Cyprus* which, as David French notes 'cut little ice with its critics in Britain and Cyprus, for the obvious reason that the government was acting as investigator, prosecutor, judge and jury in their own case' (2015: 206). But the hope expressed in the White Paper that British forces could rely 'on the world-wide knowledge of their traditions of humanity and decency' (quoted by Norton-Taylor *The Guardian* 27th July 2012) in accusations of brutality seemed remote. In March 1959 there came the simultaneous publication of reports on the deaths of eleven prisoners at the hands of their warders at the Hola Detention Camp in Kenya and the highly critical report by Lord Devlin on the conduct of the Nyasaland (Malawi) emergency.

The Hola report showed that the Kenya government had tried to hide the truth about the cause of prisoners' deaths, claiming they had died from drinking dirty water. In fact they had been beaten to death. Devlin, in a phrase that went far towards discrediting British colonial administrations in Africa and elsewhere, concluded that the Nyasaland government had a run a "police state". (French 2012:280-281).

The Conservative MP Enoch Powell told the House of Commons 'We cannot say, "We will have African standards in Africa, Asian standards in Asia and perhaps British standards here at home."' (Hansard 27th July 1959) and Phillip N Murphy notes, in the 1959 General Election, 'Conservative candidates could expect to make little capital out of the government's record on imperial affairs' (1995: 328).

1963 saw a well-publicised event were ‘the spheres of politics, medicine, law, journalism, smart society, new money and espionage all converged’ (Davenport-Hines 2013: 5) - the so-called ‘Profumo Affair’. At a party at Cliveden House in 1961 John Profumo, the Secretary of State for War met Christine Keeler, a showgirl, who also claimed to have had an affair with the Soviet Naval Attaché Eugene Ivanov. Profumo and Keeler embarked on an illicit relationship, which eventually resulted in his resignation. Peter Hennessy observes that ‘affluence at home was repeatedly punctured by sterling crises and spending and defence reviews’ (2006: 65) and the Profumo Affair unfolded at a time when Britain’s relative economic decline was the subject of concern by several commentators as represented by such books as *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (Michael Shanks 1961).

A rate of economic growth of 3.2 per cent between 1957 and 1965 may have been the most impressive rate since the 1860s (Kynaston 2014: 490-491) but this was still less than that of West Germany. In 1957 Harold Macmillan, then only a few months into his Prime Ministership, gave a speech in Bedford that contained the famous phrase ‘you’ve never had it so good’ but used in the wider context of fears to return to the inflation of the 1930s<sup>17</sup>. Six years later Andrew Shonfield complained that the lack of quality in British manufactured goods was one of the reasons why ‘ Britain’s share of world exports of manufactures has gone down consistently by a bit more in every year’ (1963: 39-40) during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Goronwy Rees claimed that ‘the great majority of those who form the country’s grand committee of management do not have the knowledge or the understanding to apply them’ (1963: 23) and Anthony Sampson argued in his *Anatomy of Britain* that the nation’s problems stemmed from:

The old fabric of the British governing classes, while keeping its social and political hold, has failed to accommodate the vast forces of science, education or social change which (whether they like it or not) are changing the face of the country. (1962: 638)

As an example of social change John Altrincham’s essay *The Monarchy Today* published in *The National and New English Review* in 1957 argued that the Queen’s advisers wrote speeches that gave her the image of ‘a priggish schoolgirl, captain of the hockey team, a prefect, and a recent candidate for confirmation’ (quoted in Judd 2012: 249). Altrincham was subsequently attacked by one B K Burbage, who was fined 20 shillings, the magistrate observing that ‘ninety-five per cent of the population of this country were disgusted and offended by what was written’ (quoted in Wilson 2009: 56).

<sup>17</sup> The full text – ‘Go around the country, go to individual towns, go to the farms, and you will see a prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime, nor indeed in the history of this country. What is beginning to worry some of us is, is it too good to be true, or perhaps I should say, is it too good to last? For, amidst all this prosperity, there is one problem that has troubled us in one way or another: can prices be steadied while at the same time we maintain full employment in an expanding economy? Can we control inflation? This is the problem of our time. The great mass of the country has, for the time being at any rate, been able to contract out of the effects of rising prices, but they will not be able to contract out forever if inflation prices u s o u t of world markets, for if that happens, we will be back in the old nightmare of unemployment. The older ones guards you will know what this means. I hope the younger ones will never have to learn it’.

Three years later came the case of *R v Penguin Books*. The Obscene Publications Act 1959 now required the prosecutors to consider the book as a whole – as opposed to individual passages – and in 1960 Penguin an unexpurgated edition of the D H Lawrence novel. The Crown Prosecutor Mervyn Griffith-Jones asked of the jury ‘Is it a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?’ David Cannadine notes how the post-war Conservative ideal view of England was one ‘composed of individuals who knew their place and of a fundamental unity of society’ (2000: 157) but in event the members of the jury did not find the book obscene. Sandbrook contends that ‘the controversy was little more than a storm in a tea-cup’ (2005: xxi) the consequences of publishing of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as a 3/6d paperback would mean that it would be available for all and sundry to be variously scandalised, depraved, bored or enlightened by Lawrence’s work.

In the following year the neat and well-groomed Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore in their postgraduate review *Beyond the Fringe* mocked British war films of the previous decade in the sketch entitled *The Aftermyth of War*. There was a mixed reception in the provincial tour<sup>18</sup> but the routine remained in an integral part of the show. January 1962 saw the BBC air the first of episode of *Z Cars*, which concerned the young crews of unmarked Ford Zephyr patrol cars in a North Country city. The plots frequently depicted the officers as out of their depth as they tried to enforce the law in an increasingly fragmented society; viewing figures for the first series reached 16 million (Sydney-Smith 2002: 169).

The 24th November of 1962 saw the premiere of BBC Television’s *That Was The Week That Was*, fronted by David Frost, a Cambridge graduate and clergyman’s son who presided over a live weekly satirical revue. Harold Macmillan resigned as premier on the grounds of ill health on 18th October 1963 and Davenport-Hines regards the Profumo Affair as ‘the death-blow of an England that was deferential and discreet’ (2013: 330). Certainly large numbers of the population seemed very keen to read Lord Denning’s enquiry - published in October 1963 by Her Majesty’s Stationary Office and available for all and sundry to read. As Bernard Levin noted, it even contained section headings that ‘read like those of some old-fashioned crime novel’<sup>19</sup>(1970:80-81).

This thesis ends halfway through a decade described from the recent viewpoint of

<sup>18</sup> At one performance, ‘a gentleman of military bearing stood up, shook his fist and shouted, “You young bounders don’t know anything about it!” (quoted in Ramsden 2003:32).

<sup>19</sup>One example – ‘The Slashing and the Shooting’ (Levin1970:81).

Bernard Levin as one that ‘saw an old world die and a new one come to birth’ (1970: 78). Arthur Marwick concludes *The Sixties* with ‘nothing would ever be quite the same again’ (1998: 806). Dominic Sandbrook makes the very valid point that ‘there is no such thing as a single national experience. People rarely remember that the soundtracks of *The Sound of Music* and *South Pacific* comfortably outsold any of the Beatles’ albums of the decade’ (2005: xxiii- xxiv).

But the commercial success of the former is not to deny the artistic impact of the *Rubber Soul* LP just as it is essential to consider when reading Marwick’s list of advances in technology during the 1960s – ‘a modernised telephone systems (vital to teenagers); a remarkable expansion on jet travel’ (1998: 17) would have been experienced vicariously by many Britons. At the end of our period Britain was still sending troops to ‘several operations overseas as it tried to shore up the post-colonial political order’ (French 2012: 285), the police still favoured black Wolseleys in crime films and steam trains were still seen on those railway lines that had escaped Beeching’s scrutiny. Maude and Lewis claimed that the middle classes were ‘the main vehicle for the transmission of the essential national culture’ (1950: vii) and in the early part of this period the young professional chaps are seen as keen and contentious, rather the resentful figures of David Cannadine describes as having an ‘embattled perception’ (2000:152) of their lot.

But by 1965, as I shall attempt to evoke, the fissures in the carapace of normality that were already apparent in many mainstream films of the 1950s became yet more obvious. To quote Richard Davenport-Hines, it was almost as if a decent chap returned home without initially noticing that the ‘living-room had swapped places with the living-room in the Windolene-burnished mirror hanging above the hearth; and that the air was hazy with unnameable secrets and squalid grudges’ (2013:331).

Finally, David Kynaston describes the phrase ‘modernity’ as having different meanings for different people and notes that ‘the change of pace varied considerably from place to place but by 1957 it was unmistakably becoming the dominant (if top-down) zeitgeist’ (2013: 46). This is one of the dominant themes of my work – of how ‘the chap’ negotiated modernity and changing views of tradition in a time when varying rates of change resulted in various forms of Britain co-existing. Harry Hopkins claimed that in the 1950s ‘affluence came hurrying on the heels of penury. Suddenly the shops were piled high with goods’ (1964: 309) but the sociologist Peter Townsend found that in the 1953-54 period there were ‘roughly 5.3 million people –

including 1.75 million primarily dependent on wages – were in what reasonably could be described as poverty’ (Kynaston 2009: 632). It was a time when *A Hard Day’s Night* (Richard Lester 1964) premiered in the year of Britain’s last hanging<sup>2023</sup>. And when a new Morris Mini Traveller and a steam engine could uneasily co-exist.



### CHAPTER 3 – ‘The Chap’: Father Figures 1951- 1965

Raymond Durnat observed that 1950s British cinema offered a ‘conspicuously rich line in fathers’ (1970: 174) and the archetypal paternal figure is a figure of probity, professional skill or training, combined with the humility to admit his own shortcomings. The actors who were most associated with paternal guidance during our period occupied the middle ground between the ‘unassuming behaviour of the character actor and self-promoting antics of the star’ (Macnab 2000:101). Their backgrounds are diverse – Jack Hawkins and John Mills were pre-war juvenile leads, the latter with an emphasis on song and dance and Cecil Parker was from the stage. Jack Warner was a former cabaret, variety comedian who moved into acting in his late forties and the film career of James Robertson Justice had similarly commenced in early middle age, and after a varied background, which included acting as Master of Ceremonies in amateur variety shows.

Justice’s career, in particular, has suffered from scant attention appears to have been paid to James Robertson Justice in terms of either the actor himself or of his impact on cinema of this period. Peter Hutchings makes a brief reference to Sir Lancelot Spratt, the actor’s recurring character in the *Doctor* series, as ‘one of the major castrating fathers of British cinema’ (1993: 45) but even the normally thorough Andrew Spicer only mentions Justice *en passant* in *Typical Men* although there is arguably no better embodiment of the ‘soppy-stern’ patriarch in post-war British cinema. His film career began when he was in early middle age, and Justice’s subsequent screen persona provides a vivid illustration of the challenges surrounding the construction of that image. As Peter Kramer and Alan Lowell warn:

<sup>20</sup>On 13th August 1964, Peter Allen and Gwynne Owen Evans, at were executed for the murder of John West on 7th April that year

A performance is made out of a large number of actions, gestures, facial and vocal expressions...Many analyses of film acting are in fact discussions of a fictional characters (whose creation is the work of a writer) rather than analyses of how that character is embodied (the work of an actor). (1999: 5)

In terms of this embodiment, Jack Warner's background as a variety comic and professional motor engineer gave him an image that was both slightly lower down the social scale than Justice was. This made him as suited to depicting senior police officers and professional cricketers as his phlegmatic trainer in *The Square Ring* (Basil Dearden 1953). Warner's background as a cabaret entertainer often infused his patriarchal roles just as Nicholas Phipps' screenplays often employed facets of the real Justice for his comedy roles for Betty E Box. However, Warner's range as an actor was far wider than is now popularly believed and his Quisling for Ealing's *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton 1948) and George Martin, his Shaw quoting sociopath in *My Brother's Keeper* (Alfred Roome 1948), are both extremely well-observed examples of screen villainy.

Other patriarchal figures of our period also display had a slightly more ambivalent set of personae. Robert Morley's characters could be self-satisfied and self-conscious in their eccentric mannerisms – *vide* his Lord Lorgan in *The Rainbow Jacket* (Basil Dearden 1954) or his provincial repertory theatre producer in *Curtain Up* (Ralph Smart 1952). Occasionally they could appear formidable; Sir Francis Ravenscourt's evident fear and loathing of his screen son in *The Good Die Young* (Lewis Gilbert 1954) is remarkable in an era of mostly amiable fathers. The character actor Alistair Sim achieved stardom as the ambiguous Inspector Cockerill in *Green for Danger* (Sidney Gilliat 1946) and Bruce Babington refers to his screen persona as having an 'underlying jolly eccentric, not-so-jolly, verging on the sinister, ambivalence' (2002: 157). Sim's characters often commented upon the illogical actions of others, as the eponymous detective in *An Inspector Calls* (Guy Hamilton 1954) but his screen patriarchs could be equally self-indulgent and histrionic. Michael Brooke sees the actor's film characters as often being in positions of authority but 'his grip on power was usually tenuous, its potential slippage fore-shadowed by frightened-rabbit panic behind the eyes or a flickering tongue behind a nervous, snaggle-toothed smile'(2005:34).

The actor who displayed the greatest variation of personae in terms of paternal authority was arguably Cecil Parker, who could be variously weak and vacillating as in *The Man in the White Suit* (Alexander Mackendrick 1951) blustering and corrupt in *The Ladykillers* or well-meaning as in *I Believe in You* (Basil Dearden 1952). The last-named was based Sewell Stoke's memoirs of his time as a wartime probation officer updated to a contemporary

setting and so we follow Cecil Parker's retired colonial officer and 'man of leisure' Henry Phipps being induced into the Probation Service. The film details how he and his female colleague 'Matty' Matheson (Celia Johnson) attempt to guide Harry Fowler's Charlie Hooker and Joan Collins' Norma away from the malign influence of Jordie Bennett (Laurence Harvey), a louche habitué of a subterranean world of jazz dens.

Charles Barr has used the picture as an example of how much of Ealing's late period was devoted to 'Deference to age and authority. There is virtually no defiance or even enterprise on the part of youth, no confrontation between father and son figures' (1993: 149). However, Durgnat was more accurate in his assessment that 'English do-gooders come movingly alive on the screen' (1970: 138). Hooker is angry, homeless and frightened and, as with his probation officer, trying to find his way in a strange society. The screenplay allows Parker, an actor seemingly incapable of giving an ill-judged performance, to display Henry gradually coming to learn that his genuinely good intentions and personal integrity – in the first reel we see him tactfully declining Norma's offer of sexual favours – must be reinforced by a sense of understanding for his charges.

Four years later in *It's Great To be Young!* (Cyril Frankel 1956) Parker's Frome is the headmaster of Angel Hill Grammar, a lonely and seemingly austere figure in opposition to John Mills' popular music teacher Mr. Dingle. Frome deplures jazz - 'it ruins character'- and Ted Wills' screenplay explicitly approves of the Ted Heath style crooning of the well-scrubbed Angel Hill scholars, depicting it as complementing rather than compromising the pupils' genuine devotion to classical music. Plain is also right when she argues that 'the film has worked hard to emphasise that the headmaster is a fair man with right on his side' (2006: 223) as displayed by his dismissal of his music teacher. Dingle, with the best of motives, has taken an evening job playing a pub piano to guarantee a loan agreement for the orchestra's new instruments.

Here the film is rather ambivalent towards the wonders of hire purchase, as Dingle's impetuous actions have left him vulnerable to Eddie Byrne's faintly vulpine music dealer agent. In doing so, he has severely compromised his professionalism in both acting as guarantor and in taking a pub job to pay for the instruments. When a fellow staff member Routledge (John Salew) visits the public bar and spies Dingle playing the piano, Frome summons his music teacher. There he also encounters Bryan Forbes as a spiv-like instrument salesman and so the headmaster has no option but to dismiss Dingle. This result in school riots but ultimately the film sees Frome as an ultimately misunderstood figure, one who plans to resign through his

failure in to inspire his students. The film concludes with both versions of paternal authority united – the liberal and the caring conservative.

These roles essayed by Cecil Parker are a vivid illustration of how human the father figures of mainstream British films can be. Jeffrey Richards was being only partially accurate

when he described Jack Hawkins and John Mills as epitomizing ‘old-fashioned English decency’ (1997:144) at a time when post-war society was settling back after the Second World War - as their respective personae were sometimes far more ambivalent than the tweedy exteriors would often suggest. Mills’ roles in the 1950s also displayed a greater flexibility of social class than those played by Parker or Jack Hawkins as displayed by his matelot in *The Baby and the Battleship* (Jay Lewis 1956) or his Corporal Binns in *Dunkirk* (Leslie Norman 1958). Mills was actually two years older than Hawkins but thanks to his small stature and his pre-war experience as a song and dance artist – *It’s Great to Be Young!* is one of the few films of this period that highlight Mills’ abilities at physical comedy – he was often cast in parts younger than his real age. This is highlighted by his junior RAF officer Peter Penrose in *The Way to the Stars*– Spicer notes how ‘by the end of the war Mills had emerged as the new Everyman; a masculine ideal of stoicism, steadiness and modest hopes for the future’ (2003: 27).

It would not be until *Morning Departure* (Roy Ward Baker 1950) that Mills would play a senior officer in a contemporary setting. His Lieutenant Commander Peter Armstrong is the captain of a peacetime submarine that is hit by a mine, resulting in its twelve-strong crew being trapped with escape equipment for only eight. Armstrong is a congenial member of the ward room who is notably more efficient in his demeanour than his shore based colleagues and an approachable authority figure who is also never entirely unconscious of his rank. Geoffrey Macnab claimed that ‘Whether as leading man or character actor (and he often seemed the same as both), Mills was always the same principled altruist’ (2000:102). Yet, during the period this thesis focuses on the actor portrayed the embittered and vulnerable protagonists of *The Long Memory* (Robert Hamer 1952), *Town on Trial* (John Guillermin 1957) and *Tunes of Glory* (Ronald Neame 1960).

The first named was rather glibly described by Raymond Durnat as an example of British cinema’s ‘running man’ sub-genre where ‘Insofar as the “running man” is violent, he’s a cad, insofar as he’s basically decent, he’s a cadet’ (1970: 144). Yet, this does not equate with Mills’ middle-aged near wreck taking refuge in the marshlands where his only source of entertainment a gimcrack café. These surroundings remain equally bleak at a conclusion that has Davidson exonerated but it in this refuge that he finds genuine kindness and rehabilitation from Ilse (Eva Bergh), a European refugee. Phillip Kemp believed that the role of Davidson called ‘for a cold, harsh venom that isn’t within the actor’s compass’ (2000: 78) but throughout the film Mills very successfully sustains a consistent note of seething rage. A

scene in which he quizzes a slow-witted waitress for crucial evidence has the actor glaring at her 'as though he'd cheerfully strangle her with her own apron strings' (Sweet 2005: 244). This

sense of suppressed aggression is evident in some of Mills' uniformed roles - *Morning Departure* has Armstrong forced, by the most appalling of circumstances, to endure the company of James Hayter's Able Seaman Higgins and Richard Attenborough's Stoker Snipe in the wardroom. Here Mills, by use of subtle gesture and a strained vocal delivery, makes it quite apparent to his lower deck shipmates - and to us - that he finds their conversation and deportment irksome but is doing his best to endure them.

Mills' near contemporary in age was Jack Hawkins, a former juvenile lead in British cinema before the Second World War. After serving as an ENSA Colonel Hawkins' post-war incarnation was that of a faintly menacing CID officer - *The Fallen Idol* (Carol Reed 1948) - saturnine heavy - *State Secret* (Sidney Gilliat) - or fast-talking confidence man - *The Small Back Room* (Michael Powell 1948). His screen association with the armed forces on screen commenced with ABPC's *Angels One Five* (George More O'Ferrall 1951) when he was cast as Group Captain 'Tiger' Small, warning junior officers that 'we don't take kindly to people who break the team's rules. The others are trying to help you do your job and it's up to you to help them to do theirs'. Hawkins' stardom was reinforced by *Mandy* (Alexander Mackendrick 1952) and *The Intruder* (Guy Hamilton 1953).

The latter commences with Hawkins' Colonel 'Wolf' Merson discovering that a burglar in his house was 'Ginger' Edwards (Michael Medwin), one of his best troopers during the war. In flashback we see how Merson believed in meritocracy and was a figure of honour as compared to the snobbish and cowardly Captain Pirry (Dennis Price). The narrative further establishes that Edwards is an orphan and that the uncle (Edward Chapman) who acts as his guardian is a sanctimonious bully whom Ginger kills by accident. Hawkins plays Merson with a sense of anger that other directors would use for more sinister purpose such as The Interrogator in *The Prisoner* (Peter Glenville 1955) but in *The Intruder* it is partially self-directed; the Colonel has failed to keep in contact with his men after the war.

When Merson offers to help Ginger to escape the country and behaves as a real father figure, it is only then that Edwards finally surrenders to the police. It is a conclusion equally represents paternalism and a repudiation of the belief that now the war is over it is back to business as usual. *The Intruder* shows how the Colonel's peacetime refusal to abandon one of his chaps is contrasted sharply with of his former second in command whose ostensibly correct approach in contacting the police is seen to be morally wrong. Murphy rather interestingly refers to Pirry as 'middle class' (2000: 192) and in Price's deliberately exaggerated vowels



(combined with the character's persistent use of his title of Captain in civilian life) there is the faint inference that he is a parvenu. Most of Hawkins' 1950s roles were of middle class

professionals but Merson, judging by his bespoke clothes, car, home and manner, is a true gentleman.

*Mandy* is more crucial in depicting the flaws of 1950s paternal figures, both the head master Dick Searle (Jack Hawkins) and within the family. The script by Nigel Balchin and Jack Whittingham describes how by the time Mandy Garland - played by Mandy Miller - is aged six her mother, Christine (Phyllis Calvert) takes her to Manchester to a school for the deaf where Searle sees Mandy's potential and gives her special evening lessons at Christine's flat. Ackland (Edward Chapman), a solicitor on the school's board of governors, wanting to discredit Searle attempts to gain compromising evidence and informs the child's father Harry (Terence Morgan) that Mrs. Garland is having an affair with the head master. As a caring educationalist Hawkins' Dick Searle is pivotal in Mandy's liberation but although the benign intervention of a middle class professional is a standard narrative trope of British films of this era here *Mandy* uses the Hawkins screen persona in a faintly subversive manner. Mackendrick contrasts montage sequences of Searle guiding Mandy's progress at the school with the faintly seedy actions of Ackland and his enquiry agent but he also includes a scene where Searle is simultaneously conducting an art lesson and verbally sparring with Chapman's pompous solicitor.

As the two adults verbally snipe, a little boy tries to gain Ackland's attention to look at his painting but just as the child cannot make himself understood, Searle is willfully obtuse when confronted by his arrogant but socially insecure governor. As Andrew Moor notes somewhat floridly –‘Few chests were broader than Jack Hawkins, but he conveys, beneath Searle's curmudgeonly rudeness, an avuncular kindness at odds with Harry's brittle masculinity’ (2005: 80). However. Phillip Kemp is equally if not more correct when he suggests that the headmaster is ‘a man who has shut off a whole area of himself – incapable of sustaining an adult relationship, he deflects his emotional commitments onto the children in his care’ (1991: 80). In fact, the most positive figures in the film are Christine, who makes the crucial decision to send Mandy to school against the wishes of Harry, Dorothy Allison's teacher, who eventually turns Mandy's screams of frustration into words, and Mandy herself. Her handicap will not abate, her parents' marital problems remain unresolved and the terrain beyond the garden walls will always continue to threaten and to challenge. Mandy making her own decision to make tentative steps towards entering the wider community, a conclusion both honest and utterly affecting in its truthfulness.

Phipps, Merson, Searle – and many of Justice's characters in their more amiable moments - demonstrate how the 1950s screen patriarch is often willing to bend or break the law in order to help a member of his extended family. Furthermore, professionalism is

frequently matched by an adaptability of approach - in *Raising a Riot* (Wendy Toye 1955) Tony (Kenneth More), a navy commander who is forced to look after his three children during his wife's illness eventually learns that his upper deck manner just does not work in family life. Marcia Landy points out that 'the film does not portray Tony as improving on the woman's role' (1991: 384) and the conclusion has the hero admitting his weaknesses. *Chance of a Lifetime* (Bernard Miles 1950) which, despite the political controversy that its release entailed<sup>21</sup> is described by Aldgate and Richards as 'rather a benign and pleasant piece' (1999:171) but the screenplay by Miles and Walter Greenwood is not devoid of ambiguity.

Courtney Dickinson (Basil Radford) issues, in a mixture of bravado and despair, a challenge to his employees to manage his small Midlands industrial concern themselves. The narrative also takes pains to observe the faults of both management and workforce; the MD does not appear not to have noticed how dilapidated his factory seems or how underpaid Palmer (Russell Walters) the long serving office clerk is. Stevens, the workers' representative (Bernard Miles), heads a group that sometimes has to battle with the inertia of certain elements within the workforce. Some of his colleagues appreciate his commitment – at one point Stevens is even prepared to offer his own house as security in order to keep the business working – as little as they did that of their MD.

When currency restrictions lead to the cancellation of a vital new order, Stevens and his team are obliged to call on Dickinson for his advice and experience. The narrative may conclude on a note of mutual respect but there is no return for Bland (John Harvey), an expert works manager who is terrible at with dealing with human beings. He soon departs the new regime and his place is taken by Adam Watson (Kenneth More), a younger, more flexible and far less self-consciously hierarchical figure than Bland. By the closing credits Watson is promoted to MD, Dickinson now happy to take a consulting role – the paternal figure who has openly learned from his mistakes.

Radford's nuanced performance as Dickinson is a prime example of how British cinema of this period does not avoid illustrating the pressures of leadership. Dickinson is seen to be a WW1- scarred workaholic whose family concern appears to have taken the place of domestic life and in the early part of the film he appears to be teetering on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Ealing's *Lease of Life* (Charles Frend 1954) has Robert Donat's thoughtful and vulnerable country parson bravely facing mortal illness and the certainties of Ralph Richardson's aircraft designer Ridgefield in *Sound Barrier* (David Lean 1952) is undermined

<sup>21</sup> The major British film circuits refused to show the film because it was 'Socialist Propaganda'. The then President of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson, personally intervened to impose its release on the Odeon circuit.

by encroaching doubt after the death of his son (Denholm Elliott) - 'Can a vision be evil?'

The cardinal sin of British cinematic patriarchs is a failure of duty affecting the family unit or the wider community. Paternal and flexible professionalism automatically commands respect as much as ersatz authority is derided. Cecil Parker's probation officer and headmaster both wish to learn from their errors so that they may better practice their callings but Dingle's main rival on the staff, Mr. Routledge (John Salew), is pompous and hopeless at discipline. In *John and Julie* (William Fairchild 1955), which is set during the 1953 Coronation the one dissenting figure is John's father Pritchett, played by Sid James as a cynical curmudgeon. He is utterly opposed to the event throughout most of the film's running time; his conversion to community values is as essential in a narrative where patriotism is fundamental to family life. Rank's adaptation of AJ Cronin's *The Spanish Gardener* (Phillip Leacock 1956) has Michael Hordern's Harrington Brande as the virtual personification of middle-aged failure. Geraghty points out how Brande continually fails to consider the interests of his son Nicholas (Jon Whiteley) above his own (2000: 144) whereas Michael Redgrave's Andrew Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* (1951 Anthony Asquith) has apparently lost all form of self-belief.

Every aspect of the classics master - the tall, stooped frame, the orders to his class given in tones of quiet contempt, the pedantry of language – all infer utter despair. For nearly two decades, Andrew Crocker-Harris has served a system that has no compunction in disposing of him when he becomes ill – the scene with Wilfred Hyde-White's headmaster denying him a pension is one of the cruelest in British cinema. It is three confrontations with younger figures that make Crocker-Harris realise that his failure to act as a paternal figure for his students ultimately causes him more pain than the collapse of his marriage. Ronald Howard gives the finest performance of his career as Gilbert, Crocker-Harris's replacement who inadvertently reveals that the older teacher is known as 'The Himmler of the Lower Fifth', and the apparently insouciant Frank Hunter (Nigel Patrick) understands that Andrew has been 'just been about as badly hurt as a human being can be'. The third, and pivotal, encounter is with Taplow (Brian Smith), the only one of Crocker-Harris' pupils who is able to understand him. His desire to 'find out if he has been promoted is given so much space in the film that it represents more than a simple graduation from one class to another...but comes to signal a kind of fatherly bequest' (Platt 2003: 102). It is Taplow's gesture of kindness that triggers the breakdown, for he, together with Hunter and Gilbert, believes in Crocker-Harris. By the end of the film, the classics master has started to believe in himself for the first time in decades.

Bleaker is Redgrave's David Graham in *Time Without Pity* (Joseph Losey 1957), an alcoholic writer whose own illness and self-loathing has alienated him from his family just as the homicidal businessman Robert Stanford (Leo McKern) uses his money as a form of domestic control. Julian Petley notes whilst 'native English cinema tends to tone down emotional "excess" and to regard melodrama as a pejorative term, Losey tends to play *up* the passion' (1986: 112) and here Graham has only 24 hours to save his son Alec from the gallows; sentenced for a murder carried out by Stanford. Redgrave plays Graham senior not as a figure of staunch reliability but a complex mixture of hysteria and resolve, growing ever more frantic in the face of English bureaucracy and self-serving MPs and journalists; 'Stop acting as a lawyer' he screams at Peter Cushing's coldly professional defence solicitor, 'Tell me what you believe *as a man.*' Moreover, it is as a man that David finally atones for his paternal failures – Alec apparently accepts his sentence, reasoning to his father that 'Why should I wait until I turn into something like you?' And seemingly as much to avoid this fate, David breaks the cycle of time and inertia by sacrificing himself.

However, it is *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (J Lee Thompson 1957) that possibly conveys the harshest yet sympathetic indictment of the senior white-collar professional. The plot has senior office clerk Jim Preston (Anthony Quayle) on the verge of leaving his wife Amy (Yvonne Mitchell) for his younger colleague Georgie (Sylvia Syms). Jim's position allows his family a degree of material comfort he is apparently blind to Amy's encroaching depression. 'It matters to me!' she screams in despair after one domestic crisis too many after Jim ineffectually tries to reassure her. We later see Amy make one major attempt to escape from her domestic Hades in order to make herself more attractive to Jim. In doing so she only faces further humiliation at the hands of hair salon receptionists, off licensees and even casual passers-by but as Melanie Williams observes, one of the real tragedies in the narrative is that 'the makeover *is* triumphant, however briefly' (2013: 720).

Yvonne Mitchell's performance as was brilliantly described by Durgnat as having 'the considerable and un-British merit of being *embarrassingly* moving, as are certain performances by Judy Garland or Giulietta Masina (1970: 181) but the film benefits immeasurably from Quayle's subtle understanding of a patriarch who is completely out of his depth. Jim is a prime example of how, by the late 1950s, British cinema's paternal figures in the police, military or business often displayed fundamental weaknesses that no amount of pipe-smoking can hope to mask. Ealing's *The Man in the Sky* (Charles Crichton 1957) has Jack Hawkins as John Mitchell, a test pilot at Conway's, a firm on the verge of bankruptcy that hopes for a vital

new contract. During a routine test of Conway's latest plane, an engine catches fire and Mitchell orders everyone to parachute to safety. However, he remains to save his company's contract – and his own professional future – via an act of heroism that puts his marriage under severe strain.

This role, even more than *Mandy* or *The Intruder*, displays Hawkins as the insecure and



truculent patriarch. ‘The man who said “better a live coward than a dead hero” was a live coward’ Mitchell bellows at his wife (Elizabeth Sellers) but his actions were not for Queen and Country but for his firm, his mortgage and his marriage and his own sense of bravado. Mitchell’s actions are at least a partial form of escape from the seemingly endless parade of semi-detached villas in a Wolverhampton suburb and an opportunity for excitement. This sense of ambiguity pervades the senior authority figures across a range of genres. With *The Damned* (1961) are more oblique. Joseph Losey took the opportunity to make his last Hammer film transcend its ingredients of Teds, motorcycles and mad scientists, elements that could have easily provided the basis for a film of cheap ineptitude. Matthew Grant notes how Bernard (Alexander Knox) a scientist who keeps a group of radioactive children imprisoned:

out of duty arising from the feeling that war is unavoidable and that ordinary people have no hope of surviving it. His absolute certainty of the annihilation of the globe is chilling, and it has caused him to imprison, or, as he sees it, care for, these children in the hope of providing some sort of future both for them and the human race as a whole. (2013: 22)

In Knox’s performance, Bernard is not the merely a dour Scottish scientist, the apparent embodiment of the middle-aged middle class scientific expert of post-war British films, but a very human villain. Bernard appreciates art, has friends outside of his work and is utterly sincere in his belief that the children, incarcerated in a nightmare version of a post-war neo-brutalist classroom, are in need of his protection, regardless of the human costs. Meanwhile, the staff rooms of *Spare the Rod* 1961 (Leslie Norman) and *Term of Trial* (Peter Glenville 1962) are populated by defeated middle-aged teachers. and whilst 1950s cinema often had lower-middle class life depicted in terms of patriarchs’ heading households of contented security - *The Happy Family* (Sydney Box 1951) or *It’s a Great Day* John Warrington 1956) Wilfrid Pickles’ Geoffrey Fisher in *Billy Liar!* is an irascible and insecure individual. Pickles was a popular radio personality of that period with a broadcasting persona of a good-natured Yorkshireman but his Fisher senior is unsupportive and deeply insecure. Liz (Julie Christie) offers Billy Fisher (Tom Courtney) an escape route to London - Sarah Street sees the scene of her swinging her handbag past C & A27 as ‘what it means to escape to the big city of bright lights and false dreams’ (1997: 86). However, his rejection of this lifeline means been condemned to a future as frustrating as that of his father.

Further up the class scale it is a group of 1960s’ second features and low-budget main features that often display the pressures faced by middle class and middle-aged professionals. *The Big Day* (Peter Graham Scott 1960) has Donald Pleasance’s accountant Victor Partridge as much

a victim of social hypocrisy as of his own weaknesses as he is appraised for promotion to the Board of Directors. *Material Witness* (Geoffrey Nethercott 1965) boasts a superb performance by Reginald Marsh as the depressed and overworked executive Harry Turner, whose expense account and Rover 2000 are poor substitutes for peace of mind. *Smokescreen* (Jim O'Connell 1964) has the insurance investigator Roper (Peter Vaughan) manipulating his expense claims in order to pay for the nursing of his mortally ill wife.

Possibly the most poignant example of the values of a decent and caring father figure being resoundingly rejected is *The World Ten Times Over* (Wolf Rilla 1963). Two young women, Ginnie (June Ritchie) and Billa (Sylvia Syms), work as hostesses in the same London night club, the schoolmaster father of the latter (William Hartnell) paying her a visit from his home in the country. If 'Dad' ultimately dismisses his daughter as 'a whore' this comes after she has calculatingly humiliated him when he finally visits his daughter's place of work. There are few sadder examples of the lack of communication between generations in British film, for if Billa is exasperated by her father's delusions on how she earns her living – 'public relations!' she cries in derision at one point – her corrosive self-loathing is dangerously toxic.

The development of the personae of Mills, Hawkins, Warner and Justice, the key father figures of 1950s British cinema, will be dealt with in more depth in subsequent chapters, but it is notable how the former juvenile regulars of Rank or ABPC such as John Gregson or Peter Finch often mirror these changes. Gregson was often used at Pinewood as the embodiment of Celtic clean living but middle age saw him as in *Live Now, Pay Later* (Jay Lewis 1962) as Callendar, the self-deluding owner of a cheap provincial credit store, selling his cheap goods with a sad fake bonhomie. Raymond Durnat refers to Peter Finch's ability to convey 'a vulnerable fatherliness' (1976: 5), as seen in *Windom's Way* (Ronald Neame 1957), which is set in the Far East where a strike on a rice plantation is handled equally badly by local officials and white farm managers. The doctor is a more a trustworthy figure than the blustering farm manager Patterson (Michael Hordern) or Marne Maitland's saturnine local police chief Commissioner Belhedron but he is also politically naïve. Finch's perfectly judged performance has Windom as a compassionate but humanly flawed professional caught in a situation where there are no easy, or glibly resolved, solutions.

Finch was contracted to the Rank Organisation in 1954 and his last film for the studio was *No Love for Johnnie* (Ralph Thomas 1961). This was the company's first X certificate picture and it was commissioned in the wake of the commercial success of *Room at the Top*. Betty Box and Ralph Thomas were, 'even given their special arrangement with Rank'

(Williams 2005:125), surprised when John Davis gave them permission to produce a screen adaptation of the controversial novel written by the Labour MP Wilfred Fienburgh<sup>22</sup>. Box, a

<sup>22</sup> The novel was posthumously published in 1959 after Fienburgh's death in a car crash.

former Communist Party member believed that the anti- heroic protagonist Johnnie Byrne was a socialist MP may have been a deciding factor for Davis' approval (Shaw 2006:58).

As the 1950s progressed the team were becoming increasingly frustrated with the mechanics of their comedy series, Thomas explaining that 'We'd make a deal; one *Doctor* film for something we really wanted to do'. (Thomas quoted in Dixon 2001:110) Durgnat describes the film in terms of 'taking a novel which was a laceratingly honest self-criticism by a Labour MP...and transforming it into pro-Conservative propaganda' (1970: 69) but this is not entirely so. The screenplay, Mordechai Richelieu and Box and Thomas's regular collaborator, the actor-writer Nicholas Phipps, depicts the sheer confused angst beneath the smooth carapace of a middle-aged professional, regardless of his politics. In Finch's justly BAFTA winning performance Johnnie Byrne is a deracinated individual, one who lost his Yorkshire accent as a Captain in the Second World War – 'For six months in the mess all I said was "pass the marmalade please"'. The film depicts the communist ginger group that Johnnie temporarily aligns himself out of expediency as unattractive in motive and demeanour<sup>2</sup> but their beliefs are at least sincere whilst Johnnie only seems to come alive when before a television camera.

Johnnie also lives in terror of returning to his roots. When he is threatened by a vote of no confidence by his North Country constituency party and narrowly avoids de-selection Johnnie - is physically sick. Thomas frames the local community from Johnnie's viewpoint: an assortment of unionists and activists whose accents represent the world from which Byrne has largely escaped. His past is now closed, his present expressed primarily in what would come to be known as sound bites and his Johnnie's response when his pass to Mary (Billie Whitelaw) is rejected is one of utter devastation:

"Nobody wants me. There's nobody anywhere", he sobs desperately, but the rest of his sentence, significantly, is unclear...Does he say "I just wanted to be someone" or "I just wanted to be with someone"? It hardly matters; for Johnnie, the two have become tragically interchangeable. (Williams 2005:131)

*No Love for Johnnie* is arguably more concerned with exploring the frailties of the middle class males psyche than political observation and towards the end of our period Finch appeared in *The Pumpkin Eater* (d. Jack Clayton 1964), adapted by Harold Pinter from Penelope Mortimer's novel. His use of sparse dialogue is seamlessly coalesced with the mellow cinematography to depict an upper-middle class capital where the orderly surface is demon-ridden. Jo Armitage (Anne Bancroft) resides in Hampstead town house, is a mother to a number of healthy children and her husband Jake (Finch) is a successful scriptwriter. However,

mental illness has trapped Jo in a very English Hades, one where demons lurk at every corner; at London Zoo she encounters James Mason's vengeful cuckold Bob Conway, whose air of joie-

de- vivre soon dissolves into a barely suppressed rage. At a hair salon, Jo is approached by Yootha Joyce's seemingly bi-polar fellow customer, whose moods change with quicksilver speed from shyness, to potential violence and ultimately to despair. Jake is professionally extremely successful and looks to be in his late forties but acts like a juvenile lead is seemingly incapable of proving any degree of support.

When Jo suffers from a near inevitable nervous breakdown it is in the temple of respectable affluence that is, theoretically, Jake's reward for his work as a writer - 'In Harrods of all places!' he expostulates. However there is the faint insinuation that Jo's charming, philandering husband is almost equally emotionally fragile beneath his carapace of wit. Sinyard was extremely accurate when he summarised the theme of *The Pumpkin Eater* in terms of 'the tension that Chekhov thought lay at the heart of all great drama; the tension between life as it is and life as it ought to be...if I had to identify the theme of the film in one sentence, this would be it' (2000: 117). The end of *The Pumpkin Eater* is of a note of reconciliation between Jo and her errant husband; a conclusion that is as adult as it is moving precisely because it entirely lacks glibness.

The final father figure of British cinema of this era is one that is an apparent throwback to an earlier ethos - *Thunderball* (Terence Young 1965) one of the most successful British films, features Bernard Lee as a traditional father figure. Richard Dyer contended that a star 'embodies that particular conception of what it is to be human that characterises our culture (1979: 111). The 007 pictures will be covered in depth in Chapter 13 but here I will argue that this equally applies to leading character players such as Lee, who had played a range of senior authority figures in 1950s British films. In 1965, his 'M' is the perfect example of a coldly affable and dependable senior professional, usually seen in his reassuring timber framed office. The frailties displayed by the fatherly professionals were sometimes apparent at the beginning of our period but by 1965, the Bond films provided a reassuring fantasy away from doubt.

## CHAPTER 4 – ‘The Chap’: Decent Young Types 1951- 1965

In *Stars* Richard Dyer refers to the ‘Good Joe’ the egalitarian everyman hero of Hollywood (1998: 48) and his nearest British equivalent is ‘the chap’, the young middle class professionals who be ‘a part of a coherent interventionism in social life’ (Weeks 1989: 233). An early example is Kenneth More’s Adam Watson in *Chance of a Lifetime* - approachable to the workforce and demonstrably good at his job; at one point, we see him explaining the intricacies of the new plough. Watson is also sympathetic towards the management’s problems – as with Dickinson he at least tries to understand the awkward and isolated Brand – and this combination of personal integrity and professional talents that have earned him his new position and the conclusion suggests a capital/professional alliance as the solution to industrial woes. It also conveys more than a suggestion of a father/son model; Adam is visibly younger than Brand and, crucially, more willing to take advice from a paternal employer who is now able, once more, to resume his duties.

Adam Watson is an early example of the figure sardonically described by Durgnat in *A Mirror for England* as ‘the cadet’, one who dominated British films of the 1950s (1970:142). However, this an example of the writer at his most dismissively sweeping. This was indeed the era in which the studio system would bestow upon their leading men the image of decent respect- ability but the sober suits and sports jackets on screen do not always reflect either the emotions such figures can convey. One example is John Gregson, whose depiction in *Genevieve* of the middle class male at his most adolescent is remarkably well-observed. Aside from their sense of duty - and appreciation of the finer qualities of tweed - the one factor that united the cadet was their middle class professional personae as demonstrated by *White Corridors* (Pat Jackson 1951). The film combines Jackson’s documentary background in wartime cinema with a celebration of public service that is adult in approach. Dr. Neil Marriner (James Donald) is the central figure, and his dedicated but approachable manner in working for the common good is in sharp contrast to Dr. Dick Groom (Jack Watling).

Groom is a young upper- class house surgeon, the son of the hospital’s senior surgeon (Godfrey Tearle), but although he is neither a cad nor a bounder, his amiable manner hides a dangerously undisciplined approach to his profession. In an institution where the quaint buildings mask dynamic

professionalism, Groom can no longer rely on family patronage to advance his career. One should also mention one particular scene with Petula Clark's trainee nurse Joan Shepherd who has grown very fond of Burgess (Bernard Lee), a gently voiced engineer who is suffering from severe burns. Joan's reaction when Burgess' bandages are removed from his face is both evidence of how British



cinema so frequently misused a fine actress and also destroys the myth of bloodless stiff upper lip values.

Dick Groom's upper-class demeanour is a sharp contrast to Marriner, the cadet as an expert who aspires to become the equal in respected professional status to his mentors. Younger actors with an upper-class persona, be it fabricated (the Lithuanian-South African Laurence Harvey or the middle class Yorkshireman Ian Carmichael) or authentic (Dennis Price) often played cads or comedy roles. Until the rise of the 007 films in 1962, one of the last young patrician male leads to becoming a star straight leading man was Anthony Steel. His background was that of a Cambridge educated ex-Guards Officer and graduate of the Rank Charm school and after his breakthrough role in *The Wooden Horse* (Jack Lee 1950) and his subsequent success in Ealing's *Where No Vultures Fly* (Harry Watt 1951) and *West of Zanzibar* (Watt 1954). In such safari dramas Steel 'exuded the spirit of the public school Corinthian' (Spicer 2003: 22) as not so much the middle class expert but the screen hero born to sing, with many gusto, and the backing of the Radio Revellers, the hit song *West of Zanzibar*.

Meanwhile the keen, but fatally out of his depth pilot Tony Garthwaite (Nigel Patrick) in *The Sound Barrier* typifies the decent chap who lacks the brains to deal with the new technology. In Lean's film it is the 'new man' who succeeds, the undemonstrative Phillip Peel (John Justin), a methodical technological expert just as the former Battle of Britain ace Freddie Page (Kenneth More) is now completely at odds with postwar London in *The Deep Blue Sea* (Anatole Litvak 1955). Steel's last significant gentleman-adventurer role for Rank was *Checkpoint* (Ralph Thomas 1956), in which his Bill Fraser, a gentlemanly, totally manly and utterly British racing driver, is much given to pipe-smoking, such aphorisms as 'women are as tricky as the devil and best driven fast' and exclaiming 'gosh!' at times of extreme stress. Unfortunately, a succession of Jaguars and Aston Martins plus Stanley Baker, in his first Rank film, as villainous O'Donovan, out-acted the leading man.

For all of *Checkpoint*'s shortcomings as a drama, it does contain authentic colour footage of the 1956 Millie Miglia some of the most splendid cars of the decade and expert stunt work. But it was a combination that did not prove especially appealing at the box office and when Steel left the Rank Organisation later that year he was replaced by the more middle

class Michael Craig, an actor apparently born to simultaneously wear a tweed jacket, drive a Hillman Minx Convertible and look reassuring. In *Searching for Stars* Geoffrey Macnab claims that in 1950s British films ‘middle class actors were invariably cast in middle class roles. They could not help but seem smug’ (2000: 184). Craig’s films for the Rank Organisation are a prime example of how to a certain extent the cadet was the creation of the studio system. An ABPC or Rank artiste had his or her image constructed via press releases to the publicity magazines of the day plus the studio’s titles - Rank had its in-house journals and Associated British published the monthly *ABC Film Review*. Craig himself came to bridle at the limitations of Rank’s casting policies devised to keep the cadet in his place. ‘I did five films at Pinewood which are exactly the same; the same writers, same directors, producers, camera team, actors’ (Craig quoted in McFarlane 1997: 144).

Another signing of this period was Tony Wright, whose first significant role for Rank displays the limitations of studio’s casting policies. *Tiger in the Smoke* (Roy Ward Baker 1956) had the comparatively inexperienced actor ‘imposed upon the film’ (Mayer 2011: 30) for the key role of the anti-hero of Jack Havoc. Wright’s performance as the commander of a gang of wandering grotesques makes one wish that the director was able to follow his instincts and cast either Jack Hawkins or Stanley Baker in the role - ‘someone you could be really frightened of’. (Roy Ward Baker quoted in McFarlane 1997: 50). Baker’s increased popularity in the latter half of the 1950s saw the rise of a new form of cadet. He was neither, to paraphrase Richard Dyer, ‘The Good Joe’ – exemplified by John Gregson, Donald Sinden or Richard Todd nor ‘The Pin-Up’ – vide Dirk Bogarde or Michael Craig but ‘The Tough Guy’.

Such figure typically uses methods reserved for the villain but puts them to a just cause. In 1950s British films the Good Joe and Pin-Up figures were both often middle class experts such as Sinden’s police inspector in *Simba* (Brian Desmond Hurst 1955) but Baker’s roles often reflected his working class background. The actor had first come to prominence in the major supporting role as the parvenu First Lieutenant in *The Cruel Sea* and Robert Shail argues that ‘Bennett still seems fresh and dynamic’ (2008: 26) in comparison with the other young chaps in the wardroom. However, Bennett’s departure is engineered by the well-bred junior officers of the *Compass Rose* not just because he was a used car salesman in peacetime - or even that his wardroom manners are horrendous - but because he is terrible at his job. His well-spoken, intelligent but potentially extremely violent O’Donovan belonged in a much better film than *Checkpoint* but Baker would have to wait until *Hell Drivers* (Cy Enfield 1957) before he was given a heroic lead.

The screenplay, by Enfield and John Kruse, who wrote the original short roman a clef, centred on Stanley Baker's repentant ex-con Tom Yately. He takes a driving job with Hawletts,

a seedy road hauler, in order to raise money for his crippled younger brother Jimmy (David McCallum). Tom was partially responsible for Jimmy's injuries sustained in a car accident during a botched robbery and so the Hawlett's job is to make partial amends. The piece rate seems generous but each driver has to haul a minimum of 12 loads of gravel per day, leading to marauding fleets of tippers careering through rural England. The opening credits introduced by a first-person camera charging along the roads and the plot unfolds in an England of visibly seedy haulage yards and boarding houses. The highlight of the week is a dance in the local village hall to the happening sounds of the local amateur combo. *Hell Drivers* does not conclude with a Detective Inspector arriving in his Wolseley of Justice to bring a moral resolution to the narrative. The only occasion the 'officer class' appears is in the form of one of the senior managers of Hawletts (Robin Bailey) who arrives to break up Tom's fight with 'Red', the psychotic and corrupt road foreman (Patrick McGoohan in uber-scenery eating mode).

