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# **The Representation of London Nights in British Popular Press and Film, 1919-1939**

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Birkbeck, University of London

## **Declaration of original work**

I hereby confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

## Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of night-time activities in the capital in popular British newspapers and films of the period. It argues that, whilst an increasingly democratised night allowed for more opportunities for previously marginalised groups, popular media of the period largely promoted adherence to the status quo.

The thesis draws on extensive primary source material, including eighty British feature films and newspaper samples of the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* to systematically analyse the representation of London's nightlife in the British interwar period. This period saw the consolidation of the popular daily newspaper industry and, after government intervention, an expansion of the domestic film industry. The interwar period also saw great social change with universal suffrage, technological developments and an economic crisis. London greatly expanded and modernised during these decades, and the city's nightlife boomed as a result.

The first chapter of the thesis offers a historical framework and literature review and explains the methodological foundations of the research. The remainder of the thesis consists of case studies of the representation of five aspects of the capital after dark. The first pair of these case studies are concerned with two aspects of the city's built environment that expanded rapidly during the interwar period: the suburbs and public transport system. The latter three chapters deal with three groups of London's inhabitants whose behaviour at night was scrutinised: journalists, police officers and women.

Each chapter uses close readings of newspaper and film sources to highlight how popular media during the British interwar period used the night-time both to appeal to audiences and to advocate resistance to cultural change. Together, they provide new insights in the cultural outputs of interwar Britain which shaped how their audiences saw the world around them.

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## Introduction: 'Dancing goes on until dawn'

It is at 12.30 a.m. that London's real night life begins, the hour when twinkling green and blue lights flash on, proclaiming the whereabouts of the "bottle parties" sprinkled over the West End and Soho (...) Dancing goes on until dawn or until the last group of guests chooses to leave, by which time the milkman is well on his round, the Tube stations are open, and the earliest shop assistants and clerks are beginning to stream back into the West End for another day's work.<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation comes from an article published in the *Daily Mail* on 1 September 1937, in which a male journalist goes out at night to explore illicit drinking parties held in London. These 'bottle parties' tried to circumvent licensing laws to allow patrons to legally drink alcohol throughout the night. 12.30am was the latest possible time for alcohol to be served legally, so bottle parties allowed patrons to *purchase* their alcohol before that time, but consume it later in the night.<sup>2</sup> For this journalist, the start of the night coincides with the start of illegal behaviour. The article also draws an explicit juxtaposition between the night-time revellers and those Londoners who start their working day early. These two groups are presented as socially separate, but briefly inhabiting the same spaces at sunrise. In this journalist's description, London's nights are about pleasure, transgression and abandonment, whereas the daytime is about labour and responsibility.

Articles such as this, purporting to provide an exposé into London's nightlife, were not uncommon in the popular press of the interwar period. Journalists and editors evidently believed that their audiences were interested in reading about what went on in London's nightclubs, bars and restaurants after dark. Although these spaces became more democratic and accessible during the interwar period, many newspaper readers across Britain continued to have no direct experience of them. Reporters such as the one quoted above were apparently not too reluctant to go out at night as part of their working day, to allow readers a glimpse of how some Londoners spent the

hours after dark. As is common for all newsreporting, these articles were an opportunity for readers, in the capital and beyond, to experience that which was otherwise inaccessible.

Fiction films could give audiences a similar opportunity, albeit with the added means of replicating the pictorial (and, from the late 1920s, the auditory) splendour of nocturnal places of entertainment, which allowed the audience to be more fully immersed in the environment.<sup>3</sup> The potential for illicit pleasure allowed for engaging storylines. Consequently, these spaces of performance and leisure, which only made up a small part of the capital's total night-time landscape, became synonymous with nocturnal London in the popular imagination.

Throughout the interwar period London's nightlife attracted attention from British popular press and cinema, the two forms of mass-media that enjoyed the largest consumption in this period. Newspaper articles and films both allowed audiences a glimpse into the exciting and sometimes glamorous goings-on of exclusive night-time spaces, and provided an opportunity for media producers to reaffirm that these places and their attendees were not decent. Both forms of media held a duplicitous relationship with nightlife – on the one hand revelling in depictions of opulent entertainment; on the other warning audiences of the dangers lurking in dark corners. The two media warned against the disruptive potential of these spaces, which harboured illegal activities and allowed white men to mix with women and people of ethnic minority backgrounds; and those of upper-class backgrounds to mingle with people from lower strata of society. They had the potential to destabilise key tenets of British society.

This thesis considers how London after dark was represented in the popular press and cinema of interwar Britain. It explores how, in a period of significant social change, the two most consumed mass media managed the increasingly prominent cultural phenomenon of urban nightlife; a phenomenon that fascinated the public but also threatened the stability of British society by allowing previously powerless groups increased agency. This thesis takes the position that the popular press and film primarily sought to reinforce existing values of national pride; patriarchal power; and government control; whilst at the same time seeking to exploit the commercial opportunities of depicting illicit night-time activities. This led to an inherent tension in films' and newspapers' relationship with the urban night which represented both fascination and threat.

### **Research goal**

This thesis's goal is to assess how British interwar newspapers and films represented London's nightlife. It takes a wide spread of newspaper articles and films produced in Great Britain between 1919 and 1939 which represent nocturnal London, and subjects these to qualitative and quantitative analysis to draw out how both forms of media negotiated the depiction of a rapidly democratising time-space. The primary sources used are a mix of well-known and studied texts and texts that have hitherto not received extensive scholarly attention. Together, this corpus provides a broad and egalitarian set of sources from which to draw conclusions about the general representation of London nights in popular media in interwar Britain. It also highlights the research possibilities of using lesser-known texts for cultural studies work, as opposed to working on a limited number of texts which have gained elevated cultural status.

