

A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CINEMAGAZINE

The cinemagazine was a periodically-released film series shown in cinemas, and later on television, both in Britain and abroad since 1913. It was closely allied to the newsreel, and some cinemagazines were produced by newsreel companies, but the form ranged widely. Some had a news or documentary function (This Modern Age), some were entertainment supplements to newsreels (Gaumont Mirror), some were sponsored by industrial concerns (Oil Review), some were issued by government bodies for national (Britain Can Make It) or international (This Week in Britain) consumption. Cinemagazines is the common term for the genre, but they were also known as screen magazines or magazine films.

The first cinemagazine was probably the Kinemacolor Fashion Gazette, issued for a few months in 1913. The First World War series The Whirlpool of War (1914-1915) was more of a magazine than a newsreel. However, the form properly became established with Pathe Pictorial, first issued by the Pathe newsreel company in 1918, and which would continue in British cinemas until 1969. Pathe became specialists in cine magazine production. In 1921 they issued Eve's Film Review, a weekly film series for women, which ran until 1933; and between 1930-1941 they issued Pathetone Weekly, dedicated to exhibiting 'the novel, the amusing and the strange', with a particular emphasis on musical items. Other newsreel companies follow suit, with Gaumont Mirror (1927-1932) and British Screen Tatler (1928-1931), while Ideal Cinemagazine (1926-1932) established the common name for this new form of screen information.

The cinemagazine was now understood to be a reel of short interest items, akin to the newsreels, but showing lighter magazine material without a news agenda. Travelogue, curiosities, fashion, sport, interviews, animals – all went up to produce a popular package that found a settled place in the cinema programme. They gained a reputation in some quarters for inconsequential trivia, but they could be observant, stylish, and slyly revealing, as well as representing popular taste. Even John Grierson, doyen of the documentary film movement, admitted of the cinemagazines, '... within [their] limits they are often brilliantly done'.

With the Second World War, the cinemagazine form began to broaden, as there came to be increased need for information film series that showed audiences issues and events beyond the newsreels. Specifically, government organisations became interested in their production. The Ministry of Information sponsored Worker and Warfront (1942-1945), made by documentary specialist Paul Rotha, while other series on the borderline between newsreel and cinemagazine were Warwork News (1942-1945) from the Ministry of

Supply and Allied News Magazine (1943), produced by the Inter-Allied Information Committee.

The cinemagazine flourished in the immediate post-war years. The Ministry of Information's successor, the Central Office of Information, became a major producer, seeing the cinemagazine as an effective form of disseminating information on government policy or economic issues. It was also seen as a means of projecting images of British life to Commonwealth countries, and encouraging international trade. The COI issued Britain Can Make It (1945-1947, a successor to Worker and Warfront), This is Britain (1946-1951), Colonial Cinemagazine (1947-1949), British Calendar (1959-1969), Commonwealth Review (1964-1965), This Week in Britain (1959-1980), and Living Tomorrow (1969-1983), among others. Commonwealth countries started to produce their own news and cinemagazine series, the Central African Film Unit being responsible for Rhodesian Spotlight, later Federal Spotlight (1955-1963).

The cinemagazine also developed as a means of showing the background to news and issues of the day, inspired by the strident example of the American series The March of Time (1935-1951), shown monthly in Britain, with some items shot by a British-based production unit. The March of Time, with its attempt to explain the world's current affairs to cinema audiences, inspired the British series Point of View (1939-1941) and the Rank Organisation's This Modern Age (1946-1951). Pathe issued an occasional series, The Wealth of the World (1950-1951), which took as its theme the industrial development of natural resources. The combination of entertainment and engagement with issues of the day saw the cinemagazine adopted as a form by industrial concerns. The National Coal Board's Mining Review (1947-1983) was shown in public cinemas in mining areas. British Transport Films produced Cine Gazette (1947-1957), Shell produced Oil Review (1950-1953), the steel industry produced Ingot Pictorial (1949-1959) and the Gas Council Mr Therm's Review (1956).

The newsreels themselves began to lose ground to television news in the 1950s. The ones that survived did by becoming increasingly like cinemagazines. The British Movietone News and Pathe News newsreels turned to magazine-style stories, while Gaumont-British News changed its name and became Look at Life (1959-1969), a fondly-remembered series covering news and general topics, and making strong use of colour, as did the long-running Pathe Pictorial, which closed in the same year. The downturn in cinema attendance and changes in the nature of the cinema programme all contributed to the demise of the cinemagazine, at least as a form of cinema entertainment in Britain. However, the flexibility of the format has ensured its survival as it successfully adapted to changes in the medium. There are examples of video magazine series distributed today such as Prisons Video

Magazine (1990-), magazine programmes on television and even online series available through the internet.

The cinemagazine has been largely ignored by film histories. It has generated almost no critical literature. Partly this is due to the supposed 'light' nature of the classic cinemagazine form. Partly it is due to the disparate nature of the genre, ranging from fashion and light interest, to news events, to industrial policy, through to means of projecting British identity and encouraging international trade. Partly it is due to the general neglect of non-fiction film as a subject of study. However, the cinemagazine has always had its apologists, and a growing number of researchers are becoming intrigued by the genre, and the possibilities it offers for a wide range of research agendas. The British Universities Film & Video Council (BUFVC), which has helped to revive academic interest in the once-reviled newsreels through its British Universities Newsreel Database (www.bufvc.ac.uk/newsreels) and has now done the same for cinemagazines. The BUFVC has, through its project Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain (2004-2007) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, gathered in all key information on British cinemagazine production and added this to its newsreel database. In 2008 it published *Projecting Britain: The Guide to British Cinemagazines*, the first step in establishing a new critical understanding of the British cinemagazine, and building the foundations for sustained academic interest in a genre that is challenging and richly rewarding.