Spicer sees Baker as embodying the 'violent man-on-the-edge' (2003: 74) and the authority figures he was often cast as by the end of the decade barely contained their rage. As Gil Plain observes, by the late 1950s British audiences were being encouraged to shift their identification from the centre to the margins' (2006: 168) and Inspector Harry Martineau in *Hell Is a City* (Val Guest 1960) is far removed from More's Adam Watson. The engineer is ready to bring youthful drive and cheerfulness to resolving a community problem but the volatile and emotional police officer is at times barely kept in check by the dignity of his office. This sense of contained violence is also present Bardow, in his civil airline captain in *Jet Storm* (Cy Enfield 1959).<sup>32</sup> Marcia Landy observed that 'In general, the films of the 1950s, even when they attempt to resolve social unrest, cannot conceal the underlying tensions centring around the precariousness of authority' (1991: 48) and Baker's professionals anticipate the less deferential young chaps of the coming decade, when Rank and ABPC employed no more juvenile leads. Geoffrey Macnab regards these years as:

the most paradoxical period in British film history. On the one hand this was an era in which British film-makers foregrounded local identity, and even stars started talking about a new style of "folk acting", earthy, demotic and in stark contrast to the blandishments of the West End and Pinewood Studios. On the other hand, there was an emphasis on internationalism as Britain paid host to "runaway" American productions and to a variety of big name continental directors and actors. (2000:206)

The 'folk actors' were the ones referred to by Penelope Houston as 'that extraordinarily talented generation of young British actors that owe nothing to the West End' (1963: 117) but

another development of this period was the rise of a new generation of performers often cast as middle class chaps. The doctors, scientists and journalists played by Richard Johnson, Edward

Judd, Mark Eden, Ian Hendry and Oliver Reed, once he had graduated from playing Teddy boys and beatniks, may have been well-spoken but they were often less respectful than hitherto and more marginal in society. Gil Plain notes that the decade was a time when the ‘complacent middle classes were facing a newly uncertain future at a time of political and social change (2006: 169) and Judd’s angry and insecure professionals often reflected this state of unease. In *The World Ten Times Over*, his Bob Shelbourne is torn between his wife (Sarah Lawson) and his mistress (June Ritchie). A high income and taste for motorcars (an American Ford Fairlane Skyliner with a retractable roof) cannot negate Bob's essential loneliness. Bob’s exotic vehicle travels through a London of a ‘hostile blandness of egg-box office blocks, conversations in which no-one communicates, and embraces where lovers’ hands lie limply in leather gloves on leather coats’ (Durgant 1970:247).

Judd’s first film as a leading man was *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (Val Guest 1961) where his burnt-out tabloid journalist Peter Stenning employing his skills in the service of an increasingly fragmented society. ‘The people at the top are cleverer than us’, argues the Ministry of Defence Secretary Jeannie (Janet Munro) but she is seen to be palpably wrong; simultaneously nuclear tests in the USA and USSR have tilted the Earth off of its axis and towards a collision course with the sun. The narrative focus is on Stennings’ office where a small community of dedicated individuals (the staff of *The Daily Express* in this instance) set themselves against monolithic officialdom. The voices of authority increasingly lack in conviction and a fragmented public is increasingly resistant to official guidance. Black police Wolsleys patrol the scorched earth of London issuing seemingly futile orders from their roof-mounted loudhailers. The community of journalists initially has as much an eye on the story and professional advancement as possibly saving the planet and Stennings himself is an unreliable near alcoholic for the early part of the film.

Robert Murphy notes Judd’s association with British science fiction films (1992: 312) and one of his last in this genre, *Invasion* (Alan Bridges 1966) provides a vivid depiction of the limitations of professional class heroism. Bridges makes the Home Counties locations look themselves alien via ‘an atmosphere built up by the imaginative effect to which Bridges puts his camera. The ordinary becomes the suggestive, the menacing’ (*The Monthly Film Bulletin* 1966: 87). It transpires that exotic appearance of the invaders belies a mundane mission - they are police officers from the planet Lystria pursuing an escaped prisoner (Eric Young) who has taken refuge in a small Home Counties hospital. The aliens’ leader (Yoko Tani) begs Judd’s Dr. Mike Vernon not to involve himself in a tragic situation that he cannot understand.

*Invasion* depicts a community where the usual standards of professionalism no longer apply, a theme also explored by *Night of the Eagle* (Sidney Hayers 1962), centred on Norman

Taylor (Peter Wyngarde), an ambitious lecturer in medicine at a provincial university who lives in a rural middle class academic community. However, his wife Tansy's (Janet Blair) involvement in witchcraft causes transformation of their country cottage into an environment where forces that defy all modern forms of rationale use the latest technology against the Taylors. Norman's battles with irrational forces are an extreme example of how, in the last few years of our period, academic and social standing cannot entirely dissipate self-doubt. In *80,000 Suspects* (Val Guest 1963) with Richard Johnson and Claire Bloom's Steve and Julie Monks are a professional (doctor and nurse) couple who could have stepped out of a colour supplement, with their immaculately fitted bungalow and new Ford Zodiac Mk.III. The main plot has a merchant seaman inadvertently carrying the smallpox virus returning home to Bath, a story that unfolds, as with nearly all of Guest's best work, against a very real background.

The script is as much concerned with the strains on an apparently perfect marriage as the impact of the virus on the community – Melanie Williams arguing that the film 'puts on screen an unusually uncomfortable depiction of middle class, married love' (2005: 137). The end of *80,000 Suspects* has the couple reconciled but with the challenges of Julie's fear of atrophying outside of her job and Steven's fear of emotion – 'I think the idea of complete intimacy between two human beings is undignified and insufferable' – still to be overcome. Durgnat claims that the film 'never escapes the gravitational pull of the "just-doing-my-duty-sir" convention' (1970: 163) but competence and professionalism are celebrated without an air of sanctimony. Arthur Grant's cinematography evokes a genuine sense of a community in the film aided immeasurably by supporting cast of the calibre of Norman Bird's proudly independent father and Michael Goodliffe's emotionally devastated surgeon Clifford.

If some young chaps of the early to mid-1960s are less deferential than in the previous decade, others look increasingly for an escape to or even from apparent security. *The System* (Michael Winner 1964), has a screenplay by Peter Draper depicting the frustration and depression of young people in an affluent society' (Draper quoted in Harding 1978: 27). The early sightings of Oliver Reed's Tinker are of a Devonshire seaside photographer whose ambitions are fast outgrowing his usual summer pursuits of fleecing the holidaymakers or 'Grockles'. His cynical pose masks a confused individual who is not part of the 'society set' but with an articulate manner that only partially masks a childlike vulnerability.

The end of *The System* has Tinker planning to escape the world that has become his prison for London while the protagonist of *The Small World of Sammy Lee* (Ken Hughes 1962) is perpetually running. Wolfgang Suschitsky's long tracking shots have Sammy (Anthony



Newley) always darting through the West End, a character who repudiates his family ties. His background is apparently of the strata of lower-middle class life referred to in the 1951 census

as ‘self-employed petty bourgeoisie’. A visit to the family grocer and delicatessen displays that Sammy’s intelligence and quick wits would make him a better shopkeeper than his respectable brother Lou (Warren Mitchell). The family business is a white and ultra- clean environment, the diametric opposite to the Soho where Sammy scrapes a career as a strip club MC. Extensive location shooting turned ‘a mythical demi-monde into a seedy quotidian actuality’ (Spicer 2003: 129) and Sammy’s flight from respectability has made him vulnerable to gang- land forces that he cannot control.

If Sammy flees the prospects of white-collar security - almost at the cost of his life - Albert Argyle (Ian Hendry) in *Live Now Pay Later* craves it. The film marked the first major starring role for Hendry, who had achieved fame via ABC Television’s *The Avengers*, and was an adaptation of Jack Trevor Story’s 1960 novel. The picture was partially shot on location in Luton where Lewis creates a fully realised world in which tallymen prowl the post- war council estates in their shiny Bedford vans - the very embodiment of the cheap furniture salesmen of Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy*:

With their neat, ready-made clothing, shiny though cheap shoes, well- creamed hair and ready smiles they are meant (like the equally harassed but flashier motor-car salesmen) to represent an ethos.... “every so nice and friendly” – the ethos being smart but approachable, the boy next door made good.’ (1957:107)

Chief among these figures is Hendry’s Albert Argyle whom Andrew Spicer refers to as ‘a heartless-professional-on-the-make’ (2003: 117) – but one of the fascinating aspects of the film is that Albert does desperately wish to express himself but is almost clinically unable to. In Hendry’s superlatively good performance – he was nominated for a BAFTA as ‘Best Newcomer to a Leading Role’ - Argyle is as much prey to his own delusions of a secure middle class future as he is in debt to his employer, Callendar’s Credits Stores. Albert believes that he can express romance by his literally hurling consumer goods at Treasure (June Richie) in the nocturnal surroundings of a deserted credit store. Jeffrey Richards suggests that the film was satirizing the phenomenon of ‘now that working class had achieved affluence, they used it to endorse and participate in the consumerist world’ (2008: 226) but *Live Now, Pay Later* pays as much attention to the middle classes. American style affluence is now firmly ensconced in suburbia; the opening and closing shots are of 1930s villas with a new chrome- laden Singer Gazelle Convertible in the driveways. The property developer and town councilor Reggie Corby (Geoffrey Keen) drives a new Humber Hawk and the walnut veneer cocktail cabinet in his living room proclaims his perceived social status.

Raymond Durnat observes of post-war British films that ‘the agreeable aspects of (social) improvement aren’t very spiritedly recorded, except through the prism of middle class affluence, as per the *Doctor* comedies’ (1970: 65) but consumer goods bring no happiness in

*Live Now, Pay Later*. A car kills Corby's former Beauty Queen wife Joyce (Liz Fraser) when she is running from bailiffs with a warrant for her hire purchased goods, her financial difficulties largely due to appeasing her abrasive husband. The film condemns neither her nor Albert, whose prized goal of eventually managing his own credit emporium marks his desperation for self-improvement. The conclusion had Argyle finally realising his employer's disdain for him for in *Live Now, Pay Later* Albert is both peddler and victim of consumerism. His genuine streak of self-loathing and honesty is a sharp contrast to the hypocrisy of suburbia where the provincial middle class life means terms of backslapping false jocularity and games of golf with wartime Catering Corps Majors.

Two years later Hendry's ambitious newspaper reporter Don Mackenzie is equally desperate to escape the provinces in *The Beauty Jungle* (Val Guest 1964). We first see his young professional rather desperately adopting New York fashions and hipster slang despite the fact he drives a second-hand Morris Minor. Mackenzie's chosen vehicle for international, or at least London based, success is beauty contestant promotion via his protégé, a typist named Shirley (Janette Scott). The shooting of *The Beauty Jungle* took place in Weston-super-Mare and other southern British seaside resorts during 1963 and the early part of the film perfectly captures a time when would-be hipsters chain-smoked whilst doing the twist.

Durnat described Guest's works as depicting how 'if duty, decency and conscience are society's mortar, irresponsibility and pleasure a major threat' (1970:164). Yet, despite the fact that the director makes Tommy Trinder's pier show, the beauty contest on a cold day in a holiday camp and the witty montage of Shirley winning the succession of dire provincial contests all look utterly seedy they are still more entertaining than life in suburbia. Robert Shail notes how 'Guest had the ability to 'bring out the tensions just under the mundane surface of everyday British life' (2007: 87); Don Mackenzie is ambitious and cynical about the scruples of his reading public but curiously vulnerable and emotional. At the end of the film, he is no longer the sharp journalist sarcastically intoning 'Swinging Daddy' on surveying Weston-super-Mare circa 1963 but a woebegone figure trapped in a cycle of false dreams.

Finally, Robert Murphy observes that the 1960s saw a wider range of talent than hitherto entering the British film industry (1992: 36) and complementing this trend were the former ABPC and Rank juvenile leads displaying new facets to their screen personae. John Fraser, a former Associated British juvenile lead, played Colin in *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski 1965), a decent chap who unfortunately learns that his 1950s style 'soft-spoken, safe as houses, knight-in-whining-armor' (Bray 2014: 45) was not equal to a fractured menacing London. John Gregson's

Callendar is a memorable depiction of provincial venality and several years after Kenneth More's contract with the Rank Organisation had come to under confused circumstances<sup>23</sup> he starred in *The Comedy Man*. The picture was adapted from the Douglas Hayes' novel about life at the lower end of the Equity spectrum. More's role was Charles 'Chick' Byrd, an ageing juvenile lead who, after being fired from a provincial repertory theatre due to his sleeping with the producer's wife, decide to make one last attempt at West End success. Eventually, he does find stardom in television commercials for breath mints, a role he acquired only after the suicide of his fellow actor Jack Lavey (Alan Dobie).

More was struck with the script's 'relevance to my own life, and to the lives of so many actors I had known' (1978:222) and *The Comedy Man* was virtually was the first time that he played a character close to his real age. More's performance of a middle-aged man desperately trying to maintain his dignity whilst eking out an existence in the bedsit land of a grey London has an intensity and poignancy that is the equal of Laurence Olivier in *The Entertainer* (Tony Richardson 1960). In *The Comedy Man*, More is more harshly lit than in his previous Rank films and throughout the story every detail of the strain of maintaining the mask of sang-froid visible on the actor's face. The bonhomie of the figure described by Andrew Spicer as embodying 'robust, confident masculinity (2001: 40) is now seen to be a desperately theatrical mask. In *Chance of a Lifetime* Adam Watson is a decent chap who possesses skills that benefit the community and is respected as such but near the end of our period *The Comedy Man* illustrates the high price of the decent chap's façade.

One major irony of British cinema is that the smuggest and antiquated figure of the early to mid-1960s was played by the sort of working class actor who could provide 'an uninhibited display of masculine energy' (Stead 1989: 90). Spicer argues that 'The most interesting, charismatic and glamorous male figures were now oppositional, at odds with the state and pre-occupied with personal gratifications' (2001: 203) but Connery's James Bond, as we shall demonstrate in Chapter 13, is ultimately the fantasy chap, a world removed from the dilemmas of Mike Vernon or Don Mackenzie. Richard Dyer notes of charismatic appeal that it was especially effective when 'the social order is uncertain, unstable and ambiguous and when the charismatic figure or group offers a value, order, stability to counterpoise this' (1979:31). For all of 007's battles with fiendish super villains uttering threats in the dubbed tones of Robert Rietty his fantasies are ultimately reassuring. Outside of the world of accessorized Aston Martin DB5s the young doctors, journalists and other professionals learn that authority figures and social

conventions cannot be automatically trusted and professional skills no longer received the deference of the community.

<sup>23</sup> The chief reason was an argument in 1960 with John Davis about being prevented in starring in *The Guns of Navarone*; David Niven subsequently played More's role. (More 1978:216)

## CHAPTER 5: 1951 – Setting the scene

Four films from this period in particular illustrates the dilemmas of the post-war Britain that the post-war Churchill government inherited – Ealing's *The Blue Lamp*, *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton 1950), *The Man in the White Suit* and British Lion's *Seven Days to Noon* (John Boulting 1951). Each film hails from different political perspectives yet all feature keen young chaps from diverse traditions within British cinema. The protagonist of *The Man in the White Suit* is oblivious of social hierarchy and the other three young professionals - Hugh Cross' scientist Steve Lane in *Seven Days to Noon*, John Gregson's Inspector Farrow in *The Lavender Hill Mob* and Jimmy Hanley's probationary police constable in *The Blue Lamp* - are utterly respectful of it. Moreover, all of these picture also vividly illustrate the sense of despair and imprisonment that could be experienced within the national family and the challenges faced by a community that could be variously stifling, hidebound, potentially criminal or violent.

The two Ealing comedies star Alec Guinness as a fanatic in the guise of a professional scientist (*The Man in the White Suit*) and criminal mastermind in the raiment of a depressed lower-middle class office worker (*The Lavender Hill Mob*). Marcia Landy contended that 'Sidney is willing to suffer any privation in the hope of success. His objectives appear not to be wealth or social power but making a contribution to society' (1991: 376) but Guinness gives a deceptively mild veneer to a figure who represents a frightening and radical force in a stagnant, Britain, terrified of change. Cecil Parker's factory owner is a model less of fatherly guidance and more of vacillation and a sequence of massive Rolls Royce headlamps - symbolising the machinery of capitalism - herald the arrival of the company chairman Sir John Kierlaw (Ernest Thesiger). He is the sole character to recognise the full nature of Sydney's unconscious menace. Indeed, it is also tempting to infer from Guinness's portrayal of Stratton that his almost total lack of social skills - and dependence upon (Joan Greenwood) to explain his ideas to a wider world is an example of Asperger's Syndrome.

In *The Lavender Hill Mob* the middle-aged Bank of England security clerk Henry Holland is ostensibly a far more predictable figure and an initial reading of the film is of a

genial vision of post-war London that ultimately endorse social values. However, an alternative reading of T.E.B. Clarke's screenplay provides less of good humour and more of lower- middle class despair. Holland presents a figure whose unrealised potential and intelligence has gone largely unnoticed by his superiors for the past twenty years. His opening narration describes a typical day in which he was 'merely a nonentity among all those thousands who flock each morning into the City' over shots of a London apparently founded on unchanging routine, a synecdoche for nearly two decades of stasis. Holland's existence of a shabby-genteel guesthouse and years of mundane work offer no legitimate satisfactions and the only pleasure is in the creation of the mask of a dutiful Bank of England clerk. As Marcia Landy observes:

Through his character, money is exposed as signifying a way of life that is guarded, hoarded and locked up. His theft is a challenge to the sterility and routineisation of everyday life, a potential source of pleasure, if only transient pleasure. (1991:375)

After the heist, Frend creates a bravura single shot sequence as we follow Holland as he receives praise from the senior ranks of the Bank of England ranging from Chief Cashier via the Board of Directors to the Chairman. The irony is Holland's superiors are unwittingly lauding a clerk who has applied two decades of wasted potential on a robbery. A further seemingly innocuous figure harbouring destructive potential is the protagonist of the Boulting Brothers' *Seven Days to Noon*. Barry Jones' Professor J. Willingdon is a nuclear scientist so strained by the pressures of his work that he threatens to detonate all of London with a stolen A-bomb unless unilateral atomic disarmament is declared.

Willingdon is framed in a darkened London of wanted posters and drab boarding houses, a mentally disturbed individual of the shadows as compared with the tall and commanding presence of Andre Morrell's Detective Superintendent Folland. Both men believe in duty towards their fellow Britons and, as Tony Shaw notes, 'Willingdon is presented as an idealist and committed Christian faced with a dilemma owing to the destructive powers his work has produced' (2006: 118). If Professor Willingdon does possess a character flaw, it is not so much that of hubris but rather his inherent naivety. Dr. Marriner in *White Corridors* never loses sight of the community his researches serve and the realities of his profession and the last glimpse of Sidney Stratton in *The Man in the White Suit* is of a fanatic with a renewed sense of vision. This is in marked contrast to Willingdon's desperately misguided scientist who is also utterly genuine in his beliefs— 'All over the world, people are moving like sleepwalkers towards annihilation.' The film makes it quite clear that society is at least in part to blame for



Willingdon's condition - 'We placed this burden on his shoulders and left him alone to deal with it' says his local vicar but ultimately the hero of *Seven Days to Noon* is not Willingdon but Folland, dutiful but compassionate and tirelessly guarding the nation.

This sense of paternal duty is also one of the main themes of *The Blue Lamp*, which is the most notable of our quartet in terms of celebrating the sanctity of the community. The film was the idea of Ted Wills, who co-wrote the original screenplay with Jan Read but by 1949, the contraction of the Rank empire resulted in the closure of Muriel Box's script development

unit at Gainsborough Studios. Ealing Studios acquired the treatment and Michael Balcon gave the project to T.E.B. Clarke, who added his own experiences as a Wartime Reserve police officer. The London Metropolitan Police gave its full co-operation to *The Blue Lamp* as Sir Harold Scott, the Commissioner from 1945 to 1953, wished for the force to make a deliberate attempt at presenting a positive image in a feature film in order to improve existing morale. The force lent Ealing a number of their patrol cars, allowed the film crew access to their stations and even permitted a select few officers to play small speaking roles. Another aim of Scott was to use the film to attract 10,000 new police officers and Steve Chibnall regards the picture as ‘more of an animated recruitment poster than an analysis of youthful crime’ (1997: 147).

Scott wrote in his memoirs of how *The Blue Lamp* ‘had been a valuable tool in spreading a knowledge of high efficiency and tradition of the Metropolitan Police’ (1954: 90-91) and the script encompassed the central issues facing the force – violence and criminals’ use of firearms. The opening credit sequence of a Humber Super Snipe squad car with its gong pealing served to create from the outset the impression of an ultra-modern and dynamic force. This was despite the fact that the capital’s law enforcement often lagged behind the rest of the UK – ‘Police telephone boxes were developed by provincial forces and the use of fast cars came later to London than elsewhere’ (White 2001: 293). *The Blue Lamp* won ‘Best British Film of 1950’ from the British Film Academy and was the top box office attraction of that year. Aldgate and Richards see the film as coupling:

Ealing’s wartime documentary style, complete with location shooting, a narrator and an air of authenticity, with a view of society as essentially moral and communal. The view of England and the English, of the life of service and duty under discipline that had characterised Ealing’s wartime films passed in peacetime from the war against the enemy without – the Germans – to the enemy within – the criminal. (Aldgate and Richards 1999: 130)

Here, the enemy without takes the form of two young spivs, Tom Riley (Dirk Bogarde) and Spud (Patric Doonan) - immature figures who reveled in conspicuous American style consumerism. In the immediate post-war period, the spiv's black market activities subverted the rationing system and were, therefore, a parasite to the community. The first film in what can arguably be described as 'the spiv cycle' is *Waterloo Road* (Sidney Gilliat 1944) produced by Gainsborough Studios and using one of its two main male contract stars, Stewart Granger, in the pivotal role of Ted Purvis, amusement arcade proprietor and all-round wide boy. After the Second World War the spiv was a folk devil of radio and theatre: the variety comedian Arthur English appeared in the guise of 'The Prince of the Wide Boys' and the play *The Case of the Demented Spiv* (Roodhouse 2013: 247) demands an immediate West End revival of the strength of its title alone.

Clarke's script contrasts the progress of Jimmy Hanley's Andy Mitchell, a probationary constable who becomes the surrogate son to Jack Warner's PC Dixon. The veteran police officer embodies community values whereas Tom Riley poses a significant danger to West London because of his essential immaturity. The solid presence of Hanley, who sports a row of wartime campaign medals on his tunic, further highlight the degenerate nature of the increasingly hysterical wide boy, with his wardrobe of flashy clothes<sup>25</sup>. Just as Holland and Pendlebury's Bank of England robbery is ultimately depicted as a raid on the nation itself, the bombsites that dominate the landscapes of both *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Blue Lamp* serve as reminders of the very recent past of 1945 when:

With external disinvestment amounting to four thousand million pounds; with her shipping, an important source of invisible exports, reduced by thirty per cent; with her civilian industries physically run down after six years of war and her visible exports running at no more than four-tenths of her pre-war level; with 355,000 of her citizens dead by enemy action either at home or abroad; with bread rationing looming ahead. (Calder 1992:586)

Andy's continued uniformed service displays his continued commitment to rebuilding the nation but Tom Riley deftly illustrates the link between erotic appeal and cinematic villainy. This was not a new development when *The Blue Lamp* went into production - the early 1940s saw James Mason practice mainly costume caddishness at Gainsborough Studios - but Tom Riley was no 19th century marquis but a wholly contemporary working class figure. Bogarde's interpretation of the cinematic sadist is 'less distanced and more radical, more of a challenge to the norms of British screen masculinity' (Medhurst 1986: 348) because he exists in this mundane realm of milk bars and suburban cinemas.

The most stalwart defender of the community against such cheap, flashy villainy is Jack Warner's George Dixon. Warner had worked to excellent effect with Dearden in *The Captive Heart* and his talents make what might easily have been a plaster saint entirely believable. In his *Encounter* article *Get Out and Push!* Lindsay Anderson satirized the scene where Gladys Henson's Mrs. Dixon learns of her husband's death, as 'There is a pause, pregnant with nothing. Then Mrs. Huggett speaks, quiet and controlled: "I'll just put these flowers in water."' Polite critical applause for another piece of truly British understatement'. He further raged that 'it is merely libelous to insist that our emotions are so bottled up that they have ceased to exist at all' (1957: 158). However, in fact, the scene in which Mrs. Dixon learns of her husband's death is a masterpiece of understated emotion, moving without falling into sentimentality.

The film constantly shows Dixon as a lynchpin of both the police station and the wider

<sup>25</sup> Clothes rationing ceased in 1949.

community whilst Tom Riley is a very isolated figure. The crooked bookmaker Mike Randall (Michael Goolden) is keen to protect the stability of his turf against such an unstable catalyst, enlisting his tic-tac men to signal Riley's increasingly desperate presence in the climatic chase sequence is the final proof that this corner of West London holds no place for such a dangerous figure. As Steve Chibnall points out 'this is a society that would hardly need policing at all if it were not for the rogue elements represented by the young tear ways' (1997: 140). Riley is a criminal who has chosen to isolate himself and virtually elected to become the enemy within and Barr argues that:

The film's touching faith in traditional virtues and in the ability of urban working class communities to resist the lure of possessive individualism and "easy money" is eloquently expressed in the key scene at the end of the film, when Tom Riley is swept away by a crowd of ordinary men into the arms of the law. (1993: 106)

This aspect of the film was also noted by some contemporary critics – *The Times* bemoaning how 'the film's insistence that bookmakers and tic-tac men at greyhound racing meetings are an example to everyone and pillars of society' (review cited in David 1997: 164). It is a conclusion that can be seen as 'Uber-Ealing' - the community comes together, abandoning its internal divisions to defeat a common threat and restore the social order. If Dixon is the ultimate portrayal of the paternal authority figure, then the shooting, as Marcia Landy observes, is an act of patricide (1991:465).

Of all the films described in this chapter, it is *The Blue Lamp* that states the community is seen to be of firm guidance and this discipline is ultimately seen to be administered by the middle classes. Jeffrey Richards argues that, unlike *I Believe in You*, the police force of *The Blue Lamp* is of the respectable working class (Richards 1997: 23) and indeed the actor who dominates *The Blue Lamp* is obviously Warner. With the exception of William Rose's Chief Inspector who breaks the news of Dixon's death to his widow, all of the uniformed officers in *The Blue Lamp* is the epitome of respectable blue-collar values. Ted Willis created the character of George Dixon as a response to fictional depictions of the uniformed police constable who 'habitually licked the stub of his pencil, was respectful to the Squire and left the investigations and solutions of serious crime to brilliant, educated amateurs' (1992: 70).

However, the CID officers of Bernard Lee and Robert Flemying carry the latter half of the film and the narrative emphasis is from hereon in very much upon *officer*. The final reel anticipates the changes of the coming decade– 'suddenly police inspectors and superintendents were drawn from the ranks of actors previously associated with officers and gentlemen'

(Aldgate and Richards 1999: 136). The central figure of *The Blue Lamp* is PC Geroge Dixon but one legacy was the senior plain-clothes detectives of 1950s British cinema, who followed the template of Lee's courteously spoken Divisional Detective Inspector Cherry. If *The Blue Lamp*, is an example of Ealing shows how an already established community is in danger of de-construction 'by the intrusion of violent and erotic forms of individual desire' (Higson 1986: 89) then its guardians will increasingly be middle class professionals. Andre Morrell's *s Folland of the Yard* blends a figure of no-nonsense authority with a sense of compassion. In *Seven Days to Noon*, it is this combination of paternalistic policing and an orderly population prepared to return to wartime privations for the common good that cause the crisis to be averted. In *The Lavender Hill Mob*, almost alone amongst the self-congratulatory and hidebound authority figures of the Bank of England and Scotland Yard, is the persistent and very sharp young Detective Inspector Farrow.

The conclusion of *Seven Days to Noon* has Willingdon's death coming not at the hands not of a senior army or police officer but of a panicking young private (Victor Maddern) – a figure from the crowd who gives way to fear rather than a senior officer. But in *The Man in the White Suit* Parker's magnate remains weak and vacillating as a paterfamilias and all sectors of the community in which Sydney works unite to react to economic threat with real violence - although his talents and ideas will ultimately return. Given the censorship limitations of the day, Scotland Yard has to enforce Holland's return to the UK and by having Henry's job as a Bank of England clerk the implication is that the robbery ultimately attacks all levels of the community. The gang smuggle the bullion in the guise of Eiffel tower mascots and Dave Rollinson argues that:

The gang's nemesis is an Eiffel-Tower-clutching schoolgirl who will not be bought off. This innocence reflects back the selfishness of the gang's acquisitive motives and asserts the moral authority of consensus against the gang's oppositional thinking. Because the consensual rhetoric of ideology has led to an internalisation of capitalist modes as natural, the public view the Bank of England as part of their society, so that stealing from them means stealing from innocent children. (2000: 89)

But Holland toils in an urban landscape 'in which Wren's surviving City churches stand proud among the bomb sites, a testament to the imperviousness of Britain's timeless cultural heritage' (Hornsey 2010: 86) that has been his prison for many years. When writing about *Victim* Marcia Landy comments on how 'concealing one's identity is anathema in the context of many British films that seek to equate appearance and essence, word and deed' (1991: 480) and this is especially relevant to the films discussed in this chapter. Uniforms and American style suits delineate the respective heroes and the villains of *The Blue Lamp* but Willingdon hides his

threats beneath the guise of the typical expert of post-war British cinema. The Professor is almost always solidly clad in middle class professional authority but ‘a single atom bomb carried in a small Gladstone bag by a retiring man could achieve what had eluded Hitler – the total shut-down and probable destruction of London’ (Guy 2000: 148). However, the threat to the status quo presented by the apparently innocuous Sidney Stratton and Henry Holland both



mostly go unnoticed by a self-satisfied and insular Establishment that adopts the thinnest veneer of paternal care.

Charles Barr's belief that at the mob of spivs in *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius 1949) might well 'represents Ealing's uneasy vision of how in the real post-war world, when you open the window, venture out from behind the protective barriers, people actually behave' (1993: 106) applies to all four films detailed here. If tradition is only as good as those who maintain it, then the communities who need to be protected are variously united in their expulsion of hysterical wide boys from their London community or in need of kindly but firm guidance in the face of an apocalyptic threat. Nevertheless, the workers and capitalists in *The Man in the White Suit* quickly, and plausibly, unite as a mob and in *The Lavender Hill Mob* Henry Holland moves unnoticed by a populace he cares little for. Matthew Sweet notes how Guinness excelled in playing 'men at one remove from the people who surround them; men suspended in a private dream; men who know something we don't, and would never blab' (2005: 187). The film opens and concludes with Holland as a lounge lizard embraced by a charming young lady<sup>26</sup> in a Rio nightclub; not so much the subdued clerk but one whose 'true self', has been temporarily, but very enthusiastically, set free.

<sup>26</sup> A young Audrey Hepburn.

## CHAPTER 6: EMBRACING TINSEL 1953 -1959

The starting point for this chapter is 1953, the year of the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth on 2nd June. To quote David Cannadine:

Churchill was back in 10 Downing Street; Britain had once more asserted hers place as a great power; there was a new Elizabethan age around the corner. All this was not only implicit but was self-consciously articulated at the time of the coronation. (2012: 154)

The actual term of New Elizabethan was not long lasting; two years after the Coronation the American sociologist Edward Shils observed that the ‘New Elizabethans who were conjured up in aspiration two years ago as the carriers of British tradition have petered out into thin air’ (16: 1955). However, the actual event represented a juxtaposition of ages that proved the basis for many British films of this period – a ceremony of ancient roots that was reported by television. Similarly, the front cover of Sir Philip Gibbs’ celebratory book *The New Elizabethans* (1953) juxtaposes a 16th century galleon with the latest RAF jetfighter. So, here we shall examine how British films, particularly the comedies of Ealing and those influenced by the studio, retreated from a more fractured society tainted by consumerism into a mythical past retreated into a mythical bucolic myth - or embraced a nation where the citizens would enjoy the consumer goods of the present together with venerating the past.

### **Ealing & Sub-Ealing Comedy – A Retreat into Nostalgia**

Throughout the period covered by this thesis, there is genre of British cinema that celebrates the defence of England often via nostalgia for a mythical past, where the aesthetics are the *raison d'être* rather than community values. A common theme in these films is how such a construct is often threatened by an intruder from the outside world - Christine Geraghty notes that these often take the form of either ‘the bureaucrat, representing the modern state, and the industrialist, representing modern industry’ (2000:41).

One of the earliest examples is Ealing’s *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (Charles Crichton 1953) the plot of which has both forms of threats to the attempts of a small town keep the local railway service in operation. In *The New Elizabethan*, Gibbs rails against ‘these

borough councils and governmental tyrants who do not care a jot for any of the loveliness of our countryside' (1953:18). Here, it is the recently nationalised British Railways – Gibbs' 'government tyrants' - puts the branch line under notice of closure they are still an official organisation - whereas the Pearce and Crump Bus Company is seen from the outset as being operated by wide boys. David Cannadine contends that after the Second World War the 'ideal images of British society were still pure Baldwin' (2000: 157) including the ordered countryside that the young squire Gordon Chesterford (John Gregson) is so keen to preserve. At a village meeting, he presents to the community a nightmare future of traffic lights, zebra crossings and housings with numbers instead of names.

*The Titfield Thunderbolt* attempted to align the antique with the industrial – the branch line's rolling stock is a world removed from the gaudy Pearce and Crump coach. This example of the 'real country' may also be zebra crossing free but the local saloon bar features a constantly malfunctioning television set. In *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, as many 1950s British comedies, 'consumerism is the enemy of consensus, an alienating presence impinging on the value of work and, through the individualizing agency of television, the domestic space' (Rollinson 2003: 88). Here the apparent advantages of consumer choice are little more than a Trojan horse (or OB series Bedford Coach) for the destructive influences of the post-war world. The plot follows the template of *Passport to Pimlico* in that a return to wartime solidarity is essential to protect the community but the narrative is framed not so much in terms of realism but pastoral fantasy. T.E.B. Clarke scripted both films and Charles Barr contends that the difference between the two is that the former:

Tested out ideas about society in a genuinely open and exploratory manner, discovering its answers in the course of the film, or at least putting the audience through a process of discovery. *The Titfield Thunderbolt* knows all the answers before it starts – knows them in effect from *Passport*. Like *The Man in the White Suit*, it shows a society which has committed itself to the backward- looking soft-option path which *Passport* settled for, and is thus a warning of some of the consequences. But it in every way lacks the critical perspective of Mackendrick's film. (1993: 160-161)

Barr's observations are echoed by Harper and Porter, who describe the film's final image of a circular railway as 'picturesque enough but going nowhere' (2003: 62), but that is precisely what the film wishes to celebrate. *The Titfield Thunderbolt* was the first Ealing comedy to be shot in Technicolor and Douglas Slocombe's ravishing (no lesser term will suffice) cinematography helped in the depiction of the village as a rural nirvana. The railway was a comparatively recent Victorian development of figures described by Joe Moran as being often regarded in the nineteenth century as 'hated destroyers of natural landscapes' (2010: 251). But

here the art direction highlights the sheer vulgarity of the rival coach, owned by Alec Pearce (Euan Roberts) and Vernon Crump (Jack MacGowran), both of who favour clothes of a such obviously caddish cut that their Bedford may as well have had the words ‘Spivs’ emblazoned in gold letters on the elaborate coachwork. As Keith Johnston observes:

In colour terms, the brighter hues of the coaches initially make them seem superior, paralleling one aspect of the narrative. Yet, when sabotage causes the old train to be replaced with a red, green and gold engine that gleams in the sunlight, the eventual victory of the train has been visually guaranteed. (2012:200)

The importance of the aesthetics in *The Titfield Thunderbolt* in establishing a rural nirvana evident in comparison with Ealing’s *Meet Mr. Lucifer* (Anthony Pelissier 1953). Here the invader is a TV set, thereby combining the external invading forces of officialdom (the BBC), with new technology and industrialism. The narrative is a fantasy of how television was an invention of Hell and the set’s first owner is Mr. Pedelty (Joseph Tomelty), a retired clerk. Television does initially bring him new guests but they are parasites in a false community—‘The viewers all look at the TV screen and not at each other, and when the set breaks down the guests desert the owner; later, they ignore him in the street’ (Barr 1986:211).

The set’s final owner Hector MacPhee (Gordon Jackson, in the film’s best performance) is a respectable young pharmacist driven insane via his love for ‘Miss Lonely Hearts’ (Kay Kendall). *Meet Mr. Lucifer* depicts her departure for a career in sponsored US TV as proof of her ersatz concern for her viewers but another cause of Hector’s breakdown could be his entrapment in a provincial form of Hell. Unlike the village of Titfield, the town that a (literally) cursed television set enters is inherently drab and dispiriting. There the main alternative form of entertainment appears is a sparsely attended provincial pantomime starring a drunken Sam Hollingsworth (Stanley Holloway) as a dispirited demon and supported by Ian Carmichael’s implausible ‘Man Friday’. The studio’s *Touch and Go* (Michael Truman 1955) further celebrates antiquity in glorious Eastmancolor, in a corner of London with the appearance of a village community. Jim Fletcher (Jack Hawkins), enraged by his firm’s dismissal and rejection of his contemporary furniture design, decides to leave with his family to Australia. Naturally, this will not come to pass, as the ties of Fletcher’s local community are strong. He is a comparatively young man but he chooses to forget his ambitions for a future of quiet stultification.

Barr notes that the Fletchers live in a London neighbourhood ‘with a “village” pub and no traffic coming through, and an onion seller plying his wares and crowds of stagey children’ (1993: 175) and even in 1955 this vision was becoming dated. *Touch & Go* anticipates the

Ealing comedies of the later 1950s, which celebrate such antique objects and characters as the pier in *Barnacle Bill* (Charles Frennd 1957) because of, not despite, their defects. The Titfield village and railway do at least have both function and charm but the Collins Music Hall setting of *Davy* (Michael Relph 1957) is one of utter dilapidation. The external force here is ambition and the narrative infers that the eponymous protagonist (Harry Secombe) is morally right to stay with his extended family and their music hall act rather than seek a new career as an opera singer. 'I think we should all stick together...All families should stick together.'

Ironically, Secombe had already established an operatic career independent from his

BBC Radio *Goon Show* role and his starring in the Ealing film was a part of this career strategy. Charles Barr refers to the undynamic and backward communities of Ealing's films of the late 1950s (1993: 164) and it is indeed depressing to contrast *The Lavender Hill Mob* with *Davy*. Henry Holland returns England not by choice but because Scotland Yard has traced him but Davy Morgan clearly displays that he could succeed at Covent Garden. It is difficult not to see his sacrifice as genuinely tragic. In *The Titfield Thunderbolt* through to *Davy*, modernity and tradition is apparently irreconcilable but some films made by Group 3<sup>27</sup> do reach an accommodation that will not compromise tradition. Chibnall and McFarlane grumble that some of the outfit's pictures displayed their 'incorrigible fascination with whimsy' (2009: 116) and gave the firm a surprisingly limited amount of space in their otherwise extensive book.

The most interesting Group 3 pictures often have an outsider who is educated in the ways of the community in such small communities that align tradition with modernity. In *Laxdale Hall* (John Eldridge 1953) the community need to convince the visiting MP Samuel Pettigrew (Raymond Huntley) why they need a new road and in *Time Gentlemen, Please!* (Lewis Gilbert 1952) it is not the local bed factory but the small town's more spiv-like residents (somewhat inevitably played by Sidney James and Sydney Tafler) who are a threat to stability. *John and Julie*, in which two children (Colin Gibson and Leslie Dudley) run away to see the Coronation, has all members of the community united in a mythical capital where 'even London, which blazes with ruby reds (buses, hats, lipsticks, flags) is free of danger' (Lewis 1994: 362). Antiquity and modernity happily coalesce – the event itself celebrates monarchy but two American tourists in their impressive looking car assist the children in their journey.

The Group 3 narrative that is most directly concerned with the issues of rural England versus patriotic modernity is *A Conflict of Wings* (Don Sharp 1954). Aesthetically it is the equal of *The Titfield Thunderbolt*<sup>28</sup> and in certain respects it is an example of how post-war British cinema often used the countryside as an unambiguous place of refuge and community gathering. The plot has an RAF base in Norfolk that needs the land known as the Island of Children for expanding its operations but the local civilians use it as a bird sanctuary. Geraghty sees the film as paying 'sympathetic attention to the demands of modernity' (2000: 49) but ultimately siding with local legends and natural landscapes. However, in *A Conflict of*

<sup>27</sup> The firm was a state-backed production company established in 1950 at the tiny Southhall Studios by the NFFC to supply low-budget feature films under the auspices of John Grierson but lasted only until 1955 in the face of distribution problems.

<sup>28</sup> It was described in *The New York Times* as being shot in the ‘loveliest Eastman color used to date, radiantly underscoring the primitive picturesqueness of the setting’ (HHT1954).

*Wings* modernity is not represented by a television set or any other mere consumer product, for the marshlands and the gleaming jet aircraft both have their own essential role to play. The commanding officer of the air force station is Squadron Leader Parsons (Keiron Moore); young, dynamic and generally a world apart from the bureaucrats of Richard Wattis or Raymond Huntley. British cinema of this period is often ambiguous towards technological developments and their effect on the landscape – vide *Quatermass 2* (Val Guest 1957) where the alien food plant is seen as a monstrous blight - but the RAF base is seen to have its own heritage.

There is also a small group of films that contrast a beguiling landscape with a sense of ambivalence as to the nature of the community. *The Maggie* ostensibly seems to celebrate the landscape as a place of transformation; American businessman versus antique Scottish tugboat but Calvin B Marshall (Paul Douglas) is, in fact, an overworked and highly intelligent character. His status as an outsider is exploited by a crew who, with the exception of the cabin boy, are rapaciously incompetent. Phillip Kemp points out Mackendrick's barbed attacks upon both British gerontophobia and the myth of the rural innocent in both of his Scottish-set Ealing comedies:

Shrewd, resourceful and anything but humble (let alone puritanical), the people of Todday and the puffer crew are quite aware of how they appear to the outside world, and quite capable of turning that image to their advantage and playing the backwoods innocent when it suits them. (1991: 107)

Many of the narratives in this chapter are resolved either by the outsider absorbing the value of the small community or being humiliated if not expelled but here the outsider is a lonely middle-aged foreigner in Douglas' downbeat and vulnerable performance. The theme of an alien figure threatened amidst a landscape of apparent peace and tranquility was one further explored by *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy 1973) and could have provided an alternative plot for *The Titfield Thunderbolt* – struggling small garage turned bus operator economically ruined by the local establishment. The location scenes for *The Maggie* are bathed in Gordon Dines' soft and gentle black and white cinematography, contrasting the charms of the landscape with its often venal inhabitants and the next Mackendrick-Rose collaboration, *The Ladykillers* (1955) takes place in an apparently quiet and un-menacing corner of London near St Pancras Station.

William Rose's screenplay concerns a gang of five criminals who pose as a string quintet in order to carry out a robbery only then find themselves ultimately defeated by Mrs. Wilberforce (Katy Johnson), their apparently harmless landlady, whose house is situated over tunnel



where even the steam locomotives are apparent symbols of stasis. The arrival of Professor Marcus (Alec Guinness) at the genteel home of Mrs. Wilberforce literally casts a dark shadow. Yet it is she whom his gang find quietly formidable and *The Ladykillers* concludes with the five mobsters all dead via their internecine warfare, the local police disbelieving the old lady's story, and Mrs. Wilberforce wondering what to do with £60,000.

Christine Geraghty cites the film as example of resistance to modernity in its apparent celebration of 'the tenacity of the past' (2000:69) but the gang, for the presence of the young Harry the Teddy boy (Peter Sellers), seem less contemporary figures but caricatured refugees from a British B-film— even their main getaway car<sup>29</sup> is a pre-war relic. Mrs. Wilberforce's villa is an essential aspect of a King's Cross that is an even more a fantastical construct as the village of Titfield. This is a corner of London where the steam trains are not the innocent symbols of resistance to progress but means of dispatching unwanted criminal elements. The landlady's invincibly ignorant benevolence defeats all who oppose her; the house has the villains trapped within her unchanging world.

Just as Mackendrick sympathised with Marshall in *The Maggie* (Mackendrick quoted in Barr 1993: 167) he saw *The Ladykillers* as 'Bill Rose's sentimental hope for the country that he and I saw through fond but sceptical eyes was that it might still, against all logic, survive its enemies' (Mackendrick quoted in Mackendrick and Cronin 2004: 104–5). But the gulf between Mrs. Wilberforce's values and the Professor Marcus' seething impotent malice gives *The Ladykillers* moral paradox lacking in *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (Durgnat 1970: 43). If the film serves as Mackendrick's oblique comment on the 'Fifties Ealing tradition of glorifying decrepitude then the Professor's attitude in the final scenes is ultimately one of wry resignation – 'she'll be with us for ever and ever'.

This is also the theme of Rose's script for British Lion's *The Smallest Show on Earth* and on first sight the narrative would appear to be the quintessence of late period Ealing. However, as compared with his screenplay for *Touch & Go*, it seems rather more astringent in tone. Barr contended that the writer needed Mackendrick as a collaborator to escape from the dead weight of English – and Ealing - traditionalism (1993: 176) but Rose's work with Dearden is also liberating. The young couple Matt and Jean (Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna) who inherit 'the fleapit' are keen for it to have actual purposes – i.e. to make a profit – and they happily depart at the end of the film after their chief rival has been set on fire by Old Tom (Bernard Miles).

What the picture house, the puffer boat, the railway line and the bomb-damaged villa also have in common is a celebration of an apparent lack of rational planning; by 1957 tower blocks were already being created in Britain's major cities (Kynaston 2013: 47). A further element is one of humanity – Dave Rollinson argues that Matt and Jean act not through 'an

<sup>29</sup> A 1939 Packard Super Eight, the property of Michael Balcon.

intrinsic love for the old fleapit, but rather to increase the asking price' (2000: 91) - but it is also the case that the picture house also gives its staff a real sense of purpose. *The Smallest Show on Earth* includes a beautiful moment where the Old Tom and the equally venerable Mrs. Fazackalee (Margaret Rutherford) and Percy Quill (Peter Sellers) treat themselves to long-forgotten silent films after hours. Roger Lewis argues that this scene 'stands alone and *The Smallest Show on Earth* would be nothing without it' (1994: 444). The Bijou keeps its elderly employees alive and similarly, *The Battle of the Sexes* (Charles Crichton 1959) the company secretary Mr. Martin (Peter Sellers) is excellent at his job, is not particularly old, and that the traditional methods he champions both keep the community in work and actually produces a very marketable product.

Both films are perfect examples of Jeffrey Richard's contention that nostalgia 'is a vital force, passionate, active, committed to the ideal of reviving and preserving the best of the past, not just because it is the past but because it works'. In the aftermath of the Beeching report, when the nation's railways were to be subject to ruthlessly rational planning, this isolated many people who could not afford a car and who lived in rural communities where 'public transport was slashed to the bone' (Sandbrook 2005: 122). Furthermore, as Richard Davenport-Hines points out, Dr. Beeching had:

botched his analysis of railway costs, and proved cocksure yet unimaginative in his thinking. His recommendations to close one-third of the 18,000-mile railway network were published in March 1963, and endorsed in one of the Cabinet's worst decisions: his proposals were based on false premises, fudged figures and dodgy political expediency; they moreover failed in their purpose of securing the railways on a profitable basis. (2013: 32)

However, the ultimate irony is that considerable numbers of the populace embraced the threats to the ways of life demonstrated in these films. The television set in the Titfield pub may malfunction but none of the patrons actively objects to its presence, and the squire's diatribe against the motor-car was not lacking in foundation. As early as the mid-1950s Geoffrey Gorer noted with the growth of private car ownership that 'There appears to be a fairly wide-spread feeling that the laws about the speed limit, parking of vehicles' (1955: 218). Raymond Durnat observed that affluence could enable 'the working classes to pay the piper and enjoy more of his tunes' (1970: 64) and the TV receivers so derided in *Meet Mr Lucifer* would increase after the debut of ITV in 1955.