By assessing how these two media represented the London night in the interwar period, this thesis expands on recent scholarly work done on cultural representations of the nocturnal.<sup>4</sup> This was a time and space of increased possibilities in the interwar period, but also one that evoked stereotypes along a restricted number of narratives. Despite making up a significant part of daily experience, the night has been relatively under-researched until recently. This thesis adds to the existing body of studies on the night by considering textual and visual cultural interpretations of the night in modern mass-media.

The project aims to demonstrate how two maturing forms of mass-media negotiated the representation of changing aspects of society in interwar Britain, in a way that attracted audiences but also protected the media organisations' commercial interests. Through this, it contributes to existing scholarly work that has argued that the British cultural industries of the 1920s and 1930s managed changing audience tastes' by rejecting radical ideas and expressions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Newspapers and films as common culture**

One of this thesis's objectives is the analysis of the reporting on London nights in the three popular daily newspapers of the period with the biggest circulations: *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Mirror*. All three titles were founded around the turn of the century and matured into market-leading tabloid newspapers during the interwar period. Their editorial offices and printing presses were based in the heart of London in Fleet Street, and their primary audience base was in London and the South East of England.

Alongside this, the thesis explores the depiction of night-time London in eighty British feature films made between 1919 and 1939. Almost all film studios of the period were

also based in London, which was the undisputed production capital of British cinema at the time.<sup>6</sup> Newspapers and films were consumed by millions of British citizens every day during the interwar period; by considering them alongside, and in relation to, one another, the thesis approaches an understanding of how the interwar public's ideas about the urban night were formed and influenced.

By considering newspapers and films alongside one another, this thesis takes forward the idea, first posed by D. L. LeMahieu, that the interwar period in Britain saw the formation of a 'common culture' led by the increased availability of commercial, mass-produced media forms.<sup>7</sup> The thesis focuses on newspapers and films in particular, because these media forms developed and matured significantly during the interwar period, and adapted to the social changes Britain was experiencing at this time. Both media were widely consumed on a (near) daily basis, thus influencing their audiences' view of the society in which they lived. Both industries had their centres of production in the British capital, which in turn meant they favoured London as a subject of their output over other British cities. Finally, both newspapers and films held links to the night-time: cinemas did a lot of their trade in the evenings, and newspapers were printed and distributed overnight. They were both dependent on night-time economic activity for their continued commercial survival.

LeMahieu has argued that in their form, newspapers and films edged closer towards each other in the interwar period, with newspaper editors adopting the strategies of film and therefore increasingly including visual materials on the printed page.<sup>8</sup> Consuming films and newspapers taught audiences to 'read' the world around them, which became increasingly fast-paced and visual, in a new way..

Newspapers were limited to presenting factual events, although reports were embellished to appeal to a large readership and increase commercial revenue. Films were able to present fantasy, but this was usually grounded in reality, to allow audiences to identify with the characters and events on screen. Both media primarily had to ensure that they were appealing to audiences in order to make a profit. As a consequence, there were many similarities between the worldviews presented by cinema and newspapers: one that resonated with the perspective of the majority of audiences.

In their content, the popular press were also 'increasingly invested in the cinema, along with other aspects of commercial culture, in [their] ongoing attempt to keep step with popular tastes, to attract readers and to sell advertising space.'<sup>9</sup> Newspaper editors recognised that cinema had become the most popular form of entertainment, offering something more modern and exciting than the theatre. The press leveraged the star power of film celebrities to increase their commercial revenue.<sup>10</sup>

Both newspapers and films were also intimately linked to the urban environment. Cultural historian Peter Fritzsche describes the 'word city' that comes off the newspaper page: 'the accumulation of small bits and rich streams of text that saturated the twentieth-century city, guided and misguided its inhabitants, and, in large measure, fashioned the nature of the metropolitan experience.'<sup>11</sup> Films similarly created 'image' and 'sound cities' for their audiences. As audiences for films and newspapers were largely the same people, the consumption of both media by London-based audiences built up an image of night-time London that influenced their perception of the city during day-to-day life. For audiences who did not live in London, films' and newspaper's representation of the capital influenced audiences' imagination of the centre of their nation.

As LeMahieu has demonstrated, during the interwar period many living in Britain enjoyed improved living standards and more disposable time and income, which meant that (daily) consumption of newspapers and films became affordable. Improved standards of education increased literacy, and government interventions boosted the production of British films. The content of these mass media products was shaped by an interplay between producer and audience expectations, which ensured that the products whose contents appealed to the largest audiences enjoyed the most commercial success.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis considers popular newspapers and feature films alongside one another, as two equal contributors to mass popular culture in interwar Britain. Newspapers and films were the two key media in Britain during this period: by 1937 the three newspapers considered in this thesis had a combined circulation of over 5 million copies daily, against a population of 47 million.<sup>13</sup> In the same year, an estimated 946 million cinema visits were made in the country; equating to an average of 2.6 million cinemagoers a day.<sup>14</sup> These figures do not take into account the many others who shared the family newspaper or consumed newspaper headlines and film advertising as they navigated through the city streets. While this thesis does not argue that audiences are passive consumers, it does consider it inevitable that the volume of newspapers and films that were distributed influenced public imaginations of Britain. This thesis explores how the depiction of a new type of social activity, taking place at night, challenged previously held beliefs about British national identity.