Many of the Titfield villagers whom their Squire is protecting from zebra crossings would, by the end of the decade, be putting down a deposit on their first new car and applauding Jayne Mansfield opening the Chiswick Flyover (Moran 2010: 40). New motorists would be able to drive their hire purchased Ford Prefects to heritage sites 'hemmed in by iron railings, guarded by a

turnstile and a post card kiosk... and smirked at by aerodrome and bungalow' (Williams-Ellis 1996: 131). In 1963, the Industrial Trust extended its remit to include:

Industrial monuments, including machinery, buildings, canals and railways. Here was a very significant change: for the whole of its previous existence, the Trust had embodied the wide-spread view that the Industrial Revolution had been an unmitigated disaster. Now it was beginning to deem its products worth of conservation. (Cannadine 2002: 23)

Meanwhile, Professor Colin Buchanan' claimed that the motor-car was 'a monster of great potential destructiveness. Yet we love him dearly' (1963: 15). By 1959 small stores were coming under increasing pressure from supermarkets – 'although customers regretted the demise of their local shops with their homely atmosphere, they admired the efficiency, convenience and variety of the new stores' (Sandbrook 2005: 119). One of the main threats to Gibbs' rural vista was not just the 'borough councils and governmental tyrants who do not care a jot for any of the loveliness of our countryside', or even RAF bases, but the occupants themselves. In his essay *Festival* Michael Frayn saw the Festival of Britain in 1951 as the product of 'the Britain of the radical middle classes – the do-gooders; the readers of the *News Chronicle*, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* (1963: 319-320). Twelve years later, 'where the Festival had once stood there grew one of the largest and ugliest commercial office blocks in Western Europe. And a car park for 700 cars' (1963: 338).

### **The Rise of the New Elizabethan – Facing the Future with Confidence**

The films in this section describe how traditional and consumerism may be successfully aligned but with signification degrees of accommodation from the young protagonists. As Marcia Landy has argued, the male protagonists of films of this era were primarily concerned with the:

conflicts over identity, particularly concerning issues of competence, assimilation into the proper family and class position, and acceptance of institutional responsibility. While the films reveal underlying tensions in the characters' struggle to conform to social expectations, the overt emphasis is on the viability and necessity of that accommodation. (1991:40)

Three films made under the auspices of the Rank Organisation between 1952 and 1954 are crucial in defining the various ways in which the central protagonist made such an accommodation. *Trouble in Store* (John Paddy Carstairs 1953) was a vehicle for the variety comedian Norman Wisdom but *Doctor in the House* and *Genevieve* have trainee or up-and-coming professionals respecting the past

but anticipating the present but although the students of St Swithin's ultimately venerated tradition whereas *Genevieve's* attitude was far more selective and even critical. Betty E Box produced *Doctor*

*in the House* after she encountered Richard Gordon's semi-autobiographical novel at a railway station bookstall against considerable opposition from the Rank Organisation:

Michael Balcon, who sat on the Rank Board was unenthusiastic. Sydney Box thought the book too episodic to be turned into a film and the Rank Board wanted Box to reduce the film's £100,000 budget. (Harper and Porter 2003:49)

Rank's management also suggested the new title of *Campus Capers* and the restricted budget meant that James Robertson Justice, rather than Robert Morley, played the senior surgeon Sir Lancelot Spratt. Box also had to fight to use Dirk Bogarde, then known for his portrayals of spivvery, as the romantic lead/straight man of Simon Sparrow. The narrative has Simon and his three close friends attempting to become fully-fledged doctors and, in doing so, coming to recognise and appreciate the old traditions embodied by Sir Lancelot. Harper and Porter contrast Simon with 'people whose self-interest, unlike Sparrow's, cannot bend elegantly with the winds of economic change' (2003:

257) but Christine Geraghty is rather more accurate when she observes how the senior staff's 'support the new students and Sparrow, in particular, as they learn not only to be doctors but also to understand the institution' (2000:67).

Thus, Sparrow and company need to understand the necessity of being berated by large bearded individual for not knowing 'the bleeding time', for it is the 'apprentice' New Elizabethan not the institution that must adapt and change and the film's critical and commercial success of demonstrated that this process need not lack for *joi de vivre*. Thomas's use of London locations show a visual flair for which he rarely receives his fair due and Carmen Dillon's art direction emphasised the gravitas of the hospital as an institution— 'a film of contemporary life should take place against realistic backgrounds with realism its most important impact' (Dillon quoted in McFarlane 1997: 52). *White Corridors* establishes the incompetence of Jack Watling's genial upper-middle class playboy-like houseman but as a medical practitioner Sparrow is not so far removed from Neil Marriner. Bogarde's hero is devoted to becoming a doctor for the benefit of the wider community, unlike Kenneth More's amiably decadent Gaston Grimsdyke. More had first come to public notice in *Chance of a Lifetime* but Grimsdyke is a far more raffish figure than Adam Watson, one who drifts – or rather breezes – through life whereas Simon Sparrow demonstrates that only the dedicated belong in the new world of the Welfare State professional.

Furthermore, the scene where Sparrow helps to deliver a baby is crucial to the development of his character – whilst some of his fellow students may (mildly) philander, Simon is sincere and keen to assist the community. Lewis and Maude argued that the middle classes contained 'the brains and the conscience of the nation' (1950: 337) and Sparrow's character unassumingly display

both traits. Bogarde and Donald were both aged in their early thirties when they played their respective men of medicine but while the drily witty but dedicated Dr. Marriner was not an overtly romantic figure Sparrow has a boyish face and a shy charm; a tabula rasa onto which Odeon audiences could project their fantasies. Phipps' script and the assured performances meant that these characterisations remain plausible and were not obviously compromised for the sake of a joke<sup>30</sup>.

*Doctor in the House* was released five months after *Genevieve*, the Rank comedy that is equally crucial in establishing the New Elizabethan template. The former Ealing producer-director Henry Cornelius had acquired the rights to a comedy script by the expatriate American writer William Rose about two rival veteran car owners staging an unofficial race on their return from the London-Brighton rally. Michael Balcon spurned the project and the Rank Organisation eventually agreed to fund 70 % of the £115,000 needed for the film, leaving Cornelius to raise the remaining 30 %, from the NFFC. The filming of *Genevieve* took place almost entirely on location – an early scene features remarkable footage of the start of the 1952 London-Brighton Rally - with absolutely no back-projection for the driving sequences. *Genevieve* also remains a prime example of that rarest of all British cinematic genres – the road movie. The journeys made by the Darracq and the Spyker veteran cars is less concerned with the actual distance covered but with the respective couples' shifting relationships in a liminal space where a seemingly chance encounter tests the resolve and the character of the main protagonists.

Unlike *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, which venerates age for its own sake, the landscape against which *Genevieve* unfolds is not a retreat from the past but a very contemporary London. The urban landscape is still bomb scarred but there are brand new Standard Vanguards amongst the black pre-war Austins and Vauxhalls; even the tramlines that trap Ambrose's Spyker at the film's conclusion were already obsolete. The skyline still devoid of tower blocks but, as Jerry White observes, the government's revocation of building licences in November 1954 'fired the starting pistol for the London land rush'(2001:48). Simon Ward argues that in *Genevieve* 'the "liminal landscapes" of road and seaside are only ever sites of ludic play without any sense of any darker threat' (Ward 2012: 187) but the foci of the narrative are the veteran cars and adult relationships rather than an exploration of the landscape.

The car represent a heritage that is worth of appreciation – veneration indeed from Alan McKim, a young barrister whose 1904 Darracq allows him a temporary entrée to the past but whose future was that of the new London. In the summer of 1952 the 'Moka Bar' coffee bar opened and three years later Paul Reilly observed in *Architecture and Building* of the coffee bars that 'variety will remain a healthy feature of these gay little centres that have done so much to enliven the West

End of London' (1955: 85).Nor was such affluence an entirely new phenomenon. Peter Ackroyd described the world of 1930s suburbia as one where:

<sup>30</sup>“What’s the bleeding time?”



The factories which lined the dual carriageways were now manufacturing the domestic items of this new civilisation – the washing machines and the refrigerators, the electric cooker and the wirelesses, the processed food and the vacuum cleaners, the electric fires and the leatherette furniture, the ‘reproduction’ tables and the bathroom fittings. (2001: 734)

The four young leads of *Genevieve* would, therefore, be able to enjoy their rights as affluent consumers within the Welfare State and to explore further options for consumers. The McKims’ home is an idealised template for this young professional couple. It perfectly combines the old and new; a ‘traditional’ mews house but one fitted with the latest of kitchens, including a refrigerator. Lewis and Maude argued that the post-war middle classes were ‘beset with worries’ (1950: 334) but there is little evidence of serious financial straits for the McKims.

The schism between the young couple’s well fitted home and their Brighton’s worst hotel is obvious – one is the ideal combination of tradition and modernity whilst the other is still wreathed in aspidistras. Wendy’s complaints about the hotel’s sheet lack of service mark a genuinely transgressive moment at a time when the British middle classes valued the art of ‘not making a scene’. Such behaviour is more associated with foreign tourists - hence the question from a long-term resident/inmate played by Edie Martins – ‘Are they Americans dear?’ It is a witty line from a USA-born screenwriter and it also serves as a reminder of an era when complaining about consumer standards in early 1950s Britain was still seen as vaguely transatlantic. Harry Hopkins wrote of how in that decade ‘American habits and vogues now crossed the Atlantic with a speed and certainty that suggested that Britain was merely one more offshore island’ (1964: 454) but the McKims are not in any way depicted as attempting quasi-Americana in their either speech or dress. They are merely good citizens and consumerists who have both realised that the Second World War is actually over.

At the seaside hotel, Christopher Challis’ cinematography memorably evokes frowsy gloom, in marked contrast to nightclub where Rosalind plays the trumpet, the McKims’ home and the gleaming coachwork of the charming (if unreliable) Darracq. The McKims’ house perfectly combines the old and new; a ‘traditional’ mews house fitted with the latest of kitchens. In *Genevieve*, the attitude to the past is ambivalent and the car of neither party is afforded the form of veneration given to the Titfield branch line. If some modern vehicles, such as the Allard driven by J.C. Callahan (Reginald Beckwith) are as flamboyantly louche as the Bedford coach, both the Darracq and the Spyker are both prone to frequent engineering maladies.

What *Genevieve* also conveyed was how post-war acceptance of materialism was not diametrically opposed to traditionalism or good manners. The utterly drab hotel is markedly contrasted with the often unreliable but still enjoyable veteran cars and Alec potentially sacrifices a £100 bet just to bring pleasure to Arthur Wontner's elderly motorist by engaging

him in conversation. A further strength of the film is that neither male protagonist is depicted as paragon of virtue; Gregson plays Alan as sullen, petulant and adolescent, and it is Wendy who often takes the lead in matters financial and sexual (Geraghty 2000: 163) and Kenneth More portrays this rival Ambrose Claverhouse as one with many of the traits of the cad. Throughout most of our period the perfect screen embodiment of the comic cad was Terry-Thomas and every detail of his screen persona was calculated to perfection from the flamboyant Jaguar X140 bought 'on approval' to the carefully assembled wardrobe but Ambrose has no need of overreliance on such trappings. As an advertising agent, he has easily made the adaptation to the post-war executive class. More's image in *Genevieve* and *Doctor in the House* was that of the 'Edwardian Gentlemen' suitably updated to the early 1950s – in Andrew Spicer's words 'A complex synthesis of the debonair ideal with a contemporary blokeishness which shed all the unacceptable class elements' (2003: 39).

Consumerism is also the background for *Trouble in Store*, which combined an expert cast and a central figure who seemingly owed less to contemporary London and the ethos of 'the chap' and rather more to traditions of slapstick humour. *Trouble in Store* was shot extensively on location in 1952 and one notable aspect of Wisdom's first film is its quite acute sense of social commentary. Harper and Porter observe the realistic yet witty shop interiors (2003:202) and John Grierson, in a letter to *Kinematography Weekly*, noted how the film's vitality derived from both its slapstick and capturing the public interest in shopping and consumerism (1954: 6). One of the finest sequences in any Rank comedy film of this period appearance is of the grand department store besieged by hundreds of wild-eyed female bargain hunters, all seemingly clad in equally deranged headgear, as they frantically search for now de-rationed luxuries.

Spicer describes Wisdom's standard screen and stage persona, 'The Gump' as being the Harlequin tradition – 'his infectious good humour and determination to enjoy himself constitute a carnivalesque celebration of earthiness and infectious vulgarity, but always within the framework of his struggle to gain acceptability' (2003: 107). Jill Craigie devised *Trouble in Store* as a vehicle for Wisdom, who plays a stockroom boy with a longing for self-improvement to become a window dresser. Much of the comedy derives from the Gump's eagerness to please combined with his childlike ignorance of social hierarchy. In appearance Wisdom's Gump costume makes the character look almost Dickensian in his desperate attempts at respectable neatness but, as Richard Dacre argues, he is more subversive than Simon Sparrow in that 'he always fails to recognise the signifiers of class' (2012: 132). This is given a heightened dimension by having his best screen straight man Jerry Desmond play the store

director Augustus Freebody as pompous and vain but also hard working and genuinely ambitious for his business.

Any antipathy that Freebody displays towards Norman is almost always justified in terms of the plot, as Wisdom's screen character often shows a childlike and aggressive desire to assist. The Gump 'always tries to be right but never succeeds – unless, of course, by a happy last minute fluke' (Robinson 1954: 213). Christine Geraghty argues that 'mainstream comedies that lampoon the traditional classes and hierarchies also served to support them in the face of modernising attempts to blow them away' (2000: 56). Yet, Alan McKim and the Gump may occupy different stations in life but the plot of neither *Genevieve* nor *Trouble in Store* resiliently shrug off the problems of modern life. Other British comedy narratives to embrace the contemporary world were the previously detailed *It's Great to Be Young!*, *Simon and Laura* (Muriel Box 1955) and *The Extra Day* (William Fairchild 1956).

These last two films explore BBC TV and popular crooners respectively in non-judgemental fashion. Ian Carmichael and Muriel Pavlov are young producers who are professional and hardworking in the former and *The Extra Day* stars a real pop singer of the day, Denis Lotis, to play a singer both talented and far more stable than his deranged bobbysocks wearing fans. In *The Captain's Table* (Jack Lee 1959) John Gregson's middle class Albert Ebb, a former freight ship captain promoted to commanding a cruise liner, regards the shenanigans of his upper-class passengers with a jaundiced eye throughout the film. However, this ethos increasingly ossified as New Elizabethan progressed up the career ladder. *Doctor at Large* (Ralph Thomas 1957) sees Simon Sparrow as much in Harley Street and amongst the rural squirearchy as serving the local community. There is a thoughtful moment when Sparrow, in a scene Bogarde had helped to write, reassures a frightened patient that people become doctors because 'they feel one of the most precious things in the world is life - and there is nothing more important than helping to give everyone their fair share of it'. However, by the final reel Simon takes a job in a country practice where the senior partner (George Relph) believes that 'the NHS is all very well but some people still prefer manners with their medicine'.

Durgnat summarised this process of middle class professionalism aping their social betters when he looked at Tony Hudson (John Gregson) in Rank's *True as a Turtle* (Wendy Toye 1957). The colour cinematography is every equal the Box/Thomas films in terms of aesthetic value but the hero is 'too consciously submissive, too sure of entering into his inheritance, too upper-crust' (1970: 141). The domestic comedy *Upstairs and Downstairs* (Ralph Thomas 1959) is a virtual return to Maude and Lewis's worries for the middles classes as we see how Richard and Kate Barry (Michael Craig and Anne Heywood) are facing great difficulty in finding the right domestic servants. The sole points of interest is that the crush of

the young maid Ingrid (Mylene Demongeot) on her tweed jacketed employer is played straight, and with genuine feeling on the part of the actress, but it is a rare human moment in a film that

looks immaculate but feels like a museum piece. By the end of the decade, the New Elizabethan seemed indistinguishable from the ABPC and Rank comedies based on popular West End successes. These reflect both Christine Geraghty's contention that much of 1950s British film comedy represented a 'safe space' (2000: 195) and the theatrical genre that Kenneth Tynan described as 'Loamshire':

The inhabitants belong to a social class derived partly from romantic novels and partly from the playwright's vision of the leisured life he will lead after the play is a success - this being the only effort of imagination he is called on to make. Joys and sorrows are giggles and whimpers: the crash of denunciation dwindles into "Oh, stuff, Mummy!" and "Oh, really, Daddy!" (Tynan quoted in Shellard 2003:96)

Unlike Dr. Sparrow, Alan McKim, or even *The Gump* with his modest ambitions to become a window dresser, these are Technicolor celebrations of inherited income and contain social attitudes that made *Touch and Go* look as avant garde. Such pictures mirrored the studios' tendency of 'British male stars to be shown as country gentlemen, sporting tweeds and jodhpurs and living in rural comfort' (Medhurst 1986: 349) and Geoffrey Macnab observes of the Christmas 1956 edition of *Picturegoer* magazine that it showcases John Gregson 'at home with his wife, He is wearing a tweed jacket and smoking a pipe. That is only expected of "the chap"' (2000:183). It is a scenario, as Macnab goes on to note, that is caught in an apparent time warp and in Loamshire films, despite some contemporary sights such as television sets and Vauxhall E-Series Veloxes in the background shots, they seem curiously time-locked into the 1930s. The worlds they depict does not explore landscape but presents an England where apparently eccentricity masks a deadening conformism – in *As Long as They're Happy*, a 'bohemian' (Nigel Greene) ultimately express a desire to 'be normal'.

This sub-genre of British comedy is also demonstrated by ABPC's determinedly jovial farce *Girls at Sea* (Gilbert Gunn 1958) and the two comedies directed by J Lee Thompson, *As Long as They're Happy* and *An Alligator Named Daisy* (both 1955). The last-named is has Donald Sinden is teamed with a reptilian co-star for much of the running time as Jeanne Carson dances on dustbins and James Robertson Justice commissions an 'Alligator Rally' with guest appearances from Gilbert Harding, Jimmy Edwards and Frankie Howerd. Such films, appreciators, of comedies reptiles taking part in garden parties funded by bearded curmudgeons do not make a strong case for the challenging status quo as they reflect Geraghty's contention that 'they revert to the traditional in a way that blocks off the challenges and risks that comedy can present' (2000: 56).

But although the New Elizabethan ideal would have appeared to have ossified by the end of the decade, in the 1953-1954 period the combination of ingredients for *Trouble in Store*, *Doctor in the House* and *Genevieve* really did create comedy that celebrated youth and ambition - especially in the latter two films<sup>31</sup>. Charles Drazin cites the *Doctor* and the Norman Wisdom comedies as examples of how Rank in the John Davis era were formulaic and cheap to make – ‘It was fine for business, but a pity for those who hoped that British films could continue to be inspiring’ (2007: 53). But the sheer craftsmanship and talent in front and behind the camera should not be under-valued. The setting of these three films was recognisably 1950s London but if wartime and post-war Ealing celebrations of the ‘People As Hero’ was defined ‘in terms of opposition to Hollywood spectacle in favour of an austere realism’ (Cook 1995: 63), the latter two photographed in a vibrant colour that inferred a bright future. The crucial difference between the films is that that the Gump does not understand social hierarchy and Sparrow ultimately defers to it, for that is the route to success for a young professional of integrity, modesty, a sense of humour and drive (Harper and Porter 2003: 257). However, the McKims are on the verge of creating a new hierarchy, one where patriotism and consumerism are in fact, close bedfellows. The world where ‘to pinch and scrape suggested respectability. Only spivs and car dealers fawned on the nouveau riche’ (Davenport-Hines 2013: 149) was already on the verge of passing.

<sup>31</sup> The Gump’s age is ambiguous, and this is partially due to the obfuscation of Wisdom’s actual year of birth (1915) during his Rank stardom.



## CHAPTER 7 BRITISH COMEDY AND THE ART OF SUBVERSION

### *Absolute Showers – St Trinian's and Private's Progress*

British Lion's challenges during the 1950s, as referred to in Chapter X, should not obscure the fact that some of the films made by its principal directors, marked, as Harper and Porter note:

a substantial move away from the deferential politics in Rank or Ealing films...What is clear that the contempt for the deferential class structures, which was enshrined in the films by the Boultings and Launder and Gilliat, found favour with large parts of cinema audiences (2003:113).

Thus, the Boultings' *Private's Progress*) and Launder and Gilliat's *The* (Frank Launder 1954); a cynical view of our glorious wartime past and of serving the wider community and an idiosyncratically positive view of the new folk devil, the teenager combined with Launder and Gilliat's jaundiced view of middle class follies. Their adaptation of John Dighton's 1948 West End farce *The Happiest Days of Your Life* (Frank Launder 1950) had Nutbourne College portrayed as a haven of mediocrity in the midst of Attlee's England. Bruce Babington dismisses *The Belles*, and its successors, as 'a minor by-product of *The Happiest Days*' (2002:

171) but the film deserves rather more attention.

Babington's description of how the earlier Launder and Gilliat comedy's 'ability to be serious is paradoxically guaranteed by its apparent unseriousness' (Babington 2002: 16) equally applies to *The Belles of St Trinian's*. The picture was released shortly after *Doctor in the House*, where we have already encountered all manner of joshing and japes under the eye of Sir Lancelot Spratt, one of British cinema's most prominent curmudgeonly yet benevolent patriarchs. But *The Belles of St Trinian's* convey a total lack of the idea that the young should ultimately defer to the established system beneath a façade that attempts a veneer of respectability when the staff lacks food let alone wages.

When *The Belles of St Trinian's* entered production in early 1954 many traditional Conservative voters, in the words of a Tory Central Office report to Sir Anthony Eden felt as though 'they have not had a square deal and are looking for somewhere else to go'

(Report quoted in Cannadine 2000: 152). It was this sense of clinging to middle class status with a minimum of means that pervade *The Belles of St. Trinian's* where the staff are obliged to consort with bookmakers and spivs in order to maintain their dubious – and even spurious – sense of respectability. Nutbourne College may not have been in the First XI of public schools but as compared with St Trinian's it is Eton and Harrow combined. Ronald Searle's first St Trinian's school cartoon appeared in *Lilliput* magazine in 1941 but it was not until after the Second World War, in which Searle had been a prisoner of the Japanese for three years that the drawings of demonic gin swigging boarding school girls took on their iconic form:

For every girl whose uniform never fitted, whose hat looked permanently on loan, whose mother worried silently and sighed audibly, whose report commented on Absence of Team Spirit, whose arrival was marked by a volley of sharp reports as elastic burst in all directions, whose appearance suggested an abandoned Christmas parcel on which the temporary staff at Mount Pleasant had worked off their grief and frustrations, Searle came as a prophet of liberty and new self-respect. (Davies 1990: 23)

The Belles may be contained within the grounds of St Trinian's for at least part of the day but their influence, as evinced in the opening sequence of villagers fleeing from the school bus, extends well beyond the gates. You could never imagine any of Miss Fritton's graduates, becoming the insipid ingénues of *Father's Doing Fine* (Henry Cass 1952) or *For Better, for Worse* (J Lee Thompson 1955), and all of who most probably took their cue from Diana Dors' spirited disobedience of the central rule of the Ealing drama *Dance Hall* (Charles Crichton 1950) - 'No Jiving'. The Belles always retain a sense of aggressive individuality and this is reflected in Launder's direction where, as with Searle's own drawings, every corner of the screen was filled with surreal imagery such as a blankly menacing 1st former with bird's-nest hair, or a fiendish innocent peering through banisters as a form of uniquely British grotesque Greek chorus.

Heading the cast was Alastair Sim as Miss Fritton, the very embodiment of shabby gentility, claiming that 'When poor Freda and I started this school during the General Strike of 1926, we vowed to make it the happiest carefree establishment in the whole of Britain.' By 1954 she is reduced to pawning the school trophies and bemoaning the vanished 'gay Arcadia of childhood it was until the war broke out and people with money lost it', echoing the cynicism of William Rose's screenplays for *Genevieve* and *The Ladykillers*. As compared with other British comedy films centred on the world of the school and young people *Trinian's* was indeed different. *Top of the Form* (John Paddy Carstairs 1953) was an updating of Will Hay's

*Boys Will Be Boys*) as a post-war vehicle for Ronald Shiner and *Fun at St. Fanny's* (Maurice Elvey 1956) was merely an example of how British second feature producers could occasionally lose their minds.

Another sub-genre of films dealing with young Elizabethans were the works of the Children's Film Foundation or CFF, founded in 1951. This functioned as a production agency of films for young audiences and the sound of a CFF hero in full well-modulated vocal flight is as evocative of post-war Britain as the bell on a police Wolseley, the whistle of a steam train and the clank of Button 'A' being pressed in a public telephone box. Beyond the Children's Film Foundation, middle class teenagers of this period still needed benevolent guidance. *My Teenage Daughter* (Herbert Wilcox 1956) is the searing drama of how 17-year-old Janet Carr (Sylvia Syms) leaves 'Business College' in order to spend all her time with Tony Ward Black (Kenneth Haigh), a homicidal deb's delight. But worse, far worse, than the alcohol and the (not very) wild parties is the jazz club full of jiving, thereby destroying the moral compass of the young. Fortunately, Janet eventually learns that a life of crime, attempting to out run police Wolseley 6/80s, consorting with cads who favour suede footwear and dancing to Humphrey Littleton's music does not pay.

In a similar vein, ABPC's *Now and Forever* (Mario Zampi 1956) has Janette Grant (Janette Scott) an upper-middle class teenager eloping with a mechanic Mike Pritchard (Vernon Gray) but ultimately accepting the guidance of her elders. In these two dramas and in most Children's Film Foundation pictures of this period legitimate authority takes the form of professional and benign experts whereas the staffroom of St. Trinian's is peopled by vamps, gin addicts and mistresses who merely keep a nervous eye for a police Wolseley clanging up the driveway.

As for the middle class authority figures outside of St. Trinian's, HM School Inspectorate in the form of Manton Bassett (Richard Wattis) is both incompetent and impotent, with two of his former number (Guy Middleton and Arthur Howard) gone native in the school grounds. Joyce Grenfell's Sergeant Ruby Gates, operating undercover as the games mistress 'Miss Crawley', is a truly inept overgrown IVth former, a cruel parody of an Enid Blyton heroine in middle age. 'We're all Girl Guides, aren't we?' she implores Miss Fritton at one point, only to receive the withering response 'Are we? Some of us may have aspired beyond that happy state, Miss Crawley.' Her Superintendent (Lloyd Lamble) is the epitome of smoothly bland timeserving incompetence. Meanwhile, the fact that the ostensibly respectable parents

seen in the final reel have chosen the cheapest boarding school in England puts them as little better than Sid James's crooked bookie and his henchmen.

The commercial success of *The Belles* resulted in a sequel, *Blue Murder at St Trinian's* (Frank Launder 1957) which tellingly dropped the girls' parents who would no longer appear unless they were used as plot devices to introduce a further note of the outside adult criminal world into the school grounds. The sole conduit between school and the outside world is Flash Harry, who by *Blue Murder* had modified his spiv outfit into a complete Teddy boy outfit; his return to the school at the wheel of his Heinkel Cabin Cruiser bubble car captures the late 1950s zeitgeist. As compared with the first film, the narrative emphasis was now upon mockery of post-war institutions such as the civil service, the police and the army rather than a deliberate inversion of girls' schools stories. Fortunately, the average student remained as described by Searle:

sadistic, cunning, dissolute, crooked, sordid, lacking morals of any sort and capable of any excess. She would also be well-spoken, even well-mannered and polite. Sardonic, witty and very amusing. She would be good company. In short: typically human and, despite everything, endearing. (Searle quoted in Davies 1990: 101-102)

A year after the release of *The Belles of St Trinian's*, the Boulting Brothers were producing *Private's Progress*. Military comedies were not a new spectacle in British cinema of the 1950s, but *Worm's Eye View* (Jack Raymond 1951), and *Reluctant Heroes* (Raymond 1951) were straight-forward adaptations of stage farces. *Orders Are Orders* (David Paltenghi 1954) was a 1930s narrative uneasily updated to the early 1950s in contrast to the Bouldings' attack on the tropes of the Peoples' War. The screenplay, by John Boulting and Frank Harvey, follows the decidedly upper-middle class Stanley Windrush, a figure whom in a conventional war film would play the role of the keen young subaltern. Cast in the role was the revue actor Ian Carmichael whom Macnab describes as having the demeanour of one:

just fallen out of the pages of a later P.G. Wodehouse novel. He still has an upright military bearing, even though the war years have passed. Hawkins, More, Bogarde and Gregson were "chaps" too, but in Carmichael the type is no longer staunch and reliable. He has an effete, febrile, almost neurotic quality, something social commentators might ascribe to the nervousness of the country as a whole. (2000: 111)

But this is an overly simplistic view of the character as Windrush is neither written nor played as dim-witted but as one of a sincere nature. His belief in the hierarchy foredooms him, as it would have ultimately ensured him success in a Loamshire comedy of the period. Stanley is definitely keen to do his duty for his nation but he is totally at odds with military life, and he is

initially assigned to the 94th Dispersal and Holding Unit. There, his commanding officer Major Hitchcock is played by Terry-Thomas, a revue light comedian whose stage and television image was that of a rotter, but in his first major screen appearance he gives a clever and low-key rendition of the sort of officer who had been:

commissioned, or had achieved promotion, for reasons which had no relevance to the conduct of a modern war. They were not properly trained for the task, they did not have the basic knowledge or skill that was required to discharge it, many of them, because they had been selected for other reasons, were unfitted by character and temperament for command. (Rees 1963: 24).

Hitchcock loathes being in charge of ‘an absolute shower’ but he openly admits to the recalcitrant Private Blake (Victor Maddern) that he does not care for the army either – a witty illustration of how the film regained human foible and amorality ‘rather than mobilizing a consensual view of the armed forces as the embodiment of Britain's wartime pride’ (Wells 2000: 52). *Private's Progress*, with its depiction of sheer inertia and incompetence presents an inverted portrait of the nation characterised by Ealing's wartime output one of the most famous sequences in the film has most of the platoon (including their commanding officer) escaping from their duties into a cinema, where they loll at their ease whilst watching a stirring patriotic newsreel. This is emphatically not a film where people unite in the face of common adversity. At the holding unit, Windrush finds an atmosphere of inertia where the common enemy is boredom and S P MacKenzie sees the film in terms of showing the Army to be “all bull”, a hypocritical institution governed by petty regulation and officiousness, where those who prospered were those who knew how to play the system rather than the brave’ (2001:133).

Thus, the conscripts, led by Private Cox (Richard Attenborough), teach Windrush the best methods of avoiding work, deftly illustrating how *Private's Progress* is not a film that celebrates recent history as a spectacle. Stanley's utterly corrupt uncle Brigadier Tracepurcel (Dennis Price) and the descent of Cox into outright villainy demonstrate their ability to manipulate the service system. If the lazy and despondent Major Hitchcock is the antithesis of the professional officer of the Ealing wartime model then Cox is an example of the wartime spiv in uniform who, unlike Jimmy Hanley's wide boy in *The Captive Heart*, is not prepared to use his skills for the community as a whole. Matthew Sweet argues that the actor was ‘born for sleaze and terror’ (2006: 256) and his Cox is as glib of patter as he is cold and calculating of eye. When Stanley is eventually granted a commission we meet Cox again, now in the guise of

Tracepurcel's batman, but with far more of a vulpine edge to his persona of the seemingly genial wide boy.

Compared with such unappetising figures, Carmichael portrays Windrush as a Candide like figure, one who is non-military but sincere and no coward. Marcia Landy argued that 'to a current audience the film suffers at times from a too specific topicality, relying upon the closeness of the audience to the war' (2000: 177) but the veiled anger in *Private's Progress* transcends any superficial Brian Rix service farce of the very early 1950s. Stanley may be an inept soldier and his friend Captain Egan (Peter Jones) the apparent model of an eager young officer but Tracepurcel and Cox, in order to engineer an art theft, equally use them both. One most subtle aspect of *Private's Progress* is Carmichael's performance of Stanley as a figure of intelligence - a brief sequence shows his skill as a Japanese interpreter - and humanity. Spicer pints out that the actor never allows Windrush to become a buffoon (2003: 113) and halfway through the film he nearly vomits with revulsion after witnessing two German officers commit suicide.

This is far removed from Christine Geraghty's 'safe zone' and the Boultings' intentions were to be 'extremely serious without being solemn' (Roy Boulting quoted in McFarlane

1992: 35). In *Private's Progress*, they demonstrate the shenanigans of a corrupt Establishment in their deliberately placing Windrush in a scenario for which he is entirely un-trained. The shift in mood away from farce once Stanley gains his commission illustrates the Boultings' deceptively subversive approach to the past. Andrew Higson describes how in British war pictures of the 1940s there is 'a productive tension between documentary realism and narrative fiction, between the general history and the particular story' (1984: 26) and the Brothers follow this example, but via showing the inertia of service life. Such subversive attitude resulted in a complete withdrawal of War Office support for the film, leading to a budget increase of £5,000 and the Boultings' billing the picture as 'The film THEY didn't want made' and acknowledging 'the official co-operation of absolutely nobody' in the opening credits.

To argue that the release of *Private's Progress* chimed with the national mood dominated by the Suez Crisis is not entirely accurate – the picture debuted in the UK in February 1956, several months before the debacle in Egypt. However, when production commenced in 1955, the Second World War had been over for a decade, allowing for a climate was receptive to a more acerbic form of film comedy about an army known to pass blind men fit for National Service<sup>32</sup>. The review in *The Financial Times* noted that 'This is a picture which possibly reflects quite a lot of a few people's war and a little bit, surely, of almost everybody's' (Granger 1956) If such Ealing comedies as *The Lavender Hill Mob* were mostly concerned with acting as a safety valve for repressed urges (albeit within a strictly middle class framework and, as we have seen, barely repressed in Holland) then the Boulting Brothers were more concerned with exposing a social complacency that depended upon out-moded and irrelevant social institutions.

Andrew Spicer sees *Private's Progress* in terms of starting a new cycle of comic films – 'Norman Wisdom revived his waning popularity with his first service comedy (1958), in which the little man triumphs over the Nazis. It is no surprise that the "Carry On" series was launched on its triumphant way by a service comedy' (2004: 172) – but the conclusion of Norman helping to win the war or the awkward squad of *Carry On Sergeant* (Gerald Thomas 1958) passing out with honour to these later films are a world apart from *Private's Progress*. *I Was Monty's Double* (John Guillermin 1958) does contain a witty vignette of basic training under Victor Maddern's Staff Sergeant but the narrative is principally concerned with a true story of the Second World War whereas Lieutenant Windrush soon learns that work for the greater community - or family Britannica - does not automatically bestow reward. In both the

<sup>32</sup> ‘Terence Morris was discharged from the Ordnance Corps in 1953. He was partially sighted, carried a blind person’s free transport pass; the medical board had passed him as Grade II.’ (Vinen 2014:46)



Boultings' and Launder and Gilliat's films tradition is seen to be largely illusory, authority based on false foundations and although *Private's Progress* and *The Belles of St Trinian's* were made prior to the Suez Crisis, they anticipate the post-1956 world where imperial pretensions and playing the game began to look foolish or even otiose.

The St Trinian's inmates, bright, determined and fully aware that they are students in a fifth rate institution funded by overdrafts and gambling will stand more chance of adapting to this post-Imperial world than Stanley Windrush for, as with the Boultings' earlier dramas such as *Seven Days to Noon*, nativity is seen as a menace. Windrush's commission in the latter half of the film is gained by chicanery on Brigadier Tracepurel's part and at the conclusion he still has to realise that not only his virtues of diligence and enthusiasm cut little or no ice but also that his trust in any supposedly paternal figure is inevitably ill founded. With *The Belles of St Trinian's* and *Private's Progress* the viability and necessity accommodating authority is unnecessary when it is not actively perilous.

## The 1960s and the Decline of 'Traditional' Comedy

In *Sixties British Cinema* Robert Murphy noted:

Time was running out for the small-scale black and white comedy which had been the mainstay of the British film industry since the early '30s...in the second half of the '60s stage farces, service comedies, rural whimsy and old crock films seemed in danger of extinction. (1992:238)

If we expand on Murphy's definition to encompass medium budget colour productions there is a definite divide in the first half of the 1960s between those films set firmly in Loamshire and other mainstream comedies with comic characters readily adapting to an England of consumerism. The first named is exemplified by the comedies with a Tudor cottages or mansion house setting made during the 1960-1965 period - such as range of medium budget MGM-British black and white comedy films. This was the twilight of film in which young ladies still simper, male authority figures still favour beards and shouting 'you miserable worm!' on a regular basis, chaps are still crisp of hacking jacket and the lower orders still know their places.

This formula was employed by the four Agatha Christie adaptations, all directed by George Pollock between 1962 and 1964 for MGM-British, that served as comic vehicles for Margaret Rutherford. After the box office failure of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (Sydney Franklin 1956) the company's strategy 'veered from expensively mounted costume films and turned towards more modest fare' (Chapman 2005: 179). Thus, the *Miss Marples* series together with *She'll Have to Go* (Robert Asher 1962) and *Kill or Cure* (George Pollock 1962), all have deliberately 'traditional settings'. At Pinewood the Rogers/Thomas farces *Raising the Wind* (Gerald Thomas 1961) and *The Iron Maiden* (Thomas 1962) - are as ultra-conservative as any Rank comedy of the previous decade. In 1962, Kenneth More essayed his last mainstream comedy in *We Joined the Navy* (Wendy Toye), a musical that felt as contemporary as a 1935 Alvis.

Perhaps the most fitting, and not unkind coda for this vision of England is in the forms of *Man in the Moon* (Basil Dearden 1960) and *School for Scoundrels* (Robert Hamer 1960 and unofficially by Cyril Frankel). The former has Kenneth More as the middle class everyman William Blood who is pitted in the UK's space race against a boulderish group of

very upper- class and devious astronauts. Here the squire figure is one Henry Palfrey (Ian Carmichael), a downtrodden executive in his father's firm, despised by his chief clerk (Edward Chapman), sneered at by head waiters and at a total loss to compete with the utter bounder Raymond Delauey (Terry-Thomas, naturally) for the hand of April Smith (Janette Scott). The script was adapted from Stephen Potter's *Lifemanship* books, which detailed how to be constantly ahead in polite society with the minimum of effort. Palfrey's attempts to become a modern cad are achieved with élan, especially in the scenes opposite the spivvish car dealers Dunstan and Dudley Grosvenor (Dennis Price and Peter Jones), from who he obtains an Austin Healey 100/6 by dubious means. Nevertheless, although Henry now has the sports car and the veneer of a very 1960-style cad, he ultimately he remains the good-hearted chap.

Running parallel to such charming (and charming indeed they are) black and white visions of the squirearchy are the comedies displaying the increasingly ossified world of the cadet. The Bob Monkhouse vehicles *Dentist in the Chair* (Don Chaffey 1960) and *Dentist on the Job* (C M Pennington-Richards 1961), Leslie Phillips playing a vet in *In the Doghouse* (Darcy Conyers 1961) and Michael Craig in *Doctor in Love*— all were seemingly trapped in a world where everyone said 'gosh' every five minutes. With *Doctor in Love*, this ossification of the New Elizabethan, as previously noted with *Doctor at Large*, was now endemic and this is even more evident in the next film in the series *Doctor in Distress* (Thomas 1963), which saw the last sighting of Dirk Bogarde as Simon Sparrow. Ten years after *Doctor in the House* Dr. Sparrow is now a middle-aged figure of probity (for all of his taste for dashing sports jackets and brand new Morris Mini Supers) who now commands his own team of (notably insipid) juveniles. Apart from the genuinely moving scene in which Sparrow comforts the mortally ill Mrs. Whittaker (Ann Lynn) Bogarde's disinterested and affectlessness in his final outing in the series casts a mood of ennui over the entire enterprise.

By contrast, a spate of early 1960s crook comedies display a far easier accommodation with consumer affluence in a contemporary setting as seen in *Go to Blazes* (Michael Truman 1962) and *The Wrong Arm of the Law* (Cliff Owen 1962). Christine Geraghty notes how 'merit is taken more seriously in these films than the comedies about education discussed earlier (i.e. *It's Great to Be Young*), since crime is presented as a more open profession than education or the law' (2000: 73). In the first film, the gang boss Bernard (Dave King) rules his team of the working class getaway driver Alfie (Norman Rossington) and the dandified Harry (Raymond Massey) with a natural authority. *The Wrong Arm of the Law* has Peter Sellers as 'Pearly' Gates, a smooth, self- made businessman who commands respect in a way that his nemesis

Inspector Fred Parker - brilliantly depicted by Lionel Jeffries as over-promoted, sycophantic and insecure – can only dream about. Gates is a highly intelligent former 1940s wide boy who now enjoys his tailored suits and fleet of motor cars in a way that Joe Lampton would appreciate. Indeed, his only real Achilles heel is his vulnerability to his deb- like girlfriend (Nanette Newman)'s duplicity as 'he wants to impress her with his clever ideas

and cosmopolitan ways' (Geraghty 2000:73).

Another entry in this entertaining sub-genre is *Crooks Anonymous* (Ken Annakin 1962); a witty crime caper focused on the talents of Leslie Phillips. It was one of a trio of films, written by Jack Davies and directed by Annakin for Independent Artists, starring Phillips, Stanley Baxter and James Robertson Justice, all of which combined visual flair with pace and superbly judged performances. *A Very Important Person* (1961) was an ambitious vehicle for James Robertson Justice that combines a well-observed prisoner-of-war background with genuine thriller elements in addition to allowing the actor's persona to be used to serious purpose rather than buffoon. The last of this cycle, *The Fast Lady* (1962), was the only film in the trilogy to be shot in colour and at first sight, the essence of its charm is that studio set in Beaconsfield, which replicates with almost surreal accuracy exactly the same world as in the Ladybird books. You half expect Peter and Jane to make a guest appearance on the high street where all of the male extras wear a tie, and the female extras are resplendent in twinsets and pearls.

In *The Fast Lady* the sun perpetually shines, traffic lights are mounted on black and white striped poles, there is no litter to sully the illusion and the nearest Davies' screenplay ever come to swearing is 'twerp'. There is even that sine qua non for any decent post-war British film comedy – a costermonger's barrow being overturned. However, as with *Genevieve* the mise-en-scene and the plot unfold in a very recognisable England. *The Fast Lady* takes place in amidst semi-detached villas and Luncheon Vouchers rather than overt fantasy and the final reel chase concludes on the M4 motorway works. The titular car may have been built in 1927 but the future for Baxter's Murdoch Troon (Baxter) and Claire Chingford (Julie Christie) is of dining at the Watford Gap on the recently opened (1959) M1. There, a smiling hostess would take your trilby and raincoat before you partook of a hot dog (2/- each), fillet steak for 12/6, or other fine foods designed to make the average Hillman Minx driver feel like a minor deity.

Observing this brave new world with a hopeful yet jaundiced eye is Anthony Aloysius St John Hancock (Tony Hancock) in *The Rebel*, (Robert Day 1960) forever wondering when the Soapflake Arcadia of Harold Macmillan's administration will finally permeate as far as East Cheam. In one of the greatest scenes in post-war cinema was of a prematurely middle-aged clerk warily seating himself in an absurdly self-conscious modernistic coffee bar, all rubber plants and red plastic chairs. Hancock's next ABPC vehicle *The Punch and Judy Man* (Jeremy Summers 1962), which was co-written by the star, has Hancock as Wally Pinner a

traditional entertainer in a rain swept seaside town. The local council wishes to promote the town's anniversary not as a celebration of heritage but for financial gain.

This air of provincial commercialism is reflected in the Bognor Regis locations - a grey realm of plastic macs and pseudo-American ice-cream parlours. The latter provided Hancock with another encounter with the forced modernisation of British life, when the manager (Eddie Byrne) issues him with a tacit challenge to consume all 2/6d worth of 'Piltdown Glory', a sundae replete with the finest of (mostly artificial) ingredients<sup>33</sup>. As John K Walton observes, *The Punch & Judy Man* conveys the sense of a traditional community whose *raison d'être* is slowly passing (2000: 10) with little or nothing to replace it. The comedy film of this period that most adroitly celebrates a reconciliation of community values with modernism and paternal management is *Carry On Cabby* (Gerald Thomas 1963), the seventh in the series that began with *Carry On Sergeant* in 1958.

Here, unlike *Private's Progress*, the institution itself was above criticism, and the film even ends with a passing out parade shot straight. James Chapman sees the first *Carry On* films as demonstrating 'consensual social politics characteristic of British cinema... authority figures are humanized and normal social relations are preserved.' (2012: 105) This is true of *Sergeant* but in the three films that followed - *Nurse*, *Teacher* and *Constable* (Thomas 1959, 1959 and 1960) Norman Hudis, who wrote the first six entries in the series, often devised well-observed vignettes about integrity versus self-obsessed vanity. *Nurse* has Brian Oulton's desperate snob and, Eric Barker gives a brilliantly convincing portrayal of a pompous and irascible Inspector in *Constable*. Hudis also contributed scripts to the comedy films made by Rogers and Thomas outside of the *Carry On* series proper; *Twice Round The Daffodils* (Gerald Thomas 1962) dealt with great sensitivity with life on a TB ward and *Nurse On Wheels* (Gerald Thomas 1963) makes some well-observed points about the squalid existence of some of the eponymous heroine's (Juliet Mills) patients.

The early *Carry On* films contain genuine moments of pathos, belying Medhurst's contention that the series lacks 'any warmth or evocation of community'<sup>34</sup> (1986: 183), together with a degree of acute social observation. Wellington Crowther (Sid James) in *Cruising* is all too aware that the shipping company directors object to one who has risen from the ranks being a liner captain. In *Sergeant*, *Nurse* and *Teacher*, Kenneth Williams's persona is that of

<sup>33</sup> 'Two scoops of luscious vanilla, two scoops of flaky chocolate, succulent sliced bananas, juicy peach fingers swimming in pure cane sugar, all swimming in super-smooth butterfat cream.'

<sup>34</sup> This sense of community is achieved by the resident *Carry On* team, as noted by Peter Rogers when he wrote to the NFFC – ‘In order, therefore, to maintain the success of the “Carry Ons” it is essential to my mind, to keep the present team of comics together.’ (Memo quoted in Chapman 2012: 104)



the expert, a middle class professional figure, (variously economics graduate, nuclear physics student and liberal minded English master) who is as accepting of a logical argument as he is prepared to argue for the sake of the group. In *Nurse* his Oliver Reckitt is given a magnificent diatribe against petty self-seeking authority which he delivers for the benefit of all the patients:

If a Doctor asks me to hang by one arm from the ceiling wearing an aqualung with my birthday tattooed on my left buttock in shorthand, I'll do it. He aims to cure me. Your rule has nothing to do with my cure; therefore, it has no meaning in here.

*Carry On Cabby* was the first in the series with a screenplay by Talbot Rothwell and the last to both reconcile community values with consumerism and offer plausible characters instead of archetypes and Pavlovian cues for laughter in the form of jaunty eight-bars. It was also the last of the series where Sid James essayed a role as a relaxed and respected authority figure as taxi firm owner Charlie Hawkins and in many respects *Cabby* represents the series at its most beguiling. Raymond Durnat argued that the myth of a commercial film is 'is the sentiments of a group crystallised into dramatic terms, and shared' (1962: 4) and this is so of *Cabby* where the aesthetic values belie its limited funding. The well-defined black & white photography carefully contrasts Charlie Hawkins' dowdy office with its black Bakelite telephones and his fleet of ageing Austin FX3s to the immaculate Ford Consul-Cortina Supers cruising through misty post-war housing estates.

This is not the *Carry On* of popular myth, the films with an 'obsession with bodily functions, the caterwauling and absurdity' (Lewis 2001: 3-4) but, thanks in part to truly delightful pairing of Sid James and Hattie Jacques (as his wife Peggy) but a picture that perfectly captures the zeitgeist of early 1960's consumerism with its glossy ranks of 'Glamcabs'. However, in place of such offerings the mid-1960s saw the rise of Hollywood funded International Comedy, films that boasted some familiar British character actors doing their best to steal the scene from the American leads. By the early 1960s, 'the NFFC's new loans policy now meant that it was looking to invest in film projects with a potentially international appeal' (Porter 2012: 17).

One result was pictures that displayed a certain degree of cultural hybridity, even if Laurie Ede's claim that 'the one thing that held British- American films of the 1960s together was a preoccupation with *time*' (Ede 2010: 114) is not entirely accurate. Comedies such as *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines; Or, How I Flew from London to Paris in 25 Hours 11 Minutes* (Ken Annakin 1965) or *A Shot in the Dark* (Blake Edwards 1964) are as conservative as *Murder at the Gallop* (George Pollock 1963). All combine 'traditional' plots

and settings – antique aircraft and a country house murder respectively – with familiar British character actors now filmed in colour and, in the case of the former, supporting an imported American hero.

In 1965, Columbia released what appeared to be British cinema's final contemporary military comedy *You Must Be Joking!* (Michael Winner 1965) The plot has Major Foskett (Terry-Thomas) setting five soldiers of different ranks the task of completing an initiative test via 'borrowing' various London icons – could have hailed from the previous decade but as with the British-set war narratives of this period, international funding meant for an imported leading man. In form and content, *You Must Be Joking!* is Janus faced – the cinematography is black and white and there are guest appearances from Leslie Phillips, James Robertson Justice and Wilfrid Hyde-White in the midst of a Britain where one or two of the soldiers sport longish hair, the bells on the police Wolseleys have been augmented by klaxon horns and the central female character is a pop singer.

Local film makers also made more concerted efforts at 'international appeal' by the mid- 1960s – the second of Morecambe & Wise's three vehicles for the Rank Organisation *That Riviera Touch* (Cliff Owen 1966) was partially shot on location in France during the summer of 1965. Of the remaining staples of post-war British comedy, the *Carry On* series post-*Cabby* avoided a contemporary setting until as late as 1967 with *Doctor* and even then this was a return to an institutional setting. Norman Wisdom also used the police in *On the Beat* (1962) and hospitals in *A Stitch in Time* (Asher 1963) but his first colour production, *The Early Bird* (Asher 1965) unfolds in suburbia, with a battle between the small Grimsdale's Dairy and the vast Consolidated Dairies. This was followed by Wisdom's last film released by the Rank Organisation, *Press for Time* (Asher 1966); 13 years after the Gump was at the heart of the nascent consumerist zeitgeist in an elaborate replica of a department store he was now isolated to a provincial seaside town. By now, as Penelope Gilliatt noted:

A lot of the elements in his style and look are pure period; the underfed physique, the Brylcreem, the clothes that sadly try to ape a fashion patented by a remote boss class...It is all very much as it used to be, except that the hero's troubles now seem fabricated now that he hasn't the backbone of a time. (1973:163-168)

Gilliatt's pertinent observation equally applies to the final mainstream Boultings' comedy, the later *Doctor* films and the last mainstream *St. Trinian's* picture. Devoid of the familiar post-war folk devils of NCOs, Majors, Teddy boys and assistant managers, and when placed in an increasingly fragmented England, the protagonists of such film comedies ran the risk of appearing utterly anachronistic. The staff of *St Trinian's* and *St Swithin's*, as with *The Gump's* battles with authority, now lacked the backbone of time and were so rooted in the template that relied on a regimented society that attempts to modernise them were otiose. *The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery* (Frank Launder 1966) was the first of the series in colour, and much of

the narrative takes place in the school but several of the trains attacked by the girls are now diesel powered, and Flash Harry now drives a Sunbeam Alpine and (un- wisely) affects

Ray Davies length hair.

The girls still wear a parody of a public school uniform and the police still arrive in their black Wolseleys. The first film celebrated youth for its anarchic qualities and cunning most of the actual students are now mere extras populating the runaway trains. In *Doctor in Clover* (Ralph Thomas 1965), the focus is on Dr. Grimsdyke, now played by Leslie Phillips, whose dated nature is delightfully but definitively highlighted by the 'Carnaby Street' sequence. Grimsdyke's encounter with Nicky Henson's boutique owner highlights his image as being trapped in the previous decade as his straight-laced cousin Miles Grimsdyke (John Fraser). Both doctors find sanctuary in the safe world of St Swinthin's - and in being regularly described as a 'nincompoop' by Sir Lancelot.

The *Doctor* films came to a tired coda with *Doctor in Trouble* (Gerald Thomas 1970) and Norman Wisdom's career in British films reached an end with a bid for 'adult comedy' in *What's Good for the Goose* (Menahem Golem 1969). After *Carry On Cabby*, the series' first engaged with genre parody with *Jack* (Gerald Thomas 1963) and the next film with a contemporary setting was *Camping* (Gerald Thomas 1969). Here Oliver Reckitt's articulate demolition of petty authority now seems long past; Rogers & Thomas evidently considered approximately 25 extras indulging in some appalling dancing to what sounds like a '62 Shadows B-side whilst dying of exposure in the November cold to be the epitome of youthful menace. In *Cabby* the 'Glamcabs' depicted as an exciting new presence in Windsor but by the time of *Camping* any vestiges of community are now prurient and insular. In the wise words of Robert Murphy 'Like 1960s town planning, which pulled down friendly terraces and replaced them with shopping precincts and high rise flats, it now seems a dreadful mistake' (1992:252).

## CHAPTER 8: CHAPS IN UNIFORM

### The War Film & the Professional Officer

In 1958, a somewhat choleric William Whitebait argued in *The New Statesman* that:

A dozen years after the Second World War we find ourselves in the really quite desperate situation of being, not sick of war, but hideously in love with it....while we 'adventure' in the Suez in the cinemas we are still thrashing Rommel and in doing so creating "an imaginary present". (1958:432)

But from the vantage point of 2015 this a gross over-simplification. The classic British war film was virtually over by the end of the 1950s, a victim of the pressures of distance from the War itself, Britain's post-Suez mood and of the influx of American capital in British cinema that resulted in more Hollywood leads a la William Holden in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* it allowed for many variations. John Ramsden argued that 'post-war films reinterpreted the Second World War experience in such a cozily reassuring way that by about 1960 it was safe material even for comedians on the BBC...From there it was an easy road downhill to *Dad's Army* and *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*'. (Ramsden 1998:62)

However, this is frankly a partial and lazy viewpoint, for late 1950s war films encompassed a considerable amount of self-criticism and even earlier pictures are often far from homogenous. The chief difference between most war narratives from 1950 onwards and Ealing's model of The People's War, as established with *San Demetrio, London*, is the greater emphasis on officers. This cycle ended with the 1950s, with increased US involvement in British film production and the end of the studio star system saw American leads taking precedence over local stars. Andrea Lant notes that:

War produced the need for images of national identity, both on the screen and in the audience's mind, but British national identity was not simply on tap, waiting to be imaged, somehow rooted in British geology. "National characteristics" could not simply be infused into a national cinema' however much later writers wished it to be true. Instead, the stuff of national identity had to be winnowed and forged from traditional aesthetic and narrative forms, borrowed from the diverse conventions of melodrama, realism and fantasy, and transplanted from literature, painting, and history, into the cinema. (1991:31)

Thus, the British war narratives of the early 1940s often focused on the 'air raid warden and the shop steward were men of destiny, for without their ungrudging support for the war it might be

lost; morale might be in danger' (Calder 1992: 18). Such figures would be guided but never dominated by those middle class professionals who were best placed by the end of the war 'to be a part of a coherent interventionism in social life' (Weeks 1989: 233). The commercial success of so many films in this genre echo Graham Dawson's observation that 'If masculinity has had a role in imagining the nation, then so too has the nation played its part in constituting preferred forms of masculinity' (1994: 1). Indeed Harper and Porter list seven war films as the top box office attractions (2003:249).

One possible reason for 1950s British war films being oft regarded as homogenous is in the principle casting – 'their domination by a regular corps of actors; Jack Hawkins, John Mills, Dirk Bogarde, Kenneth More, Richard Todd, Trevor Howard, Leo Genn and Anthony Steel in the starring roles' (Murphy 2000: 208). The names of Richard Attenborough, David Lodge, John Gregson, Bryan Forbes and, of course, Sam Kydd could be added to the list. Each actor, as was often the case with their civilian roles, having a social class image that was usually fixed. However, beneath this apparently orderly exterior the war narratives of this era often questioned notions of masculinity and, as memories of the conflict receded, issues of morality. Neil Rattigan sees the British war film of this period in terms of 'those films that show the upper classes winning the war almost singlehandedly, thus revising the myth. On the other hand, there are those that emphasise the role of the middle-classes' (1994: 151).

In fact, the officers played by Kenneth More, Jack Hawkins or John Mills are equally far removed from the soigné authoritarianism of Noel Coward's 'Captain Kinross' of *In Which We Serve*. Besides from *They Were Not Divided* (Terence Young 1950) and *The Battle of the River Plate* (Michael Powell 1956) the upper classes in the 1950s British war film were the very senior officers played by equally venerable character actors issuing orders from behind their desks. In the latter film, the focus is more on Peter Finch's Captain Langdorf than on the British characters. Few war narratives were made in the late 1940s – Ealing's *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton 1948) was not a commercial success – and British cinema was more concerned with ex-servicemen in the film noir world of *They Made Me a Fugitive* (Alberto Cavalcanti 1947) and *Cage of Gold*.

The first film in the cycle is *The Wooden Horse* (with a script based on the roman a clef *The Tunnel* by the former RAF bomber pilot Eric E. Williams. In Staling Loft III, in 1943 a group of POWs (prisoners-of-war) devise a plan to use an exercise yard vaulting horse to cover the construction of an escape tunnel. The central trio of *The Wooden Horse* – Peter Howard

(Leo Genn), Philip Rowe (David Tomlinson) and John Clinton (Anthony Steel) - can be seen as the template for the later British war films. These had a narrative based on a true story with an operation manned by a small number of service personnel on an important enemy target (Harper and Porter 2003: 255). However, neither the screenplay nor the performances shy from the despair beneath the jovial surface. At one stage a POW muses that 'I'd give anything to get out of this place even for a few days, just to do ordinary things like using the telephone, walk on grass, carpets, walk up and down stairs, use a lift, spend money and have to make a decision.'

This is a war largely of loneliness and boredom and this sub-genre of war narrative allows for a considerable amount of variation in its parameters. *The Colditz Story* (Guy Hamilton 1955) was based on a true story and despite Medhurst's critical dismissal that it is essentially 'a Billy Bunter story where Mr. Quelch is a Nazi' (1984: 35) the narrative does encompass the inmates' sense of fear. In some respects, the film's tone does reflect the memoir



of Major Pat Reid (played John Mills) who claimed that Colditz was the culmination of ‘the qualifying or passing out test was the performance of at least one escape from one of the many “Preparatory School” camps’ (Reid 1952: 9-10). Group discipline is the one way in which the men may finally come to obtain their freedom and with enough flexibility, unlike the regime of their captors, for each Allied officer retaining a sense of individuality. Richard Gordon and Robin Cartwright (Richard Wattis and Ian Carmichael) act as a Greek chorus and the chaps ultimately defer to the wise guidance of the senior British officer Richmond (Eric Portman) but Jimmy Winslow (Bryan Forbes) is staving off a nervous collapse.

The first major war film made by Ealing after 1945<sup>35</sup> also features professionally minded officers. *The Compass Rose* is small community under constant threat as with the director’s *San Demetrio, London* but the emphasis in the latter film is to the strains of wardroom professionalism. Geraghty has argued that British war films of this period allow ‘a safe space in which problems around masculinity can be resolved effectively’ (2000: 192) but *The Cruel Sea*, as with the best films within this cycle, contains no pat resolutions. Eric Ambler’s script illustrates the emotional and psychological damage inflicted by the war - Lieutenant Lockhart (Donald Sinden), has to carry out first aid on survivors, the sister of Petty Officer Tallow (Bruce Seton) dies in a German bombing raid, Sub-Lieutenant Ferraby (John Stratton) suffers a nervous breakdown, and Lieutenant Commander Ericson (Jack Hawkins) is reduced to tears when he recalls how his decision to depth-charge a U-Boat results in the death of some British survivors.

*The Cruel Sea* strongly infers not only the physical and emotional cost - *vide* the famous sequence of Ericson’s emotional breakdown - but also the sense of weariness and psychological damage. Towards the end of the film Ericson, now promoted to Commander, is on the verge of becoming a fanatic in his pursuit of a U-boat and it is only the sight of the survivors who look so similar to the British sailors rescued by the *Compass Rose* that bring him to his senses. At the conclusion when Ericson reflects to Lockhart on how they have successfully sunk only two enemy U-Boats as they sail past the surrendered (yet still numerous) U-Boat fleet and Fred Inglis notes that:

Much more, however, is made of saving lives and losing them than of cutting down or up the enemy. *Compass Rose* rescues sailors (including Scandinavian merchantmen), their lungs clotted with machine oil; in pursuit of a U-boat which they fail to catch they run down their own shipwrecked comrades struggling in the water; when the second of the two ships in the story comes finally home in 1945 the last word of the film is the bare order “Shut down main engines”. (2003: 44)

Christine Geraghty notes an ‘emphasis on confined space in 1950s British war films – ‘windowless ops rooms, the cabins of small aeroplanes or submarines’ (2000: 180) but in the

<sup>35</sup> *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton 1948) did not mainly deal with British uniformed forces.

best of these films these tensions are depicted as utterly real and in a subdued and modest manner. These are not narratives overly concerned with epic ideas of heroism – a mere three men escape in *The Wooden Horse* and, in *The Cruel Sea* Ericson and Lockhart sunk two U-boats in five years. Of the comparatively few pictures were made about the RAF in the 1950s – *Angel's One Five*, *Appointment in London* (Phillip Leacock 1953), *The Dam Busters* (Michael Anderson 1954) and *Reach for the Sky* (Lewis Gilbert 1956) - all have an individuality that denies the popular myth of homogeneity.

With the first, the theme is professional behaviour for the sake of the community whilst in ABPC's *The Dam Busters* the actual raid occupies surprisingly little screen time, with Barnes Wallis (Michael Redgrave), his invention and his determined pursuit of the idea making up the bulk of the film. Much of the impact of *The Dam Busters* is reliant on the detailing – a ground based officer (Arthur Howard) attempts to filch the egg ration reserved for flight crew and Bill Kerr's Flight Lieutenant Mickey Martin trying to hide his nerves before the raid on the Dams. In demonstrating the way in which Wallis's inventions are routinely confronted by bureaucratic negativity, Anderson also passes critical comment on Britain's tendency to stifle creative genius.

Sarah Street describes *The Dam Busters* as a key film in perpetuating traditional images of the Second World War: which have become entrenched in the popular imagination from the ingenuity of the boffins to 'the romance and superiority of British aircraft; the camaraderie of male groups who fight the enemy in the spirit of sacrifice and professionalism' (1997: 84). But neither R C Sherrif's screenplay nor the direction underplays the cost of such sacrifice. Wing Commander Guy Gibson (Richard Todd) may reassure Wallis, the 1950s father figure as benign scientist, that the men who did not come back did their duty without regret but the narrative ends with him doing his duty– writing to the families of his dead men.

None of this tallies with Lindsay Anderson's diatribe that 'tapping our feet to the *March of the Dam Busters*, we can make believe that our issues are simple ones - it's Great Britain again!' (1957: 160). As for *Reach for the Sky*, the screen adaptation Paul Brickhill's 1954 biography of Douglas Bader, this is the 1950s British war film that may be said to epitomize office-cadet virtues. S P Mackenzie argues that *Reach for the Sky* differs from *Angels One Five* in that the latter wholly emphasised teamwork whereas Bader is depicted as an individual (2007: 66) but throughout the film we see how the young air cadet receives and expresses the trust of the wider group. The story follows the template noted earlier of being concerned not so much with the nation as a community, but rather with the actions of the individual officer

whose rebellious or individualist traits – John Gregson’s Baird in *Angels One Five* or Peter Ross (Alec Guinness) in *The Malta Story* (Brian Desmond Hurst 1953) - can be channeled for

the common good.

Those who do not accept paternal discipline are expelled from the group, such as the arrogant and incompetent Bennett in *The Cruel Sea*, whereas Bader serves as Dyer's rebel, one whose behaviour is sanctioned by the necessities of war and his achieving the rank of Wing Commander. When these cadet figures do break the rules it is often for a demonstrably good reason – when Wing Commander Tim Mason (Dirk Bogarde) in *Appointment in London* defies an order not to fly this is after we have seen him being concerned with the correct level of discipline. One could also cite Lieutenant Commander Crabbe (Laurence Harvey) in *The Silent Enemy* (William Fairchild 1958) or Guy Gibson *The Dam Busters* – both cadet figures in terms of their actual age but with sufficient seniority to both give weight to their rule breaking and to understand their duty towards the group.

Bader's flying accident that cost him his legs occurs when he is a literal cadet and on the surface *Reach for the Sky* is primarily concerned with a celebration of masculinity in terms of courage and fortitude. There is an equation of suffering with nobility - it is only after Bader has endured appalling physical and mental pain and demonstrated his courage that he is a full member of the team. One sequence, in particular, exemplifies this approach with the camera discreetly panning away from Bader's face after he has been informed that he has lost both of legs. The review from *The Monthly Film Bulletin* accurately summarises the film's virtues and vices:

Bader himself - apparently an indomitable, often irascible, personality - has been conventionalised into a slangy, headstrong British air ace and is played here, very conscientiously, by Kenneth More with his customary easy charm. But, lacking strong directorial moulding, the character rarely becomes fully or richly alive and it is only in the early scenes (such as Bader's first painful experiments with his artificial legs) that one is made to feel a genuine emotional involvement with a real person. (1956:87-88)

Had Gilbert went with his original casting choice of Richard Burton (More 1978: 168-169) it is possible that the actor's aggressive screen persona would have played Bader as more angrily vulnerable. This would have possibly negated the criticism of the likes of John Osborne at his most angry – 'a nation that finds her most significant myths in the idiot heroes of *Reach for the Sky*' (1957: 77). The view of Bader is indeed a myth in the terms described by Angus Calder – 'myths must be consensual, they contain truths, they do not deny, are selective, and become facts from the past' (1991: 46). Yet, More's central performance is extremely nuanced and the actor's understated skill in displaying the strains in maintaining a mask of sang-froid was rarely put to better use than in the scenes depicting how Bader relearns how to walk, with

the aid of Sydney Tafler's physiotherapist. Here, the film shows, with the maximum of conviction, the sheer effort needed to maintain Bader's professionally 'breezy' façade.

*Reach for the Sky* was the top British box office attraction for 1956 and was possible the last

war film where Britishness was celebrated on the screen with such uncritical enthusiasm.

*The Battle of the River Plate*, which was released in December 1956, became the third most popular film of 1957 public sentiment changed as soon as the political and military implications of the Suez Crisis became clear (Harper and Porter 2003: 255). Dominic Sandbrook contends that the early 1950s were a time when ‘many still looked back with pride on Britain’s (2005: 65) and the diplomat Sir Christopher Mallaby reflected that:

World War II vindicated our way of doing things. There was great and genuine pride in contrast to France’s defeat and Germany’s sin. It was only when people sensed the decline after Suez that there came a sense of shame. (Mallaby interviewed in Hennessy 2006: 458)

The later 1950s also saw an increasing questioning of the notion of the middle class professional as a hero and the loyal NCO’s duty to his comrades. One the last major commercial successes in the British war cinema genre during the 1950s was also the last major box office attraction made by Ealing. *Dunkirk* was a painstaking recreation of the event hailed as a ‘miracle’ by Churchill and here the ‘professional’ figures John Holden (Richard Attenborough) and Charles Foreman (Bernard Lee) are civilians and the most resourceful character is Corporal Binns (John Mills). Although it is an epic that concludes on an insistence of patriotic unity forged through war, with its narrator stating, ‘No longer were there fighting men and civilians, there were only people. A nation had been made whole’ the overall tone is grim, and there are expressions of discontent at disorganisation – ‘what a shambles we’ve made of this whole rotten business’, says Foreman at one point, Charles Barr describing the mood as ‘a recognition that Ealing cannot recreate that spirit (of the People’s War) and that united community any longer’ (1993:179).

Few British POW films were made in the 1950s after *The Colditz Story* and those were produced in the latter half of the decade are more ambivalent about the nature of British heroism. *The One That Got Away* (Roy Ward Baker 1957) based on the actual story of the only German POW to have escaped from a British camp, contrasts the charming but self-centred Franz Von Werra (Hardy Kruger) with the middle-aged senior British officers. The narrative is careful to create a structure of sympathy in Von Werra’s favour – indeed the original casting choice was Kenneth More – and if his British interrogators are seen as brave men sporting visible war wounds then Hans is depicted as courageous, resourceful and not especially devoted to the Nazi cause (Mayer 2004: 187). The Army Interrogator (Colin Gordon) perceives how the captured airman’s driving force is not Nazism

but his own ego – ‘the only thing Von Werra believes in is Von Werra’. Kruger’s performance created a German officer of charm and driven individualism and, as Geoff Mayer notes, the character does not ‘kill or physically hurt British soldiers or civilians (2004: 187).

The coda explains that Von Werra died in a flying accident, highlighting a subtext that Baker never belabours, that of undoubted intelligence and talents used by a regime that was evil. The other late flowering POW camp film *Danger Within* (Don Chaffey 1958) is ostensibly on territory that is more familiar, but the narrative plays with the standard conventions. The guards are Italians rather than the Germans, the vain Capitano Benucci (Peter Arne) is far removed from the ultra-professional and formally mannered commandant (Frederick Valk) of *The Colditz Story* and the narrative concentrates equally on the jealousies and tensions within the camp as the unmasking of the traitor.

Murphy notes how the senior British officer Lieutenant Colonel Huxley (Bernard Lee) refused to be browbeaten by his escape officer Lieutenant Colonel Baird (Richard Todd) and how the escapers are oft regarded as troublemakers by their fellow inmates (Murphy 2000: 216). The script, by Frank Harvey and Bryan Forbes, also gives space for Captain Callender (Dennis Price) to justify why he believes his camp drama group is vital, as it helps to keep the men sane. ‘You tunnellers think you are a race apart. If you weren’t such a nuisance, you would be a joke’ exclaims Callender at one point. The comic-sardonic overtones of *Danger Within* are an example of how ‘a noticeable ideological shift after the Suez debacle of 1956 had seriously undermined the credibility that the officer hero incarnated’ (Spicer 2007: 185).

Almost all of the war films we have previously encountered state that whilst the human cost was immense the context of Britain’s survival make it necessary but *Orders to Kill* (Anthony Asquith 1958) and *Yesterday’s Enemy* (Val Guest 1959) question the mores of warfare. The former, made for British Lion, concerns USAF officer Gene Summers (Paul Massie) who is retrained as a spy. His first assignment is to kill Lafitte (Leslie French), a Parisian lawyer believed to be betraying his colleagues in the French Resistance. Summers begins to have doubts but Leonie (Irene Worth), his contact in France, convinces him to go and commit an appalling act in the name of war. Summers carries out the murder and afterwards sinks into an alcohol-fueled breakdown, attempting redemption in the final reel by giving money to Lafitte’s family.



This ending is in sharp contrast with the early stages of the film, which has Summers as the literally eager cadet, with his trainer, 'the Commander', played by none other than James Robertson Justice in a rare straight role. Another of Summers' colleagues Major MacMahon (Eddie Arnold) observes that 'Except for one moment in his interrogation, I don't believe he's ever stopped to think what it is going to be like over there. He's play-acting and he's loving

it'. Summers illustrates the obverse side of Durnat's 'Ready aye ready' chap by his inability to exercise his own independent judgement when following orders and perceiving the duplicity of his superiors.

With *Orders to Kill*, a Canadian actor, portraying an American character may have distanced a British audience from the flawed protagonist. With *Yesterday's Enemy*, adapted by Hammer from the television play by Peter Newford, there is no such relief from the questioning the ethics of war (Pronay 1988: 46). The film is set in Burma in 1942 a British platoon led by Captain Langford (Stanley Baker), cut off from its main division and with a badly wounded Brigadier (Russell Walters), discovers a small force of Japanese holed up in a remote village. Langford's men find a top- secret map on the body of a slain Japanese commander; the Captain suspects that one of the villagers secretly knows about this document, and so he begins to execute members of the village to force a confession. The Captain is highly intelligent but ruthless and driven – he orders the execution of two local civilians in an attempt to force information from a collaborator. But if he is the army officer as 'Tough Guy', Langport is not a brute but a professional man forced into making appalling decisions - 'you don't mind when a bomber pilot pushes a button and kills a few hundred civilians. You don't mind murder from a distance' he berates the Padre (Guy Rolfe) and Max, a peacetime journalist (LeoMcKern).

ABPC's *Ice Cold in Alex* provided a vision of equal bleakness of the British officer struggling to maintain his own sanity. The story was based on Christopher Landon's novel of the crew of a Royal Army Service Corps ambulance in WW2. The main protagonist, Captain Anson (John Mills), is alcoholic and shell-shocked, and as such is carried by both Sergeant Major Pugh (Harry Andrews) and a German spy disguised as an Afrikaans South African officer 'Captain van der Poele' (Anthony Quayle). The original story focuses on Pugh, but ABPC used Mills' star value to sell the film - Chibnall notes how the director had a policy of 'changing star persona' (2000: 199) and the professional Lt-Commander of *Morning Departure* is far removed from an officer who is seen as wholly unstable.

*Ice Cold in Alex* takes the idea of the 1950s British war film of this cycle providing a 'safe space' to resolve problems with masculinity to new limits. Thompson is one of the few directors to highlight Mills' short stature – he seems nearly a foot shorter than both Quayle and Andrews – and if Hawkins presented a figure of duffle- coated solidity despite his inner demons in *The Cruel Sea* then Mills is a smaller and more vulnerable presence. *Town on Trial* has his Superintendent Halloram speeding around middle class suburbia, the sight of his

battleship-like Wolseley 6/80 inducing respect and fear in genteel surroundings, but here Anson is lost in an empty but threatening landscape and battle-fatigued induced alcoholism cannot wholly explain his problems. The film's opening scene already hint at senses of moral cowardice and irrationality with his leaving behind of his colleague Captain Crosbie (Richard Leech) and his attempts to defy the order of a Military Police officer (David Lodge) at a bombsite.

During the journey across the desert, Anson is often hysterical and prone to making fatally rash decisions - he attempts to outrun a phalanx of German tanks, and they open fire on the ambulance, killing Sister Norton (Diane Clare). As the Panzer commander later explains, they would not have done so had Anson followed the advice of his Sergeant Major and the 'South African'. In *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend 1948) Mills' eponymous hero is diligent and courageous but in *Alex*, the only way in which Captain Anson can regain his self-respect is to coax the ambulance (which bears the female name Katie) through the desert and Mills plays Anson as anything but graceful under pressure. 'The protective shell of duty and conformity has cracked, and the terrifying "other" of emotional excess is demanding expression' (Plain 2006: 161) and if the Captain does gradually recovering his sense of professionalism, this is not quite enough to dispel the impression of a weak aggressive man who needs constant support. Even the conclusion is ambivalent – the ice cold lager is a reward but it also has Anson falling back into his addiction (Sweet 2005: 244).

The release of *Ice Cold in Alex* was at a time when the later 1950s saw the rise of the Anglo-American war film in light of increased US financial involvement with British cinema. Earlier in the decade, they were seen as members of the Eagle Squadron, often embodied by the Canadian actor Lee Patterson, plus occasional British-based Hollywood productions such as *The Purple Plain* (Robert Parrish 1954). Gregory Peck plays the Canadian Squadron Leader Bill Forrester serving with the RAF in Burma who is much more able to cope with being lost in the jungle than Blore (Maurice Denham), the officious civilian passenger. More typical of Hollywood leading men in 1950s British war films was the mid-ranking Hollywood actors brought over by Warwick. In 1953, the firm established a distribution agreement with Columbia and *The Red Beret* (Terence Young 1953) featured Alan Ladd as Steve Mackendrick, an American who masquerades as a Canadian in order to join the Parachute Regiment during WW2.

The subsequent commercial success resulted in several other films, most notably *The Cockleshell Heroes* (Jose Ferrer 1955), but Ferrer played the lead role of Major Stringer as

English and the script, based on a true story, concentrates as much on the growing understanding between the intellectual Stringer and his sardonic embittered adjutant Captain Thompson (Trevor Howard) as on the raid. In the following year, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was backed by Columbia-British and although Carl Foreman's script both questions the nature of heroism itself, in the performance of Alec Guinness's Colonel Nicholson, charting the no-man's land between devotion to duty and masochism. In *The Colditz Story* the narrative agrees with Richmond's statement that he is the Senior British Officer and thus does not have the freedom to act as he pleases, but Nicholson's devotion to duty is treated rather differently. To Major Crompton (James Donald), the British medical officer, he argues that:

Would you prefer to see this battalion disintegrate in idleness? Would you prefer to have it said that our chaps cannot do a proper job? Don't you realise how important it is to show they can't break us in body or spirit? One day, this war will be over, and in years to come, I want the people who use this bridge to know how it was built and who built it. Not a gang of slaves, but soldiers, British soldiers...

However, the film seems to agree more with the top-billed William Holden, whose US marine Shears screams that British are obsessed with 'How to die like a gentleman, by the rules, when the only thing that really matters is how to live like a human being!'. The narrative notably slows in the last three reels for a virtual form of Burmese travelogue, partially to display the overseas locations (in the then Ceylon) and the use of colour, a rarity in British war films in the first part of our period. By 1960, Kenneth More's starred in his last major war film and *Sink the Bismarck!* (Lewis Gilbert) was a black and white British picture with Hollywood money. By now the former cadet is a middle-aged Royal Navy Captain barely recovered from the death of his wife in a Luftwaffe bombing raid and now purely shore bound.

The 1960s saw British reconstructions of the Second World War being gradually succeeded by colour productions made either by the British arm of US studios or by international corporations. Robert Murphy cites *The Guns of Navarone* (J Lee Thompson 1961) as the beginning of the process of using war as a setting for high adventure (2000: 249) and two years later *The Great Escape* (John Sturges 1963) may have featured a fine array of British character actors, were both essentially Hollywood films made in Europe. Paul Brickhill's original account detailed how the escape was a mainly British Commonwealth enterprise but asides from James Coburn's strangely accented RAAF officer this is now an American show.

The former cadets of the 1950s were often now promoted in rank and supporting the perma-tanned Hollywood leading men. Group Captain Mandrake (Peter Sellers) in *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick 1963) provides the ultimate cinematic valediction of the British

professional officer. Mandrake is a WW2 hero who is intelligent, rational and a gentleman in all circumstances, but in the face of cold war insanity, these attributes are not enough to prevent him from appearing as a figure from another era. However, despite the increase of transatlantic input into the war film genre by the mid- sixties - vide *633 Squadron* (Walter Grauman 1964) or *Operation Crossbow* (Michael Anderson 1965) - it was a US director who brought the most devastating attack on the British forces of World War 2.

In *The Hill* (Sidney Lumet 1965) the conflicted and angry figures played by Mills and Baker would translate into Sean Connery's formerly loyal Company Sergeant Major thrust into a nightmare inversion of wartime values where routine is developed and forged for benefit of the common good. The setting is a British military detention camp in the Second World War, the Medical Officer (Michael Redgrave) and the Commandant (Norman Bird) are both weak and ineffectual drunkards and where power-crazed NCOs run the camp in the absence of any direction from their drink-sodden officers. Andrew Higson argues that:

many films do explore narratives of nationhood and in many cases they will imbue the experience of a shared culture with a profound sense of tradition and invoke a collective memory of an undisputed national past. (1997: 7)

The 'National Past' of the Second World War is now seen to make 'clockwork soldiers' serve an out of date ideal, maintaining the imperial status quo as a task of utterly Sisyphean futility. Devoid of an external enemy to fight – the script makes it quite explicit that the main antagonist, Staff Sergeant Stevens (Ian Hendry), is in a 'soft job', away from the front line in North Africa – the non-commissioned officers develop ritualistic obedience as literally deadly game. The pivotal figure in *The Hill* is Joe Roberts (Sean Connery), a professional soldier who received a sentence for refusing to obey a seemingly futile order.

*The Hill* initially seems far removed from the model of the professional commanding a loyal squadron of *Angels One Five* but the gulf between Norman Bird's weak and alcoholic Commanding Officer and Captain Anson is not a wide one. *The Hill* is extremely traditional in respect of its contempt for officers who do not accept their responsibilities, a trope of the 1950s' war film here taken to new depths. Lumet's film is in fact within the tradition of British war narratives that question values and do not shy from displaying human weakness. The senior officer/cadet template allows for a myriad of detailed and moving observation on the nature of heroism, duty and masculinity, moving towards the end of the 1950s to debates of the nature of warfare itself.

Colin McArthur contended that the idea of the people's war was replaced by films centred on 'a series of heroic actions (mainly) by middle class white men supported by compliant other ranks with women as waiting sweethearts or mothers' (1984: 54-56). Neil Rattigan wrote of how 'Nearly all such films (as *The Wooden Horse* and *The Colditz Story*), except those like *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, had are replete with self-congratulatory tones along the lines of "how we won the war"' (1994: 147). Neither description really tallies with the many carefully balanced narratives and their equally carefully observed characters. Nor do

the best of the British war films of this period conforms to such scathing criticism as 'the prevalent officer world is one of hard work, quiet confidence and stiff upper lip understatement, and the other ranks know their place and are jolly good chaps really' (Armes

1978:179).

It is the most clichéd entries in the canon, such as *Above Us the Waves* (Ralph Thomas 1955) and *The Sea Shall Not Have Them* (Lewis Gilbert 1954) that besmirch the genre. Andrew Spicer cited *Angels One Five*, *The Dam Busters*, *Reach for the Sky*, *Dunkirk*, and *Sink the Bismarck!* as films that ‘acted as a consolatory reassertion of national self-esteem through celebrating the heroics of the officer class in winning the war’ (Spicer 2004: 167) but this, at best, a selective viewpoint. Certainly, asides from *Dunkirk*, few non-comedic war films of the 1950s had NCO protagonists and neither were V-bombing<sup>37</sup> or the Blitz, the aspect of the conflict that impacted on most Britons’ lives directly featured in the pictures of this era. However, the middle class officer heroes of these pictures are thrown into circumstances that test both their ability and morality. Ericson is middle-aged, inclined to temper, and it is only the rescuing of the German survivors towards the end of the narrative that restores his balance. Bader has to live with the terrible consequences of what was intended to be a peacetime prank and Wallis, when confronted with the pilots’ death toll has deep regrets about the nature of his researches.

Even the actors who look classically heroic in Dyer’s pin-up mold— as More, Hawkins and Redgrave arguably never did – are often in need of support and advice. In *The Silent Enemy* Crabbe relies heavily on Chief Petty Officer Thorpe (Sid James) whilst Mason in *Appointment in London* is over-stretched and on the verge of exhaustion. Todd’s Guy Gibson maybe aloof and prefect-like compared to his chaps but this is due to circumstance borne upon him by rank and responsibility. Furthermore, this particular genre of British cinema the divide between character and actor, the line becomes unclear when discussing this sub-genre precisely because of the verisimilitude brought to the parts by so many of the leading actors. During the Second World War Richard Todd was a Paratroop Captain, Jack Hawkins was a Colonel in charge of ENSA in India, Kenneth More was a Royal Navy Lieutenant and Anthony Quayle was a Major in the Special Operations Executive.

Sue Harper noted that 1950s British war films ‘might also be interpreted as fathers speaking to sons about themselves and their experiences’ (1997: 163) and it is so often because of this verisimilitude that war narratives of this era abide, as well as that the senior officer/cadet relationship is often so movingly portrayed. As Fred Inglis perceives ‘From the vantage point not only of the victors but of human emancipation at large, the retelling of the defeat of fascism makes for stories with plot, point, moral grip and a powerful ending’ (2003: 46). The myth in the best of the genre was never less than hard-won and neither, pace





Whitebait was there a glossing over to 'lull fears and angers' in the best films in this chapter. Alan McKim, Ambrose Claverhouse and (judging by his age in *Doctor in the House*) Gaston Grimsdyke, had earned the right to enjoy their newfound affluence; they served with honour.

### **Adjusting to the Peace - The Last Days of Pax Britannica**

If the 1950s was the heyday of the cadet in British cinema, they did not entirely displace either the displaced officer or the disillusioned professional. A Mass-Observation Report of 1944 drew attention to servicemen who outside of the services saw the future in terms of 'private adventurism or escape, so accentuating the potential conflict between wartime co-operation and peacetime "selfishness"' (report quoted in Murphy 2000: 187). In this vein, there are two fascinating alternatives to Wing Commander Guy Gibson or Lieutenant Commander Lockhart provide prime embodiments of the WW2 commissioned veteran as cad in peacetime. In *Cage of Gold* Farrar's Wing Commander Bill Glenning (David Farrar) was awarded the DSO and DFC during the Second World War but after the conflict he is a flashy opportunist who uses the titular nightclub as his base of his currency smuggling operations. As compared to the film's hero Dr. Alan Kearns (James Donald) who opts to work for an NHS practice rather than a private clinic, Kenning is a figure who revels in indulgences but Farrar's performance makes him a charming and witty rotter.

The second film opens with a Mk. VII Jaguar cruising through night-time and the screenplay for *The Good Die Young* has three embittered and honest war veterans fall under the spell of one Miles 'Rave' Ravenscourt, a 'gentleman of leisure' played by Laurence Harvey. Prior to his starring role in *Room at the Top* Harvey was often miscast as a juvenile lead of the pin-up or 'good chap' variety. A brief contract with ABPC produced a performance of almost unutterable awfulness as Lieutenant Mourad in *Cairo Road* (David Macdonald 1950) only equaled by his Herr Isherwood in *I Am a Camera* (Henry Cornelius 1955). *The Good Die Young* was his best early film, a crime thriller that often bears a closer resemblance to a gothic horror. A mood of impending doom is established by George Auric's plangent theme music and with an uncredited fatalistic narrator introduces four main characters as they drive towards a planned crime that ultimately becomes a rendezvous with death.

Rave initially seems to be as much of an uber-cad as Glenning, but one crucial difference is that the former's record of war heroism is false, and another is that Rave is a coldly

unappealing figure. Bill Glenning has a veneer of considerable charm - John Hill points out 'the acts of transgression possesses a vitality which the return to normality can't quite suppress.'

(1986: 74) – but Rave is a calculating psychopath. In *The Blue Lamp* Riley shoots Dixon in a blind panic whilst Rave gives one of his most vulpine smiles prior to dispatching a PC in cold blood. Harvey's liquid tones, acquired at RADA, make Rave a Mayfair lounge lizard with adolescent mood swings and a fake war record. Both Glenning and Rave possess hard-won skills for killing, be it as airman or soldier, which are seemingly useless in post-war society except for illegal personal gain. Dennis Price in *The Intruder* depicts the cad as utter coward but the displaced professional officers seeking purpose through crime or seeking adventure is seen in the mentally exhausted ex officer turned peacetime spy David Somers (Trevor Howard) in *The Clouded Yellow* (Ralph Thomas 1950) and, in terms of crime, in *The Ship That Died of Shame* (Basil Dearden 1955).

With the latter film, Bill Randall (George Baker), the former captain of the wartime costal patrol vessel 1087, drifts through a series of non-jobs after his wife Helen (Virginian McKenna) was killed in a V1 raid. The decaying middle class surrounding of the Costal Forces Club Randall has an apparently chance encounter with George Hoskins (Richard Attenborough), his former second in command. Hoskins has found 1087 decaying in a boatyard and suggests reviving her for some light smuggling. 'We would carry whatever people want - nylons, perfume, wine, cigarettes...' enthuses Hoskins. 'Put like that', Bill subsequently reflects, 'it was like a moral crusade'. Charles Barr notes how problems often occur in post-war Ealing films when 'the individual is detached from his service role and from the all-male group. One solution is to out the group together again' (1993: 77). So 1087's wartime Coxswain Birdie (Bill Owen) rejoins the team and Bill Randall now has an apparent sense of purpose – in his narration he describes Hoskins' initial overtures as 'put like that it was like a moral crusade'.

At first, the vessel is used to 'lighten the post-war darkness' but mid- way through the narrative the team begins to smuggle in earnest thanks to Hoskins' association with the sinister Major Fordyce (Roland Culver), first glimpsed in the nocturnal surroundings of his seedy used car emporium. Philip Gillett argues that in post-war British cinema 'Mindless crime is working class crime. Middle class crime is planned' (2003: 123) and *The Ship That Died of Shame* functions as a 1950s British interpretation of Faust. Our first post-war sighting of Hoskins

is as the archetypal saloon bar wide boy, tempting Randall with cheap dreams and a perverted return to wartime camaraderie. As Sinyard and Mackillop contend:

If the British cinema of the decade has been characterised as a complacent cinema, then the cracks in that complacency are discernible some time before the appearance of the New Wave, with its new priorities, its new order of things, its new social configurations. The old class hierarchies are breaking down along with the

remembered comradeship of the war. ‘Gentleman’s agreement, old boy?’ says Roland Culver’s peacetime Major. (2000:7-8)

During the flashbacks to the Second World War, there is the implication that although Hoskins’ service for the wider community could not negate those negative aspects of his character, at least an RNVR commission could channel them for the common good. If Hoskins’ baser instincts were temporarily repressed by the codes of WW2, then this equally applies to Fordyce; initially seen emerging from behind his array of pre-war ‘bargains’. Hoskins and the Major Fordyce cut ambiguous figures, with slightly too overelaborate accents and constant use of the phrase ‘old boy’, the Major explaining that he ‘didn’t fancy working for the plebs after fighting for them’ and considering, seriously, that he fought ‘for the wrong side’.

The ship’s association with him marks the point at which the daylight sequences of the commodity smuggling days are gradually replaced by encroaching darkness and mists and 1087 further descends a spiral of hell from carrying firearms and forged British currency to helping a child murderer Raine (John Chandos) to escape to France. When *The Ship That Died of Shame* was released in 1955 the critic Derek Hill lambasted it for ‘the same dreary old work-manlike proficiency that follows all the rules’ (June 1955) but the scenes with Culver and Chandos alone belie this claim. Robert Murphy notes how most of the film’s wartime sequences are thrilling and exciting compared with the ‘unappetizingly grim’ peacetime (2000:194) and never is more pronounced than our first sighting of Raine. He is initially seen as a fugitive lurking in the mist, his rimless glasses broken and always whimpering at the memory of unspeakable deeds.

It is Raine whom finally ‘explodes any fantasy of sustaining past heroics and camaraderie...the sad looking figure – echoes of the Nazi banality of evil – erupts from the shadows of a hideous past and onto the boat’ (Cook J 1986: 364-365). When he emerges from a derelict World War 2 pillbox, he provides the ultimate demonstration of how Randall has betrayed both 1087 and his own commissioned heritage to the forces of unlicensed commercialism. *The Ship That Died of Shame* ends with Hoskins drowning and Birdie and Randall escaping from the sinking of 1087, reflecting that ‘and so she died. She gave up and died, in anger and in shame’. Tim Pulleine argues that the conclusion ‘bespeaks the film maker’s lack of any sense of a positive way ahead’ (2001: 83) but the one identifiable male role model is the senior customs officer Brewster (Bernard Lee) – dourly witty, shrewd and dogged.

Spicer sees Randall as a 'maladjusted middle class naval officer...for whom the war was the time of moral certainty' (2003: 169) but although he responded to Hoskins' overtures through a mixture of loneliness and economic desperation he retained the free will to have followed his own path. As Burton and O'Sullivan argue, in the narrative:

The values of the past are held as up as worth fighting for, as the problems of the present seem to derive precisely from the ways in which Hoskins and Fordyce—and to a degree Randall – turn their backs on them, allowing moral anarchy and corruption to takeover’. (2009:182)

All of the four main protagonists held positions of some authority during the Second World War but I would counter Burton and O’Sullivan by suggesting that more than her erstwhile second in command or even the degenerate figure of the Major, 1087’s ‘anger and shame’ were towards the failure of her captain to maintain his duty. McFarlane observes how both the Ealing film and *The League of Gentlemen* are both laments for the loss of wartime camaraderie (1998: 103), the former melancholy in tone and the latter ostensibly comic whilst providing a no less subversive view of the demobbed senior as flawed but genuine paternal figure. Raymond Durnat links Bryan Forbes’ script with his directorial work in *Séance on a Wet Afternoon* (1964) and *King Rat* (1965)<sup>38</sup> as a study of negative of paradoxical leadership (1976: 5) and indeed the driving force of Lieutenant Colonel Hyde (Jack Hawkins) is anger over his enforced redundancy after ‘twenty-five years un-blemished service’.

As a displaced officer meeting with post-war disillusionment in an England of decadent civilians with no apparent need for his services, Hyde rescues seven tarnished ex-officers from their state of shabby gentility by dint of their return to structured teamwork, albeit for their own ends as opposed to that of the nation by robbing a bank. Alexander Walker saw the league in terms of ‘Ealing gentlemen-amateurs’ (1974:67) but this is an erroneous interpretation. Hyde’s plan is predicated on mere civilians being unable to defeat eight professionally trained soldiers who are now applying their battle-honed abilities for individual gain. The mutual responsibility and local solidarity of *The Captive Heart* are now used for criminal ends. The League’s essential diligence and intelligence is wittily compared with the shambolic nature of the peacetime army camp, apparently populated by inefficient and disaffected officers and run by spit-&-polish NCO’s who fail to mask the grumbles of bored National Servicemen.

The film also takes pains to display just how good each gang member is in their respective field, each having served their country. Their crimes mainly took place after the war - Race (Nigel Patrick) ran a black market ring, and Porthill (Bryan Forbes) was cashiered for shooting EOKA suspects in colonial Cyprus – although Hyde’s main ire at the initial meeting is towards Captain Weaver (Norman Bird), whose alcoholism caused the



death of four of his men whilst on bomb disposal duty. The eight pull together as a team to regain their privileged status in society, their self-respect and replenish their bank balances.

<sup>38</sup> I would have wished to include this film in my thesis but under Board of Trade classifications, it is technically an American production

The most naïve and lost figure is ex-Major Rupert Rutland-Smith (Terence Alexander) the closest character to British cinema's standard officer-cadet role model. He enjoyed a 'good war' and, by comparison with his comrades, his crimes (concerning mess bills) are light. He is eager, contentious and loyal but these virtues, so essential in *Reach for the Sky* or *The Dam Busters*, now cut little ice with his wife (Nannette Newman). Even more so than with Bill Randall, Rupert's glory days are now long past, his spouse reminding him that –'the war's been over for a long time... there's plenty to go round'.

John Hill contends that 'it is the all-male group which proves the most positive and compelling' (1986: 94) but although the tone of *The League of Gentlemen* is more lightly comic than *The Ship That Died of Shame* wartime tropes of heroism are frequently undermined. Hyde reprimands Race with the warning that although he 'has nothing against heroes they tend to ruin it for the rest of us' and the witty sequence of the raid on a torpor ridden peacetime barrack does not mask the fact that the gang is potentially very dangerous. At one point Porthill is on verge of shooting an inquisitive police constable and Hyde's similar threats to the bank staff are conveyed by Hawkins at his most considerably menacing. Race resigned his commission in the face of charges for black market activities but now his criminal tendencies are re-directed for the betterment of stealing money from 'defenceless civilians'.

As the Colonel exclaims – 'Think of it as a full- scale military operation. What chance has a bunch of ordinary civilians got against a trained, army-disciplined, military unit?' By the time of the actual heist the gang has now regained the confidence they so clearly lacked in the opening scenes but the bonds are still largely of financial opportunism. When the League is finally captured, their 'betrayal' was via a small but vital lapse in the Colonel's professionalism - an error with a car number plate. On receiving the news, Hyde's face displays both shame for a mistake caused by a seasoned professional as himself and relief that none of his chaps had succumbed to their (fairly well delineated) lack of scruples and betrayed him. However, the inference always remains that just as Henry Holland in *The Lavender Hill Mob* has been quietly biding his time, Hyde's less laudable qualities may have been always dormant and only catalysed by his premature retirement. - 'And here, I promise you, we shall enjoy our "Finest

Hour". What price glory? £100,000 each tax free. You won't have to sign a form for it. You won't even have to salute!

Jeffrey Richards notes how *The League of Gentlemen* marked a notable change in Hawkins' screen image 'A renegade officer using professional skills for his criminal ends... or the general as shrewd and unscrupulous politico. The old-value systems were being turned on their head.' (1997: 168) and in *Guns at Batasi* (John Guillermin 1964) Hawkins' Colonel Deal is the commanding officer of a British Army regiment in a recently independent African state.

Peter Hennessy argues that 1959 marked the point at which ‘the rush to de-colonize over the next five years (between 1960 and 1964 seventeen British colonies – mostly in Africa – gained independence) could be fully sensed in Whitehall for the first time’ (2006: 817). However, ‘decolonialisation did not always represent a ‘clean break’ (Vinen 2011:22) and in Batasi political turmoil means that the British army barracks are under threat. Deal appreciates the realpolitik of the situation, for ultimately the British government recognise the new regime.

The one figure who cannot adapt to a post-Imperial army is Regimental Sergeant Major Lauderdale (Richard Attenborough), now isolated not only from the younger staff sergeants but also from the military he has served for over thirty years. The values he so proudly embodies have less and less value and the continuing Commonwealth membership of Batasi (with its consequent British military presence) is partially dependent upon his deportation, a development that Deal wearily accepts. Much of Lauderdale’s life has been devoted to an Army that sacrifices him to a premature retirement, as reward for a display of heroism and initiative. These qualities impress the audience, making one realise why he was such a good NCO, but by the mid-1960s, these qualities were no longer enough. We learn that the new Batasian premier once served as gardener to the former Governor (Cecil Parker) as part of a prison sentence: ‘He was a lousy gardener. I just hope he makes a better Prime Minister.’

Such resigned cynicism is mild compared with *Masquerade* (Basil Dearden 1965) where Jack Hawkins reprises Hyde in all but name as Colonel Drexel, a former wartime hero who is now ‘jaded and resentful officer-type seeking monetary reward for all the years of danger, hardship and service that he has devoted to his country’ (Burton and O’Sullivan 2009: 295) – ‘A pat on the back, a word of praise in a secret report, a dinner at the club. I want more than that – materially I mean.’ Drexel plans to use his old American comrade in arms, David Fraser (Cliff Robertson) as part of an illicit arms deal disguised as an official mission to the Middle East. Drexel amiably sacrifices all principles for easy money and the conclusion has his British villainy is officially rewarded whereas slightly naïve American virtue receives the sum of £11 9.2after payment of back taxes (and ‘dinner at the club’) for his pains.