Because of mass media's need to be commercially viable, most mainstream culture did not offer radical opinions, but rather reinforced those viewpoints already shared by most of the public. As Lawrence Napper has pointed out, however, those majority viewpoints were in flux during the interwar period, as British society went through a



period of social and cultural change.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the positions expounded by mainstream media were not monolithic throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but shifted as their audiences' experiences of the world around them changed. This thesis highlights areas of London's make-up which changed radically during the interwar period and investigates how two of the primary sources of mass media negotiated these developments.

### **The development of London nightlife**

This thesis uses a broad definition of London nightlife, which encompasses anything that happened in the city between sunset and sunrise. This includes activities in pleasurable locales such as theatres, restaurants, parks and nightclubs; criminal schemes occurring in public and private space; domestic tasks; and the labour that takes place to keep the capital going. What all these activities have in common is that they happen under the cover of darkness, lending them an air distinct from daytime activities. During the interwar period, nightlife became increasingly public, as more and more people participated in it and the activities received more coverage in the media. Night-time activities by their nature were disruptive and challenged accepted notions of appropriate behaviour. Investigating mass media's response to these activities, then, reveals how instruments of power handled activities that had the potential for transgression.

As is evident from the quotation opening this introduction, nightlife was usually seen in juxtaposition to the day-time, when the regular business of the city took place. The night-time, by contrast, was a time for transgressions and, therefore, also for increased scrutiny and attempts at control. Activities could gain an aura of mystery simply by being conducted in the dark. Cultural historian Joachim Schlör refers to the use of

'languages of the night' which consists of slippery metaphors and imaginings.<sup>16</sup> Films gratefully used these 'languages', for example by consistently linking night-time with criminal behaviours. In *The Love Test* (1935), a lab technician uses the cover of darkness to break into the lab and sabotage the experiments; in *Cocaine* (1922) going out at night is fuelled by drug- and alcohol use.<sup>17</sup> Films in this way played into audience's expectations of the urban night, further consolidating the cultural 'language of the night'.

The history of nightlife is closely intertwined with the history of technology, as it was technological advancement that allowed people to be active after dark. This is explored more fully in the first chapter of this thesis with reference to Wolfgang Schivelbusch' book *Disenchanted Night*.<sup>18</sup> The interwar period did not mark the birth of nightlife - people have pursued social and leisure activities after dark at least since the early modern period.<sup>19</sup> However, technological advances continued to make the London nights more accessible through the end of the nineteenth century and the Edwardian period. These also allowed daytime activities to be extended into the night. Historian Judith Walkowitz, for example, notes that Berwick Street Market was able to stay open until 9pm thanks to gas and electrical lighting.<sup>20</sup> During the First World War, the Defence Against the Realm Act (DORA) placed restrictions on opening hours of theatres and other places of entertainment, thus curtailing London's night-time economy.

After the First World War, the relaxation of these restrictions led to a night-life boom with many entertainments on offer for a cross-section of Londoners. In the interwar period London's nightlife became more democratically accessible and it established itself as a feature in the lives of Londoners. Walkowitz has considered this

development as a turn towards cosmopolitanism, placing London's West End in conversation with Britain's global empire rather than its strict national boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

The film industry, too, was a cosmopolitan affair, especially during the silent era when filmmakers and actors from across Europe participated in making 'British' film productions. This thesis discusses media outputs which were produced in Britain, regardless of whether all parties to the production were British-born. The content of both films and newspapers works to strengthen audiences' feelings of being part of a national community; as all audience members consume the same media, they build up a common understanding of the world around them and the nation's position within that world.<sup>22</sup> During the interwar period, the sites of production for both popular daily newspapers and popular film in Britain were in London or the South East. The primary source material used in this thesis was consumed by a national audience, but created in a specific part of Britain. As a result, films and newspapers' presentation of nightlife was heavily influenced by the experiences and ideas of those in and around the capital.

### **Interwar Britain – a society in flux**

The interwar period in Britain has received ample attention from social historians in recent years.<sup>23</sup> These explorations have challenged assumptions about the two decades between the World Wars, for example around the impact of the economic crisis on families in London and the South East in the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> What is not disputed, however, is that the 1920s and 1930s were a period of great social change for Britain. For example, technological developments changed people's domestic environments, as increased availability of household appliances removed the need for domestic servants. At the same time, new industries such as food production factories increased

available jobs for women, who preferred working on a conveyer belt to working in service.<sup>25</sup> This reduced the number of domestic servants on the labour market which, in turn, encouraged the development of more household appliances. This is but one example of the ways in which social and technological development impacted on one another and led to social change.

The built environment of London also changed during the interwar period; suburbs developed, and the capital's public transport network unified under the name London Underground. The suburbs made it possible for many people to live in their own family home with a garden; the trains, buses and Tube allowed for more convenient travel across the city's expanse. Public transport was cheap and anonymous, allowing anyone to travel anywhere in the capital, at almost any time of day and night, thus greatly expanding individual freedoms. Class differences, previously enshrined in the physical locations of people's homes, became progressively less defined.

The increased mobility of previously marginalised groups, such as women and working-class Londoners, increased opportunities for social disruption. To minimise this risk, deviant behaviours were policed both explicitly and implicitly by highlighting and rewarding 'acceptable' behaviour through channels of mass communication. For example, in the popular stage and film production of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, a working-class woman is explicitly taught how to behave in an appropriately feminine way, which includes wearing glamorous clothes and not swearing. This thesis argues that the press and film industries had a vested interest in maintaining the existing condition, as they were profit-driven industries depending on stable revenues. In their output, they therefore praised behaviours that perpetuated the status quo, and were critical of actions that disrupted it.