Of the second strain of ex-wartime officer, the disillusioned professional, *Tunes of Glory* is more acerbic still about regimental glories. As with James Kennaway’s novel, his film script is set in 1948 where the up from the ranks Major Jock Sinclair (Alec Guinness), seeks to undermine the new English-born commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Barrow (John Mills), the product of Oxford and Sandhurst. Both are the professional officers celebrated by 1950s British cinema but for all of their individual heroism – Sinclair at El Alamein and

Barrow as a POW of the Japanese – they each convey a ‘sense of arrested development, of men who, at their core, have remained either ‘old boys’ (a recurrent refrain) or “toy soldiers”’ (Sinyard 2005: 120). Furthermore, Barrow’s mental equilibrium is so damaged by his wartime experiences of being tortured by the Japanese that he is unable to exercise paternal authority and Sinclair’s qualities that made him such a viable leader in times of war– the Rebel granted patriotic licence - now make him a distinct liability.

The colour cinematography of *Tunes of Glory* and its undeniable beauties – Neame frames shots of Stirling Castle against an ice-blue sky – only highlight the utter hell facing Barrow. The peacetime officers’ mess is a form of imprisonment; the regiment may indeed have a glorious past but now Sinclair and his supporters, especially Richard Leech’s rude and loutish Captain Rattray, are now retreating from true community spirit to an atavistic individualism typical of the long-term inmate. The claustrophobic atmosphere is further intensified by no flashbacks to the Second World War and Durgnat points out how *Tunes of Glory* ‘catches something of the old-womaness of army life’ (1970: 113).

Neame continually highlights just how isolated the new Colonel is from the regiment – ‘Barrow is repeatedly placed on the margins, framed in doorways, seated away from the crowd, or excluded from the group, Guinness is always centre stage’ (Plain 2006: 177) - giving him an almost ethereal presence. Sinclair is a former boy soldier who has been institutionalized since adolescence and is now a toxic blend of playground bully and veiled insecurity. Mills’ screen persona of the 1950s, as established by *Morning Departure*, was often one of self-contained professionalism but as displayed in *Ice Cold in Alex* the actor was equally adroit at ‘showing what happens when that self-control is pushed to breaking point’. (Richards 1997: 132) Matthew Sweet contends that Mills’ forte was in portraying ‘the fatigued, the self-disgusted, and the men who stayed behind or who ran away’. (2005: 244)

Our first sighting of Lieutenant Colonel Basil Barrow is of an immaculately presented figure who speaks in the clipped commanding tones of Mills’ Major Pat Reid or Lieutenant Commander Peter Armstrong. Integral to Barrow’s realisation of his ideals is the shaping of the barrack’s standards in his own image. He arranges a cocktail party for the local grandees but Sinclair incites his cronies to ruin the event with calculatedly appalling behaviour. At the event Mills’ short stature and rigid body language creates a figure not so much in command but akin to a nervous floor-walker as he negotiates his guests. The result of Jock’s display is the Colonel’s public breakdown: ‘The camera closes in on him as the noise swells and his anger

risers, as if before them is his worst nightmare, hands clenched so tightly you feel they could break glass' (Sinyard 2005: 115).

After this humiliating outburst in front of his men and the local grandees he flees in a

jeep, accompanied his genuinely concerned adjutant Captain Cairns (Gordon Jackson), and it is then that we learn how Barrow's dream of finally taking command of the regiment helped to sustain him during his time as a POW at the hands of the Japanese. 'When you're dying, when you really believe you're dying' he tells Cairns, the only officer sympathetic to both the Colonel and Jock. 'You survived, you're here to tell the tale' reassures the Adjutant, only to receive the desperate response 'Who said I survived?' No amount of drilling, practice of reels and of elaborate dinners can compensate for Barrow's increasing despair as he attempts to preside over the officers' mess dominated by Major Sinclair. Barrow's final betrayal comes after Jock strikes Corporal Fraser (John Fraser) who is dating his daughter Morag (Susannah York) - an offence that merits a court martial. Barrow, for the sake of the regiment and out of a genuine sense of kindness, ultimately decides to deal with the matter internally at Brigade level only to have Sinclair cite this as an example of the Colonel's 'weakness'.

Major Charlie Scott (Dennis Price at his most serpentine) delivers this news and Spicer was, in my view, correct when he argued that *Tunes of Glory* captured the sense of uncertainty about the officer class, about the types of masculine behaviour and about the lasting damage caused by the Second World War (2007: 193). At one point in the film Barrow tells the adjutant that 'ridicule is always the finish' and Barrow's eventual suicide is as much the result of ostracism by his 'family' as his wartime experiences. Durgant perceives Jock's decision to award his former foe a ceremonial funeral as Sinclair finally assenting to 'the aristocratic tradition' (1970: 113) but the film concludes with the former band boy suffering a nervous breakdown. His plans for the funeral are received with increasing unease by the officers and senior NCOs and our final sighting of Jock of his being led away by Jimmy Cairns (Gordon Jackson is magnificent throughout the film) and the self-possessed and self-interested Scott.

Neil Sinyard makes the fascinating argument that 'Sinclair compels Barrow to fatally confront his own weaknesses' (2005: 120) which is not a lack of moral or physical courage but a desperately human need to be liked. But Jock is equally vulnerable, his craving of acceptance taking a diametrically opposite form of a self-conscious use of vulgar language and playing to the gallery. Jock's own form 'self-control' was his flamboyant act and now he has run out of lines.

British films celebrating peacetime forces became rarer from the late 1950s onwards. *These Dangerous Years* (Herbert Wilcox 1957) was the first of three films made for ABPC that starred the crooner Frankie Vaughan, as Dave Wyman, a Liverpool gang leader conscripted into

the Army to his ultimate benefit. The predictably unpredictable Raymond Durnat found the picture to be 'a spirited defence of rebellious teenagers against national service, in the *Waterloo*

*Road spirit*' (1970: 46) but the film ultimately floundered on the fact that Vaughan's 'rebellious teenager' looked as though he had been avoiding the call-up for the past decade.

Far more cynical was *A Prize of Arms* (Cliff Owen 1962), set during the Suez Crisis and here, even more than the barracks sequence in *The League of Gentlemen* the overall impression is one of dis-organised chaos. The NCOs are more concerned with protocol than actual security, in contrast to Turpin (Stanley Baker), a cashiered Captain turned gang boss who is highly intelligent and disciplined. Turpin's scheme is to disguise the gang as part of a military convoy in order to gain access to an army base on the eve of a massive troop movement to rob the payroll. The plan almost succeeds due to the laxity encountered at nearly all levels of military life, and the fact that most of the camp seems to be engaged in performing their duties with the maximum swinging of lead.

Two years later the protagonists of the dramatisation of the Portland Spy Affair *Ring of Spies* (Robert Tronson 1964) betray national secrets to the USSR in an attempt to achieve a better style of life as much as for political ends. In the words of Tony Shaw the two clerks 'lead sad and tragic lives, partly related to the mind-numbing nature of their work' (2006: 67) and the screenplay, co-written by Launder and Peter Barnes, is as much an exploration of post-war suburban inertia as a documentary drama about the Portland Spy Affair. Henry Houghton (Bernard Lee) is not a master of espionage but an ex naval Master at Arms turned peacetime middle-aged cypher clerk with a drink problem. Spurred by the Soviet agent Gordon Lonsdale (William Sylvester), Houghton embarks on a shabby seduction of his colleague, Elizabeth 'Bunty' Gee (Margaret Tyzack) and Lee's performance is a virtual inverse image of Jack Warner's PC Dixon; an outwardly stable figure who seen early in the narrative bemoaning his becalmed RN career in a state of alcoholic despair.

Launder adroitly establishes the characters' depressing existences – Houghton is initially billeted in a mobile home near the Portland docks and Bunty lives a life of quiet desperation. Sylvester, an excellent US-born actor who made notable contributions to several British films, is so genuinely charismatic that the pair's descent into espionage is comprehensible. Senior naval and police officers probe into Houghton's Soviet funded colour supplement lifestyle ('a new Ford Zodiac!', exclaims one CID officer) in a judgmental fashion juxtaposed with the couple's almost naïve dreams for an affluent future. The dominant mood of the film is one of grey sadness – the former wartime Master of Arms is now a large shambling figure who embarks on spying almost in a sense of resignation. Even the consumer goods his actions bring him give no lasting pleasure; a trip in the Zodiac with the hood lowered takes



place in a cold autumnal New Forest, with the couple monitored all the while by MI5 agents.

Towards the mid-1960s, we have three films made in the wake of Eon's adaptation of the James Bond novels, which combine spy motifs with a critical depiction of the military mind-set. Robert Shail brackets *Where the Spies Are* (Val Guest 1965) with the same director's work on *Casino Royale* (1967) as epitomizing 'all that was superficial and self-indulgent about Swinging London' (2004: 87) but it is very hard to perceive just how this applies to a Middle Eastern set spy drama. David Niven, an actor whose facility at seemingly unflappable gentlemen with hidden weaknesses was often underused on both sides of the Atlantic, gives one of his best performances as Dr. Jason Love, a wartime medical officer who is now a middle-aged civilian hopelessly out of his depth. In *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt 1965) Alec Lemas (Richard Burton) is a wartime hero and peacetime spy used by his masters to ultimately sacrifice a Jewish East German intelligence officer in order that Whitehall can continue the control of his former Nazi superior.

Finally, there is the film adaptation of Len Deighton's 1962 novel *The Ipcress File* starring Michael Caine, a prime example of a leading man who spurned by the studio system of the 1950s<sup>40</sup>. Until 1963, Caine's film career was largely in bit parts and walk-ons<sup>41</sup> but following his West End breakthrough with *Next Time I'll Sing for You* he was cast in the major supporting role of the Old Etonian Lieutenant Bromhead in *Zulu* (Cy Enfield 1963). In Deighton's original novel the unnamed narrator is a middle-aged North Country wartime sergeant and provincial university graduate, the figure holds a degree of authority as a civilian member of a MI5 but the character was radically altered for the film version. Harry Saltzman and Cubby Broccoli of Eon Productions 'wanted a hedge against the innumerable imitations which the James Bond were now spawning worldwide and which, he feared, might make the public weary of the original' (Walker 1974:304).

Thus, Palmer<sup>42</sup> is now a young sergeant, seconded to military intelligence and with a suspended glasshouse sentence for black market dealing in Berlin hanging over his head. *The Ipcress File* is ostensibly concerned with espionage but it also functions as an oblique interpretation of a military drama. The film was one of the first mainstream commercial features to have employed op-art special effects (for the brain washing sequence) but in the main the deliberately drab screen world of Sergeant Harry Palmer was to provide an alternative to Bond's post imperialist world. Palmer's bespectacled appearance and use of a Ford Zodiac from the car pool is far removed from the world of Commander Bond. Durnat saw Caine's

<sup>40</sup> Caine's first volume of autobiography refers to being spurned by Robert Lennard of ABPC. (2010: 140).

<sup>41</sup> Caine's truly remarkable depiction of an Irish hood in *Solo for Sparrow* (Gordon Fleyming 1962) remains a British B-film highlight

<sup>42</sup> The character is never named in the original novels.

persona in the film as ‘an organisation man in style, but his Cockney accent asserts an outsider status: "us" against "them"' (1976: 2) and Harry Palmer’s deadpan and sardonic manner is akin to the sort of NCO who would have found a sideline in dealing in black market coffee from the NAAFI in a comedy film. Ronald Shiner’s uniformed wide boys typified fast-talking non-commissioned officers in the early 1950s but Palmer is now in mufti and using cynicism as a weapon.

One could also argue that Caine was not the first British film star with a marked London accent but Shiner and Jack Warner were middle-aged whilst Palmer is young and good looking. When *The Ipcress File* was released in the UK in 1965, there would have been enough audience members who had served in the armed forces in WW2 or during peacetime National Service for Palmer’s bland insouciance to be very familiar. The subversiveness of both the character and Caine’s performance deriving greatly from the hero’s conventional outward appearance. Palmer dresses with the precise neatness of a mid-range bank clerk, his realm is a parochial grey, and brown capital, where British spies favour Pringles’ sweaters and trilby hats and even Mr. Caine's sartorial choice of a blue tweed sports coat and fawn mackintosh illustrate that this is a realm far removed from Carnaby Street.

With both *Guns at Batasi* and *The Ipcress File* paternal values are subordinate to realpolitik - the former film has Jack Hawkins in his professional commanding officer persona, readily adapting to changing circumstances whilst Flora Robson’s visiting Member of Parliament is shocked and confused by the sudden turn of events. ‘I disapprove of their methods as I do of yours’ she tells Lauderdale when she compares his actions with those of the Batasian rebels. Meanwhile Palmer ultimately has to choose between two untrustworthy patriarchal figures and Major Dalby (Nigel Green) is gunned down less because being a traitor but because Palmer despises him even more than he loathes Colonel Ross (Guy Doleman).

The cadet, Stanley Baker’s Inspector Martineau and even Commander Bond can rely upon their father figures Palmer relies on his intelligence and sense of individuality. Unlike *The Intruder* or *The Cruel Sea* there are no trustworthy father figures in *The Ipcress File*: Ross and Dalby are both equally devious and equally disdainful of Palmer, achieving heights of caddishness that Glenning or Rave could only have dreamed of after numerous cocktails. Indeed, the film entered production a few months after Kim Philby defected to the USSR:

the story of the (Cambridge) Five shatters the convention that the ideal Briton should be a gentleman. Sons of the English gentry, the Cambridge spies could boast the best

public schools and one of the finest universities in the world as their alma mater.(Willmetts and Moran2013:54)

Palmer's chief weapons against the treacherous Dalby and the insouciantly contemptuous Ross are intelligence and culture. The scene where he encounters Ross in the supermarket and

insouciantly informs his old commanding officer that tinned Champignon mushrooms ‘do have a better flavour’ is seen by Charlotte Brunsdon as marking ‘the beginning of the social extension of “shopping for pleasure” trope in the identity of landmark London’ (2007:36). But the battle of the trolleys takes place in an anonymous shop that could be any British supermarket anywhere - echoing Caine’s ‘sense of ordinariness, which made it easy for audiences to identify with him’ (Shail 2004:70). Whilst Ross and Dalby are seen as habitués of the London of gentleman’s club, Pall Mall and Hyde Park Harry is most at home in his modern kitchen. On the wall is Len Deighton’s cook strip from *The Observer*, echoing Wendy McKim’s culinary library, and a further example of culture as democracy.

Christopher Bray notes that the heart of Furie’s camera pyrotechnics, with characters often seen through the prism of a telephone box or a car windscreen, is a hero who ‘looks as though he could get hurt’ (2006: 75). Palmer’s few remaining illusions concerning the military’s care of his well-being are dispelled at the conclusion. Ross responds to his subordinate’s complaints that ‘You used me as a decoy. I might have been killed or driven stark, raving mad’ with a brutal ‘That's what you're paid for’. Unlike the crew of *The Ship That Died of Shame*, Palmer’s appreciation of consumerism is not his downfall but both a defence against patronage of his alleged social superiors and an assertion of his own worth.

Regimental Sergeant Major Lauderdale in *Guns at Batasi* may be shocked at how the Establishment has used him but Sergeant Palmer has long been aware of that fact. And whilst twenty years earlier Clifford Turner’s Melbourne Johns of *The Foreman Went to France* nearly makes a fatal error of trusting figures because of their bearing and diction Harry Palmer, described in his official report as ‘insubordinate, insolent and prone to criminal tendencies’, is very unlikely to make such a mistake again.

## CHAPTER 9 – Use the Bell, Sergeant – The Police in British Films

In 1955, the American writer Geoffrey Gorer noted a lower-middle class enthusiasm for the police that was ‘peculiarly English and an important part of the contemporary English character. To a great extent the police represent an ideal model of behaviour and character, an aspect about which many respondents are articulate’ (1955: 298). With *The Blue Lamp*, we saw how the narrative shifted emphasis of this role model to the senior officers and in many crime stories of 1950s, British cinema the senior plain-clothes police officer was the expert, arriving to the accompaniment of the Winkworth bell at the scene of the crime. *Emergency Call* (Lewis Gilbert 1952) is centred on the search for blood to save a leukemia victim’s life and Richards sees the narrative as ‘symbolic of the notion of people as hero’ (Richards 1997: 129). But the film is arguably less concerned with the actual donation as it is with Inspector Lane (Jack Warner) and his guidance of the young Dr. Carter (Anthony Steel) who acts as his ad hoc assistant. George Dixon belongs to his community but here the Inspector sweeps through the suburbs and bombsites in his immaculate Wolseley 18/85. Inspectors and Superintendents were also frequent heroes of British second features of this period<sup>43</sup> and Andrew Spicer argues that producers favoured the crime genre, as they required:

a limited number of easily constructed and small-scale sets, whose deficiencies could often be disguised by the use of low-key lighting, and which could be accommodated in the cramped space available in the small studios that these companies used’ (2005–6: 26).

As such, Anglo-Amalgamated’s 1953-1961 *Scotland Yard* series was less concerned with policing than with celebrating low-budget detection. The films were fronted by Edgar a ‘barrister, broadcaster and noted criminologist’ (as the opening announcement describes him), whose chief role was to provide a lugubriously moralistic commentary up to and including the moment when the wrongdoer was sent to the gallows. Charlotte Brunson

<sup>43</sup>These films were the mainly the province of firms such as Butcher's Film Service, Exclusive, Eros and Anglo- Amalgamated who sold their wares to cinema chains for a flat rental fee.



unlike Hollywood crime films a Victorian city lurks behind much of 'London noir' and indeed the background to many of the early entries in the series was of a dark and 19th century capital. *Scotland Yard* minor villains often had an existence defined by halls, hurried meals in fish and chip parlours and 20/- per week lodging houses. 'relentless, unceasing crusade against crime'<sup>60</sup>. Russell Napier's 'Superintendent whose character development rarely extended beyond the successful wearing of a often policed this bleak realm.

However, in A-films from the mid-1950s onwards there was an increasing move as depicting senior officers in terms of Dyer's Tough Guy. Aldgate and Richards argue that this change is 'encapsulated in the arrival among ranks of senior police officers of Stanley Baker' (1999: 138) but this process is visible in *a Crooked Shadow* (Michael Anderson 1958) where Richard Todd's jocular screen appears oppressive and insidious in his role as an undercover CID Inspector. In *Lost Green* (1955) where David Farrar's Craig is an irascible and lonely figure but still respected by his team. Rank's budget allowed for the lavish use of colour, in part to showcase their signings David Knight and Julie Arnall, but it does contrast the a vista of with the human and mentally villainess (Anna Turner) whose problems Craig is unable to resolve.

In Ealing's first police film since *The Blue Lamp*, *The Long Arm*, Jack Hawkins' Superintendent Tom Halliday is an overworked and dogged figure who may live in leafy but sees more of the Yard than his own son. Barr dismisses the film as resembling a television pilot (1993: 181) but Freund creates an atmosphere of low-key professionalism rather than melodrama with occasional expressionistic flourishes. There is an indelible image of a Ford V8 Pilot used as a murder weapon, a Cyclops-like fog lamp gleaming as it docklands towards its prey. The London through which the travels is one captured by Gordon Dine's cinematography as one of the change. Smog from steam engines and belching factory chimneys still surrounded the capital, where dank allies were barely lit by gas lamps. Here and there amidst the 'houses like giant teeth in which decay had been drilled out, leaving only the cavity' (1963: 129) and the battered pre-war Morris 8s are signs of the concrete and hire purchased future, with geometrically precise new buildings are already appearing on former bombsites.

Superintendent Mike Halloram (John Mills) in *Town on Trial* combines Craig's air of aggressive loneliness and Halliday's sheer persistence. The film was adapted from the Francis Durbridge Sunday newspaper series *The Nylon Murders* and made for Columbia-

British at Shepperton. Charles Coburn, as a faintly unlikely Canadian émigré GP, and Barbara Bates as his niece were imported from Hollywood and this air of perceived displaced Americanism permeating British suburbia annoyed several critics – ‘Are there really country clubs like this in Subtopia? And are does Dorking, say, possess this smug American small town pride?’ (Granger 1957: *The Financial Times*). However, this setting is utterly in keeping with a middle class community that is enthusiastically embracing conspicuous consumption beneath a genteel exterior; British snobbery in an uneasy but wholly plausible marriage to quasi- American consumerism.

Mills plays the police officer as an angry and deeply flawed individual, bitter that his social origins have resulted in him ‘taking 10 years’ to achieve his current rank and regarding the ‘Oakley Park’ of tennis clubs and fake Wing Commanders with a blend of envy and disdain. Craig’s sour air of aggression is seen to be in the cause of saving a child and severely disturbed woman. Halliday’s urgent interrogation of the dying witness, seen as a nightmare vision from the barely conscious victim's point of view, causes the Superintendent visible distress afterwards - and his questioning does bring forth results when the Pilot found abandoned in a scrapyard. But Halloram ‘prowls the leafy lanes of the Home Counties town in a shabby battered raincoat, no longer the protector of a community but its scourge’ (Spicer 2001:52).

The strange South London/Mid-Atlantic accent that Mills adopts is in keeping with the film’s depiction of the senior police officer as Hollywood Film Noir style Tough Guy

for despite his short stature he plays Halloram with ‘assertive pseudo-American masculinity’ (Plain 2006: 153). This sense of disillusionment with the police’s sometimes flawed guidance is also reflected in AFM’s *The Man Upstairs* (Don Chaffey 1958) a British interpretation of *Le Jour Se Levre* (Marcel Carne 1939). The misguided and heavy-handed police Inspector Thompson (Bernard Lee) willfully ignores professional advice in how to deal with a disturbed suspect in a London boarding house. Thompson’s actions lead to his men injured and a state of siege in the house whilst it is the civilian Mental Welfare Officer Sanderson (Donald Houston) who is the ultimate professional in the crisis.

Halliday and even Mike Halloram are to be on good terms with the very senior members of their force but the Inspectors played by Stanley Baker at the end of the 1950s are maverick but isolated figures. In *Blind Date* (Joseph Losey 1959) Baker’s Inspector Morgan is young, self-made, and aggressive and as much influenced by inverse snobbery – he is the son of a chauffeur - as his colleague Inspector Westover (John Van Eyssen) is evidently is of a patrician background. According to Losey ‘Rank, who were distributing it, basically in England, didn’t like the treatment of the police... But fortunately the writers and Hardy Kruger and I all stood strongly together and (John) Davis was not able to change anything at all’ (Climent and Losey 1985: 170).

Baker’s stature made him a more convincing tough guy than John Mills and his Inspectors both lacked the middle class patina of Hawkins or Farrar and Mills, being both more aggressive and suffused with self-doubt. *Hell Is a City* adapted from the novel written by the ex-police officer Maurice Proctor and co-produced by Hammer and ABPC co-production featured Baker as Inspector Harry Martineau, a young up-&-coming police officer obsessed with a childhood foe against a grim Lancashire background. Andrew Higson remarks that ‘viewing experience of British cinema audiences, and several British film genres draw on these American cinematic traditions as much as more indigenous traditions’ (1997: 22). John Mills adopts a faintly mid-Atlantic delivery in *Town on Trial* but although Baker’s North Country accent is variable, Harry Martineau is an English detective at one with his city. Guest’s direction combines the narrative strengths of the Hollywood crime thriller with a sharp evocation of the North Country landscape – ‘I wanted to give it a newsreel quality. I tried desperately to get the quality of realism about the streets, houses and crowds’ (Guest quoted in McFarlane 1997: 108).

The plot unfolds not against the background of Soho dives but rather in a Manchester captured by Arthur Grant’s black and white cinematography as a city still scarred by the Blitz,

still smoky from the many coal fires and steam trains and still a part of the Victorian Lancashire landscape of mills, factories, chimneys and railway viaducts. Christine Geraghty described Guest's 1958-1964 output as looking back 'to the ethos and assumptions of the 1950s with a sensibility that is starting to feel like that of the 1960s' (2005: 135) which that encapsulates Martineau's volatile police officer who is almost as flawed and human as the society he guards. Our first sighting of Martineau is of an imposing figure framed against the remaining Victorian buildings of night-time Manchester, a character at one with his surroundings. Throughout the narrative, the Inspector comments on the empathy that he has with the film's villain, a former childhood cohort – 'from the same streets' as he describes it – and he spends as little time as possible in his comfortably furnished suburban villa.

Martineau only seems happy in the streets of Manchester and the surrounding moorlands but Guest also shows the 1960s clearly looming on the horizon; former bombsites now boast new buildings, nearly every taxi on the roads seems to be a brand new Austin A55 Cambridge Mk.2 and department store windows tempt the unwary with offers of easy credit. Furthermore, the countryside provides no sense of release from the urban squalor, no 'That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill' (Higson 1984: 2) seen in many Kitchen Sink films and neither is there a stereotypical contrast between the sinfulness of the city with the honest values of the rural landscape. Outside of Manchester is a bleak wilderness in which crime can flourish almost unfettered, from illegal games of pitch and toss to the dumping of corpses.

The closing shots has Harry Martineau newly promoted to Detective Chief Inspector quarrelling with his wife and storming out of his suburban villa to the open spaces of Manchester where he feels that he belongs. The film's PR material billed Martineau as an -'almost Bogart-style he-man (who) provides a refreshing change from the rather neurotic, mixed-up heroes who have been in fashion for a while now' (publicity book quoted in Shail 2008: 60) - but Baker's angry, emotional and troubled detective is both. *Hell Is a City* ends with the Chief Inspector wandering through a new city of neon-lit streets, the office blocks and shopping developments and Martineau is figure both young enough to take part in this future but emotionally tied to a world that is on the verge of disappearing.

If Martineau is an example of a flawed and very human police officer a number of British crime narratives did not focus on a senior police officer as main protagonist. *The Criminal* (Joseph Losey 1960) has no benevolent trench coated figure CID officer preventing Bannion (Stanley Baker) from meeting his terrible end; as he dies in a snowdrift in the middle of farmland his former confederates 'dart about like a pair of scurrying mice, digging

desperately for the stolen money in a frozen field' (Gardner 2004: 82). *Nowhere to Go* (Seth Holt 1958), intended by its director to be 'the most un-Ealing film ever made' (Holt quoted in Barr 2012: 178), revolves around George Nader's Paul Gregory, a Canadian confidence trickster who robs a wealthy woman of her valuable coin collection.

Spicer refers to Gregory's cool and slick professionalism, a figure representative of a deracinated society. (2001: 141) There is no sense of the benevolent community of the law and the underworld co-existing in harmony and the saturnine gang boss Sullivan (Harry H Corbett) and Inspector Scott (Geoffrey Keen) equally distrust Gregory. Any assistance he receives is from characters whose motives remain oblique, such as Bridget Howard (Maggie Smith), a brittle and cynical niece of a Chief Constable. The entire production has an air of cultural displacement, not so much for the Ealing logo adorning a film definitely set in the late 1950s of Renault Dauphines and coffee bars but of how the final reel reflects its protagonist's mind-set. Gregory's last desperate attempt at escape from the country is doomed through his own corrosive personality that makes him isolated from nearly all sectors of British society.

The police are an almost equally distant presence in *Never Let Go* (John Guillermin 1960). Here, the crime is solved not so much by the acerbic Inspector Thomas (Noel Willman) but by the cosmetics' salesman John Cummings (Richard Todd) who is figuratively and literally a little man. In order to rescue his stolen car Cummings must descend into an idiosyncratically British expressionist nightmare of Teddy Boys, Norton-Villiers and seedy cafes and, in the process, recover his lost masculinity. Cummings is depicted as, one who epitomizes Gorer's observations of how the lower- middle classes welcomed state authority and unlike the anti-heroes played by Stanley Baker or *Nowhere to Go* with its sociopathic outsider protagonist) Cummings is the epitome of the respectable family man now trying to maintain his position in a changing world. As Sandbrook remarks, 'The middle class ideal of respectability was often simply equated with 'moderation'. It was not respectable to be voluble, passionate or outspoken; it was certainly not respectable to "make a scene"' (2005:

57) but that is just what John Cummings intends to do.

Alan Falconer's screenplay establishes that Cummings works for Bergers, a family firm, but his younger and more acerbic son Alec (Peter Jones), who continually moots a need for 'efficiency' has now replaced the former head of company. Alec Berger anticipates the coldly professional managers of a more corporate world - 'By 1963 'less than a third (29 per cent) of the largest 116 companies were controlled by traditional tycoons or family businessmen' (Perkin 2002: 441-442). Lewis and Maude noted how the lower-middle class was 'frequently regarded with a certain amusement, sometimes tinged with a contempt which is as foolish as it is unmerited' (1950: 353). Inspector Thomas, an overworked professional exasperated with civilian interference, mirrors Berger's dismissive attitude towards Cummings.

Throughout *Never Let Go* the attitude of senior police officers and businessmen to Cummings is one of frustrated contempt, as he desperately tries to maintain at least a veneer of modernity with his privately rented flat and his hire purchased new car. The racketeer Lionel Meadows (Peter Sellers), a racketeer seen as the embodiment of working class enrichment, further despises the salesman. Meadows' mantra 'keep moving, get organised' mirrors that of Cummings' employers and Steve Chibnall notes that:

The bullying Meadows represents the anti-social reality behind the façade of the new economic order. His "legitimate business" is barely more ruthless than Cummings' own employer. Both suggest an evilness inherent in the spirit of advanced capitalism and the world it is shaping. (1999:107)

In terms of conventional British cinema Meadows is readily identifiable as a villain - he drives a 1956 Oldsmobile 88, dresses *a la* the gang boss 'Narcy' Narcissus (Griffith Jones) in *They*

*Made Me a Fugitive* and attempts to disguise his Lancastrian vowels with American vocabulary. His emporium often seen at night where the neon lighting makes even the innocuous brand names of 'Morris' or 'Riley' seem redolent of menace. Sellers' performance makes the car racketeer one of the great heavies of post-war British cinema. Meadows is sexually rapacious and openly invades Cummings' home - the underworld intruding upon lower- middle class security – and he even kills harmless pets. Lionel Meadows could have feasibly begun his career in the war but he is now keen for Establishment status, taking pride in his well-furnished apartments and having aspirations of respectable status as a local 'legitimate businessman'.



If the car dealer stands for the London of the embryonic corporate raiders, John Cummings stands for the already fading world of the London 'village communities' of the Clarke- Ealing model, relocated to a private tower block and attempting to survive in a relentless business world. Andrew Spicer notes that the *métier* of the gentleman of post-war cinema 'was restraint, moral authority and the preservation of the status quo' (1999:9) but none of these seem to apply to Cummings' professional life. For Cummings to maintain his grip on his social position when increased affluence was eroding the petite-bourgeois' traditional bastions of respectability is to put himself in the position of taking on massive levels of debt in order to maintain his status. The new Ford Anglia represents Cummings' latest attempt prove that he too belongs in the new business world of supermarkets and concrete office block. Christine Geraghty observes how British films of the 1950s often showed industries that made consumer goods (Bergers is a cosmetics manufacturer) as 'corrupt and interested only in money and profit, even though some individuals who work for them may be honourable' (2000: 16).

The hypocrisies of the 'paternal firm' were dealt with in a comic vein with *Trouble in Store* but by the end of the 1950s we have the management of *Angry Silence* (Guy Green 1960) debating on whether to fire Richard Attenborough's loyal worker Tom Curtis who defies a wildcat strike. In *Never Let Go*, the gulf between Lionel Meadows and the coldly dismissive Alec Berger is one of social manners and accent rather than actual substance. The closing shot is of the injured and exhausted Cummings comforted by his wife (Elizabeth Sellars), for the physical and emotional cost of regaining his Anglia and his self-respect is considerable. Chibnall argues that *Never Let Go* displays how the fears of respectable citizens concerning 'cultural vulnerability, commercial reorganisation and moral deviation'(1999: 108) can be refracted through the medium of the crime genre and it is this, rather than apparently reassuring sight of police Wolseley 6/90s clanging through West London, that is the picture's central message.

*Never Let Go* also displays how by the early 1960s there was a stronger inference than hitherto that the arrival of a senior police officer will not automatically resolve the situation and the involvement of paternalistic senior officers in A-film British crime narratives would start to diminish. *Jigsaw* (Val Guest 1961), *Girl in the Headlines* (Michael Truman 1963) and *The Informers* (Ken Annakin 1963) were some of the last British main features to showcase the workings of the middle class police detective, now struggling with a new morality. With the first, Andrew Spicer expresses his surprise at this traditional casting after Baker's performance in *Hell Is a City* (Spicer 2003: 54) but Jack Warner was ideally cast in his final film role as Inspector Fellows, a senior police officer on the verge of retirement and uneasy at the social developments of the 1960s. *Jigsaw* has the constabulary patrolling the streets of Brighton in their black Austin A99 Westminsters but the society that the Inspector polices is progressively fragmented. One of the ultimately exonerated principal suspects is the oily Clyde Burchard (Michael Goodliffe), a womanising vacuum cleaner salesman whose smart attire and Morris Oxford De Luxe reflects a ready market for his official and unofficial wares.

Ian Hendry's younger Chief Inspector Birkett in *Girl in the Headlines* polices a London of public schooled television celebrities and raids a gay nightclub with regret and sympathy for some of his habitués. Another detective in a changing world is Detective Chief Inspector Johnoe (Nigel Patrick) in *The Informers*— one of the first instances of a British police officer defying the letter and the spirit of the law. Johnoe disdains science in favour of using a chain of 'snouts' but the gangs he is now chasing are led by Leon (Frank Finlay) who is never seen without a copy of *The Affluent Society*. Derren Nesbitt's calculating Bertie Hoyle, a gang boss whose appearance and Bentley S2 apes the manners of the English gentleman rather than the Hollywood gangster.

As we have noted with *Never Let Go* the first half of the 1960s saw the senior police officer, a professional expert of the previous decade, as increasingly isolated figure in main features. In the Newcastle-upon-Tyne set *Payroll* (Sidney Hayers 1961) much of the running time is devoted to the planning of the raid on a bullion van, and Detective Inspector Carberry (Andrew Faulds) is a minor character as compared with the charismatic young gang boss Johnny Mellors (Michael Craig). The film's only other middle class figure is William Lucas, with an excellent depiction of Pearson, the gang's inside man in the accounts office who cannot face up to the consequences of his actions. Some second feature crime narratives still highlighted agree-ably clean cut leading men such as Conrad Phillips, Laurence Payne or William Franklyn. It also has to be said that the standard materials of low-budget crime drama of this period could be compounded into a film of a surreal awfulness: *Danger by My Side* (Francis Searle 1961) attempts 'glamour' with a nightclub that appears to have been fashioned out of a village hall. As for *Gaolbreak* (Searle 1963) this is a picture that Chibnall describes as being 'as bad as the crime film gets' (1999: 98) but he is being overly kind; *Gaolbreak* is about as bad as British cinema gets.

Away from assassination attempts via a 1954 Ford Zephyr Six travelling at 5 mph or a 'prison escape' effected via placing a ladder on the studio wall were the challenges of applying traditional policing to an increasingly affluent and fragmented society. The post 1958 later entries in the *Scotland Yard* series have plots 'wonderfully evocative of a world of guilty secrets, clandestine passions, suspicious landladies and mysterious happenings behind tightly drawn curtains' (Murphy 2007: 100) superseded by more suburban locales. Edgar warns of 'the motor-car' – a super-tuned Ford Zephyr Mk.II capable of 100 mph no less - as a tool of the criminal in *The Dover Road Mystery* (Gerard Bryant 1960). In *The Never Never Murder* (Peter Duffel 1961) where John Salew's villain uses the disguise of a travelling salesman offering consumer goods to suburban house- wives at never to be repeated prices.

By the latter half of our period, Second Features were moving away from the need to supply US distributors and in place of Merton Park nightclubs and imported US leads increasingly offered telling criticisms of the certainties of everyday life. Butcher's *The Hi Jackers* (Jim O'Connolly 1963) benefits from well-observed background of lorry-drivers' pull-ins, the problems of maintaining a one-man business and some pleasantly off-beat casting in the form of Patrick Cargill's sardonic police inspector who sympathises with the robbed hauler McKinley (Anthony Booth) but who also makes no false promises about the easy resolution of the case. The co-feature *Tomorrow at Ten* (Lance Comfort 1962) has John Gregson as a determinedly professional Detective Inspector working in and against a First IX accented hierarchy which, as Brian McFarlane notes, 'is much less benignly presented than it was over a decade earlier in *The Blue Lamp*' (McFarlane 1999: 139).

1962 saw Anglo-Amalgamated re-launch their *Scotland Yard* series as the *Scales of Justice* series and the opening credits now came complete with a theme tune courtesy of the beat combo The Tornados and a stentorian opening announcement from Michael Hordern. *Scales of Justice* also boasted the faintly disturbing sight of Edgar Lustgarten allowed out of his studio office to introduce the story<sup>64</sup>. In the 1950s, he was, as Dave Mann observes, one with ‘the pleasures of the distanced voyeur’ (2009:111) and the *Scotland Yard* series tended to conclude the story with the villain dispatched to the gallows - a moment that Edgar often seemed slightly over keen on. The better narratives in the *Scales of Justice* concentrated less on crime and more on the temptations available to an increasingly affluent society, with crimes and underlying causes that cannot always be easily resolved. *The Undesirable Neighbour* (Gordon Hales 1963) is a sharply observed vignette of suburban hypocrisy and *Moment of Decision* (John Knight 1962) has one of the most memorably unpleasant villains of post-war British cinema in Bert West (Ray Barrett) a commercial traveller who financially exploits the kidnapping of a baby by his mentally disturbed wife.

In 1960, Nat Cohen and Stuart Levy of Anglo-Amalgamated also acquired the film rights for worldwide distribution of the entire Wallace library and made 47 films at Merton Park between 1960 and 1965, all updated to a contemporary setting for reasons of budget. The gulf between the narrative certainties of *The Clue of The Twisted Candle* (Allan Davies 1960) to John Stratton's alcoholic solicitor hero *Strangler's Web* (Llewellyn Moxey 1965) describes a series that commenced when the Man from the Yard 'represented the stability and disciplined consensus of the New Elizabethan Age'. When the series ended in 1965 'old taken-for-granted certainties were under severe strain' (Chibnall and McFarlane 2009: 240). *Strangler's Web* combines tropes from 1920s pulp fiction – Griffith Jones' blackmailed former matinee idol – with Stratton's very flawed hero and a bold attempt at reflecting a changing London; – the pop artist Pauline Boty plays a disco owner and Gerald Harper's acerbic young Detective Inspector Murray works from a modern office filled with malfunctioning equipment.

At the beginning of our period, the arrival of a black police car with a clanging gong is the inevitable sign that matters will be resolved but by 1965, there is far less certainty. Chibnall & Murphy refer to *He Who Rides a Tiger* (Charles Crichton) as ‘the last of the breed of tight, no-nonsense, black and white British crime films’ (1999: 12) but here Tom Bell’s cat burglar Peter Rayston rather than Superintendent Taylor (Paul Rogers) is the narrative focal point. In *Bunny Lake Is Missing* (Otto Preminger 1965). The American expatriate mother Ann (Carol Lynley) discovers that not only has her four year old vanished from nursery school all traces of Bunny have disappeared from the Lakes’ flat. John and Penelope Mortimer’s script updated the original 1957 New York set novel to a mid-1960 London where Ann is confronted by a gallery of middle-aged grotesques in a capital still ‘of sinister Victorian buildings’ (Orr 2010: 106) and her only point of sanity is Detective Superintendent Newhouse (Laurence Olivier).



As was traditional in a British film Newhouse arrives at crime scenes in an immaculate black Wolseley 6/110; Andrew Sarris observes how ‘There is one sequence when Olivier walks up the steps of the school with a fixed focus on the revolving police light in the foreground’ (1970: 214). But Newhouse is seen as weary and faintly despondent, travelling through an outsider’s vision of an England where the sinister, the decaying and the Mod uneasily co-exist, one where ‘Authority – however disinterested, well-qualified and experienced – was increasingly greeted with suspicion rather than trust’ (Davenport-Hines 2013: 331). *Bunny Lake Is Missing* is set in a London of 19th century darkened alleys and public houses where the Zombies’ *Just Out of Reach* blares from a television set above the bar; a city where few accept the Superintendent’s paternal guidance.

## CHAPTER 10: CAPTURING THE MOOD

This part of the thesis is concerned with the two key films that serve as a watershed of criticism within the filmic mainstream family. These pictures represent a possible *Annus mirabilis* (Marwick 1998: 37) of British cinema of the conventional ideas of heroism and community – *Room at the Top* and *I'm All Right Jack*. The latter is not usually classed as a 'drama' but, as I will attempt to demonstrate, its intent was utterly serious.

### *I'm All Right Jack*

In 1958, the Boulting Brothers, together with Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, gained further independence within British Lion when the studio bought out their respective production companies, Charter Films and Vale Films and in return 'the two producer-director teams acquired deferred shares in British Lion and became directors of the company. They now controlled both their choice of subject and the distribution of their finished films'. (Porter 2012: 17) *I'm All Right Jack* entered production after the Boultings had made three 'satires' in the wake of *Private's Progress – Lucky Jim* (John Boulting 1957), *Brothers in Law* (Roy Boulting 1957) and *Carlton- Browne of the F.O.* (Roy Boulting 1959). Each film featured their established repertory company and the Boultings' adaptation of Henry Cecil's 1955 legal memoirs was conventional compared with *The Green Man* (Robert Day 1956) a black farce about suburbia containing freelance assassins or *The Naked Truth* (Mario Zampi 1957) where Peter Sellers' ITV quiz show MC Sonny McGregor is depicted as a cynical failed actor who is eaten with contempt for his (largely working class) guests.

But in *Brothers in Law*, Carmichael's young barrister is ultimately deferential to the status quo and the world of the young lawyers is akin to that of *Bachelor of Hearts* (Wolf Rilla 1958) where the German exchange student Wolf Hauser (Hardy Kruger) comes respect the chaps in tweeds – i.e. one where junior barristers utter, completely straight, the lines 'Gosh! Jolly Good! Bags of briefs!' The Boultings' version of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* was seen as a muting of the original novel's anger – 'from the screen version with its decidedly traditional humours, one would never suspect that the novel had become the symbol of a new movement in English fiction' (Mortimer 1957: 135). Their satire on post-Suez colonial politics *Carl-ton-Browne of the F.O.* was an amiable farce that was lent an extra edge by Ian Bannen's acerbic young King Loris but primarily focused on the comic talents of Terry-Thomas.

It was the return to the characters of *Private's Progress* that displayed the Brothers' real

anger and pain at the failures and hypocrisy of modern existence. *I'm All Right Jack* was the middle film in the trilogy of pictures that ended with *Heaven's Above!*, as described by Julian Petley as 'beneath their superficially modish cynicism and scatter-gun satire can actually be read as the expressions of a profound disillusionment and a deeply disappointed idealism' (2000: 26).

As with *Private's Progress*, *I'm All Right Jack* was scripted by John Boulting and Frank Harvey from an original novel by Alan Hackney. Many of the characters of the earlier film were transferred into a late-fifties setting and the narrative wastes no time in establishing the film's motif of ersatzness - the dominant pre-credit image is of a soldier (Victor Maddern) on VJ Day giving the 'V' sign as the narrator states that 'with a new age came a new spirit'. The plot commences with Stanley Windrush (Carmichael) graduating from Oxford and seeking work in the brave new world of industry, applying the values inherent to his caste to British manufacturing industry *circa* 1959. He may have failed as an officer-cadet but nothing will stop him from becoming a leader of the New Elizabethan revolution and help to maintain Britain's rather illusory position as a world economic leader. 'In the ten years after 1955 there is an annual average of 2,251 strikes, involving 1,116,000 workers and resulting in 2,073,000 days lost' (figures cited in Aldgate and Ricards 1999: 174).

The trials proper of Windrush commence with a series of cod- newsreels that promises a vibrant future whilst the screen simultaneously displays images of obsolete Victorianism, parodying the propaganda of the Second World War, in which professional management was praised as a national resource. Angus Calder cites how:

To maintain a smooth and peaceful flow of work through increasingly large factories of increasingly interdependent workers, skilled management was essential. In 1939, its practitioners had remained rare in Britain. The war made them the heroes of the hour, the demigods of a new ideology. (1992:472-473)

Twenty years on, this ideology is seen to produce ill-run factories staffed by disinterested, unmotivated and notably unhygienic workers and away from the inherent archaism of Britain's establishment institutions, Stanley's bowler hat and neatly furled umbrella are as redolent of an already passing era as the prologue's Sir John (Peter Sellers) is. In *Jack* Windrush attempts to play the role of the dynamic young business executive but his values obdurately remain sincere and traditional. Stanley cannot escape the fact that he does not belong belongs to this England and the film's narrative details how he finally comes to realise this.

David Lusted refers to the Boultings' occasional penchant for 'surrealist-expressionist modernism' (2000: 189-190) and this is never more evident than in the opening reel of *I'm All Right Jack*. Since Stanley's first two interviews are with the forces of the post-war meritocracy, in the forms of a soap powder manufacturer and a confectionery factory and

so it is entirely befitting that his arrival at his first appointment heralded by dire ITV style advertising jingles. These sequences display the Boultings' attack on the superficial and the inane; even the setting of the climactic scene the fake-*Panorama* setting of ITV's *Argument* is curiously apposite; a derivative programme on a channel with an ersatz image of public service. Post-university Stanley is seen briskly marching towards a modernistic factory building yet, as an off-screen announcer stirringly proclaims that industry 'was working at high pressure to supply the vital needs for which the family had hungered for so long' it is ultimately seen to produce 'Num-Yum bars, Detto powder ('The New Black Whitener') and weapons of mass-destruction' (Petley 2000: 28).

In one sequence of *I'm All Right Jack* Liz Fraser's Cynthia Kite embraces Stanley in the latter's Heinkel CabinCrusier bubble car against a background of a municipal refuse tip, together with the Num-Yum chorus. It is a moment referred to by Dave Rollinson as 'a contrast between life and lifestyle' in a film as established by the 'Altherrsonian reading of "false needs"' (2003: 94) of the opening narration. Virtually everything Cynthia craves is artificial - her portable record player is made of plastic and the vocalists who she listens to are Britons vainly attempting to sing in an American idiom. In one sequence she enquires whether Stanley wears dentures, such is their whiteness and as for the Num-Yum bars themselves, they are as popular as they are artificial. Derek Oddy notes that in the late 1950s 'the willingness of consumers in Britain to accept processed food differed markedly from that in other European countries' (2003: 174)

At first sight the factory workers are those who would 'cheerfully exchange their last glimpse of freedom for a new car, a refrigerator and a TV screen' (Priestley 1957: 122) and certainly to the rank & file of the factory the *raison d'être* leans towards the upkeep of their HP payments but Durgnat makes the valid point that:

What's so up-lifting about humping crates about? If the boss pays as little as he can why shouldn't we work as little as we can? Isn't this middle class eager beaver (i.e. *Windrush*) showing us all up with his hot-shot efficiency, a bit of a pest? (Durgnat 1970: 71)

The fruits of affluence enjoyed by the factory workers – the car park is filled with recent models – but the Boultings do not disparage the shop floor workers as 'people who've got money but not the educational background to go with it'. (Willmott & Young 1960: pp.111-117) Nowhere in *I'm All Right Jack* is the inference that high wages equate with job satisfaction; Tracepurcel's mock patriotic to his workforce is cynically intended to cause

industrial dissatisfaction and is received as such. The factory reflects the world of Graham Turner's survey of the British motor industry *The Car Makers* – the 'Gold rush mentality' (1963: 116- 117) is balanced by production line duties that are 'just another form of Yogism—they automate your mind as well' (1963: 166).

If Stanley's colleagues do little actual work the Boultings also deftly establish both that the factory is indeed a bleak environment and that in *In I'm All Right Jack* the corrupt directorial and managerial classes are, if anything, less appealing the workforce. From *Private's Progress* we have Major Hitchcock as personnel manager, embodying an official who rose to his own level of incompetence whilst Bertram Tracepurcel is the now the definitive remittance man as incarnated in the form of a retired senior officer. The fullest example of cheapness flourishing in the Macmillan age is exemplified by Richard Attenborough's Cox has transformed from the initially amiable lead-swingler of the earlier film to a ruthless fraudster. Affluence has bought him an uneasily genteel accent, a loudly pinstriped suit and the inevitable Mk. VIIM Jaguar, complete with automatic gears and a customised paint finish and it is Cox, now cold of eye and distinctly menacing of manner, who offers Stanley a bribe in exchange for his resignation.

Furthermore, in place of a Jack Hawkins or a James Robertson Justice style paterfamilias, *Windrush* encounters virtually the whole spectrum of unprepossessing members and representatives of the Establishment. Ministerial and TUC spokesmen alike appear to speak entirely in clichés, 'Go on in if you're going', orders an indifferent young police Inspector (Roy Purcell) at the picket line whilst Raymond Huntley's magistrate, in a chilling little cameo, is stern, unfeeling – a figure far removed from the crustily benevolent stereotypes of the Boultings' own *Brothers in Law*. It is in their *I'm All Right Jack*, that such members of traditional squirearchy that populated post-war British films set in Tynan's Loamshire are becoming marginalised to either nudist colonies or living upon diminishing fixed incomes in their mildewing villas.

The only character in a position of authority who displays any vestige of community values is the shop steward Fred Kite (Peter Sellers). When the film entered production in 1958 strikes were headline news and one possible role model for Kite was the Briggs' body shop union leader Johnnie McLoughlin. In 1957 McLoughlin was fired, resulting in a strike. A subsequent Board of Enquiry, much reported by the British press, heard of 234 stoppages in five years and that McLoughlin was known as 'The Bellringer' due to his technique of calling his members out on strike (Kynaston 2013: 32). Kite is frequently heard to ruminate upon the

brotherhood of man and life in a worker's state ('all them cornflowers and ballet in the evenings') but on faced with the possibility of a threat to the status quo, his response is instant. 'You all heard what they said about working with coloured labour. Before you know it they'll have the blacks working here like they do on the buses in Birmingham!'