Newspapers and films themselves also changed significantly during the interwar period. Film, most notably, made the transition from silent to sound at the end of the 1920s, which expanded the representational tools available to filmmakers and influenced the types of stories that films could successfully portray. The interwar decades also saw the development of increasingly bigger and more opulent cinemas, primarily in the West End. These super cinemas competed with theatres for the evening crowds seeking entertainment.<sup>26</sup> On the production side, the interwar period saw the introduction of the 1927 Cinematograph Act, which sought to artificially boost national film production. Hollywood dominated the British box office for the whole of the interwar period but, after 1927, British film production increased and there was more space for representation of British lives on the screen.

The three popular newspapers considered in this thesis were all founded around the turn of the twentieth century, but they matured and established themselves as market leaders during the interwar period. In the 1930s a 'newspaper war' broke out which spurred all three titles on to innovate their offering, leading to the establishment of the visual identity of the tabloid newspaper as it still exists today. Throughout the interwar period popular newspapers increased the amount of visual materials included in their pages; adopted bigger headlines and moved to printing news rather than advertisements on the front page.

The interwar period, then, is both a period that is clearly demarcated by two major geo-political events and a period that contains a multitude of social changes. Its common feature, spanning both decades, is the fact of constant change, as class and gender identities were challenged, and the physical living environments adapted accordingly. The producers of newspapers and films capitalised on these changes but also used their media to warn against the developments.

## **Chapter outline**

This thesis starts with an extensive exploration of how the popular press and cinema in interwar Britain developed to become two primary forms of mass media. The first chapter considers the legislative framework in which both industries operated and recounts the circumstances of production for both media. The chapter then investigates the existing literature on British interwar cinema and popular press, highlighting how this thesis builds on, and adds to, existing scholarship. The first chapter then justifies the methodology this thesis uses to investigate its primary sources, and demonstrates initial findings from the primary research.

The thesis then proceeds to five separate case study chapters, each of which closely investigates an aspect of London nightlife's representation in film and papers of the period. The first two chapters consider aspects of the capital's built environment; the subsequent three chapters explore the depiction of particular groups of people that move around in the nocturnal city. Together, these five chapters provide a broad perspective on how popular films and newspapers represented nocturnal London and the people who moved around inside it.

The first of the case-study chapters considers the growth of London's suburbs during the interwar period, and how the nocturnal suburbs were depicted in the mass media of the period. New suburbs were often built around the extending train and Underground lines, as suburban dwellers used these trains to travel to and from the city centre for work and leisure. Suburban developments were egalitarian and did not inherit the strict class identities of existing inner-city boroughs. Suburbs became incubators of class tensions as people from different social backgrounds rubbed shoulders with one another. My primary research identified few texts which discussed

the nocturnal suburb. Consequently, this chapter makes initial explorations into the representation of night-time suburbs in interwar popular media, and gestures towards areas for future scholarly work.

Following on closely from the chapter on suburbs, the second case study discusses the impact of the expansion of London's public transport provision on the city's nightlife; and how the producers of newspapers and films responded to this increased accessibility of the night-time city. The chapter considers both London's train, bus, and Underground network, which greatly expanded during the interwar period; and the depiction of taxi cabs used at night. It considers these transport spaces as public-private spaces, where the public and the private spheres collide, thus creating the potential for transgression.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapter of the thesis discuss specific groups of people who featured heavily on London's night-time streets. Chapter four discusses the representation of the figure of the journalist itself both in newspapers and in films. As is demonstrated throughout the thesis, the popular press was an expanding and maturing industry in interwar Britain, and the journalist became an increasingly important cultural figure. Journalists were also given the license to freely move around the nocturnal city, although female journalists had less opportunity to do this.

In post-Second World War cinema, the journalist became a quickly recognisable type, especially in Hollywood. This chapter poses that in the films of interwar Britain, journalists fulfilled a different role. The cinematic journalists of the period under consideration often supported existing power structures rather than challenging them. Real-life journalists also did not pride themselves on their independence, instead collaborating often and gratefully with the police.

The fifth chapter investigates the representation of the police officer at night in films and newspapers. Previous scholarly explorations on the representation of police officers in films have primarily focused on post-Second World War texts, with researchers making assumptions that before the War police officers were primarily comic characters in films.<sup>27</sup> This chapter refutes this belief by providing evidence that the representation of police officers in interwar mass media was nuanced but overall supportive of the place of the police in British society.

Real-life scandals that rocked the Metropolitan Police in the interwar period, which have been extensively researched by police historians, had limited impact on the representation of the police in other media stories. Female police officers, who started to become more commonplace in interwar Britain, received scant representation in the media. This underlines this thesis's hypothesis that the mass media ultimately promoted stability and control rather than encouraging change of the instruments of power.

The thesis's final chapter provides a culmination of a theme that runs throughout the thesis, by considering the increased mobility of women after dark in the interwar period. This represented both modernity and potential danger, as women became increasingly more difficult to manage and police. The chapter considers the representation of female prostitutes in both newspapers and films. Prostitutes were traditionally one of the few groups of women who would be out on the streets at night and this stereotype remained in the interwar period, where a woman on the street at night could often be assumed to be a prostitute. The thesis ends with a discussion of both fictional and real-life case studies of women who were killed after navigating London at night. This sadly still-familiar narrative was used to warn against the potential consequences of women's increased appetite for freedom.



## **Chapter 1: British newspapers and films in the interwar period: a history and a review**

This chapter sets out the different strands and topics this research project covers, laying the foundations of the research, its methodology and the data it considers. It is followed by five case-study chapters that explore particular aspects of the London night in depth.