However, Kite is a far richer character than the film's other figures of cynically ersatz



authority and he is far more than a modern folk devil. As Michael Shanks noted of trades' union shop stewards of this period:

The average salaries range from £750 to £1,250 per year. This means that many full-time officials are being paid a good deal less than their members on the factory floor, though they are no doubt getting some "perks" which they would not get at the workbench. (1961: 94)

The main 'perks' for Kite are his own office cubicle, a de-mob suit and a small cohort of grim-faced acolytes and in terms of the class structure he is carefully negotiating the no-man's land between respectable working class and the petite bourgeoisie; Kite's voice now a strange mixture of London vowels overlain with a certain degree of gentility. Yet he is also an idealist and a devotee of self-improvement, reading tomes of political theory. In this Kite is completely unlike his daughter, whose addiction to third-rate pop music fills her father with despair, and his followers and acolytes. Their 'cultural competence is nil but whose desire for ease is paramount' (Harper and Porter 2003: 112) but if Kite can barely comprehend the tomes on his bookshelf then it might equally be the case that the union leader 'with his immensely laudable aspirations has, in fact, been educationally stunted by the class society in which he grew up'. (Marwick 1998: 120). The shop steward, who presumably had little formal schooling, is touchingly proud to have attended Balliol Summer School. He offers Stanley room & board as the prospect of a fellow 'Oxford man' joining the struggle of the proletariat is enticing indeed to him. It is a relationship that Aldgate and Richards see as being:

short-lived. Stanley is unwittingly timed working harder than the other men would like; new schedules are introduced and Kite calls a strike. At first Stanley is merely "sent to Coventry" but when he insists, as his Aunt's prompting...upon going to work, and breaks the picket line, he becomes a "blackleg" and is totally ostracized. (1999: 179)

But one of the major strengths of *I'm All Right Jack* is that Fred Kite's personal regard for Windrush is expressed in idiosyncratic but utterly sincere terms and it is this picket line confrontation that provides the best illustration of their relationship. The revelation that Stanley is Tracepurcel's nephew elicits not so much anger from Kite but more of a sense of hurt disappointment. In a film replete with figures of ersatz paternalism, Kite, in his odd fashion, is the closest to being a quasi-father figure to Stanley. This aspect of his persona is neatly illustrated by the fact that Windrush has been sent to Coventry provides no cause for his eviction from his house – in fact at the picket line Kite actually advises Stanley to 'go home' (i.e. back to his lodgings) to avoid the press.

After Stanley finally returns ‘to his own kind’ we see a forlorn and dejected Kite, abandoned by his family, and so desperate for company he even welcomes Major Hitchcock with an offer of Empire Burgundy. When Lusted describes the pair as ‘music hall clowns whose performances open up a reflexive space between the characters’ (Lusted 2000: 196) one

does wonder if he had been watching the same film. Although this unlikely pairing originates a formula for ending the National Strike, it is noticeable that Kite's primary motive is the return of his family (the Major expresses his gratitude for his own wife's continued absence). It is the quality of inherent sincerity, common to both Stanley and Kite, which will ultimately prevent them from becoming fully paid members of the affluent society. Our penultimate sight of Fred Kite is of his desperate attempts to quell the climatic riot with a vain appeal to his comrades' better natures - his earlier fears concerning his membership behaving like 'gabardine swine' (sic) have been fully realised. In the unseemly scramble which Stanley provokes at the climax of the film by throwing vast quantities of money around a television studio in front of a live studio audience; Kite is the only person who refuses to fight for it. Indeed, he appeals for self-control - and is immediately punched in the face for his pains. His Workers Educational Association ethos is as redolent of the past as his Fifty- Shilling Tailor suit.

The Boultings' affection for Stanley and his strange, awkward but sincere landlord is in sharp relief and their despair at the nihilistic attitudes of nearly every other character, for Windrush and Kite, both wish to see the good in their colleagues. At the film's climax Stanley denounces the selfish greed of everyone around him in the film's climatic television debate. Initially he is seen as a representative of the figures de-scribed by Anthony Sampson, where the Establishment has 'lost touch with the new worlds of science, industrial management and technology, and yet tries to apply old amateur ideals into technical worlds where they won't fit' (1962: 635). By the end of *I'm All Right Jack* he is despairing, disillusioned and with nothing left to do but retreat to the pastoral pleasures of a nudist colony. Stanley is now away from an England, where deference is threatened by as much by corrupt Establishment as by newly affluent workforce who refuse to consider any values: "I dissent" becomes "It's all baloney", a mockery of all principals and a willingness to destroy them. Cheerful debunking becomes an acid refusal to believe in anything' (Hoggart 1957: 274).

*I'm All Right Jack* has Windrush is at sea in a world he does not understand and the sequences of Stanley at the Victorian home of his Aunt Dolly (Margaret Rutherford) clearly portray him as much a part of this ethos as his elderly relative. When Stanley finally denounces his uncle, and all that he stands for, we cut to a shot of Aunt Dolly reacting in shock as, stood at the back of the room, her maid (Esma Cannon) and chauffeur (Enyon Evans) exchange sad glances of recognition. In *Private's Progress*, Cox and Tracepurcel are, at least, brought to justice but in *I'm All Right Jack*, by contrast, not only do the main villains go free, 'they receive the blessing of the court to boot' (Hill 1986:149). In the Boultings' films of an earlier

age, such as *Thunder Rock* ( Roy Boulting 1942), the idealistic hero would re-enter society from his isolated state with renewed purpose – by the end of the nineteen fifties, this sense of vigour has been succeeded by a sense of resigned isolation.

Our last sighting of Stanley Windrush is of his flight from a pack of naked female furies and as he disappears from view, the camera pans past a sign bearing the legend - ‘Danger - Beyond This Point You May Be Seen From The Road’ for outside of this naturist Loamshire there are real dangers. The viewpoint of the Boultings appears to be akin to that Michael Shanks, who blamed Britain’s declining economy on ‘Too much of our money has been invested in the wrong things, in the wrong way, often at the wrong time’ (1963: 30). The disillusionment felt by Stanley Windrush at the end of the film encapsulated a mood noted by some contemporary critics. Penelope Houston saw the film as looking ‘the work of soured liberals, men who have retired from the contest and are spending their time throwing stones at the characters’ (1959: 63). Meanwhile *The Monthly Film Bulletin* raged that:

Successful comedy is based on love of life, successful satire on indignation: the Boultings succeed in revealing neither, and their equivocal air of detachment can only produce the impression of a supercilious disinclination to come out into the open. This, in turn, presupposes an audience reaction of broad cynicism and facile denigration equal to the Boultings' own. (1959:133)

All of this was to ignore the Brothers’ despair at the nihilistic attitudes of nearly every other character, as contrasted with the well-meaning Windrush and Kite. Macnab compared Carmichael’s screen image of that of a Wodehouse hero, but Marwick was more accurate when he described the film’s ‘rather unhappy middle class elements’ (1998: 120) sandwiched between the corrupt upper classes and the consumerist working classes. Windrush is less Wooster displaced and more the central character of the Boultings’ very idiosyncratic and angry take on the fate of virtue in a bleak and plastic world.

### *Room at the Top*

One of the central paradoxes of *Room at the Top* was that Free Cinema was designed to celebrate the significance of the everyday but it was to commercial cinema that British filmgoers celebrated the everyday reality. Lindsay Anderson wrote in his *Encounter* article how with his Free Cinema short *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957) ‘Those good and friendly faces deserve a place of pride on the screens of their country; and I will fight for the notion of community which will give it to them’ (Anderson 1957: 22) but as Sandbrook rather tartly notes:

although the Free Cinema movement offered a good example of the frustration of many younger, artistically minded, directors, it could not compare with the widespread popularity and public effort of films like the first New Wave picture *Room at the Top*. (2005:204)

By the late 1950s, some major British films approached a ‘realist’ aesthetic – the aforementioned *Woman in a Dressing Gown* – and a few productions such as Rank’s *Tread Softly Stranger* (Gordon Parry 1958) were employing a regional background. When the film was released in 1959 some contemporary accounts linked it to the movements in British theatre and literature and *The Financial Times* notes the:

The notorious reluctance of the British cinema to consider the contemporary scene seems to be weakening. *Room at the Top* is only the first of a series of adaptations from works all vigorously concerned with aspects of life here and now which may very well revolutionise the absurd escapist philosophies which have deadened our film industry for so long. (Quoted in Zarhy-Levo 2010:236)

The background to the filming of *Room at the Top* in 1958 owes an arguably equal debt to the decline of the British studio system caused by the fall in box office receipts and to the change in censorship regulations. John Trevelyan, a former schoolmaster, was appointed as Secretary to the British Board of Film Censors in July 1958. Trevelyan believed that in a rapidly changing society films would also have to change and in his memoirs he argued that:

In my time at the Board we worked on a general policy of treating with as much tolerance and generosity as possible any film which seemed to have both quality and integrity, and being much less tolerant of films which appeared to us to have neither of these qualifications. (Trevelyan 1973: 66-67)

Because of the nature of its story, *Room at the Top* would attract an X Certificate, which had been introduced in January 1951 for filmgoers aged over 16. When Trevelyan became Secretary in July 1958 he believed that the X certificate deserved more than being associated

with horror films. At the end of that year he was approached by the trade body the British Film Producers' Association who wished to revive the 'H' (for horror) certification - which had been superseded by the X certificate - on the grounds that 'the current vogue for horror films and the danger of its bringing the industry into disrepute'(Aldgate 1995:51).

To a certain extent *Room at the Top* was a production that Trevelyan was hostage to by timing and commercial circumstance. Romulus took care to submit *Room at the Top* to the BBFC fairly close to the final cut stage leaving Trevelyan with little opportunity to make significant changes. This also represented a gamble on the part of the Woolf brothers that Trevelyan would 'shrink from imposing the punitive costs which would be involved in a substantial rebooting of the film (Marwick 1998: 123-124). The battle for respectability concerning the X certificate was a genuine one; the Rank Organisation had a blanket ban on 'non-family' films: Dirk Bogarde recounted in his memoirs how his employer thwarted his attempts to make a film of Braine's novel (1979: 170).

Stuart Laing brackets the screen version of *Room at the Top* with the film of *Lucky Jim* as clear instances of established cinema entrepreneurs seeing the commercial possibilities of specific novels and adapting them accordingly' (1986: 117) and when John Braine's novel was published in 1957 Romulus Films saw its potential. Ironically for a production intended to tempt cinemagoers away from their television screen the firm's co-founder John Woolf heard of it via the BBC TV's *Panorama* (Sinai 2003: 232). Romulus initially considered casting Stewart Granger but after this idea was (mercifully) discounted, the Woolfs chose Laurence Harvey to play Joe Lampton. Richard Dyer cites Brigitte Bardot as an example of a star 'whose films may actually be less important than other aspects of their career' (1998: 61) and this also applies to Harvey prior to *Room at the Top*.

Throughout most of the 1950s Laurence Harvey was an actor who managed to generate column inches via his devoted pursuit of publicity but asides from his previously encountered feline villain of *The Good Die Young* is work for Romulus encompassed several typically 1950s juvenile leads for which his talents appeared utterly unsuited. The Lithuanian-born South African Jewish Zvi Moise Skikne provides the perfect example of how British film stardom illustrates the 'tension between the democratic ideal that you do not have to be well-bred or rich to become a star, and the British class system which would nevertheless keep you in your place' (Street 1997:146).

By 1959, the growing box office and critical popularity of Stanley Baker might have rendered Harvey's brand of decadent charm as redolent of a previous era but the role of Lampton allowed the actor's own insecurities to be displayed on celluloid. Neither the director nor Harvey spared any effort in contrasting Joe's handsome appearance with the character's fundamental weakness. It could also be argued that the ambitious outsider of post-war British cinema was ideal for the role of Joe Lampton - the young actor was known to reflect on how he 'was looked on as a cocky intruder' (Harvey quoted in Sinai 2003: 81) in 1950s theatrical circles. Certainly, Harvey was more of an outsider than New Wave stars such as Albert Finney,

the son of a prosperous Manchester bookmaker<sup>45</sup>, and Jack Clayton believed that:

Harvey might not have an authentic Bradford accent, but Clayton knew that he did have another kind of authenticity. Who better to play someone talented, aggressive, ambitious, arrogant, with a huge chip on his shoulder but also bags of charm and self-confidence? (Sinyard 2000:40)

A further element that made *Room at the Top* so distinctive at the time of its release was in its use of the provincial landscape. Earlier British films of this decade had made adroit use of the industrial areas the Liverpool of *The Magnet* (Charles Frennd 1950) and *Violent Playground*, Stoke on Trent in *Hunted* (Charles Crichton 1952) and Yorkshire in *Tread Softly Stranger*. However, these were comedy or crime genre pictures whereas Lampton is neither a comical nor a criminal outsider but one making a journey of class within the subtle gradients of small town life. John Hill argued of the New Wave films that their outsiders' view articulates 'a clear distance between observer and observed' (1986: 4) but *Room at the Top* is itself concerned with the outsider as protagonist. Joe Lampton is a vulnerable and deracinated individual confronting a local establishment that is utterly self-centred; the moment when Joe returns to the bombsite that used to be his family home in Dufton and Harvey's softly inflected sad remark to a little girl playing there 'It used to be mine too' infers that there can be no return. Hill complained about the cultural visual tourism of the Kitchen Sink films (1986: 132-133) but in *Room at the Top* the factories of the West Yorkshire locations are mainly seen in the background and there is no attempt to evoke 'the beautiful and poetic' (Higson 1984: 136).

The backgrounds of Bradford, then a mill town of belching factories and massive brick edifices. Romulus's own publicity placed heavy emphasis on *Room at the Top*'s 'Where the smoke comes from!'— but the opening shots emphatically establish that Lampton is leaving his old life. Even his confrontation with Abe Brown (Donald Wolfitt), his future father-in-law, is within the confines of the local Conservative Club. *Room at the Top* does not feature the panoramic shots of the local town as seen in so many of the Kitchen Sink films as this is not Joe's real home and that house at the top is precisely where he wishes to be. There are none of diatribes against popular culture as seen in other Kitchen Sink films. Arthur Seaton may bemoan his father's television viewing in *Saturday Night & Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz 1960) and in *A Kind of Loving* (John Schlesinger 1962) Vic Brown's shotgun marriage sees him removed from his authentic class values to a nightmare suburbia of ITV quiz shows in the evening. In the Blackpool day trip sequence of *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson 1961) Peter Smith (Robert Stephens) drives a Vauxhall Victor Super, a surreal Luton interpretation of a 1956 Pontiac, is paralleled by dreadful British rock & roll music on the soundtrack as a



<sup>45</sup> As stated by Finney in *Acting in the Sixties* (Hal Burton 1970).

nightmare of Tin Pan Alley. But Joe Lampton's focus is on social advancement, as he evidently believes that it is:

only from a class position outside the city that the city can appear beautiful... pictorialism can only really be achieved by placing the camera in the room at the top of the hill; that is, in the house which belongs to the factory owner. (Higson 1996: 151)

During the war Lampton used his talents and intelligence for his own self-preservation and the brief visit to the bombed ruin of his childhood home makes the divide between Joe's pre-war and post-war lives explicit. Both the POW camp and the factory chimneys are now far behind but the attractions of suburbia are limited; lower-middle class community values are anathema to this former Flight Sergeant. John Braine remarked of the film that part of its novelty was in:

presenting a boy from the working classes not as a downtrodden victim, but as he really was. It wasn't important that Joe Lampton was honest about sex, what was important was that Joe was honest about the whole business of class. Most ambitious working class boys want to get the hell out of the working class. That was a simple truth that had never been stated before. (Braine quoted in Murphy 1992: 13)

Lampton may cry out during an amateur dramatic performance that he is 'working class and proud of it!' but this is seen to be demonstrably false as he subsequently observes that 'when I was a POW there was...a limit to the time served, but Dufton...that seemed like a lifetime sentence'. Escaping is the central theme of the film – Joe has spurned the chance to break-out from a POW camp in order to plan a form of personal escape via education – 'What did I have to escape for?'<sup>46</sup> Lampton's achievement in passing his cost accountancy exams was, as Adrian Gilbert points out, a phenomena that was not unknown in the Second World War and indeed, with the co-operation of both German and Allied authorities 'it worked surprisingly well in practice. Exams certainly helped counteract POW inertia' (2006: 85). The range of examinations were provided via the British Red Cross included:

6,091 different papers from 136 examining bodies including Cambridge University, the Royal Horticultural Society and the School of Oriental Languages. Eleven POWs sat the ordination exam for the Church of England...Men studied most subjects offered by universities, as well as more practical subjects such as flour milling, hotel management, occupational therapy, papermaking and stock exchange dealing. (Gillies 2011:278)

Joe rages that 'Those three years (in a German POW camp) were the only chance I had to educate myself', seeing escape attempts as the prerogative of the officer caste who (as he bitterly observes) have something to escape for. Hill also contends that the British New Wave was more traditional than it initially appears, citing how the issue of class was either never directly tackled or 'conceived in such a way that its significance was undercut' (1986: 179).

<sup>46</sup> Under the terms of the Geneva Convention, officer-prisoners could not be put to manual work. They therefore had all the time in the world to dream up escape plans while Other Ranks were kept far too busy at work to have any energy left for digging tunnels.

This does not apply to *Room at the Top*, which is explicitly concerned with Lampton's further escape bid from his post-war suburban destiny. His passing of his accountancy examinations has placed Joe on the lower rungs of the middle classes but the town clerk Mr. Hoylake, played by Raymond Huntley at his most lugubrious, offers a distinctly unenviable template for the future.

The disillusioned lower-middle classes was a faint but definite theme of British cinema of our period. Edwards, the coffee plantation manager in *The Rake's Progress* who makes deadpan comments about his position and Henry Holland in *The Lavender Hill Mob* internalizes years of overlooked potential. In *Only Two Can Play* (Sidney Gilliat 1962) there is one particular moment that encapsulates all of the frustration felt by under-employed graduates (and especially graduate research students) the world over. Peter Sellers' John Lewis - librarian and part time provincial drama critic - lies back in his seedy armchair, surveys his truly grim lodgings and bemoans his current fate: 'What did I do it for? Why did I spend my time cramming for degrees if all I do now is stare at the vomit-coloured wallpaper?'

Meanwhile, Superintendent Halloram in *Town on Trial* fulminates about his delayed promotion prospects and Bland in *Chance of a Lifetime* wears his professional status to shield himself against the plebs and re-signs rather than be employed by 'a bunch of half-baked Bolshies'. He drinks in the saloon bar away from the overall-wearing *hoi polloi* and when Radford's MD stands on a box, to address the mutinous workforce, stands alongside him on a smaller one; the British class system in microcosm<sup>67</sup>. 'In complete contrast to the paternalistic Dickinson, Bland is filmed in shadow like a predatory power-hungry school prefect' (Street 2000: 73).

Harry Hopkins claimed that when half of British people described themselves as 'middle class' this proved that 'in this England of the Fifties it had finally become impossible to describe the social present in terms of the social past' (1964: 346) but Halloram, Lewis, Lampton, and Stanley Baker's Inspector Morgan in *Blind Date* would most probably disagree. In one respect they are prime examples of the scholarship boy in that they are at 'the friction-point of two cultures' (Hoggart 1957: 292) but unlike the cowed figures in *The Uses of Literacy* - 'afraid of all that has to be obeyed' (298) - one particular element that binds these disparate characters is their discernible sense of imprisonment and anger. *Room at the Top* is set in the immediate post-war era but Lampton's barred social progress reflects the experiences of those who were given their opportunity of a grammar school education by the 1944 Education Act but who 'found they had nowhere to go' (Feldman and Gartenberg 1960: 10).

What especially angers Joe Lampton is that his hard-won skills and qualifications are apparently not in themselves sufficient for them to move up the British social scale. Even when

the scholarship boy apparently does so, support and welcome are not guaranteed; Morgan is warned by his superior officer that a Detective Inspector needs more than ‘a constable’s mentality’ if he wishes to achieve further advancement. In the flawed but interesting *Tiara Tahiti* (Ted Kotcheff 1962) John Mills’ peacetime office wallah and wartime Lieutenant Colonel Southey is forever being baited by James Mason’s caddish Captain Aimsley both during the war and afterwards – ‘For you I will always be a little clerk’. Throughout the film, Lampton experiences similar levels of frustration.

Charles Drazin notes of *Saturday Night & Sunday Morning*, the film that established Woodfall as a commercial force, that it embodied Free Cinemas’ manifesto’s advocacy of ‘the individual over the group... a rejection of the fixed rules that underpin the existence of any group, movement or institution’ (2014: 307). Arthur Seaton defiantly states that ‘I’m me and nobody else. Whatever people say I am, that’s what I’m not because they don’t know a bloody thing about me!’ but Joe has studied hard and has played by the rules, albeit for his own ends. Indeed, *Room at the Top* was made at a time when the eager young cadet would naturally look to paternal authority figures for guidance and when ‘Rank, Davis, and Balcon all thought that social progress had to come from a benevolent moral order which required due deference from the worker’ (Harper and Porter 2003: 167).

But Lampton faces little but sneers and derision from the officer caste in his battle for self-improvement. It is difficult not to agree with Jeffrey Richards’ assertion that in his battle for self-improvement he faces a conservative and conformist working class, in the form of his surviving family members and a self-made middle class who wish to guard the status quo (1997: 150). The confrontation between Joe with Abe Brown, a middle-aged and self-made magnate, is more of a generational collision than that of a social clash. It is Brown’s wife, played with icy disdain by Ambrosine Phillpotts and the ex RAF officer Jack Wales, a figure played by John Westbrook as far more derisive towards Joe than in the novel – ‘Sergeant-Observer eh? I can always tell’ - who depict the upper classes with such an unsympathetic light. As Neil Sinyard argues ‘When Lampton retaliates against Wales’ sneering address of him as “Sergeant” he is signaling a new direction not only for himself but for British film. He refuses to accept deference based on tradition rather than talent, to genuflect instinctively to the officer class’ (2000: 47).

If the local business class and gentry illustrate William Donaldson’s contention in *The Angry Decade* that the ‘middle and upper classes were philistines’ (quoted in Allsop 1959: 137) the one redeeming member of the community is Alice Aisgill, the 35 year old wife of a

prominent local solicitor and Lampton's main love. In the book the character is English but the casting of Simone Signoret makes Alice almost as much of an outsider as Joe, her accent

concealing her social origins from British ears. It is Alice who sees through Joe's mask of surliness and the subtle manner in which he gradually thaws under the influence of Alice and his pleasure in bringing her happiness – Street points out how 'Signoret's voice beautifully complemented the occasional soft tones of co-star Laurence Harvey's (imitation) northern accent' (1997: 140) - is contrasted with his fundamental cowardice.

Hall and Whannel compared 'the almost bearable inhibitions of *Brief Encounter*' with 'the quality of emotional life' (1964: 220) of *Room at the Top* yet both films are about entrapment and escape. Celia Johnson's Laura is trapped by her gender and her own neuroses - her husband Fred (Cyril Raymond) is a far more sensitive figure than her reverie would suggest) and Joe by a toxic combination of class prejudice and his own immaturity. When *Room at the Top* was released in January 1959 amidst a blaze of Romulus's publicity concerning sexual frankness – 'A Savage Story of Lust and Ambition' - and the French leading lady – the film's overall mood is seemingly an excoriating one. Marwick is slightly mistaken when he argues that the Lampton of the novel was 'fastidious and self-questioning whereas in the film Joe is 'straight forwardly predatory' (1998: 125).

For all of his surface glamour, Harvey's Lampton is essentially an adolescent; his desperate longing to claim what he believes to be his rights occur at the expense of any future happiness. Clayton was less interested in the film's social arguments than the human story - 'It was infinitely more truthful about relationships between people than films in that genre that had preceded it' (Clayton quoted in Walker 1974: 53). The PR material for the film may have held out the promise of 'A Savage Story of Lust and Ambition' a scrutiny of the poster tells another story - Harvey is not so much embracing Signoret as clinging to her for support. In Sinyard's words 'Alice has suggested to Lampton that he puts more ardour into their embraces. 'I'm not fragile' she says, smiling. 'I won't break'. But she is: she will'(2000:60).

And so will Joe by the end of the film, having exchanged one perceived trap for a seeming lifetime of middle class hell for conclusion has Joe marrying into moneyed status - presumably in much the same way as his own father-in-law did some thirty years earlier. Braine describes in the novel how Joe 'wanted an Aston Martin, I wanted a three guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Rivera suntan – these were my rights' (1957: 28- 29) and on his arrival in Warley we see him cast a covetous look at a parked Lagonda. This vignette is mirrored in a conclusion that has Lampton riding towards 'the top' in an even more exclusive marque of car. But his ride in the Bentley towards the top is suffused with a memory of Hoylake's description of Alice's fatal car accident.



If Lampton is the figure that represents the moral and ethical compromises presented by attempting to partake in a consumerist society so Stanley Windrush is seen to have opted for a

world of deliberately heightened whimsy, residing in the isolation of a nudist colony. Unlike the denizens of Titfield, Windrush did sully forth into the brave new world only to find his virtues now ultimately surplus to requirements. Both *Room at the Top* and *I'm All Right Jack* display an equal sense of ambivalence towards the notion of the affluent society and of community, especially the deeply flawed paternal figures; the brutal Abe Brown, who refers to Alice Aisgill as an 'old whore' and the lonely, defensive figure of Fred Kite. The cadets we have previously encountered often enjoy total security of within their worlds – bearded gentlemen on a regular basis may call them a 'miserable worm' but they are ultimately assured of their relevance and worth.

Robert Fairclough very accurately points out that Ian Carmichael rather brilliantly builds Stanley's indignation and rage 'through a speech of dawning affronted realisation' (Fairclough 2011:78) in the ITV discussion programme. *I'm All Right Jack* begins with Sellers in a cameo as the elderly gentleman-businessman 'on his way out' and by the end credits Windrush has nowhere to go but a rural nudist nirvana for dispossessed gentlemen. But Lampton lacks even such roots or family and the final shot of a desperate figure who fears his past, has lost his self-belief and faces a materially comfortable but insecure and guilt-ridden future. The moment when Alice laments that Joe Lampton 'had it in you to be better than all of them' is one of ineffable sadness – she was right.

## CHAPTER 11 Social Problem Dramas 1960 - 1963

During the later 1950s and early 1960s, a number of British directors associated with the cinematic mainstream used the new realism that occurred in the commercial and critical wake of *Room at the Top* to develop their own ideas in an atmosphere of more liberal censorship. Three films directed by Basil Dearden - *Sapphire* (1959), *Victim* (1961) and *Life for Ruth* (1962) - offer once familiar icons of apparent stability, such as doctors and senior police officers, in apparently familiar surroundings viewed in a new and more disturbing light. Janet Green who scripted *Sapphire* and *Life for Ruth*, and who co-wrote *Victim* with John McCormick, employs melodramatic framework but this can convey a devastating level of social critique often with no sense of reassurance or reconciliation by the final reel.

The earliest of these films commences with a 'half-caste' music student, one who had passed for 'white', found dead on Hampstead Heath, with Nigel Patrick's Superintendent Hazard and Michael Craig's Inspector Learoyd arriving to investigate the crime – apparently the epitome of the senior police officer as fatherly Good chap and cadet-like pin-up. The narrative was an extremely timely one, given that shooting commenced in November 1958, only two months after the Notting Hill race riots. Against this historical background

Sapphire's attitude to race can best be described as confused but brave. As Marcia Landy has noted, Green's screenplay 'fuses the notion of black-ness with female desire and sexuality' (1991: 477) and early in the narrative Superintendent Hazard on searching the dead girl's room, looks in the chest of drawers and sees the red lace undergarments she evidently wore beneath her demure tweed skirt student outfit. His Inspector describes this as 'the black under the white' and as John Hill argues:

The flaw of the film, however, is that its ascriptions of natural qualities is not natural at all, but the projection of its own culture's values, values which form part of the problem and not a solution to it. (1986: 89)

This truly bizarre observation (is boiled white cotton the only hallmark of purity?) is made by the young Inspector rather than his more experienced and worldly Superintendent. The detectives' investigation into Sapphire's 'other life', almost inevitably for a Dearden film, will involve the evils of popular music and so mid-way in the narrative, we enter 'Tulip's Club', a seedy dive of jazz, overpriced beer, and populated by approximately several dozen Commonwealth low lives, all seemingly named 'Johnnie'. At one point the camera cuts to Hazard's point of view, we see an apparently white woman dancing with ecstatic abandon and a further point of view shot, reminiscent of Joan Collins' encounter with Laurence Harvey in *I Believe in You*, now reveals the women to be dancing with a black man. Mr. Tulip, the smooth-sinister proprietor, informs the police that 'your chick was a lily skin wasn't she... you can always tell once they hear the beat of the bongo.'

In such admittedly crass moments *Sapphire* seems to imply that African or West Indian communities will always be outsiders; the calypso beat will out. A further problem is that Green's script does not go beyond the surface of individual black identity – the Bermudian Earl Cameron plays Sapphire's GP brother, yet the character's back-ground is given simply as 'black', with no other detail as to his own history. But the actor's dignified, sensitive performance as Dr. Robbins essays a character who is a world removed from Tulip, a sardonic graduate of the Herbert Lom/Martin Benson School of Club Proprietors, and the narrative does cover a varied cross section of humanity. Sapphire's dancing partner Johnnie Fiddle (Harry Baird) is described by his fellow boarding house inmates as 'a big bushman' and during his flight from the police is turned away by two of his compatriots as 'bringing trouble to respectable folk'; to them he is as much a delinquent figure as the gang of white Teds who subsequently menace him. Her previous boy-friend Paul Slade (Gordon Heath), a confident

and condescending barrister with First XI manners, informs Hazard that Sapphire being part white would have ruled out him marrying her.

Nigel Patrick's raffish screen persona, as established in *Noose* (Edmond T. Gréville 1948) a decade earlier, alternated commissioned officers with charming confidence tricksters

throughout the 1950s, and the actor adds a certain humanity to what could have been a stock character. His performance as Hazard subtly captures a middle-aged professional who is determined that his liberal sentiments are matched by the appropriate behaviour. The police - and, by proxy, the audience - initially assume Sapphire Robbins to be white, so the appearance of her black brother is genuinely astonishing. Earl Cameron recalled that:

There was some heavy make-up on me though. They were trying to get my skin as dark as possible to get the contrast. As dark as they could get it because Sapphire looked white, and when I first appear to the two detectives, who had come to see her brother, they were surprised. (Interviewed by Guha and Brundson 2009: 131)

It is how the Superintendent then responds that is crucial to understanding his character. ‘Sanctimonious’, sneers Paul Slade later in the film, but by then we have already seen that Hazard is a courteous professional involved in a situation that is new to him. ‘It is also my job’ he reassures Dr. Robbins, in sharp contrast to Craig’s insecure young Phil Learoyd who displays an immature streak of racism almost from the first reel. *Sapphire* does have limitations of this approach to criticizing the police; when Johnnie Fiddle (Harry Baird) accuses the Inspector of framing him it is demonstrably ludicrous within the confines of a standard 1950s British police narrative.

But, equally, *Sapphire* also displays the variations possible within the detective thriller formula and Michael Craig’s vulpine good looks were cleverly used by Dearden to portray an overambitious young professional who illustrates the self-defeating nature of racism. The Inspector’s prejudiced obsession with stereotyping Sapphire’s ‘black origins’ are seen to mask the sharp mind of one who has made a senior rank at a comparatively young age; Learoyd suggests a large pram could have carried the victim’s body and his investigations ultimately exculpates Fiddle as a murder suspect. What the Inspector has in common with Sapphire’s two landladies, and unlike his superior officer is, in the words of Lola Young, the concern with the discovering the alien origins of one who ‘passes for white’ - ‘the important concern is that such an identification is made’ (1996: 45).

Sapphire’s first rooms were in the home of a middle-aged lady who explains Sapphire’s eventual expulsion in the grounds of her colour with a remark of such venom that even the experienced Hazard is taken aback. The second was unaware of Sapphire’s racial origins until her brother calls to collect her belongings. Her anger at Sapphire’s student friend and fellow lodger is a blend of racism and shabby-genteel poverty that the film refrains from moralising against and indeed pervades the entire drama. Harry Waxman’s cinematography captures a cold

autumnal vision of a harsh London landscape far removed from the jovialities of a contemporary Box-Thomas comedy. The background to the murder enquiry is of a mist-strewn city with an aspidistra apparently in every window and Sapphire's corpse is found in a

Hampstead Heath of sage greens and rusts. Dearden stated that he wanted to contrast this drab urban vista with ‘the sudden splashes of colour introduced by the coloured people themselves’ (Dearden quoted in Edwards 1958:15).

In 1950 *The Blue Lamp* the opening narration establishes the clear-cut solution to social ills but by 1959 *Sapphire* leaves open any questions of societal obligation or morality and the film continually subverts our assumptions. The initial appearance of Dr. Robbins is an early example but Johnnie Fiddle, an apparently menacing West Indian, is far less vicious than the Teddy boys who attack him and Learoyd also postulates that the murder was carried out by ‘a hysterical frightened boy’ only to discover that a housewife is the villain. Yvonne Mitchell’s pathetically human villainess finds her home is not so much a castle but a prison. Charles Barr cites Orwell’s observations on ‘the privateness of English life’ (1993: 90) in his description of George Dixon’s home but in *Sapphire* the Harris’ dark and dank looking villa is lit as to create a sense of claustrophobia. The frowsy interior is redolent of the lower-middle class gloom typified by the 1958 *Sunday Afternoon at Home* episode of *Hancock’s Half Hour*, in which the inmates of 23 Railway Cuttings sit around in bored apathy.

The two CID officers are as much outsiders to this London of suburban inertia as they are to seedy boarding houses, nocturnal cafes and nightclubs: the Superintendent does not even leave the leather-upholstered comfort of his highly polished squad car to speak to Rupert Davies’s local beat bobby, the narrative’s virtual Dixon figure. John Hill sees the film’s locus of violence as the Harris villa and ‘the sexual repression that’s within’ (1986: 88) – her merchant seaman husband has more or less abandoned Millie – but an equally valid interpretation is that of class envy. Millie Harris commits murder partially out of her perceived loss social of status through having a ‘coloured’ sister-in-law.

When Millie finally explodes with loathing at Dr. Robbins, it is a scene that displays a toxic blend of rage, prejudice and fear - yet Raymond Durnat very pertinently notes that ‘Respectability is hardly a silly vanity’ (1997: 78) for it can have real consequences. We have already met with *Sapphire*’s second landlady: ‘I run a white house...this is my living. If parents found out....’ but Millie Harris commits murder partially out of her perceived loss social of status through having a ‘coloured’ sister-in-law. Lola Young notes that *Sapphire*’s desire to pass as white was ‘not necessarily to be perceived as solely as a desire not to be black, it is as much to do with the desire to have access to the privilege invested in whiteness by white people’ (1996: 96). This echoes comments made at the time of the film’s release by Dai Vaughan in *Films and Filming* – ‘Is it true that in London student circles a girl would have to



“pass for white” in order to cultivate the society of white people?” (cited in Burton and O’Sullivan 2009: 231). But Sapphire Robins lives in a country where the government warn

immigrants from Africa and the West Indies to expect ‘to be refused because you are coloured. You must expect to meet this in Britain’ (*How to Adjust Yourself in Britain*, cited in Sandbrook 2005:330). Her brother reflects to the Superintendent how racism dating from his childhood affects him still – ‘something rubbed off on me’. The bitter irony is that as she is a student and her brother is a GP, both Robbins siblings representing a ‘privileged’ place on the middle class hierarchy that Mildred Harris so desperately craves for herself and her daughters.

Victor Perkins argued that *Sapphire* was filled with stereotypes and that it failed as both thriller and social problem film – ‘These pictures are particularly offensive in assuming that their holy platitudes are too loftily intellectual to be accepted by audiences unless the pill of wisdom is sweetened with spurious excitement’ (1962: 5) but Dearden does not offer any glib solutions. The sheer power of the performances from both Mitchell – her eyes filled with a toxic blend of middle age despair, prejudice and envy – and Cameron in the denouement gives lie to any idea that the film lacks passion. Robert Murphy believes that in *Sapphire* the ‘liberal enlightened authorities’ (1992: 79) are in control and Durgat sees the final shot as a reverent look at the police car as it returns Hazard and Learoyd to Scotland Yard (1970:76) but the conclusion reads as far less consensual.

The moral authority the Superintendent represents ‘no longer derives from a network of community values’ (Hill 1986: 83), although this was already partially the case with *The Blue Lamp*. There, the CID officers are removed by rank and social background from the uniformed beat officers but all forces of the community unite to expel the alien criminal element. But *Sapphire* ends with Hazard, a senior Establishment figure who is professional and dedicated, contemplating how he cannot resolve the underlying problems of a fragmented society<sup>47</sup>.

The two themes of flawed protagonist and of coping with a problematic world coalesced in *Victim*. Following the impact of *Sapphire* Relph and Dearden planned their next ‘social conscience film’, to be concerned with an apparently successful, happily married barrister who is a covert homosexual and when his boyfriend commits suicide he attempts to uncover the blackmail ring that led to the young man’s death. Green composed the screenplay against background of, as Jeffrey Weeks describes it, ‘the growth of official concern and public anxiety to which police zeal was a response’ (1981: 240). In 1954, the *cause célèbre* of this ‘zeal’ with regard to the Montagu Case<sup>48</sup> led to press coverage that was not unsympathetic

<sup>47</sup> Kelso Cochrane, a 32 year old Antiguan carpenter, was stabbed

to death in Notting Hill on 17th May 1959 within days of the film's release. His murder remains unsolved.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Montagu and the film director Kenneth Hume took two boy scouts to a beach hut at Beaulieu for a bathe, where Montagu subsequently reported a stolen

in detailing ‘illegal searches, tampering with evidence and denial of access of legal counsel’ (Conrad 2004: 35). *The Sunday Times*’ reporter concluded that ‘The case for the reform of the law as it stands as to acts committed in private is very strong. The case for an authoritative enquiry into it is overwhelming’ (quoted in Kynaston 2009: 374). A month after the trial of Lord Montagu David Maxwell-Fyffe, the then Home Secretary, agreed to the appointment of a departmental committee to examine and report on the laws relating to homosexuality. Sir John Wolfenden chaired the committee and the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, published on September 3rd 1957, concluded that:

homosexuality cannot legitimately be regarded as a disease, because in many cases it is the only symptom and is compatible with full mental health in other respects. It is not, in our view, the function of the law to intervene in the private life of citizens, or to seek to enforce any particular pattern of behaviour. (Wolfenden 1957: para 28)

Unlike British theatre, where the Lord Chamberlain’s censorship policy had banned plays with a homosexual theme until 1957, there was never any explicit bar to films tackling the subject. By 1959 the BBFC did pass, albeit with an X certificate, *Serious Charge*, which concerned a hooligan (Andrew Ray) falsely accusing a vicar of molesting him. The following year saw two further breakthroughs with separate portrayals of Oscar Wilde by Robert Morley and Peter Finch. When John Trevelyan saw a draft script for *Victim* in early 1960, he noted the contrast between ‘something that was historical fact...the real details relating to homosexuality appeared largely in the clinical atmosphere of the Court’ (Trevelyan quoted in Robertson 1993:122) and a drama focused on a ‘respectable’ character in contemporary London. Indeed, *Victim* was rejected a Production Code seal in the USA, a decision upheld by the Appeals Board because it ‘dealt with the subject of sex perversion far beyond their intent’ (ruling quoted in Benshoff 2007:80).

The initial choice of leading man was Jack Hawkins and after he t James Mason and Stewart Granger were briefly considered before Rank’s Earl St, John suggested Dirk Bogarde (Dux 2012:206). As with *Sapphire* Janet Green’s screenplay ensured that there was at least one sympathetic police officer in the form of John Barrie’s Detective-Inspector. Outside of Pinewood there were claims that the police were not so scrupulously fair - ‘I don’t think

camera to Hampshire Constabulary. However, the boys claimed that they had been indecently assaulted and Montagu was charged by the police with both committing an unnatural offence and an indecent assault. At his trial, Montagu was acquitted of committing an unnatural offence but the jury disagreed on the lesser charge and the DPP decided that Montagu and Hume should be tried again for indecent assault. Three

weeks later Michael Pitt-Rivers, a cousin of Montagu, and Peter Wildeblood, a journalist, were also arrested and their premises were searched without a warrant prior to their being charged with indecency against two RAF servicemen in a beach hut at the Pitt-Rivers estate in Dorset.

there's much more than mild physical violence, but they're not above threatening more if they think it will persuade a person to plead guilty' (Anon quoted in Westwood 1960:142). Derek Hill, writing about British film censorship in general, claimed that 'John Trevelyan has said that he regrets films which show the police as inefficient' (1960: 56). Barrie's idealised Establishment figure was the price of the BBFC passing the eventual film for general release and so Inspector Harris is an utterly fair-minded and professional character who is obliged to enforce an antiquated law. Green's screenplay does not endorse homosexuality *per se* and has the blackmailed as victims both of the extortionists and their 'condition'.

John Hill notes that 'Although the film's primary concern is to appeal for legal reform...it does so in a context which identifies gays not only as victims of crime but as victims of nature itself' (1986: 91). Eight years before the release of *Victim* the historian Rupert Croft-Cooke was sentenced to nine months imprisonment for homosexual offences, the judge reassuring the court of his lack of prejudice: 'I know a waiter in my club who is a flaming pansy...I do not dislike him. I do not watch him. It is all right until you are caught' (quoted in Morley 2002: 264). 'All right until you are caught' is the film's virtual subtext, the 'little men' of Norman Bird's second-hand book dealer, Nigel Stock's car dealer Pip and Peter McEnery's 'Boy' Barratt all living in in fear. An interviewee in Richard Hauser's *The Homosexual Society* made the observation that:

If a man in a responsible position is convicted he will be utterly crushed. Whatever he does he cannot recover, even if the charge is (criminally speaking) of less gravity than dangerous driving. Killing a person on the road by driving while drunk costs you neither job nor friends. But loving a man of twenty- one or more can be a crime for which there is no forgiveness. (1962:99)

In a roadside café, where a jukebox blares out Jimmy Crawford's *Long Tall Honey*, Barratt responds with stark terror to the sight of a police Wolseley emerging from the darkness. His wages fraud is the result of his paying off blackmailers but his reaction to the police car is indicative of a whole sector of society who live in fear. Dennis Price's West End leading man Calloway, Anthony Nicholls' Lord Fulbrook and Peter Copley's Paul Mandrake are apparent men of the world who all pay the blackmailer as a price for their 'condition' but they still remain victims. One notable exception is Barratt's quick-witted best friend Eddie and Durnat rightly observes how Donald Churchill's performance displays the character's 'gift for quick, generous friendship' (1997:81).

The plot has Farr tracing the reason for Barratt's suicide and it is he, rather than the Inspector and his cynical sergeant (John Cairney), who is our guide to this subterranean

London. Unlike *Sapphire*, where Hazard and Learoyd are CID officers, Melville Farr occupies an ambiguous position of an Establishment figure as outsider. It is his renewed sense of guilt over his role in the suicide of Barrett that begins his crusade and Farr is a pivotal figure in

illustrating the dichotomy between realising a part of one's nature widely then seen as a form of handicap - or repressing it altogether. We first see Farr in his chambers and then at his mews house, backgrounds that infer old money whilst the Bristol 406 in the garage assuming old-fashioned values combined with a certain raffishness.

When Eddie meets Farr he remarks on how the boy's fate might have been avoided had someone cared for him and in the plot reflects *The Intruder* with the barrister as the Establishment figure seeking to discover the factors that led to the boy's suicide. This negotiation of the divide between the 'straight world' and the gay demi-monde is a journey undertaken partially through guilt of failing in his duty towards his younger, vulnerable and working class would-be lover. The barrister's journey through London, both literal and metaphysical, is a virtual negation of the tabloid exposes of the previous decade such as Douglas Warth's *Evil Men* articles in the *Sunday Pictorial* published in May and June of 1952. The opening lines of the series read thus – 'the natural tendency to pass over anything unpleasant in scornful silence is providing cover for a very unnatural sex vice which is gaining a grip on this country' (1952: 12).

The series described a cartography of sexuality in London 'not just through exotic place names such as 'Soho', 'Mayfair' and 'Piccadilly' but by cataloguing in detail how queer men operated within the built environment'(Hornsey 2008:40). By contrast, the capital that Farr travels is replete with mundane images, with homosexuality found as much in Charing Cross Road as it is in West End theatrical dressing rooms. Alice Ferrebe points out that the prosecution in the Montagu case echoed the Oscar Wilde trial in its insinuations that homosexuality was a 'perversion' that was the province of the decadent idle rich (2012: 117) but the gay characters of *Victim* range from hairdressers to car salesmen to bookdealers.

The leading man lends *Victim* a further measure of empathic power for, as a major Rank Organisation Star, Dirk Bogarde had to maintain a dual existence. There was 'The Squire of Buckinghamshire', resplendent in a hacking jacket in countless PR handouts and more ambivalent and febrile figures, as in *The Singer Not The Song* (Roy Ward Baker 1960) where an 'Irish' priest, played by a rather disconcerted looking John Mills, is confronted by Bogarde's leather trousered 'Mexican bandit'. Even with ostensibly conventional villainous roles such as his parvenu gigolo in *Cast a Dark Shadow* (Lewis Gilbert 1955), or indeed in *The Blue Lamp*, the actor brings an unsettlingly ambiguous persona to what might have otherwise been a conventional role. Richard Dyer observes how even in Bogarde's 'more straightforward films his acting style suggests a repression of feeling, often manifested as an uneasy combination of



cool, poised stretches of acting and sudden outbursts of acting' (2002: 82). For most of *Victim* Farr is visibly barely keeping his emotions in check but in the scene,

partially written by Bogarde himself that is arguably the heart of the film, the barrister is confronted by his wife Laura (Sylvia Syms). Her husband finally informs her that he stopped seeing Barratt because 'I wanted him!' This is, as Andy Medhurst so beautifully puts it, the moment when 'irresistible desire, literally, finds its voice' (1984: 30- 32).

In her review Dilys Powell thought that 'To treat the theme as a thriller may not be particularly bold, but to treat it at all was brave' (*The Sunday Times*, 3rd September 1961). But the format allowed *Victim* to convey its message to a wide audience and Michael Relph contended that independent producers in Britain with serious artistic intentions:

had two choices. He could either collaborate with sympathetic writers and actors in order to make his film on a shoestring outside the main industry, or he could work within the commercial structure in order to give his artists the best possible tools and reach the widest audience. (Porter 2012: 17-18)

As we have seen, Relph and Dearden chose the third option and so when Terence Kelly posed the question in his *Sight & Sound*'s review 'Could *Victim* have been more frank than it is?' his response of 'It is only fair to say that it is not' (Kelly 1961: *Sight & Sound*) is wholly accurate. The acting alone, especially the anguished performance of Dennis Price - whose role as a blackmailed gay matinee idol Calloway was a tragic example of art imitating life - raises *Victim* above mere didactics. It is Calloway who utters the line that summarises the Wolfenden Report:

Unless a deliberate attempt is to be made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business. (1957: para 61)

Or, in Calloway's sad words 'why should I not find love in the only way I can?' As for the character for Farr, Geoffrey Macnab sees him as 'able to detach himself from his own personal drama and speak with an impersonal view of authority' (2000: 123) but the radical ending of has Laura supporting her husband as he prepares to give evidence at the blackmail trial. Far from being an 'impersonal' expert Farr -a barrister on the verge of becoming a QC and therefore a senior member of the legal establishment - tells the Inspector that he intends to highlight the oppression surrounding male homosexuality at a time when:

the prosecution of homosexuals has become a kind of grotesque lottery, in which a hundred men out of a possible 500,000 are annually selected to face the further hazard of coming up before either Mr. Justice A., who signed the Wolfenden Report, or Mr. Justice B., who would rather sign his own death warrant. (Wildebloode 1959:63)

The last of the Relph/Dearden 'Social Problem' trilogy *Life for Ruth* has a narrative far removed from the Establishment certainties of *Sapphire* - or even, to an extent, those of *Victim*. Michael Craig (in a career best performance) plays John Harris, a father whose faith will not allow his daughter to receive a blood transfusion after an accident. He is a figure both of, and remote from, the local community; a neat bungalow and polished Ford Popular describes his lower-middle class respectability but Harris' neighbours come to regard his faith with incomprehension.

Ruth was one of two children that he recused from drowning and Teddy's father (Frank Finlay) is grateful to John Harris' courage in saving his son's life but shocked at his refusal to allow a transfusion for his own daughter. The opposite view Patrick McGoohan's agnostic Dr. Jim Brown who is enraged at the death of a child and determined to bring a private prosecution under the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act. Burton and O'Sullivan cite such reviews as Derek Prowse's 'nagging resentment at being led up a series of garden paths' (*The Sunday Times* 2 September 1962) as typical of the "damned if you do, damned if you don't" criticism that 'dogged Dearden and Relph continually on their work on problem pictures' (2009: 274). The *Monthly Film Bulletin* review regarded how *Life for Ruth* 'gives free speech to every shade of opinion on the subject, while taking sides with none' (quoted in Burton and O'Sullivan 2009: 273) as a weakness, one which now appears to be one of the film's major strengths.

In *Life for Ruth* there is none of the benevolent official guidance as seen in *Pool of London* or *The Blue Lamp* and indeed the three 'Social Problem' films' of Basil Dearden describe a changing role for the police. The marginalisation of the Establishment is deftly illustrated by this trilogy; in *Sapphire* the efficient but human senior officers find the culprit but are ultimately unable to resolve the underlying causes of racism. *Victim* has the

phlegmatic Inspector Harris less able to be involved in the blackmail case than Melville Farr. John Hill argued of Dearden's 'social problem' dramas that their logic was towards 'an integration, or an assimilation, of troubling elements through an appeal to "good sense" and reason' (1986-69-70). But Superintendent Finlay (Kenneth J Warren) refuses Brown's demands for an official prosecution – 'religion's a tricky business. Everybody feels: nobody thinks'.

When Brown exits the Superintendent's office, Dearden focuses on the police officer's look of doubt for at this point in the film the Doctor is less the caring professional but a morally dubious fanatic. John Hill sees the central theme of *Life for Ruth* as one of 'excessive individualism which threatens to undermine the rational order' (1986: 94) but this more applies to Brown as much as it does to Harris. We first see the doctor in the darkened interior of the hospital where his pleas for Harris to set aside his beliefs to allow a transfusion can be seen as either a sincere attempt to save a child's life or, as Robert Murphy notes, 'like the smooth talking plausibility of the devil' (1992: 43).

McGoohan's clipped Irish inflected diction marks his character as an much an outsider to the local town as Harris, who finds help via other professional figures who are not entirely part of the landscape; Hart-Jacobs (Paul Rogers), a Jewish solicitor who believes Harris is being persecuted, and Kent (Michael Bryant) a radical young barrister. The conclusion has John Harris turning back from contemplating suicide after his 'Not Guilty' verdict, a decision that he reaches without coercion from the Establishment or his family. The film opens with Otto Heller depicting the Durham coast against a skyline of relentless greyness and as the narrative develops; his high contrast cinematography has Harris and his wife (Janet Munro) in increasing shadow. However, Harris' final walk away from the cliff top is towards the streets illuminated by a Bleisha Beacon – a seemingly mundane sight beaming light into utter darkness.

John Hill claims that social problem films, a genre which would certainly encompass the three Relph/Dearden offerings, 'end up confirming rather than querying a consensual view of the world' (1986: 125) but this would apply to none of the pictures detailed here. The final programme for Free Cinema at the BFI in March 1959 stated that 'we have tried to make a stand for independent, creative film-making in a world where the pressures of conformism and commercialism are becoming more powerful every day' (programme quoted in Drazin 2014: 302). Yet the films I have discussed in this chapter are powerful precisely because they display the pressures and the pain in both maintaining this status quo and its value per se. Such plausibly human protagonists, from the suicidal parent and Melville Farr's guilt-ridden moral

crusade are often adrift in a country where paternal guidance cannot resolve their problems or weaknesses. These are some of the most emotionally honest depictions of repression and self-delusion to be found in any British films of this era, and when Victor Perkins wrote that 'We are unable to find evidence of artistic sensibilities in working order' (1962: 3) maybe he should have looked a little harder.

## CHAPTER 12: From ‘Jiving, Drivelling Scum’ to Future

### Consumers – British Cinema and The Teenager

One of the earliest appearances of teenage delinquents is in the Ealing film *I Believe in You*. Here Basil Dearden, whose stylistic approach is often underrated, contrasts the London landscape of weed filled gardens, lidos and bombsites with jazz clubs forming subterranean dens of inequity harbouring one Jordie Bennett. As with *The Blue Lamp*, the film’s most fascinatingly ambiguous figure is that of the chief delinquent and Laurence Harvey infuses Jordie with a sinister sexuality that no amount of National Service or probation officer guidance would be able to quell. The poster artwork has a young Joan Collins apparently mesmerised by Harvey’s pompadour of evil and John Hill observes that:

Music is a snare, a fatal incitement to surrender to descent...the final image is of Jordie in sinister close-up, shot half in light and half in shade of bodily impulses. What then follows is a desperate struggle between rational control and dionysiac, in a signification of dementia so characteristic of many of Dearden’s films. (1986:76)

The narrative establishes from the outset that Jordie is a danger to the community. We first see him fleeing from a stolen Jowett Javelin and smirking, as only Laurence Harvey could, on receiving a six-month prison sentence. On his release this criminal behaviour escalates to the point of using a firearm and, unlike the basically redeemable Norma and Harry Hooker, Jordie must be expelled from the community as he is beyond control. Rational control is also the theme of the film version of the West End hit *Cosh Boy* (Lewis Gilbert 1953) in which James Kenney plays Roy Walsh, possibly the only anti-hero in cinematic history to favour a Red Rudge bicycle as a getaway vehicle. Durgnat argues that in such British juvenile delinquency dramas ‘less obvious social and cultural problems are not even intuitively sensed. The issue is seen as being “tough” or being “soft”’ (1970: 199) and, as proof, *Cosh Boy* ends with Roy receiving a damned good thrashing.

Our anti-hero is on probation for coshing and robbing an old woman but he is offered an alternative to the bomb scarred streets of South London in the form of his local youth club. This institution is by its very nature an enclosed space; the nocturnal street by implication is no place for the respectable teenager of either gender. The propaganda film *Youth Club* (Norman Prouting 1954) explicitly contrasted the aimlessness of the pintable parlour habitués with the many and various healthy activities on offer in the controlled but democratic environment of



the club. Alas, Roy is so dastardly that he has the audacity to subvert his local youth club by using it as a base from which to plan further outrages against post-war society although Gilbert

has the gall to present Michael McKeag's youth club leader and trainee accountant Brian as an alternative role model to the fiendish hooligan. Brian is played as one of the least charismatic juvenile leads of 1950s British cinema - a title won against some massive odds - and who is generally - and is the personification of George Melly's view of youth clubs as a 'grey colourless world where good boys played ping-pong' (1970: 83).

*Cosh Boy* ends with Roy's new macho Canadian stepfather about to apply corporal punishment just before the police arrive to take the gang to Borstal and Andrew Spicer saw it as exhibiting 'an obvious fascination with youth culture as an absorbing, sexy spectacle at the same time as repudiating it' (2003: 133). Although 'sexy' is not quite the phrase this writer would use to describe Walsh's gang<sup>49</sup> it does anticipate the almost lascivious approach taken by some British films towards the next youth sub-culture, the Teddy boy. In British films, when the Teddy boys were not providing visions of the lumpen proletariat at its most vicious-*Sapphire*, *The Bulldog Breed* (Robert Asher 1960) *The Angry Silence* (Guy Green 1960) and *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Ward Baker 1961) - they might be falling prey to this latest musical influence from across the Atlantic.

The theme of uncontrolled youth in thrall to transatlantic mass culture is one of the themes of *Violent Playground*. The script, co-written by Basil Dearden with James Kennaway, has Detective-Sergeant Truman (Stanley Baker) reluctantly transferred from crime to the Juvenile Liaison division<sup>50</sup> and trying to understand David McCallum's Teddy boy gang leader Johnnie Murphy. However, despite Truman being a younger and more dynamic figure than either PC George Dixon or Detective Superintendent Halliday the arguments are still with the Establishment. Although the Sergeant's vocabulary and style of speech infer his working class background, the gulf between the police officer and the Ted still seems to be insurmountable. 'You are whatever you want to be' Truman informs Johnnie but, as John Hill notes, this is not the case even on the film's own terms. 'Johnnie, for example, attempts to enter the Grand Hotel (with its Rolls Royce clientele) but is, of course disadvantaged by virtue of age and class' (1986: 82).

Steve Chibnall argues that with Johnnie Murphy, unlike Tom Riley in *The Blue Lamp*, 'The voice of youth may be weak and inarticulate but it can now be heard' (1997: 149) but the Teds' culture is seen to have neither worth nor validity. In one truly astounding sequence, an ill-choreographed Johnnie and his gang engage in a bout of dancing, as witnessed by an appalled Truman; June 1957 saw a B-feature *Rock You Sinners* (Denis Kavanagh), as the first domestic production with a rock and roll theme song and *Violent*

<sup>49</sup> Its members include delinquents played by Melvyn Hayes and Johnny Briggs.

<sup>50</sup> 73 Formed in 1949 by the Chief Constable of Liverpool Police to prevent vulnerable juveniles from drifting into crime

*Playground* was one of the first major British A-films to follow suit. Dearden depicted jazz in *I Believe in You* as wicked enough but rock and roll encapsulated the fears of transatlantic influence on teenagers as expressed by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* after he encountered some drape jacketed youths aged between 15 and 20 years in a north of England eatery:

The milk bars indicate at once, in the nastiness of their modernistic knick-knacks, their glaring showiness, an aesthetic breakdown so complete that, in comparison with them, the layout of the living-rooms in some of the poor homes from which the customers come seems to speak of a tradition as balanced and civilised as an eighteenth-century town house. (1957:247–8)

In his concentration on the venue's pseudo-Americana, Hoggart seemingly ignores the possibility that such establishments represented freedom from paternal and work control for their young patrons. Stephen Berkoff described a trip to his local dancehall, another space where for a short spell you could be who you wished to be – ‘warrior, lover, Jimmy Cagney, Tony Curtis, villain, spiv, leader, loner, heavy, Beau Brummell’ (1996: 15) but the idea that the milk bar patrons also had their ‘expectation of a dream’ seems to have by-passed Hoggart. The same applies to the Teds’ choice of music and although the early work on *The Uses of Literacy* was undertaken circa 1954 to 1955, before rock and roll gained real infamy in the UK, Hoggart’s noting of a jukebox (1957: 248) highlights how he perceived its role as an engine of the destruction of indigenous working class culture.

This is apparently the attitude of *Violent Playground* where Liverpool is under siege by side-boarded delinquents and the Teds and their habits, observed via from the professional standpoint of Baker’s CID officer, are ‘them’. *Violent Playground* apparently shows that caring but firm authority succeeds where the well-meaning liberalism of the local headmaster fails. ‘Haven’t we had enough of these crazy mixed-up kids who go around bullying and ganging up on people, beating up old ladies?’ moans Truman’s Chief Inspector (George A Cooper). Steve Chibnall points out that Truman is ‘fifteen to twenty years younger than Dixon and Phipps’ (1997: 149) but the rock and roll scene displays the gulf between the Sergeant and the Teddy Boys. The camera cuts to Johnnie’s younger brother and sister cowering in a corner of the living room, both clearly traumatised by the horrendous music and abysmal dancing, but Truman is equally appalled.

Burton and O’Sullivan see Johnnie Murphy as a troubling figure “irrevocable” beyond the discursive boundaries of the social problem film, receptive, it would appear, only to the

beat of rock'n'roll' (2009: 150) but *Violent Playground* also uses the music it ostensibly condemns to lure youth into the depleted ranks of the Odeon and the Gaumont picture houses.

John Spraos noted that ‘The 15-24 age-group is...by far the most cinema-prone’ (1962: 22) and Richard Weight argues that the Conservative government of the day supported youthful consumerism as an essential part of popular capitalism (2002: 299). The confused attitudes to youth in *Violent Playground* – John Hill sees it as torn between ‘voluntarism and determinism in its account of delinquent behaviour’ (1986:82) - can be regarded as a prime example of what Glynn refers to as the:

the harbingers of an exciting and prosperous future and condemned as exemplifying a new moral and cultural bankruptcy. These are key motifs around which dominant interpretations of social change were formulated, and culturally the early British pop musicals can be seen as working to establish these twin tropes, the thesis and antithesis of what Dick Hebdidge has termed “youth-as-fun” and “youth-as-trouble”.(Glynn 2005: 6)

In that regard *The Violent Playground* represents both of these tropes and the financial potential of films celebrating ‘youth as fun’ was demonstrated by *It's Great to Be Young!*, which has a fair claim to be one of Britain's first teenage musicals. Abrams also observed that the teenage market was almost entirely working class (1959: 13) but this is a very middle class affair. Andy Medhurst was clearly in extreme Lindsay Anderson uber-curmudgeon mode when he decried the film as lacking all traces of ‘the rock n roll revolution breaking out all around’ (1995: 62) but when the film was released in August 1956 there was no hint that the ‘new rhythm’ would be any more than another post-war musical fad.

Vincent Porter remarks that although ABPC’s 1950s films ‘were often about England, they were not of it’ (2000: 163) but *It's Great to Be Young* is set in an idealised but not unrecognisable middle-middle class suburbia and the narrative is focused upon the genuinely young cast who retained an engaging Nigel Molesworth<sup>74</sup> attitude towards authority. Despite Isabel Quigly’s moans that ‘I found the Angel Hill Kids of Angel Hill Grammar School quite nauseating’ (1956: 794) it is British cinema at its most utterly wizard. The financial success of *It's Great to Be Young!* was replicated when Anglo-Amalgamated produced the first ever teenage rock and roll musical *The Tommy Steele Story* (Gerald Bryant 1957). The UK’s very early rock and roll musicians were from the world of jazz, such as Tony Crombie’s Rockets, but Steele was a very young ex merchant seaman with a following amongst even younger consumers - he was ‘the first British pop event’ (Melly 1970: 2).

Anglo-Amalgamated’s co-director Stuart Levy pointing out that ‘we figure if the Americans could produce money-making movies about rock’n’roll we had the necessary talent to do the same here. Steele, himself, has a tremendous following’ (Levy quoted in Spicer 2003: 96). When the picture was released in June 1957, it re-couped its £15,000 production costs within weeks, making a total profit of £100,000. *The Tommy Steele Story* strives to establish the protagonist’s music as a form of a native folk art as opposed to transatlantic mass culture. Steele was one of the few early British rock and rollers to co-

write his own material – ‘Tommy may be the first English pop artist to sing English songs’ (MacInnes 1957: 5) – and his naturalistic acting also received plaudits from *Sight & Sound*. ‘Tommy Steele lives out his part with an ease and freedom from affectation that makes you despair of the politer conventions of film acting’ (Robinson 1957: 43).

*I Believe in You*, *Cosh Boy* and, to an extent, *Violent Playground* place a heavy emphasis on the bleak working class existences of the main protagonists. Steele’s actual film debut has been in *Kill Me Tomorrow* (Terence Fisher 1957) but there his performance of *Rebel Rock* was to reinforce the threatening nature of the coffee bar in which the middle-aged protagonist Bart Crosbie (Pat O’Brien) temporarily finds himself. In *The Tommy Steele Story*, the hero comes from a stable home and he accepts wise adult guidance, informing journalists that ‘I don’t know how long it will last but while it does, I know who I have to thank for it – the thousands of people living in the thousands of streets like Frea Street’.

The formula established by *The Tommy Steele Story* - a quick shooting schedule, a maximum of songs and a minimum of dialogue plus an almost automatic of deference and respect towards authority - was repeated for other early British rock and roll singers. At a time when, as Harper and Porter note, ‘Cinema audiences were in decline and ever-increasing proportion of them were under-16s’ (2003: 231) they were tempted by *The Golden Disc* (Don Sharp 1958) the vehicle for Steele’s rival Terry Dene. Alan Sinfield contends that the late 1950s was a time when educationalists feared that the negative influence of rock and roll would infiltrate hitherto respectable young people (1989: 156) but no-one could have objected to 28 year old ‘teenagers’ swaying among the coffee bar pot plants to Dene’s acoustic guitar.

By the late 1950s press reports made it seem as if ‘the collective adult mind had become neurotically imprinted with the idea of teenage delinquency’ (Laurie 1965: 123). These roles played by Steele and Dene also demonstrate just how filmmaker had to establish that their young star as definitely not a Teddy boy. Richard Hoggart argued that new forms of Americanised mass culture could successfully appeal to ‘established attitudes that were not wholly admirable’ (1957: 15); his ‘juke-box boys’ were lumpen proletarian ripe clad in drape jackets, all seeming ripe for exploitation by American imported decadence.



Yet, despite certain sartorial similarities to the mooching individuals of *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (Karel Reisz 1959) British pop heroes were essentially ‘the boy next door’, often prone to honest Cockney sayings in the manner of John Mills in his *In Which We Serve* mode. T R Fyvel, in his book *The Insecure Offenders* cites pop stars who were ‘fabulously successful’ (1961: 222) but *The Tommy Steele Story* displays a hero with a blue-collar background (the Merchant Navy) and a respectful attitude to authority. This was not always an unproblematic process. Dene’s 1958 National Service conscription into the Royal Hampshire Green Jackets was to the accompaniment of press publicity concerning how rock and roll singers could serve their country but he was shortly discharged following a nervous breakdown. Despite his issuing a statement that ‘The Army has made a new man of me’ (Quoted in Kynaston 2013: 299). Dene’s career never recovered.

A variation on this image was using a young singer to play a youth as in a contemporary drama. Cliff Richard had risen to fame in 1958 with *Move It77* and his support role in *Serious Charge* (Terence Young 1959) allows for two semi-diegetic numbers in which he sings to a jukebox accompaniment. Richard’s character Curley is a Ted but a redeemable one and other films of this period that used pop singers to play confused but sympathetic figures were *Rag Doll* (Lance Comfort 1960) where the director elicits a touching performance from Jess Conrad, as a would-be rock and roll singer and Adam Faith in *Never Let Go*. The most intriguing use of a teen idol as actor during our period is Cliff Richard as Bongo Herbert in *Espresso Bongo* (Val Guest 1959) the screen version of Wolf Mankowitz’s satire on Tommy Steele’s rise to fame. This is the one film of our period to comment on the commercial process described by Hall and Whannel, with a plot centred on Johnny Jackson (Laurence Harvey) - big band drummer, general Soho low-life and embryonic rock & roll manager.

Stephen Glynn sees *Espresso Bongo* as a ‘coruscating plague on both-of-your-houses satire to match its British Lion stable mate *I’m All Right Jack*’ (33: 2013). In fact, although Harvey provides a cherishable turn as a perpetually gyrating spiv, one existing on a diet of cheap dreams and salt beef sandwiches, the singer is as corruptible as his manager is. Johnny Jackson, with eyes resembling luminous ‘£’ signs, may skip through a night-time Soho crooning *I’ve Never Had It So Good Before* but whilst Tommy Steele publicised his East End roots Bongo Herbert refers to his public as ‘grimy jobs’. *Espresso Bongo* has the British rock and roller less as honest working class journeyman entertainer but more as ambitious self-promoter.

During this same period, Adam Faith starred in *Beat Girl* (Edmond T Gréville 1959), one of the first films that focused on another group of post-war folk devils, the beatniks. These first attracted the attentions of the British press around 1957 and so *Beat Girl* boasts dialogue along the lines of 'Funny, only squares know where to go' and a John Barry soundtrack that is indeed 'Straight from the 'fridge!'. Faith's gang leader Dave is, despite filling a respectable London house with 'jiving, driveling scum!' to quote its irate owner Paul (David Farrar), a thoughtful individual but elsewhere British cinematic beatniks tended to provide comic relief with their penchant for bad poetry; *The Rebel* (Robert Day 1960) and *His and Hers* (Brian Desmond Hurst 1960).

Both of these last two film featured Oliver Reed in the ranks of black roll-necked youth<sup>78</sup> and he starred in the most interesting, and notorious beatnik film, *The Party's Over* (Guy Hamilton), which was completed by 1963 but its controversial plotline of inadvertent necrophilia ensured that it would not be released, in a heavily cut form, until 1965. Reed's first major roles in *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1960) and *The Damned* had elicited a sense of vulnerability behind his macho screen persona but his Moise takes this to extremes, with the implication behind his penchant for aphorisms he not only despises the gang that he commands but is secretly terrified of them.

By the early 1960s the idea of youth in thrall to a transatlantic culture that promotes

hedonism was still seen in *Flame in the Streets*. But there were also far less dogmatic view of teenagers as in *Two Left Feet* (Roy Ward Baker 1961) distinguishes Michael Crawford's naïve but decent and hardworking Alan Crabbe from genuine Teds, *Some People* (Clive Donner 1962) *The Boys* (Sidney J Furie 1962) and *The Leather Boys* (Furie 1961). *The Boys* concerns four late-vintage Teds on trial for murder and does make genuine attempts to create individual figures and the dramatic structure has the viewpoint of the often middle class adult witnesses confounded by reality. As with Roy Walsh and his gang, the four defendants hail from materially deprived backgrounds – Barney's (Jess Conrad) dreams of becoming a company director and owning a £2,000 car are just that – and their defence counsel Montgomery – played by Robert Morley in very restrained form – makes genuine attempts to understand their limited existences. The conclusion has the prosecution proving that the gang's leader Stan (Dudley Sutton) did commit the murder but by this stage in *The Boys* we have come a long way from the simplistic conclusion of *Cosh Boy*. Dudley Sutton plays Stan as troubled and mentally disturbed and Stuart Douglass' screenplay highlight's Ginger's (a very young Tony Garnett) pride in his trade as a builder.

Similarly, *The Leather Boys* uses authentic footage of the Ton-Up boys of the Ace Café on the North Circular to depict a blue-collar world where doing the ton along the A23 to Brighton is a bright moment in a bleak and circumscribed existence. Pete (Dudley Sutton) is the moral centre of *The Leather Boys*; a charming, decent and caring individual who is ostracized as much by the dim-witted confusion of his friend as by outmoded legislation towards homosexuals. His performances are examples of why Durgnat brackets *The Boys* and *The Leather Boys* with *Some People* as one of the few 'consistently interesting' (1970: 139-140) British films about juvenile delinquency.

Donner shot *Some People* on location in colour in Bristol in 1962, with profits going to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The plot focuses on a trio of Teds, Johnnie (Ray Brooks), Bill (David Andrews) and Bert (David Hemmings) who are banned from driving after a motorcycle accident and expelled from a local dance hall when Johnnie plays rock and roll on the piano (prompting the glorious line 'I won't have Teddy boys contaminating my boys and girls!'). The gang's fortunes change when a local choirmaster gives them an opportunity to use the church hall for band practice, echoing the Albemarle Report's contention that:

the jazz clubs often develop a scholarship of their own; and there are plenty of young toughs who will spend intent hours tuning up each other's motor cycles or overhauling radio or television sets. Even if their craftsmanship remains at the "do it yourself" level, it has a neat, quick competence that commands respect. (1960: para 193)

Unlike the film's other authority figures who are desperate to maintain the status quo Kenneth More's middle class aeronautical engineer Smith is an approachable single parent who trusts Johnnie as the group's unofficial leader. In common with *The Leather Boys*, *Some People* appreciates that the young protagonists use their hobbies as a form of autonomy and Donner's directorial approach towards the young characters is markedly

different to the Furie pictures. *The Leather Boys* and *The Boys* follow the dilemma for British society described by Stanley Cohen – ‘Is he an innocent lad being led astray or is he a psychopathic thug’ (1980: 16) but here they are well-rounded individuals. The band is not working towards putting on a gig or cutting a single but just enjoying themselves and Smith regards their music on its own merits. Geraghty notes that many post-war British films show mass culture imposing ideas or products on a largely passive audience (2000: 16) but in *Some People* Johnnie, the main protagonist, is thoughtful and hard working.

John Hill sees Johnnie’s home as cluttered unlike Smith’s elegant middle class villa (1986: 111) but it is not a slum but a comfortable council house furnished with an ever-blaring television. In *The Blue Lamp* Tom Riley’s flamboyant garb is seen as symptomatic of his immature criminality but twelve years later, in a nicely observed touch, both Johnnie and his father (Harry H Corbett) evidently enjoy dressing well. To repeat the words of Raymond Durnat, affluence can enable ‘the working classes to pay the piper and enjoy more of his tunes’ (1970: 64) and the gang’s enjoyment of consumerism anticipates one of the central tropes of Swinging London. Clive Donner makes excellent use of the Bristol landscape and the emerging world of the shopping precinct - Murphy observes that ‘Donner’s films are notable for their lack of nostalgia...and their use of colour and unusual locations’ (1992: 132) – and the director chose Bristol as:

I didn’t want to make it in a city where there was a traditional background of working class problems...I don’t think the subject we’re considering in the film related to the “bad areas” but much more to the housing estates and so forth.  
(Donner quoted in Perkins 1962: 23)

*Some People*, *The Party’s Over* and even, to an extent *Beat Girl*, are notably unpatronising views of youth, in marked contrast to the majority of early British pop films where the young viewer would inevitably find bourgeoisie figures dispensing paternally sound advice to the likes of Billy Fury. A further development of this sub-genre was *The Young Ones*, one of the first fruits of the Associated British studio’s decision to concentrate on comedies and light entertainments. Douglas Slocombe’s Eastmancolor camerawork and Furie’s ambitious direction, together with production values way above the standard norm of a poorly lit black and white British pop film, made *The Young Ones* an elaborate London musical with Cliff as just one of its attractions.

The final reel may boast rock and roll in the undeniably fantastic Shadows' number *The Savage* but it also has Cliff's Nicky Black rescuing his father (Robert Morley) from a genuine mob of Teds. The sullen Bongo Herbert is now definitively replaced by a clean cut figure who is precise of diction and beaming of smile - a Brylcreemed demonstration of how British film makers has developed successful

strategies for incorporating pop in their output (Donnelly 2001:6). In Cliff's next film *Summer Holiday* (Peter Yates 1962) our quiffed hero is now the leader of a gang of London Transport mechanics who decide to turn a bus into a hotel and drive it across Europe. Penelope Houston wrote in 1963 that British national cinema might be summarised as 'a view of a boy and a girl wandering mournfully through the drizzle and the mist of industrial Britain' (119) but *Summer Holiday* became the most second most popular film at the UK box office of that year.

For a mere 1/9d the audience could vicariously experience sun, sea and polyester shirts in many and various hues in a wholly safe and neutered environment but it was in a second feature shot in 1961 that displayed signs of a genuinely major changes. Amicus made *It's Trad, Dad!* (Richard Lester) for £50,000 to cash in on the boom for revivalist trad jazz. Lester's direction highlights rather than masking the somewhat middle-aged appearance of many of the British jazz musicians and authority is mocked and derided, from Deryck Guyler's deadpan narrator to Pete Murray, Alan Freeman and David Jacobs gamely playing themselves as vain middle-aged DJs. Meanwhile the adult members of the small town that wants to ban jazz are, small- minded and status obsessed provincials. In George Melly's words, the film's achievement was to 'make the maximum impact *now*, to hold the moment, freeze it and let it melt' (1970: 167).

Two years later Lester was approached by Walter Shenson, an independent producer charged by the United Artists executive Bud Ornstein to make the first film of a three- picture deal for The Beatles. The group had their first British Top Twenty Hit in late 1962 and two members of group wrote the A and B-sides; this was unusual by the standards of the day, for although Steele and Billy Fury did devise their own material many more were still in thrall to Tin Pan Alley tune- smiths. When it came to recording their follow-up The Beatles' confidence allowed them to reject the producer George Martin's choice of *How Do You Do It*, penned by the established song writer Mitch Murray, in favour of their own *Please Please Me*.

For the Beatles' cinematic debut, *A Hard Day's Night* Shenson did not want to follow the then standard formula of 'a Hollywood style pop musical about four unknown boys from Liverpool who smuggle their homemade tapes of their own compositions into a disk jockey's studio' (Shenson quoted in Walker 1974: 234-235). This echoed John Lennon's own critique of the British pop B-film sub-genre:

We (i.e. The Beatles) weren't interested in being stuck in one of those typical nobody-understands-our music plots where the local dignitaries are trying to ban something as terrible as the Saturday Night Hop. The kind of thing where we'd just pop up a couple of times between the action, all smiles and clean shirt collars to sing our latest record. (Lennon quoted in Mundy 1999:171)

Thus, Lester focuses on a comic version of the group's own fame – trapped in limousines and hotel rooms by their fans and subjected to vacuous questions by jaded show business journalists. There is no equivalent of the paternal figures of early British pop musicals; the road management played by Norman Rossington and John Junkin are definitely present for comic relief. Jeffrey Richards observed how The Beatles were:

the first pop idols not to be processed into safe 'family entertainers' and in the process emasculated. Both Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, initially viewed as threateningly sexy, had been carefully transformed into the 'boy next door', a Mickey Rooney *de ses jours*. (1997: 159-160)

Steele's transformation to latter day variety performer was virtually complete when he starred in *It's All Happening* (Don Sharp 1963) and George Melly sourly described *Summer Holiday* as 'Fun loving boys and girls with pneumatic bodies but apparently no sex organs, dancing and singing their way to happiness and success' (1970: 179). *Wonderful Life* (Sidney J Furie 1964), the third colour musical starring Cliff Richard, was released within weeks of the Beatles' screen debut but the ABPC film actually contains a number celebrating *Youth & Experience*. Indeed, parallel with *A Hard Day's Night* and its sequel *Help!* (Richard Lester(1965) was the last flowering of the traditional British pop film with *Be My Guest* (Lance Comfort 1965 ) and *The Cuckoo Patrol*, (Duncan Wood 1965 but not released until 1967), the latter featuring the terrifying credit 'Based on a story outline by: Freddie and the Dreamers'. There was also *Gonks Go Beat* (Robert Hartford-Davies 1965), a film made on the dubious assumption that what the nation's teenagers really craved was Terry Scott wearing a crash helmet.

Just prior to *A Hard Day's Night* entering production Paul Johnson wrote a piece for *The New Statesman* condemning The Beatles as another example of manufactured pop and pitying their audience:

What a bottomless chasm of vacuity they reveal! The huge faces, bloated with cheap confectionery and smeared with chain-store makeup, the open, sagging mouths and glazed eyes, the broken stiletto heels: here is a generation enslaved by a commercial machine. Behind this image of "youth", there are, evidently, some shrewd older folk at work. (1964:2)



In addition to going even further than Hall and Whannel in his condemnation of commercialism, Johnson ignores one essential aspect of the group – their ability to generate and control their own material and thus play a part in shaping their own future – and the ability of the youthful consumer to choose their own pop culture. Of the Teddy Boys, Hebdige saw them not as Hoggart's milk bar victims of American cultural domination but a sartorial display that 'required financial planning and was remarkably self-conscious' (1981: 4). Similarly Henry Fairlie cited the popularity of young pop singers of that period as evidence of how 'a population with independent tastes, even if its tastes are only Tommy Steele and Terry Dene, is a population which is capable of feeling, thinking, and therefore perhaps even acting, independently of it' (1959: 16). Five years later, as Durgnat put it, *A Hard Day's Night* produced its effects 'under the assumption that the audience knows "it's only a movie"' (1977:2). At the end of our period *Dateline Diamonds* (Jeremy Summer 1965) has Conrad Phillips fatherly police Superintendent pursuing William Lucas's diamond smuggler in his Wolseley but the Beatles had no need of such authority figures.

The depiction of youth in the films of our period move from highlighting the protagonist's capacity for violence as seen in *I Believe in You* to ostensible celebrations of youthful vitality. In British films of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Teddy boys were often depicted as the embodiments of undesirable role models but by 1965, young working class males were no longer feared, given a damned good thrashing (Roy Walsh) or paternally steered towards the mainstream. The time when David Farrar could tell a gang of beatniks to 'Get out of my house you jiving, driveling scum!' was already long past.

### **CHAPTER 13: ENGLAND SWINGS? British Cinema and ‘The Scene’**

The period of 1951 to 1965 saw significant physical changes in the capital due to a number of factors. These included the Clean Air Act of 1956, the demolition of much of the Victorian buildings in the East End in favour of geometrically planned developments and the consumer affluence brought about by the economic liberation of the previous decade. There was also a decline of manufacturing industry in the city and ‘by 1964, under the influence of the expanding motorway network, firms were moving from Park Royal to take advantage of better road connections further west’ (White 2001: 202). In addition, the final demise of National Service in 1963 meant that the youth of London, as with the remainder of the UK, would no longer have a two-year suspension of career or education. By the mid-1960s, youth tribe garbs increasingly replaced service uniforms on streets and railway platforms.

In cinema, a period costume picture ironically brought about the way to Swinging London. Woodall Films decided to make an adaptation of Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* and the subsequent *Tom Jones* (Tony Richardson 1963) was backed by United Artists after Bryanston refused to fund the colour cinematography – a decision Balcon came to regret so that he subsequently wrote that ‘*Tom Jones* is engraved on my heart’ (1969: 101). *Tom Jones* was released in June 1963 and in December of that year John Davis informed the Annual Showmanship Luncheon that ‘the public has clearly show it does not want dreary kitchen dramas’ (Davis quoted

by Hursa 1964: 31), a speech apparently partially inspired by the recent commercial failure of the Rank-backed *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson 1963). *Kinematograph Weekly* cited *Tom Jones*, *Summer Holiday* and *From Russia with Love* as the main locally made commercial success in UK cinemas in 1963 (Street 1997:83).

*Tom Jones* was a ‘period’ film but it anticipates the screen heroes that, in the somewhat jaundiced view of Jeffrey Richards that:

“Swinging London” heroes were in part a Romantic reaction against a world that was highly structured, traditional and conventional, that was still in essence Victorian. In its place they (i.e. the 1960s Romantics) advocated a culture of liminality where the outsider, the rebel and the deviant were heroes. (1997: 167)

Finney’s eponymous protagonist conveys the two elements of youth and rebellion at a time when British cinema needed to attract younger audiences, and John Trevelyan’s policy of liberalization at the BBFC was well underway. In much of the print and television media, as Alexander Walker argues, the fantasy of Swinging London was not threatening but rather ‘provided a sense of continuous vitality as the fresh events on the London scene were seized on and reported’ (1974: 291). Christopher Brooker claimed that ‘in the summer of 1965, focused by a series of newspaper and magazine articles, at home and abroad, the whole thing came into the open – that in the previous few years, England had been overtaken by a no less than a “social revolution”’ (1969: 19).

Yet, the early Swinging London films are remarkably unhomogenous, often questioning as much as celebrating hedonism. Robert Murphy makes the additional argument that the most interesting films of the Swinging London cycle had already been made by late 1965. This was the year before Piri Halasz told Americans about London: *The Swinging City - You Can Walk Across it On the Grass* in a *Time* magazine cover story. Halasz claimed that ‘London is exporting its plays, its films, its fads, its styles, its people. It is also the place to go. It has become the latest mecca’ (1966:31).

However, what is very notable is that the London-set and US backed films made towards the end of our era have as much short back and sides as shoulder length hair. In *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* which ‘squats like a toad on the zany optimism of the Swinging 60s’ (Murphy 1992: 224), the capital is run by mean, chipped and cardigan wearing officials who make decisions that can literally mean life or death. Alec Leamas exists in a city of 1930s tenement blocks and gimcrack grocer’s shops in all-pervasive

atmosphere of a never-ending winter - London as 'a place and culture of scarcity' (Orr 2010: 62)

As late as 1963, British cinema was still showing London as the city of ruin for young provincials with *Bitter Harvest* (Peter Graham Scott). Patrick Hamilton's original trilogy *Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky* was published in 1934 but for the film version Ted Willis' screenplay updated the narrative to a 1960s style road to ruin narrative with Janet Munro's Welsh ingénue Jennie Jones escaping from the valleys in a Ford Consul Convertible-load of hedonists. There she finds a city of decadence, despair and Alan Badel's camp uber-cad theatre impresario Karl Denny, as glossy images of consumerism perpetuated by magazines and ITV commercials.



The front cover of *Time* magazine of April 1966 boasted a cover designed by Geoffrey Dickinson with illustrations depicting both the aristocracy and the nouveau riche – ‘royals in Mini Coopers and Beatles (or at least two men with Beatle haircuts are driving a Rolls Royce’ (Ryecroft 2011: 67). A hallmark of Swinging London was an apparent easy co-existence of old and new money so it is intriguing to examine two films of the early 1960s with contrasting Establishment attitudes to the prospect of social change in London – *The Servant* (Joseph Losey 1963) fears it whilst *Nothing But the Best* (Clive Donner 1964) cynically embraces it.

In the former picture James Fox’s Tony is representative of a torpor ridden social class still living off their capital gains and the film commences with Tony (James Fox) the young master of a Chelsea townhouse meeting Hugo Barrett (Dirk Bogarde), the eponymous new valet. The servant eventually comes to dominate the Chelsea townhouse where ‘entropy has set in among the privileged’ (Orr 2010: 124). *The Servant* was made at the same time as the Profumo Affair was unravelling before a nation that was ‘ready to be scandalised’ (Levin 1970: 72) but it is improbable that his indolent young master had the energy required for such decadent pastimes. When we first encounter Barrett, Tony is asleep in a deckchair, the unfinished house unlocked. His indolence allows the servant to turn a fine house where everyone knows his or her place ‘into a seedy brothel where everyone now knows his vice’ (Sarris 1970: 131).

Amy Sargeant argues that with the exception of *The Blue Lamp* Bogarde had been known for ‘solidly middle class roles’ (2010:33-34) and Durgnat cites *The Servant* as the film which turned the actor ‘from the melancholy-eyed cadet of an earlier era into a pivotal figure in the new European genre’ (Durgnat 1976:2). Yet, this is to ignore the ambivalence of so many of Bogarde’s earlier roles, from *The Singer not The Song* and *Victim* to his calculating villains of *Libel* (Anthony Asquith 1958) *Cast a Dark Shadow* and *The Sleeping Tiger* (Joseph Losey 1954). And Bogarde was never more serpentine as in the moment when Barrett whispers to Tony the central theme of *The Servant* - ‘You have a dirty secret, you shall be caught’. As Orr notes:

This is Chelsea in the early 1960, on the brink of consumer transformation, yet the accretions of upper-middle class Englishness are still present in which sexual transgression is veiled, understated or simply unspoken.(2010:124)

The valet instinctively understands the power of knowledge itself, which the film ultimately condemns. Harry Palmer's appreciation of gourmet cooking and classical music is presented with approval but Barrett's knowledge of the weakness of his 'social superiors' is seen as dangerous. The insolent tone used by Tony's girlfriend Susan(Wendy Craig) when speaking to the servant whose equal disdain for her could be due to her over-brittle mannerisms masking a more humble background. Barrett's own past is oblique, Nick James observing how Harold Pinter's screenplay replaced the 'arguably anti-Semitic characterisation of Barrett - oiliness, heavy lids' (2009: 1) with a febrile individual with a manner akin to an actor playing a servant. The valet looks to be aged in his forties yet his speech mannerisms have a curiously second-hand quality of an era he is too young to have experienced not dissimilar to his own.

Meanwhile, our initial sighting of his young master is of one too lackadaisical to secure his home or even consider his new valet's duties. Tony's failure to control Barrett is one of a member of the Establishment not adhering to his duties - a subtext rather more conservative than Hammer's *The Nanny* (Seth Holt 1965). Unlike Barrett Bette Davis's eponymous carer is a haunted figure whose servitude towards a vacuous upper-middle class household has indirectly lead to the estrangement and death of her own daughter. In *The Servant*, Tony has committed the cardinal sin of the officer class as displayed in *The Ship That Died of Shame* - a failure to set an example to his men.

*The Servant* unfolds in traditional London, where Tony, despite his Mercedes-Benz 190SL, listening to Davy Graham in fashionable nightspots and familiarity with the latest eateries, is still a figure of Nairn's old London - 'the Billingsgate porter amongst the bowler hat, the Wren church and courtyard among the towering office blocks'(1959: 54). By contrast, *Nothing But the Best* made for Anglo-Amalgamated is concerned with the absorption of new money into the old. Frederick Raphael's script details how this new London and traditional values shared an equally cynical lack of morality; Alan Bates' Jimmy Brewster, a London estate agent keen to escape from his lower-middle class provincial origins is not so far removed from Barrett - in his total and utter lack of scruples in his rise to the top. In *The Servant* Fox's very finely etched

performance lends the naïve and courteous Tony more sympathy than Barrett, the below stairs figure who is far more calculating than Joe Lampton.

In *Nothing But the Best*, the sympathy is with the amoral Brewster who hides his calculating nature beneath a charmingly persuasive manner. Douglas Slocombe's cold black and white cinematography, highlighting Barrett's sinister blank stare over the wintry landscape but the use of colour in *Nothing But the Best* highlights Brewster's genial manner, akin to one advertising hair cream in a cinema commercial. He could almost be the figure bemoaned by the writer Michael Wharton in 1961- the ideal Englishman not as an aristocrat but:

a salesman or a financial speculator. His office skyscrapers shoot up overnight where familiar old buildings have been (and he hires public relations men to tell us how much more beautiful they are than the old buildings and makes us ashamed of ourselves for thinking otherwise); his empires of money grow and combine, grow and combine again, continually devising new needs, new categories of people to feel those needs and buy the goods that will satisfy them, temporarily, until new needs can be devised.' (Wharton quoted in Davenport-Hines 2013:332- 332)

In Jimmy Brewster's attempts 'to become the only figure amongst cyphers', his past must not only be left behind in the fashion of Joe Lampton but entirely obliterated. A swift upgrading of background, accent and manners is essential in attaining the eventual prize of a directorship. Furthermore, Brewster's job enables him to partake in destruction of Victorian London whilst to advance his own social position. Alexander Walker observed that *Nothing but the Best* being largely set in the offices of a fashionable estate agent and auctioneering firm was perfect as it was 'a business that set the tone for everything bogus, fluctuating, pretentious and would-be respectable in society' (1974:277).

The implication throughout Frederick Raphael's script is that both the old Establishment - in the form of the remittance man Charlie Prince (Denholm Elliott) - and Jimmy's questing meritocrat spring from the same ruthless ethic. Prince is the cad, but a younger and more sinister version of the figures often played by Terry-Thomas, instructing Bates' counter-jumper in the codes and mores of the upper classes and Brewster's parents are dispatched as unwitting 'ten pound poms' as part of Jimmy's deliberate deracination process. His social background is akin to that of George Dixon but instead of this being a cause of pride Jimmy's parents must be isolated in the name



of professional advancement. In *Nothing But the Best*, the past may vanish if it proves inconvenient just as in London itself:

vast swathes were demolished in order to make way for what became known as 'comprehensive redevelopment'. What it represented was a deliberate act of erasure, an act of forgetting, not so dissimilar in spirit to the mood and ambience of the 'Swinging Sixties' elsewhere in London. It was as if time, and London's history had, for all practical purposes ceased to exist. In pursuit of profit, and instant gratification, the past had become a foreign country. (Ackroyd 2001: 760)

Andrew Spicer sees Jimmy as a modern version of the rouse in the guise of the business fixer (2003: 117) and, as with Barrett, he is a natural actor. With both figures, there is an insidious chameleon-like quality; when the valet is fully in control of the house, a camp and insidious North Country accent replacing the theatrical gentleman's gentleman tones and Jimmy increasingly mimics the public school vowels of his remittance man mentor.

What the two films reflect is a growing sense an Establishment focused on duty and public service did not conduct that public life. Old money is seen to result in inertia in *The Servant* and but *Nothing But the Best* has the Establishment seamlessly absorbing the new— Jimmy's chairman favours a Rolls Royce whilst his prospective, and definitely U, son-in-law (James Villiers), drives a Jaguar E-Type. Meanwhile William Rushton's Gerry worries if 'Rembrandt is hip square this year' and beat combos play at hunt balls as Jimmy learns to mimic the signs and signifiers of the ruling classes. To exercise this power, Brewster position of an estate agent -in a company that is a parody of a 'family firm' – provides him with the ideal opportunity to assist the Establishment's destruction of the London skyline. In place of venerating tradition Jimmy very probably chants as a mantra the article in the 15th September 1959 edition of *Queen*. Under the headline 'Prepare to Meet Thy Boom!' the magazine's aspirational readership was asked:

Have you woken up? Do you know you are living in a new world? You are half-aware of it perhaps. You don't use words like ersatz or economy label. You don't even say credit squeeze. But here we are, twenty years after the war started, in an age better even than our grandfathers can remember, for all their grumblings. Better, in fact, than any in the history of the world. Material, yes, but pleasant. You are richer than ever before. You are spending more than you have ever done. Our hope is that you realise it and enjoy it. We don't want you to miss it. Don't wait till years after to realise you have lived in a remarkable age – the age of BOOM. (Article quoted in Walker 1974:131)

Brewster is a figure made for the colour supplements, a 1960s innovation dismissed by Bernard Levin as 'the nadir in the advocacy for conspicuous consumerism' (1970: 185). The camp-theatrical Barratt does not appear to belong to any fixed era, his age and background masked by his carefully second-hand phraseology. *The Servant* end with him ultimately trapped in the cycle of decadence with which he ensnared his master but *Nothing But the Best* concludes with Brewster plotting how to save himself from arrest.

Jimmy may yet prosper, enjoying the Boom as the true heir to Charlie; a renegade Establishment figure whose morals are not far removed from those of the legitimate hierarchy. Jerry White described the 1960s as a period of social revolution

where working class talent was ‘plucked from obscurity and pitched into overnight stardom and riches overnight: not a new phenomenon but new in its apparently inexhaustible cast list’ (2001: 332). This does not apply to the protagonists of *The Servant* nor indeed *Nothing But the Best* - Jimmy is aged in his twenties but is more interested in social climbing than beat music. *Darling* (John Schlesinger 1965) does feature a young protagonist who is involved with the new media but Diane Scott (Julie Christie) is a model who sleeps her way to the top of society, rather than a pop star.

Charlotte Brunsdon sees the scene where Diane and her photographer friend (Roland Curran) shoplift from Fortnum and Mason as mocking the ‘privilege and stuffiness of the British upper classes’ (2007: 36) but Diane’s background is demonstrably at least upper- middle. Beneath the script’s witty aphorisms *Darling* is essentially a morality tale garbed in 1965 vintage raiment’s with a narrative that not so far removed from the ‘road to ruin’ story of *Bitter Harvest*. *Darling* also suffers from an equally suffocating sense of pseudo- virtue, the film virtually condoning Dirk Bogarde’s BBC journalist Robert Gold leaving his young family for the model in the same breath that it condemns Diane. It is the sinister advertising agent Miles Brand (Laurence Harvey) who is paradoxically the least obnoxious of the two male leads, simply because he does not bother to mask his nature. Diane ends the film trapped in a society marriage in Italy whilst *Bitter Harvest* concludes with Jennie committing suicide with a police Inspector (Nigel Davenport) wearing the Homburg of authority arriving in his Wolseley 6/90 to deliver a moralistic coda.

Far less condemnatory of youth is *The Knack...and How to Get It* (Richard Lester 1965), adapted by Charles Wood from Ann Jellicoe’s play for Woodfall and with a truly hip John Barry score. George Melly, in typically unrestrained form, saw *The Knack* as celebrating ‘love and fucking because it felt that this was more pleasurable than fucking without love’ (1970: 169). Yet the film is as much a critique as a celebration of the new morality. Ray Brooks’ sinister Tolen has a controlling and manipulative nature is depicted as a further aspect of his anachronistic persona – his black ‘college boy’ suit and vestigial Tony Curtis hairstyle mark him as figure that is already a few years adrift. Sue Harper claims that the script for film version of *The Knack* ‘evinces a grudging admiration for Tolen’s character’ (2000: 113) but in fact the plot has him lurking in the darkness of his rooms. It is Colin, Nancy (Rita Tushingham) and Tom (Donal Donnelly) we see pushing a

double bed through the streets in the daylight of contemporary London but Tolen often prefers to skulk in his lair listening to Thelonius Monk.

Christopher Brooker cites that *The Knack* as a prime example of a Swinging London film where 'façade had never been so important, or so unreal' (1969: 262). However, it is Tolen, with his now ludicrously dated outfit and affected verbal mannerisms, who is patently a figure of façade just as Colin's middle-aged fellow teachers in the staffroom can apparently only communicate in platitudes. Arthur Marwick refers to 'youth sub-culture having a steadily increasing impact on the rest of society, dictating taste, fashion and music and popular culture generally' (1998: 17) as a characteristic of the 1960s. This does not apply to Barrett, who appears to be aged in his early forties, Jimmy Brewster, who is keen to ape the manners of his social superiors or Tolen who we last glimpse joining the ranks of the middle-aged Greek chorus that the film equates with sexual prurience.