The chapter is divided up into six sections: the first section starts with setting out why this work explores the representation of night-time in particular, as a time-space that significantly changed during the interwar period. It then outlines the increased popularity of newspapers and fiction films in Britain in this same period. The second section of the chapter provides an overview of the scholarly research that is relevant to this project. After mapping out these fundamental elements of the research, the third part of the chapter explores the interplay between the night, popular newspapers, and film.

The subsequent segment provides historical context to the research by outlining the development of the British film industry and popular newspapers in the period between the wars. Section five explains the research methodology and the way the newspaper and film texts were sampled. The concluding part provides a high-level analysis of the data gathered through newspaper and film sampling, to set the scene for the five case-study chapters that follow.

## **Section 1: Setting out the parameters of the research**

### **The night in interwar London**

This thesis is concerned with representations of London at night. The analyses of the primary material are limited only to representations of the night-time for two reasons. One is practical: it provides a clear limitation to the amount of data that the project engages with, and makes the scope of the project manageable. The second reason is conceptual. In Western cultures, the night has traditionally been considered as a time for transgressive and unruly behaviour.<sup>1</sup> As such, it has received specific attention by scholars, who have been particularly interested in the changes to the urban night in Europe in the long nineteenth century.

Historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch has demonstrated how the introduction of (electrical) street lights fundamentally altered people's experience of the night.<sup>2</sup> Cultural historians have taken this work further by exploring the development of the night-time city in the second half of the nineteenth century across various European cities,<sup>3</sup> or exploring the role of the night in nineteenth-century literary fiction.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of streetlight democratised the night-time space; previously, to navigate the night-time city, one needed to pay a 'linkman' to light the way with a torch.<sup>5</sup> As such, walking around the city at night in a safe and respectable way was only accessible to upper-class men.

As shops also increasingly lit up their shop windows and technological developments led to brighter lamps, late nineteenth century London became increasingly well-lit.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the introduction of French-style restaurants, hotels and department stores gave Londoners more public spaces to access at night.<sup>7</sup> These spaces became increasingly concerned with leisure and commercialism rather than being purely functional. Night-time activities were still mostly restricted to the upper classes in the

Edwardian period, but the First World War marked a significant shift in how Londoners accessed the night.

After the war, increasing numbers of working-class women entered London's workforce, which meant they navigated the city independently throughout the day and in the evenings.<sup>8</sup> It became more acceptable for white, upper- and middle-class women to eat in restaurants alone as they became increasingly active participants in public life.<sup>9</sup> After the end of the war, some of these changes proved irreversible. Many more people were now able to walk around in the night-time city and sample its pleasures, challenging previously-held notions of exclusivity and class boundaries.

In 1915 the British government implemented the Defence Against the Realm Act (DORA), a comprehensive piece of legislation that sought to control elements of society to aid the war effort. Press censorship was instituted under DORA, for example, to ensure that newspapers did not publish sensitive information about the war. DORA also prescribed that no alcoholic drinks could be served after 9pm, whereas previously there had been no restrictions on this. After the War these limited serving hours were extended, but not abolished, to 11pm for Central London venues under the 1921 Licensing Act. This was extended again to 12.30am if food was served alongside the drink.<sup>10</sup> This restriction applied to restaurants and pubs as well as to private member clubs. The latter type of venues came under increased scrutiny by undercover police officers in the interwar period.<sup>11</sup>

The continued restriction of licensing hours after the war came up against a desire on the part of young, wealthy Londoners to seek release and enjoyment after the horrors of the war. This created a market for illegal nightlife venues which stayed open after the respectable venues closed at 11pm. These nightclubs have become the epitome

of the 'roaring twenties' in the popular imagination. But this was not the only element of nightlife that developed in London during the interwar period. The expansion and professionalization of the public transport made Central London accessible until late at night to large groups of people who could enjoy its restaurants, theatres and, of course, cinemas.

The interwar period was the era of the 'picture palaces', huge opulent cinemas whose managers sought to lift cinema-going from a primarily working-class form of entertainment to something for the middle-classes.<sup>12</sup> Many of these cinemas were built in the West End, sometimes replacing old theatres and music halls. As is evidenced by newspaper coverage of this period, cinema became as important as theatre in the capital's nocturnal entertainment landscape.<sup>13</sup> Films were increasingly shown in the evening, and first night screenings of big budget productions became media events.

The interwar period saw an expansion of London nightlife, both in the types of entertainment on offer and in the numbers of people who were able to access them. Despite attempts at legislation and class-stratification, the night time remained a more liberal and transgressive time than the day. In clubs and restaurants, people from various backgrounds and ethnicities mixed. Indeed, this was a large part of the appeal of these spaces for the upper classes – they provided a controlled environment for potentially dangerous encounters.<sup>14</sup> Democratic transport systems such as the Tube also allowed for people of different classes and creeds to mix freely in a public space.

When it comes to depicting London at night, as opposed to any other British town, media productions attempting to depict British values ran into a challenge. As Judith Walkowitz has demonstrated, London in the interwar period was a cosmopolitan city; cosmopolitanism being a state which she argues exists 'in tension with conventional

norms and attachments to the nation.’<sup>15</sup> At night this cosmopolitanism came even more to the fore as many key elements of London’s night – restaurants, nightclubs, theatres, criminals – were linked with international influences and foreign agents.

Night-time London, then, was perceived as decidedly un-British, at the same time, paradoxically, as the capital and its landmarks defined the British national identity. British films were expected to promote this national identity – a key aim of legislative interventions designed to boost British film production was for British films to act as a counterbalance to the perceived corrupting cultural effect of American films.<sup>16</sup> Depicting cosmopolitan nightlife was arguably not the best way to do this, but London nightlife scenes also provided opportunities for exciting and potentially transgressive narratives which appealed to audiences. One tactic for managing this conflict was to link foreign elements of nightlife with criminality, thus preserving British characters as ‘good’. Another tactic was to define the capital as ‘bad’ and the countryside as ‘good’. This demonstrates how film plots and narratives were shaped by external pressures and a desire for films to further a specific national identity.

### **Popular newspapers and cinema in interwar Britain**

To consider the representation of London nightlife in the interwar period, this thesis uses British fiction films and popular newspapers as its primary source materials. These two distinct types of media both matured in Britain during the interwar period. Popular newspaper titles reached daily circulations of well over one million each in these decades, and their increased competition with one another pushed each title to develop ever more sophisticated reporting and design practices. This changed the face of the British printed press irrevocably, increasing the amount of entertainment,

sensationalism and advertisements found in newspapers. The interwar period saw the consolidation of the tabloid press as it still exists in Britain today.<sup>17</sup>

In the same period, cinema became the most popular leisure activity in the country, receiving an estimated two-thirds of the nation's total spend on entertainment activities.<sup>18</sup> It was not unusual for young, working-class Britons to visit the cinema multiple times a week. At the start of the interwar period, the majority of films screened were American productions. The British government implemented a far-reaching legislative intervention in 1927, the Cinematograph Films Act, to boost the British film industry and to curb the perceived Americanisation of British culture. As a result, the proportion of British films consumed by domestic cinema audiences steadily increased in the second half of the interwar period.

These major changes during the interwar period, in the form and consumption patterns of popular newspapers and British fiction films, have drawn the attention of newspaper and film historians alike. In both disciplines, the interwar period has been investigated as a distinct period of historical interest. However, a comparison of the interplay between both media in relation to a specific topic during this period, which this present research undertakes, has not yet been attempted elsewhere.

The two media influenced one another – newspapers and journalists were commonly featured in fiction films; newspaper editors adapted their paper's style and layout to appeal to film audiences; journalists worked in the film industry as screenwriters; and films adapted real news stories for their plots. The central role of both newspapers and cinema in many Londoners' lives in the interwar period meant that the content of these media had considerable influence on how their audiences experienced the world around them. At a time of significant social change which included a rapid expansion

of urban nightlife, cinema and newspapers together provided ordinary Londoners with windows on parts of British society that had hitherto been closed to them.

Ahead of popular fiction or magazines, newspapers and films were the two primary types of media consumed by interwar Britons. This was particularly true for the working classes and lower-middle classes, who made up the bulk of both cinema audiences and popular newspaper readers.<sup>19</sup> Naturally there are differences between the two forms: fiction films are designed to lead audiences into fictional worlds and often provide escapism, whereas news reportage, in spite of any sensationalism and embellishment, fundamentally serves to inform readers of factual events. Newspaper editors can choose which items and events to report on, but ultimately the paper's content is restricted to real events. Films, on the other hand, can choose to depict almost anything as long as it fits in with any existing censorship requirements. However, as newspaper reporting became increasingly sensationalist, the line between fact and fiction in newspaper content could become increasingly blurred.

The content of a film is determined by a writer or director choosing to include specific scenes from an infinite number of narrative possibilities. Film content and style are governed by narrative expectations and conventions designed to maximise ticket sales.<sup>20</sup> When a film depicts night-time scenes, it is because a conscious choice is made by the writer and director to set part of the film's action after dark. Filmmakers had to navigate between what nocturnal representations would pass the censors, and what night-time scenarios audiences would be eager to see.

No existing research has yet considered the interplay between the representational output of popular newspapers and films, two media that both became so prominent in interwar Britain. Newspaper articles, and to a lesser extent, film content, have been

used to illustrate wider cultural developments in this period, but there has not been substantial research into how newspaper and film content corresponded or diverged. This thesis investigates precisely this question of common representational form which, although not explored in recent years, was a topic of considerable interest in the interwar period itself.

This section has outlined the significant changes that the urban night-time, newspaper industry, and film industry underwent in the interwar period. It has demonstrated how the convergence of these three areas at the representational level has not yet been considered by researchers. The next section outlines which scholarly research has been undertaken on interwar cinema and newspapers and positions the current research in relation to this existing scholarship.



## **Section 2: A review of the literature**

### **Media studies, journalism studies**

Although this thesis considers newspapers and films together, it has been more common for media and cultural historians to study the two forms separately, as the scholarly fields of film studies and journalism studies remain distinct. Film historians have tended to write about specific film texts within their historical contexts, whereas newspaper historians have commonly focused on institutional histories rather than on specific newspaper reports. This is understandable given the difference in volume: one newspaper title contains more articles in a single week than the number of films an entire national film industry produces in a year. Despite these disciplinary differences, both film and journalism studies have moved from using an institutional perspective and focusing on key players (editors or directors), to considering audience responses to films and newspapers and considering both forms as part of a wider media culture.

Printed news media have existed in Britain for hundreds of years. Technological developments of the early twentieth century made newspapers a player in an increasingly crowded media landscape. By the interwar period this landscape also included broadcast media such as radio, film and, later, television. Newspapers remained one of the key forms of media in this period, as evidenced by the high circulation figures of popular dailies, noted above.

In recent years, newspaper historians have discussed whether journalism studies is a sub-division of media studies, or whether it is a discipline in its own right. This debate is most explicitly outlined in Mark Hampton and Martin Conboy's 2014 article 'Journalism history – a debate.'<sup>21</sup> This piece appeared in *Journalism Studies*, but

Hampton, Conboy and other interwar press historians, such as Adrian Bingham and James Curran, also regularly publish in the journal *Media History*. This indicates that currently, the distinctions between the journalism and media history fields and their respective publications are fluid.