It is the 'conventional' characters who belong to the London of 1965 and Nancy is the most liberated character in mind and attitudes, suffering none of the moralizing experienced by Diane or Jennie. *The Knack* initially appears to celebrate the pop culture that was 'non-reflective, non-didactic, dedicated only to pleasure. It changes constantly [and] its principal faculty is to catch the spirit of its time and translate this spirit into objects or music or fashion or behaviour' (Melly 1970: 5) but this fails to mask the narrative's conservative core: only monogamy brings true happiness. Another figure from British cinema's recent past is Michael Caine's eponymous and brilliant portrayal of *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert 1966); adapted from Bill Naughton's play *Alfie Elkins and His Little Life* and funded by Paramount. *Alfie* featured in Geoffrey Dickinson's front cover of *Time* magazine, the posters proclaimed that 'Michael Caine is Alfie, is Wicked, is Crafty, is Irresistible' and Isabel Quigly wrote that his portrayal of the lothario was:

the sort of man once thought totally un-English but now being fished out of the proletarian pond where Englishness of the traditional sort never flourished. Like the clothes on the bright new boys, he suggests a subterranean national character rising to surprise even the locals. (1966:17)

Yet *Alfie* should come as no surprise to any observer of British cinema and indeed *The Daily Telegraph* review noted that 'While the text is superficially avant-garish, with racy dialogue and an anti-hero who appears to be successfully defying society, it is basically old-fashioned' (Gibbs 25th March 1966). It would not be overly fanciful to

suggest that if his Harry Palmer is the wartime NCO in a changed world then his Alfie Elkins is a 1940s wide boy now clad in a Terylene & mohair suit, filmed in colour and backed with Paramount's funds. The young people in *The Knack* award themselves the freedom to travel across the capital but Alfie Elkins is more rooted in a particular corner of London. His job as a chauffeur may take him across the country and his alternative employment as a street photographer takes him to the Embankment but amongst sights of the capital's landmarks for North American cinemagoers Elkins lives in a seedy bedsit that would easily fitted into an early *Scotland Yard* film.

Indeed, despite Phillip French's complaint that most post-1963 British films looked as though 'they had been made under the personal supervision of the regius professor of Applied Camp at the Royal College of Art' (1966: 107) *Alfie* ultimately conveys an overwhelming sense of drabness. There is also a sense of ambivalence towards the anti-hero as lothario, being unsure whether to condone or condemn a figure who uses women. There is no middle class voice of authority to bring Alfie to his senses and the only male Establishment tones hail from is Denholm Elliott's back-street abortionist.

The power of the scene between Caine, Elliott and Vivian Merchant's Lilly also serves as a reminder that the liberalization of the 1960s (*Alfie* was released the year before Abortion Act 1967) contained 'a strong element of negative utilitarianism in the legislation, more concerned with removing difficulties and minimising suffering than in positively enhancing happiness' (Weeks 1981: 252). With *Alfie* Robert Shail regarded Caine's interpretation of the character as exuding 'the kind of joyful male hedonism which increasingly characterised the ethos of the mid-1960s'. (2004:71) However, the final shot of Alfie Elkins alone on the Embankment conveys nothing of either Piri Halasz's city 'alive with birds and beetles, buzzing with minicars and telly stars, pulsing with half a dozen separate veins of excitement' (1966:30) or a celebration of 'self-assertion, personal fulfilment and the good life' (Richards 1997:157).

A similarly isolated figure is Joe Lampton in *Life at the Top*, a direct sequel to the 1958 film with the narrative is set in the mid-1960. Lampton is now the chief accountant of Abe Brown's textile mill and enjoys a lifestyle of tailored suits, gin & tonics and Jaguar S-types. He sees his nine-year-old son Harry (Paul A Martin) off on the train to his prep school but is hurt when his farewell embrace embarrasses his son and Joe bemoans the fact that he has more in common with the paperboy. If Kotcheff's direction lacks

Clayton's bravura flourishes, the screenplay of Mordecai Richler - who had made uncredited contributions to the earlier film - is of a high standard, expertly capturing the boredom of middle class provincial life where the local Establishment still despise Lampton for being *aparvenu*.

Duften society is seen as a world of marital infidelity and loneliness, with Sybil and Mark (Margaret Johnson and Michael Craig) providing a nightmare vision of the Lamptons' marriage some ten years hence. The capital is initially seen as equally unappealing - early in the film Joe makes a business trip and visits a strip club to see a show apparently straight from the nightmares of Sammy Lee - but he is now desperate for escape. Honor Blackman's visiting TV journalist Norah and the vague possibility of a directorship at a rival firm offered by Mottram (Nigel Davenport).

In the *Weekend Telegraph* of the 26 April 1965 John Crosby told his readers of 'London: The Most Exciting City in the World. However, *Life at the Top* is one of the very few films of our period to note the social gulf between provincial England and the capital and once he is in London Joe is sneered at by Norah's literati friends for not owning a black roll neck sweater and for still using Brylcreem. Unlike Jimmy Brewster, Lampton has never seen the need to moderate the speaking voice of his childhood and his Bradford tones contrast uneasily with their actorish vowels. 'Full of love and Oxfam they are, full of humanity, but introduce a stranger, a non-club member into their midst and they will insult him just for the hell of it' is his not inaccurate assessment.

Lampton is on the verge of middle age and craves not pop success but recognition from the London - as opposed to the provincial - Establishment. Joe believes that the capital will be less class bound than the world of the provinces but a key scene set before an interview board for a senior commercial directorate disabuses him of this notion. Joe's CV - modest compared with the academic achievements of other applicants but a vast personal success given his deprived background - is politely and ruthlessly dissected. In *Life at the Top* London appears less the city of limitless opportunity and more of another closed fortress to a scholarship boy.

Throughout this whole scene, Harvey effortlessly and subtly conveys Lampton's shame and destruction of self-esteem and, following Lovell and Kramer's dictates on the analysis of how a character is embodied, one is reminded that this is the performance of a deracinated actor. As Anne Sinai contends, Harvey's entire career saw columnists,

reporters and public relations agents invent various backgrounds ‘and he invented some for himself’. (Sinai 2003: 1-2) Laurence Harvey was a Jewish Lithuanian raised as an English speaking South African with a screen persona partially forged at RADA yet some of his best and most sincere work saw him adapt another accent, one of a lower-middle-class provincial parvenu found wanting in metropolitan society. For Joe Lampton the dreams of London as a classless city of opportunity are just that.

In *Room at the Top* Alice tells Joe that ‘You don’t ever have to pretend. You just have to be yourself’ but by doing just that in front of the figures he wishes to impress the result is near mental collapse - subtly conveyed by an actor who understood how a persona needed to be crafted to survive in an alien land. The end of *Life at the Top* sees Joe running his father-in-law’s business, driving a Maserati Quattroporte and now trapped in provincial affluence. Lampton has returned to Yorkshire both for his family and for enhanced career prospects at the cost of further entrapment. The final shot of the factory gates shutting in front of his new car, symbolising his status as a privileged prisoner, a conclusion as bleak as in the first film.

Bernard Levin wrote that the 1960s was a decade when ‘Never was it easier to gain a reputation as a seer, never was a following so readily acquired’ (1970: 9-10) but this applies to none of the figures here. Aside from the romantic conventionalism of *The Knack*, the films within this chapter concur with Brooker’s assertion that ‘The dream has come true - and the real fruit of the Fifties and Sixties lies in the fact that, never before, its hollowness has been exposed’ (Brooker 1969:299). *Four in the Morning* (Anthony Simmons 1965) opens with a long tracking shot of London’s still industrial docklands in a grey dawn and although the unnamed couple played by Ann Lynn and Brian Phelan seem to have the freedom of the city their day is spent ‘desperately trying to be carefree and spontaneous’ (Murphy 1992: 85) but this cannot balance their lack of communication. *Catch Us If You Can* (John Boorman 1965) was funded by Anglo-Amalgamated as a vehicle for the Dave Clark Five in the wake of *A Hard Day’s Night* but despite the first 75 seconds containing ‘37 cuts, eight pans, three tilt’s (Glynn 2013:107) the director does not create a pop vehicle. Peter Nichols’ script has Clark as Steve, a stuntman working on a TV commercial for meat at Smithfield Market; commercial London subverted for consumerist kitsch. The remaining four-fifths of the Dave Clark Five are reduced to being virtual extras, present only to take part in comedy relief car chases in their Mini Moke as

the director saw the film as ‘a portrait of a shallow materialistic society, controlled and manipulated by advertising where youth was a commodity’ (2003:114).

Tired of his meaningless work Steve decides to escape with Diana (played by the wonderful Barbara Ferris), the campaign’s mascot, to Burgh Island in Devon. Steve’s old youth club leader now has a farm near there and Diana had bought property on the island in memory of her childhood holidays. As the borrowed white Jaguar E-type speeds along the London Steve and Diana appear every inch the swinging couple of a time of ‘individualism, doing your own thing’ (Marwick 1998: 16) but the two are attempting to escape the London where ‘theyouths themselves were exploited by a vast commercial project’(Ackroyd 2001: 759). Throughout thejourney, Boorman continually explores the notions of illusion and reality; en route to Devon, the young people find the attempts of business and the government to control the countryside resulting army camps and gimcrack hotels and the saturnine advertising executive Leon Zissell (David de Keyser) manipulates their flight to the country.

If Zissell offers the oppsite to paternal guidance, he is matched by Nan and Guy (Yootha Joyce and Robin Bailey, both in superlatively good form), a faintly sinister middle class couple who collect antiques. ‘The desperate measures people have taken to immortalize the moment’, Guy muses, predicting the time when the clothes and attitudes of the young people would themselves be historical kitsch in the near future. Bernard Levin wrote in *The Pendulum Years* of ‘the Sixties’ search for the past and the certainty it might contain’ (1970: 430) and on reaching the coast, Steve finally meets with Louis (David Lodge), his former youth club leader and mentor - who promptly gets his name wrong. The pair next discover that Diane’s Utopia ‘smells of dead holidays’ and even Burgh’s island status is another illusion, as demonstrated by the lonely and depressed materialist Zissell who ‘walks’ to the island. Pauline Kael saw the film:

as if Pop art had discovered Chekhov - the Three Sisters finally set off for Moscow and along the way discover that there isn't any Moscow. The young refugees from urban corruption look for pastoral innocence and solitude, and find that the corruption has infected the countryside. It is total. And the island the girl dreamed of turns out-at low tide-tobe attached to the mainland. (1982:244)

Of all the male figures in this chapter, it is Brewster who falls into Dyer’s description of the rebel figure who does not ‘fit in with the prevailing norms and/or because they see the latter’s pointlessness’ (1979: 52) the irony being that the norm Jimmy is rebelling against is his own respectable background. Halazcs claimed that ‘During the shell-shocked 1940s,



thrusting New York led the way, and in the uneasy 1950s it was the easy Rome of la dolce vita. Today, it is London. (1966: 30) but the confused and lonely figures played by Harvey, Clark and Caine are far closer to the reality than any ‘Swinging Myth’.

### 007 – For Cad and Country

In *The Neophiliacs* Christopher Brooker mused on ‘Why was it going to be Britain that would produce the Beatles and Carnaby Street and television satire and the James Bond films, why London would end up acclaimed as “the most swinging city in the world”?’ (Brooker 1969:80) But the positioning of the square-jawed 007 with these figures of modernity now appears slightly incongruous; an Establishment figure who believes that the Beatles should only be listened to whilst wearing ear-muffs. The cinematic James Bond was a character who might be the ideal combination of square-jawed British cinema hero and darkly romantic cad, one who could successfully combine a professional role and sexual appetites with post-war consumerism and even patriotism. 007 fused unambiguous physicality with a wholehearted embrace of consumerism and selfishness in the name of Queen and Commonwealth; the ideal combination of cad and cadet.

*Casino Royale* was published in 1953 but it was not an immediate commercial success; it was only in 1956, when Pan re-issued the novel as a cheap paperback to a target marketplace of book clubs and public libraries, that Fleming’s work was finally able to reach a wider readership. David Cannadine compares the success of the Bond novels to that of John Buchan’s heroes Bulldog Drummond in that 007 flourished in ‘an Establishment England of the Conservative governments of 1951 – 1964 just as Buchan was that of the Conservative (and Coalition) governments of 1922 – 40’ (2002:292).

Alexander Korda passed on the option to film *Casino Royale* around 1954 but eight years later the mood was more propitious for a 007 adaptation. The book had already been turned into a US TV play in 1954 Harry Saltzman, the producer who had co-founded Woodfall Productions with John Osborne and Tony Richardson, acquired the rights to Fleming’s books, apart from *Casino Royale*. This association ended in 1960 and Saltzman joined forces with Albert Broccoli of Warwick Films to form Eon Productions, choosing *Dr. No* as the first of the series to adapt as its plot echoed contemporary events in Cape Canaveral.

As Andrew Spicer also notes, the screen Bond was, in some ways ‘direct descendent of Warwick Films’ “lounge-suited supermen” ( 2003: 75 ) and from 1953 until the end of the decade, the company made 18 films for Columbia in the USA. Many of these pictures featured British supporting actors ‘as either objectionable villains or as dull-witted opponents of tribal chieftains’ (Harper and Porter 2003:129). Warwick often managed to convey a transatlantic air regardless of the locations. *The Long Haul* (Ken Hughes 1957) has a British setting but this is circumvented by having Mature in the lead as ex GI lorry driver Harry Miller - and by having many of the supporting characters sounding either Canadian (Patrick Allen) or Irish-American (Alfred Burke!). The fact that the traffic is still resolutely driving on the left is a mere detail and it is very hard not to like a film in which Miller proves his macho credentials by changing the wheel of a Leyland Octopus in the middle of a loch; it is difficult to imagine even Sean Connery attempting that. And impossible to imagine Roger Moore.

Thus, the first four Bond films that were made within our period follow Warwick’s tradition of making colourful but still medium budget spectacles with a certain amount of overseas footage and reaction shots from a supporting cast of British or British-based Commonwealth actors. 007 variously encounters the familiar faces of Anthony Dawson, Earl Cameron, Paul Stassino, Burt Kwouk and Michael Brennan and the opening sequence of *Dr. No* with its Brylcreemed extras crowded around an obviously studio set roulette wheel that provides the most visible connection with the legacy of Warwick Films’ succession of 1950s’ Double Bills. The financial backing for *Dr. No* was from United Artists, who offered Eon a six-picture deal. UA had been investing in British films as early as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda 1933). Tino Balio notes how by 1950, in the wake of the Eady Levy, ‘Great Britain was the most important market for overseas efforts and it was here that UA first concentrated its overseas production efforts’ (1987: 236).

UA’s funding would ensure a certain degree of overseas filming and in place of Warwick’s use of Hollywood leads – Alan Ladd or Victor Mature whose career had peaked but who still carried a certain amount of box office value together with a certain amount of glamour there would be a young British leading man. Prior to *Dr. No* Sean Connery’s principal image in British cinema was that of a useful heavy – *Tarzan’s Greatest Adventure* (John Guillermin 1959) or *The Frightened City* (John Lemont 1961). Jeffrey Richards distinguishes Connery’s 007 from Bulldog Drummond in terms of the

latter being ‘essentially classless’ (1997: 163) arguing that the Scottish accented Connery functions as a cooptation of the class critique of the *Angry Young Man* film and Sarah Street contends that he ‘represented “Britishness” of a meritocratic rather than a class-based nature’ (2002: 189).

Yet, both of these claims seem faintly improbable. Connery’s physical grace – the actor had undergone dance training in the 1950s –inferred Bond’s inherent violence although the accent initially employed by Connery is certainly different from the RP tones of M, changing vocal inflexions matched his progressive ownership of the role. The actor’s voice, already more refined in 1962 than the Edinburgh tones heard in *Hell Drivers*, moving ever up the social scale as the series develops. Derek Hill described the first cinematic Bond as having ‘exactly the right mixture of strong-arm fascist and commercial telly salesman’ (1962: 19) and indeed British cinema of the later 1950s and early 1960s may have seen a greater acceptance at the box office of blue-collar leading men such as Stanley Baker and, by 1965, Michael Caine.

However, Connery seems to have been mainly cast as 007 because traditional stars of 1962 proved to be too expensive; Bray refers to his salary as being £6,000 (Bray 2010: 86). The United Artists executives complained at Eon’s decision to film in colour, which added some \$50,400 to the overall budget and how much of the funding was earmarked for ‘production values, that vague term encompassing the conspicuous “above the line” expenditure on things that will actually show up on screen’ (Walker 1974: 186-187). A budget of \$1.1 million was fairly limited even by the standards of 1962 but as with the Hammer horrors, the *Carry On* films, the *Doctor* series, the Boultings’ comedies and other highly popular film genres Eon’s production base was a key factor in establishing the Bondian formula. In *Dr. No* the set designer Ken Adams, on a limited budget of £20,000, invented the concept of the Nehru suited super villain’s underground lair as well as lending a convincing air of gloss to a modestly budgeted production. The UA funding allowed for five weeks of location shooting in Jamaica, and here Terence Young’s camera captured a world that is possibly the nearest to the original novels. This is Bond’s true home: a surviving British Crown colony where police chiefs wear Sam Browne belts, and where a streak of miscegenation and casual racism is quite noticeable. *Laurence of Arabia* (David Lean 1962) may have questioned the very nature of pax Britannica but in the first 007 film, Bond is happy to order his West Indian assistant Quarrel (John Kitzmiller) to clean his shoes. Ian Cameron of *The Spectator* went so far as to refer to the first screen

appearance of James Bond as the film debut of ‘every intellectual's favourite fascist’ (1962:20).

Eon’s financial restrictions meant that Young had to use several amateur and semi-professional actors in Jamaica but this further emphasised the setting of *Dr. No* in a colony of ceiling fans lazily turning above the heads of gin-sling quaffing remittance men. William Foster Davis, a local solicitor, played Superintendent Duff with great aplomb, sweeping up in his black Ford Consul Mk.2 staff car to arrest the duplicitous ‘Eurasian’ Jezebel Miss Taro (Zena Marshall). The film version of *Dr. No* created a character who combined the decadence of Wing Commander Glendenning or Miles Ravenscourt with national pride; the Cad as Cadet. Sarah Street contends that the Bond films equate with the protagonists of Kitchen Sink films’ desire to escape a future of domesticity (1997:87) and Harper and Porter see 007 as the successor to Arthur Seaton as the epochal British film hero (2003: 272). However, the Bond pictures, as with the novels, revel in brand names in a manner that Joe Lampton would have heartily approved of. The off-duty 007 would regularly dine in Blades and Joe aspires to its provincial equivalent in the form of membership of the Leddersford Conservative Club, together with an Aston Martin in future that embraced:

Finlay the tailor with the Daks and Vantella shirts and the Jaeger dressing gown, Priestley the grocer with its smell of cheese and roasting coffee, Robbins the chemist with the bottles of Lenthéric aftershave lotion and the beaver shaving brushes. (Braine 1957: 196)

Meanwhile, in *From Russia with Love* (Terence Young 1963) Commander Bond likes to commence the day with coffee from De Brynes of New Oxford Street together with Tiptree’s Little Scarlet Strawberry Jam, Jersey Butter, Cooper’s Vintage Oxford Marmalade and many other foodstuffs not readily available at your newly opened supermarket. There was a not insurmountable gulf between the world of Alan McKim of *Genevieve* Joe Lampton and Commander Bond. All three are professionals – 007 is not a decadent amateur – and all believe in combining traditional values with the latest in consumer goods.

Outsiders to Bond’s world, such as Robert Shaw’s psychotic and decidedly plebeian Red Grant of *From Russia with Love* (Terence Young 1963) would undoubtedly identify themselves via one faux pas or another – Grant orders red wine to accompany his fish. The Commander Bond of the films delights in technology and the accretions of

good living – ‘Green figs and yoghurt’ is his breakfast of choice when on a mission in Istanbul at a time when fried bread was still the norm in the UK – and the cinematic equation of sex with violence took the form of a British hero. Such a combination in a contemporary setting was not unknown in post-war cinema, but unlike *The Blue Lamp*, where Tom Riley was an oik and wide boy 007 is a government-licensed cad. Bond reports to Bernard Lee’s figure of paternal authority, and inevitably his sexual conquests are in the name of Queen and Commonwealth.

The screenplay still constantly associates Bond with a combination of breeding, natural authority and a sexual persona not so far removed from any number of Gainsborough anti-heroes such as James Mason’s portrayal of the Marquis de Rohan or indeed Christopher Lee’s interpretation of Count Dracula for Hammer Studios. Commander Bond contains elements of both, now suitably updated for the 1960s with an Aston Martin DB5 and an imperishable belief in the British status quo. Meanwhile, Jack Lord’s Felix Leiter has little obvious narrative function but sporting a truly epic pompadour, and wearing shades with verve and aplomb, bearing out Kingsley Amis’s contention that:

The point of Felix Leiter, such a nonentity as a piece of characterisation, is that he, the American, takes orders from Bond, the Britisher, and that Bond is constantly doing better than he, showing himself, not braver or more devoted, but smarter, wiler, tougher, more resourceful, the incarnation of little old England with her quiet ways and shoe-string budgets wiping the eye of big global-tentacled multi-billion-dollar- appropriating America. (1965:90)

Indeed, one of the more notable achievements of *Dr. No* is just how a figure as faintly anachronistic as Commander Bond was successfully given a contemporary gloss. Against a back- ground of earnest looking cypher clerks in their Hank Marvin glasses and local intelligence officers who drive Ford Anglia 105Es moved a tall immaculate figure equally at ease in airports as cocktail bars. 007, despite being played by an actor aged only in his early thirties, is a devoted traditionalist. The two Bond films of our period that were partially shot in what were then British controlled territories – some of *Thunderball* was filmed in The Bahamas– entirely lack the ambiguities of *Windom's Way* and instead take the viewer back to the uncomplicated ethos of the bush-shirted Antony Steel in *Where No Vultures Fly*.

*Dr. No* was released on the 5th October 1962 in the UK and in the USA in early 1963. It was the next in the series, *From Russia with Love* that developed the 007 film formulaproper; the Maurice Binder devised titles the pre- credits sequence, the first appearance of a Blofeld figure and Desmond Llewellyn's first appearance as Major Boothroyd of Q Division. However, catalysing the cartoon like elements present in the first two films was the moment when 'Q', unveiled Bond's new Aston Martin DB5 in *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton 1964). This was the culmination of the process described by John Pearson, in that Eon – 'the professional myth- makers' (1966: 449) - had now taken over 007 from Ian Fleming.

The dashing Aston Martin - itself ironically the product of a 'traditional' British car-maker under commercial siege from the cheaper Jaguar E-Type parvenu rival - also masked a figure who was 'a rigid jingoist, almost lovably archaic' (Durgnat 1970: 151). To place 007 in Carnaby Street or Kings Road would have been unthinkable for a character who only seemed to know gentleman's clubs and the Admiralty Buildings whilst on leave in London. When *Casino Royale* was first published, London was actually seeing a revival of upper-class society via a reinstatement of the Social Season and of the films Simon Winder remarks that when in *Goldfinger* 'Connery says that drinking un-chilled

champagne is like listening to the Beatles without ear-muffs, the entire swinging sixties collapses' (2006: 2001).

Dominic Sandbrook sees 1963 as the year of 'the gleaming new Britain of Sean Connery and Paul McCartney' (2005: 715) but beneath the exotic locations and, from *Goldfinger* onwards, an increasing reliance on hardware, remains the author's Commander RN. The 007 of the novels rails against Teddy boy taxi drivers – 'This youth, thought Bond, makes about twenty pounds a week, despises his parents, and would like to be Tommy Steele' (Fleming 2012:12) – when he is not engaged in womanising and gourmandizing. This is the principal irony of the 007 films – that their attitudes are far more reactionary than the best war or crime films of the previous decade, from an author who believed that 'taxation, heavy controls and certain features of the Welfare State have turned the majority of us into petty criminals, liars and work dodgers' (Fleming 1963: 466). George Melly quotes Ronald Bryden's article for *The Observer Colour Supplement* of the 7th August 1966, *The Spies Who Came Into Camp*, describing the 007 of *Thunderball*, the last Bond film of our period, as:

Leaping into the sky, streaking in primary colours through the empty blue seas, has more in common with Superman and Flash Gordon than with the puzzled grey hirelings of Greene and Ambler. (Bryden quoted in Melly 1970:191)

The aesthetics of the Bond film, as devised by Ken Adams, increasingly helped to reinforce the image of Bond as more of a comic book figure than the 007 of Fleming's novels. Yet in *Thunderball* Terence Young's direction still makes the British superman a cad turned B-film style hero. The film was made at almost the exact time that the Beatles were planning their seminal *Rubber Soul* album but almost the entire first half of the narrative unfolds in a deeply un- swinging health spa in a country club. Christopher Bray notes that throughout the film 'our patently bored hero is chauffeured around from one set-piece to another' (2014: 197) as 007 attempts to rid the world – and this particular Crown Colony– of eye-patch sporting villainy. At one point Bond drives a Morris Minor, thereby further adding a bathetic note to the sense of plodding traditionalism in an ostensibly dynamic spy narrative.

The Bond films may have been made for an international market (Balio 1987: 260) but their hero is far closer to Lindsay Anderson's grumblings about the 'snobbish' (1957: 157) tendencies of the UK film industry than the often self- doubting figures seen in the best war films of the 1950s. Thus, in the wise words of David Cannadine, the James Bond

of Fleming's novels was 'a quintessential clubland hero, flourishing in the very era when they were deemed to be doomed'. (2002: 293) Winder sees the films as appealing to an audience stranded, like the government, on a planet that didn't have too much to say about them. (2006: 201) In the Bond films of our era, beneath the Aston Martin's equipped with lethal accessories and a sexual licence that was diametrically opposed to the Woodfall vision where sex = pre-martial pregnancy = misery, was a hero figure about as progressive as Donald Sinden dealing with a recalcitrant reptile. The strongest trait of the screen Bond, as with his literary counterpart, is his sense of traditionalism - Tony may be no match for Barratt in *The Servant* but Commander Bond is ready to convey and defend values as resolutely as Bulldog Drummond.





## **CODA –*HEAVEN'S ABOVE!***

To end this thesis with one particular film may, at first sight, seem otiose but *Heaven's Above!* is arguably the definitive critique of the Myth of the Blitz and the New Elizabethan ideal of affluence and tradition combining harmoniously. The screenplay, written by John Boulting and Frank Harvey and based on an idea by Malcolm Muggeridge, concerns how a filing error by a Church of England clerk causes Peter Sellers' John Smallwood, to be appointed to the living of Holy Trinity Church in place of Ian Carmichael's clergyman of the same name.

John Smallwood is a former prison chaplain from the West Midlands and on arrival he shocks the local community by replacing Major Fowler (William Hartnell) as church warden with Matthew (Brock Peters), a West Indian dustbin man. He also allows the extended Smith family to set-up home in the vicarage after they are evicted by the police when their campsite is acquired by the town's main employer Tranquilax. Smallwood's initiatives so move Lady Despard (Isabel Jeans), the owner of Tranquilax, that she puts her whole fortune at his disposal, and he starts to distribute free food from the church – a development with disastrous economic consequences for the town. Durgnat observes that:

Idealists of a pre-war vintage, such as Muggeridge (who provided the basic idea for the film) and the Bouldings, had fought the good fight in the 1930s and 1940s, hoping the peace and social reform would generate a new, less selfish spirit. Now they were the Angry *Old Men*, as the Common People, so long the great Old Left cause, enthusiastically embraced "Admass". (2000:218)

The film's setting is 'Orbivston Parva', which has more than a passing resemblance to Titfield – but now supermarkets have supplanted the local grocer's store and the streets are dotted with Morris Mini-Minors. John Smallwood is an outsider to the community in both background and belief, for he has an unquenchable desire to change as a wholehearted member of the community. As the film makes clear, Smallwood stands little chance of acceptance as a member of the polite society; he speaks with an impeccable Brummagem accent (a Sellers specialty) and dresses in a drab chalk-stripe suit.

The clergyman is initially seen as apparently as much a naïf as Stanley Windrush but neither the script nor Sellers' performance infer that Smallwood's faith is ever less than

genuine, a figure holding a set of values in stark contrast to his surroundings. In *Heaven's Above!*, the middle class townsfolk - splendidly portrayed by Hartnell (one of the few British actors who could be convincing as both officers and NCOs) and by Eric Barker as the local bank manager - remain resolutely unsympathetic. Nor is there any attempt to personify the Teddy boys who hover around the coffee bar and of The Establishment, the town's leading figures and the senior clergy are both portrayed as variously elderly, hidebound, bureaucratic. Some of the senior Church of England bishops, rather more concerned with their television appearances and promotional prospects than contending with real spiritual issues. There is no form of earthly paternal guidance from Cecil Parker's Archdeacon Aspinall. 'The Church has to live with the world as it is. We have to compromise', he informs Smallwood.

But this is what Smallwood cannot and will not do so - 'If I've come to Orbiston Parva it's because I was meant to come. I'm not packing it in now.' His new home is one of intellectual vacuity in a town where the middle class clinging to status symbols that in themselves have become virtually absurd - Fowler is still using his military title 18 years after the end of the Second World War. The mock- travelogue that opens *Heaven's Above!* sardonically observes the tawdry amusements offered by Orbivston Parva by applying heritage terminology to the vulgarities of consumerism. Sellers' fake American announcer's eulogies are contrasted with coffee bars populated with Teds, families enraptured by cheap ITV quiz shows and streets dotted with third-rate supermarkets. As we have seen with Freda Kite in *I'm All Right Jack* the Boultings perceive that mass culture cannot provide for the citizen's true needs. They also treat with disdain any organisation or popular phenomena that reduces individuals to a homogenized mob, from governmental bureaucracy to popular youth culture or an ineptly run army regiment.

*Heaven's Above!* is not a film devoid of flaws - Wilfred Sheed accurately noted how the Boultings fail to quell their tendency to 'never pass up a laugh, however much it weakens the film' (Sheed quoted in Wells 2000:48) - and the dialogue allotted to the West Indian dustman Matthew (Brock Peters) must have sounded patronising even in 1963. Much of the subplot concerning Carmichael's Smallwood is wholly dispensable and all too often the narrative indulges in mean spirited slapstick humour that would have been slightly out of place in a contemporary *Carry On*. However, in the lead is Peter Sellers giving one of his greatest, and most under-valued, performances. Eschewing all possibility

of coarse caricature, Sellers brilliantly underplays the part of the sincere clergyman and some of his best moments are opposite the most interesting of Smallwood's antagonists is Sir Geoffrey, the youngest scion of the Despard family.

The character is given extra weight by the performance of Mark Eden who plays Geoffrey as younger version of Gordon Chesterton of *The Titfield Thunderbolt* – a squire who is adapting with ease to the world of business. The process of how old money embraces new money has been one of the themes of this thesis and the young member of the Despard family combines traditional trappings – the Bentley Flying Spur, the First XI manners – with the direct approach of a straightforward businessman. The community of Obrviston Parva is almost as replete with symbols of empty consumerism as in *I'm All Right Jack* – 'Wonder Loaf', hire purchased tel-e-vision sets and the Despards' own product is a combined laxative-sedative. Geoffrey believes that the wages paid by his factory are what are principally required to keep the populace contented. He also believes in the Welfare State as the panacea for all social ills and opines of the Smith tribe - 'Human beings? That idle, dirty, thieving bunch! What do you imagine they think of all this? They're laughing at you - both of you. Making rude signs behind your back!'

As the story progresses, it would initially appear that Sir Geoffrey is correct. The Smiths seem to be utterly corrupt – our first sight of them has the town's police Inspector (Richard McNeff) and planning officer (GeoffreyHinscliffe) discussing their shiftlessness – and Despard factory is the town's economic mainstay. Lady Despard's funding of free food distribution causes the local shops to empty but the basis for Smallwood's establishment of a 'Chari-table Centre' is by no means presented as devoid of rationale. In a television interview with Ludovic Kennedy the clergyman questions both the ability of the Welfare State to alleviate all poverty and the modern world's denial of the individual, by the ignoring of their spiritual needs. Nor is Smallwood as deluded nor romantic as to assume that his task will be at all easy - 'They're not saints, I don't expect them to be. They've had it pretty rough all of their lives, they're not going to suddenly sprout wings overnight'.

It is the mass media, by miss-reporting one of Smallwood's sermons, that help to cause the collapse of the factory and the centre fails, not through any ineptitude on the part of Smallwood, but through manipulation of the Establishment and the greed of the mass-mob. The ec-centric patriarchy of the Clarke-Ealing model – senior clergy, Ladies of the Manor and aged family retainers – all ally themselves with the voraciously demanding

forces of mass consumerism and in *Heaven's Above* the very concept of mass-civilisation, by its very denial of the needs of the individual, has potential to destroy those inside of it. At the end of the film, Major Fowler learns rather too late that there are no longer any 'gentleman's agreements', a scene that resonates precisely because of its minutely observed savagery. Fowler is a resolutely unsympathetic character, constantly twitching from the vantage point of his living room, but his building firm depended on the expansion of the Despard factory; his subsequent financial ruination is a punishment out of all proportions to his insecure suburban snobbery.

It is the Church of England, in their capacity as one of the nation's largest property owners, who bail out the Despards' empire. Sir Geoffrey, meeting with the Prime Minister (Colin Gordon), agrees for the Commissioners of the Church of England to refinance his factory on the condition that Smallwood leaves the town. The withdrawal of the Despard funding for the Charitable Centre causes riots and British cinema's favourite post-war folk devils, the Teddy boys, attack Matthew. He abandons Smallwood and advises the clergyman also to flee but the clergyman defies his, and all official orders, and remains in the church. Outside, the local community is now virtually indistinguishable from the invading spivs and wide boys of the newly economic liberation zone of *Passport to Pimlico* some sixteen years earlier.

*Heaven's Above!* initially received a mixed critical reception – *The Times* regarded it as 'A serious film comedy goes wrong' (1963) whilst *The Monthly Film Bulletin* saw it as 'remarkable chiefly for the amount of schoolboy smut it manages to incorporate, and for the nastiness of its view of people' (1963: 95). However, Bosley Crowther saw it as 'like Ingmar Bergman's "Winter Light"—with jokes'. (*New York Times* 1963) and from a 2015 perspective it is a mature and deeply subversive piece of work. Much of the film's moral weight is due to the performance of Sellers who beautifully shows how Smallwood as having achieved at least personal salvation, 'even if the world has gone to Hell in a handcart' (Petley 1997: 30). The film's conclusion has Smallwood circling the earth in a space ship; far removed from the vacuous social rituals of Middle England, constantly beaming his message of hope to anyone who cares to listen - isolated but still not submitting to the dictates of the organisation.

*Heaven's Above!* was the last Boultings' satire and its impact, on this writer at least, is akin to Richard Davenport-Hines succinct and brilliant description of the impact of the Profumo Affair on British life – 'Afterwards everything still looked reassuringly familiar

but was weirdly twisted' (2013: 345). The scenes of the riot are lent an extra piquancy by being staged in such an apparently stable and reassuring cinematic environment - the redbrick town hall, the Edwardian villas and the Wolseley 6/99 and Humber Hawk squad cars are all familiar from innumerable British films. And as the townsfolk of Orbiston Parva protest, they are captured in Max Greene's gently lit black & white cinematography. But the potential viciousness of Britain's communities that was hinted at in *The Maggie* is now turned against this English 'alien'. It is against this stark background that Smallwood delivers his message to his parishioners – 'What you want I can't give. What you need, you don't want' but this is almost inevitably doomed to be unheard.

Smallwood narrowly escapes being lynched and is exiled to a Bishopric on a British rocket base in the outer Hebrides, a move seen as one of complete cynicism on the part of the Establishment. The staging of the scene before the launch of Britain's first manned spacecraft deftly and movingly illustrates the Boultings' sincerity as Smallwood gives comfort to a terrified astronaut (Howard Pays). He asks of the new Bishop if he has even been in the condemned cell and Julian Petley observes how Smallwood's tying up of the spaceman is:

presented explicitly as an act of Christian kindness to an astronaut who has lost his nerve as well as an escape from his job of Bishop of Outer Space which his employer have forced upon him and which the film shows he realises is an absurdity. (2000:30)

There is the faint inference that the astronaut has been forced by his superiors into a role to which he is unsuited - John Smallwood's act of mercy is to another victim of Establishment betrayal. As the end credits roll the clergyman retains his faith, using the spaceship to attempt to spread his message to the entire world, the spaceship orbiting past an English landscape that still looks timeless even if it does contain all levels of human weakness. And here we depart the thesis with the words of Raymond Durnat - that what is truly subversive about *Heaven's Above* is that it openly runs completely contrary to the myth of the People As Hero - or the 'religion' of 'Everyman' (2000: 221).

## CONCLUSION

As I noted in my introduction, this is the work of a cinephile social historian and I hope that I have demonstrated just how patriarchal authority in British films of the 1951 to 1965 period did change form as memories of the war receded and consumerism, especially in the post 1954 period came to be embraced by cinema. The ‘New Elizabethan’ of *Genevieve* and its ilk was a fascinating compromise between the ‘traditional values, as espoused in the ‘People as Hero’ film and post-war commercialism.

So, I will commence my conclusion with the plaque that Michael Balcon had erected on the site of Ealing Studios on January 13 1956 when the buildings were sold to the BBC. The wording read ‘Here during a quarter of a century many films were made projecting Br British character’ and at first reading, this may seem as more than slightly hubristic. We have already encountered Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s distinction between ‘being national in an objective and mainly reflective sense, and actively pursuing a national agenda’ (2004: 53) yet the national character’ projected as part of the ‘agenda’ embraced the films of Robert Hamer and Alexander Mackendrick as much as they did those of T.E.B. Clarke. In Ealing’s twilight at MGM-British Balcon’s vision also encompassed *Nowhere to Go*, a film that perhaps above all others in the late Ealing cycle highlights the importance of stereotyping neither film director, actor or producer.

If Ealing’s comedic output did show an increasing ossification as the 1950s progressed then *Nowhere to Go* and even the more cynical world-weary views of masculinity and the society that middle class figures operate in – *The Long Arm* or *The Man in the Sky* run counter to the mythology of Balcon’s late output being ‘safe’. Above all, the apparent gulf between the plaque and the ‘British character’ often encountered in Ealing films of the 1950s is another reason for my attempts to avoid conventional reactions to seemingly familiar filmic tropes and cycles became increasingly apparent. Ian MacKillop and Neil Sinyard argue that the perception of mainstream British cinema of the 1950s consists of:

Parochial comedy – what one might compositely call the ‘Carry On Doctor at St Trinian’s’ school of mirth – weary transpositions of West End successes, and bland



World War Two heroics designed to steel us against the loss of the Empire. (2003: 3)

Such a view is one that this thesis has sought to actively challenge. The films produced by the Rank/ABPC studio system can be utterly conformist - just one viewing of *True as a Turtle* or *Checkpoint* should be demonstration enough - but yet the first *Doctor* film was written, directed, photographed and acted with élan. *Trouble in Store* contains the truly surreal and extremely elaborate set-up of the department store under siege from proto-consumerist hausfraus and a five-minute vignette illustrating the hypocrisy of the 'paternal management model'. *Genevieve*, and indeed *Doctor in the House*, may have entered production against the reservations of Rank's management but this did not negate the former's trenchant criticism of British inertia. *Raising a Riot* questioned the 1950s patriarchy in the guise of a domestic comedy and the best war narratives are underpinned with sincerity and a lack of triumphalism.

The products of the studio system were indeed often the 'imperfect films' referred to in my literature review, comprised through obligation to use individual contract players but even in a product as neutered as the screen version of *The Spanish Gardener* one finds as devastating a portrayal of a failed patriarchal figure as seen in any British films. Certain contracted actors did have their talents misused by their employers - with Rank one could cite many of the films of Dirk Bogarde or Michael Craig - yet Tony Wright's miscasting in *Tiger in the Smoke* did not entirely detract from Roy Ward Baker's vision of London as a smog-bound Hades. It was also the same the Rank Organisation that showcased Peter Finch's depiction of confused and angry middle class males in *Passage Home* and *Windom's Way* and contracted Stanley Baker, arguably Britain's first working class cinema leading man. ABPC produced *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and *Room at the Top* evolved more from a filmmaker's wish to exploit a commercially viable novel than from the 'Free Cinema' movement.

So, from the viewpoint of a historian, I have attempted to follow certain principles when charting the changing role of the middle class professional film hero. Firstly, as a social historian, to appreciate the need as described by Justin Smith in *Film History* that 'a historical reading can recapture a sense of the structures of feeling of a particular period, its predilections and its anxieties - but only if rigorous contextual research supports a sensitive reading of the text itself' (1998). Secondly, to understand the studio system and industry politics, in order to better comprehend the various forces that affect

both film and filmmaker. I have cited Betty Box and Ralph Thomas' reluctance to extend their *Doctor* series as a prime example of how 'main-stream' film-makers did not have complete control over their output or image.

This in turn further highlights the impact of the post studio world on such directors – their *No Love for Johnnie* being a prime case in point. In addition, without a knowledge of just how the Eady Levy functioned, of how US funding of British films increases throughout our period or of how censorship regulations altered (to give but three examples), any work detailing cinema of this era would be moribund.

Thirdly it is important to pay individual attention to the pictures within a particular genre or series and in my thesis I have attempted to do just that with individual *Doctor*, *Carry On* films or entries in the various Anglo- Amalgamated B-film series and the James Bond cannon. This is partially because the first entries in the series are often atypical of the cycle's popular image - *Carry On Sergeant* was devised as a one-off - but also to treat the pictures as homogenous entities is to ignore their many and various ambiguities. In amongst the bed pan jokes of *Carry On Nurse* the screenwriter Norman Hudis had a left-wing scientist as his authorial voice uttering lines far removed from the series' image of flying bras in a muddy field. It is through individual examination of the *Doctor* series that one sees how the cycle moved from the celebration of controlled youth to a cosy institutionalisation safely away from the wicked world of Carnaby Street. This is equally the case with B-film series and I have described how the *Scotland Yard* series moves from Edgar Lustgarten narrating anecdotes of Soho or dockland crimes (indeed the first entry in the series, *The Drayton Case* (Ken Hughes 1953) is actually set during the Second World War) to *Scales of Justice* with its evocation of misery within affluent suburbia. En route one may encounter moments of utter despair and the line of John Warwick's Superintendent - 'fetch a male nurse and an ambulance' - on discovering a mentally challenged murder suspect in *The Crossroads Gallows* (Montgomery Tully 1958) still resonates as encapsulating years of family tragedy.

Fourthly, if the history of a popular culture aims to recover what the people of the past felt as well as thought, then as Justin Smith argues:

film can claim two advantages as a source. First, for the first half of the 20th century at least, it was the dominant medium of audio-visual representation and, at its what A. J. P. Taylor called the 'essential social habit' of an age... But second, beyond its popularity, feature film deals not only in ideas, but also in emotions.

While reflects social reality, it always refracts and mediates it and may, to some extent, be considered the repository of currents of feeling in any age. (1998)

Smith also refers to the medium as one of the expression of 'both desire and loss (1998) and such currents of often conflicting feeling may be experienced in the war films made by Rank and ABPC where one often finds not so much the 'stiff upper lip' of Beyond the Fringe's *Aftermyth* and countless subsequent parodies but senior and junior officers who are seen to maintain desperately their façade in the face of almost insurmountable challenges. The scene of Guy Gibson choking back his grief after the death of his dog may be regarded as the epitome of the British cinema stiff upper lip but the authenticity of the final scene - the Wing Commander walking away to write letters to the families of those who did not return is beyond doubt. The anger displayed by Joe Lampton towards his 'betters' in *Room at the Top* to Harry Palmer's culinary prowess in *The IPCress File* display the fears and aspirations from those of a recent, but often very remote, past.

I have argued that Michael Caine's Harry Palmer is a prime example of how consumerism could be seen by the mid-1960s as a form of power and Deighton's advice on how to make kebabs is an excellent example of cultural knowledge that was accessible by all social classes. In my analysis of *Invasion*, shot towards the end of our period, to understand the request for the hero to not involve himself 'in a situation that is already very tragic' from an Oriental 'alien' is to gain a greater understanding of Britain during the era of mass de-colonialisation.

My examination of films such as *The Damned* or *The Great St. Trinian's Train Robbery* illustrate my belief that a picture does not have to boast a sizeable budget to serve as a form of historical text or even 'cultural respectability' – hence my devoting equal space to *The Cruel Sea*, *Carry On Cabby* and the *Edgar Wallace* series. With regard to the last-named, these are key to illustrating changing role of the senior police officer in British film, his diminishing importance within the crime genre reflecting an increasingly affluent society progressively less likely to respond to the clang of a Winkworth bell on a black Wolseley. The younger Inspectors played by Stanley Baker react to this new world with unease and aggression whilst the senior figures of Jack Warner and Laurence Olivier merely shake their heads in despair. Similarly, the films detailing the peacetime army move from the securities of *Carry On Sergeant* to *Tunes of Glory* with its peacetime officers performing rituals within their barracks with all of the

zeal of POWs attempting to stave off madness, as the ex-officers of *The League of Gentlemen* fulminate against their lost status.

Finally, I have argued that the National Cinema template of Michael Balcon was created for a specific purpose during the Second World War but even during the conflict the tensions and ambiguities are already apparent – vide *Went The Day Well?*. By the 1950s *The Titfield Thunderbolt* displays the anger and fear beneath the comic mask at anyone who tries to threaten the ideal community. By the time *Sapphire* entered production during the end of the Rank studio system the faith in the police to resolve issues in an increasingly fragmented society was wavering and in *Life for Ruth* there were no paternal figures to resolve an appalling dilemma.

What has also affected me during the years of research is that the popular genres discussed in these pages so often belie their reputation for solidity as bestowed upon them by a myriad of critics and academics. In comedies, war films and police dramas there is often penetrating criticism or at least an examination of the pressures of maintaining the status quo. Christopher Bray encapsulated such views when he compared the London of *Repulsion* with the capital of:

a thousand British pictures – *Genevieve*, *The League of Gentlemen*, *Spring in Park Lane* etc. – before it. In those movies, though, it had figured as a topography of the utmost stability – the topography of the comfortably well-off Britain that had come through the inclusively social democratic consensus years almost untouched. (2014:43)

However, I hope this thesis has demonstrated that this was never the case and the potential for dissent is often present in the most seemingly solid of screen patriarchs. British films of the 1950s so often boast paternal figures who are isolated, confused or troubled – *vide A Chance of a Lifetime* or *It's Great to Be Young!*. The anger displayed by Jack Hawkins in *Mandy* and *The Intruder* easily and plausibly transforms into resentment against a society that has spurned his professional guidance and protection in *The League of Gentlemen*. The military rituals that preserve group solidarity and sanity in *The Captive Heart* can equally easily descend into the self-regarding brutality of *The Hill*. As *Heaven's Above!* makes explicit, the malign aspects of the British character were always present, and as memories of the war recede they are thrown into sharper relief.

Thus Balcon's plaque does seem apposite, as the 'British character' seen in Ealing's films is, as I have argued, one that was forged in the Second World War and one that allowed for the ambiguities of Robert Hamer and Alexander Mackendrick. But it also equally applies to other studios that aimed to reflect and cater for the commercial market; it was British cinema of the mainstream that produced *Room at the Top* and *Victim*. At the end of our period, as I have contended, shows not mass contentment with a new consumerism but a sense of confusion in a post-patriarchal world. Harry Palmer is still shocked at the casual cruelty of his superiors in *The IPCRESS File* and James Bond retreats into moribund imperial dreams with *Thunderball*. In *Help!* the guiding authority figures of the vehicles for Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele may have been replaced by Patrick Cargill's buffoonish police Superintendent but in that same year the bright professional young leads of *Catch Us If You Can* are still betrayed by their elders.

During the writing of this work, I have also considered the words of David Bordwell:

A piece of cinephile criticism typically focuses on evaluation and appreciation. The ideal cinephile critic has wide and subtle tastes and tries to expose the distinctive qualities he or she finds in the film. Through the skillful use of language, the critic tries to convey the film's unique identity and to summon up, by a kind of tonal mimicry, the effects that the film arouses. (2011:1)

This, as the reader can see, is what I have attempted to do but I have always prefixed 'criticism' with 'academic'. Some of the most powerful writers in this particular area – Raymond Durgnat, Julian Petley, Sue Harper – are of an age to have experienced many of the pictures in this work during their first run – but others – Leon Hunt, I Q Hunter, Melanie Williams – evidently are not. Such academics demonstrate that affection and a

description of the emotions that certain performances and directorial flourishes evoke are not merely acceptable they are in fact completely relevant when placed within a context of solid academic research. I have detailed why I believe historical study combined with an appreciation of the text underlies my work, not least because no film can be entirely constrained by the mechanics of its production.

I quote once more Andy Medhurst when he wrote of Farr breaking ‘Simply writing those words cannot convey the strength of Dirk Bogarde’s delivery’ (1984:31). It is largely for this reason that the last film I wrote about was *Heaven’s Above* for beneath the guise of a ‘Boultings’ satire’ is as devastating, and self-reflexive attack on the tropes of the People as Hero as to be found in British cinema. To describe the expression on Peter Sellers’ face as his hero faces betrayal of all levels of society, and as he embarks on his last earthly gesture of kindness, his faith undimmed, is to express the undermining of the myth of everyman more radical than any Free Cinema or Kitchen Sink offering. I refer again to Michael Balcon’s plaque with the thought that the ‘British character’ that the Ealing promoted increasingly became one that the individuals in society needed protecting from, including those middle class figures charged with their control and guidance.

Any film, regardless of budget or indeed intent, is an ambassador for a gamut of the incidental; places and moments in time combined with capturing a set of ideas and social values elements that impact on an audience long after the picture’s initial release. This especially true of the heroes of British films of 1951 to 1965 and perhaps my main reason for embarking on this work was, to quote Fred Inglis:

The dead go on before us, larger than in life they seemed, as Larkin also said, never more so than in these films. As we heed them, in our history books and in our cinemas, their energies flow again down the reopened channels of feeling and imagination. The ghosts walk, inspiring us with new possibilities. That is what ghost stories are *for*. (2003:50)

That is why I wrote this thesis.

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