The Hampton/Conboy debate responded to Conboy's 2010 article 'The Paradoxes of Journalism History'. In this article Conboy situates journalism history as a sub-discipline of media history, which in turn sits within the scholarly field of history. He describes journalism history as a burgeoning field, as the increased digitisation of newspaper archives gives scholars easier access to historical newspapers.<sup>22</sup> Conboy advocates an extraction of journalism history from media history, so that journalism's specific features are appropriately addressed by scholars.<sup>23</sup>

In the 2014 article, Hampton argues that rather than extricating journalism from media studies, 'journalism history, like media history, needs further integration into (...) mainstream historiography.' According to him, journalism as a cultural product should be considered in relation to the technology through which it is produced, and to the media organisations that control these means of production. In his response to Hampton, Conboy clarifies his standpoint and calls for historians to not only use newspapers as source materials, but to 'consider [journalism's] practice and culture as a topic of research.'<sup>24</sup>

This thesis takes up this call by providing historical context to the newspaper articles that are used as sources throughout my thesis. This chapter provides an overview of the state of the newspaper industry in the interwar period; chapter Four discusses at length the working practices of British journalists during the 1920s and 1930s. The thesis uses newspaper articles not simply as illustrative to my research topic, but

considers the cultural factors that contributed to their production. However, the overall aim of this thesis is to use newspaper articles to explore visual and textual representations of London nightlife, rather than to investigate the organisation of the press industry.

Those scholars who have favoured a media history approach over a journalism history approach usually focused on technological and institutional histories. James Curran and Jean Seaton's oft-reprinted work *Power Without Responsibility*, for example, devotes much of the book's section on 'broadcasting history' to the BBC, the primary broadcasting institution in Britain. The section on 'press history' includes several pages of anecdotes about Lords Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, founders of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* respectively, which mythologizes these newspaper owners and the supposed influence they had over the content of their newspapers.<sup>25</sup> Another key media history book, *A Social History of the Media* written by Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, focuses on the technological development of media as a means of communication. It places media history in a wider history of technology and links the birth of mass media to the development of the railroads in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

A subsequent critical evaluation of these media histories by Siân Nichols has noted the difficulties involved in writing one single history that encompasses separate media and spans across national borders. Nichols demonstrates that rich material can be uncovered if one considers the different media outputs of interwar Britain to be in interplay with one another. Hers is an audience-centred approach: as Nichols points out, the interwar British audience experienced different forms of media 'as thoroughly interrelated and overlapping phenomena.'<sup>27</sup> Taking its cue from Nichols' approach, this thesis uses the perspective of audience member, rather than the media institution, as

its starting point and investigates a breadth of cultural texts which this audience could have consumed alongside one another.

Some newspaper historians have argued against a perceived misuse of newspapers as historical source materials within wider cultural historical research. Newspaper historian Adrian Bingham has repeatedly voiced concern about historians preferring 'quality' newspapers as sources, over using more widely read popular papers.<sup>28</sup> Owing to both the digitisation of newspaper archives and the advocacy of using the popular press as source material by scholars like Bingham, historians are increasingly drawing on the content of popular newspapers to support their research.<sup>29</sup>

This thesis uses popular newspapers, which may be perceived to be of 'lower' quality, because these papers reached lower-middle class and working class audiences – groups that also made up the majority of the cinema-going public. Popular newspapers and films shared a common audience that was influenced by the content of both media, and the interplay between the popular press and cinema was more pronounced than the interplay between cinema and broadsheets.

Where traditional historians of the popular interwar press often focus their attention on the 'press barons' (Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook), who appear to have controlled the popular press in Britain during the interwar period, more recently scholars have paid attention to the content of the papers as well as their ownership. Bingham and Conboy, for example, have closely interrogated the way the *Daily Mirror* reported on the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, examining how the use of grammar and syntax influenced the meaning of the newspaper content.<sup>30</sup> In his book-length study *Tabloid Britain*, Conboy previously used this methodology to examine how the post-war popular press constructed a sense of national unity.<sup>31</sup> Analyses of this type

locate the source of discourse creation in which newspapers engage in their written output, as opposed to locating it in the papers' institutional figureheads.

### **Film scholarship considering the interwar period**

In this respect the development of the field of journalism history mirrors the developments in film history studies, which has similarly moved from reading film texts as expressions of a director's experience of the world (auteur theory) to reading films as texts constructing diverse cultural narratives, including national identity.<sup>32</sup> The field has since progressed to preoccupations with film audiences, and recent work on British newspaper history has followed a similar trajectory.<sup>33</sup>

Scholarly attention to the British film industry between 1919 and 1939 tends to split the interwar period into two parts, based on historical or technological moments of great change. Scholars either consider the 1920s and the 1930s as distinct periods;<sup>34</sup> or they consider silent films separately from early sound films;<sup>35</sup> or they start their investigations from the introduction of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, a legislative measure that sought to boost British film production.<sup>36</sup> Few scholars have considered the total British film output between the wars, as this thesis does.<sup>37</sup> Considering the interwar period as a whole places the focus on continuity within film production of the period, rather than on turning points, and allows for an interrogation of film texts in a cohesive socio-cultural context.

Among the different approaches to writing British film history of the interwar period is Rachael Low's *History of British Film*, which is one of the works that is dismissive of 1930s British film output due to the low production values of many of this decade's films.<sup>38</sup> This work long counted as the standard work on British film history, but more recently, film historians have re-examined British interwar film production. In a

significant contribution to silent film history, Christine Gledhill has undertaken a careful consideration of the links between Victorian theatre and British silent film in *Reframing British Cinema*.<sup>39</sup> Her work includes a close reading of the acting and performance style of key British silent films. Gledhill primarily considers the film texts as theoretical objects, rather than as texts produced by a collective culture industry. In her argument, theatricality and acting style change irrevocably with the introduction of sound cinema; hence why her research considers the period 1918-1928 only.

Alongside a consideration of formal and acting styles in British cinema, film historians have also considered the role of interwar cinema in British society. Jeffrey Richards, for example, has reviewed the role of the censor in the 1930s, and the creation of a British star system, in *The Age of the Dream Palace*.<sup>40</sup> This volume does important work in uncovering the regulatory framework in which films were produced, in particular since many of the original censorship reports of the interwar period are no longer extant. However, Richard's approach and methodology now appear somewhat dated, as he does not use sources such as film journals or fan magazines to place the films he discusses in a wider cultural context. His analysis limits the consideration of film as a mass cultural product.

Some film historians have attempted to draw on quantitative data, such as box-office figures, to establish the popular success of British films in the interwar era. This work has been impeded somewhat by the lack of raw data available from the period. John Sedgwick, for example, developed his own calculation method to rank the popularity of each film shown in interwar Britain.<sup>41</sup> Others, such as Michael Hammond, have used the box office figures of one cinema or a small group of cinemas to determine the popularity of films in a particular town or region.<sup>42</sup> My research does not argue the

importance of one film over another, based on box-office returns, but rather, holistically considers the industry's total output.

Annette Kuhn has drawn on retrospective personal testimonies and qualitative research to establish audiences' experiences of cinema going in the interwar period.<sup>43</sup> Kuhn's research provides a unique perspective into real audience members' experiences of interwar film viewing, although these memories are necessarily affected by the passing of time. Naturally, further research using the same methodology is now almost impossible, as most film audience members of the 1920s and 1930s have passed away.

Recent scholarly work has attempted to use source materials ancillary to the film texts themselves to establish the role of cinema-going in British interwar culture. This is often done by comparing film texts with another type of cultural output, in the same way this thesis undertakes to do. For example, interwar films have been considered in conjunction with female-authored novels of the same period, to come to an understanding of female cinema culture.<sup>44</sup> Gledhill's work on performance styles has been expanded on by considering how printed materials of the interwar period, such as magazine and newspaper articles, talked about acting, and the 'right way' to act.<sup>45</sup> Rather than considering the films as standalone texts, these recent explorations consider interwar films to be in conversation with other cultural outputs of the era, such as fan magazines.

### **Considering a 'common language' for film and press**

This thesis argues that films and newspapers were in conversation with one another during the 1920s and 1930s. This section sets out how contemporary thinkers viewed the interplay between these two media; as well as how later scholars developed this

argument. During the interwar period, several writers, such as the German commentator Kurt von Stutterheim and the journalist and former editor of *The Times* Henry Wickham Steed, commented on the influence of cinema on the layout of newspapers. In the 1930s they primarily noted that newspapers started to include more photographs, and newspaper adverts became increasingly pictorial. The writers argued that this was done to pander to an audience used to consuming moving pictures. Von Stutterheim, who in 1934 wrote a short book explaining the British newspaper landscape to German readers, noted that 'the *Sketch* and the *Mirror* are daily organs whose *raison d'être* are their illustrations, and the success which these two papers have had shows to what an extent the modern mind has become a cinema mind.'<sup>46</sup>

Four years later Steed argued that 'with the advent of the cinematograph a revolution began in the journalistic world. Newspapers were obliged to print 'pictures' and to cut down the space reserved for letterpress, in order to meet public demand for illustrations.'<sup>47</sup> Both commentators assumed a direct link between the rising popularity of cinema, and the increased use of illustrations and photos in popular newspapers. These examples indicate how this perceived link between the two media forms was an accepted idea at the time.

Steed also suggested that newspapers started offering their content in increasingly shorter articles during the First World War, because the reading public became unable to concentrate on long pieces of writing, given the emotional strain they were under. Whereas this claim is debatable and is impossible to verify, elsewhere in his writing he offers an alternative reading: that the public, once accustomed to 'impressions that could be received through the eye without mental effort' primarily through silent films, became unable to follow serious public discussion.<sup>48</sup>



The readers clamouring for illustrated news were, by both these authors, clarified to supposedly be female newspaper readers, a group already perceived to be less capable of challenging mental exertions by contemporary commentators. Von Stutterheim and Steed claimed that women were the primary consumers of illustrated news and that this, in turn, led the changes to printed advertisements, as women were also the main spenders of the household budget.<sup>49</sup> Neither commentator discussed the technological advancements in photography and printing which were also necessary to facilitate this increased use of photos in newspapers. Instead they opted to read the formal changes purely as a response to a changing audience and a desire to maximise advertising revenue.

In the interwar period, then, commentators speculated how cinema culture had a direct influence on the layout of popular newspapers. Although these arguments are simplistic and sexist, and do not take technological developments into account, they are not without merit. Cinema provided audiences, and particularly those in the working classes, with a visual system of representation. The editors of popular newspapers tried to appeal to the same audiences, so they developed a similar understandable system of ordering content.

A more sophisticated argument is articulated by D.L. LeMahieu in his influential 1988 work *A Culture for Democracy*.<sup>50</sup> He agrees with the writers of the 1930s that the newspapers started to increase the number of images used in order to attract 'a more visually literate audience.' However, LeMahieu looks beyond the simple use of static images and extends the connection between film and popular newspapers to the practice of editing. He argues that prior to the 1930s, 'the press communicated with its readers in a visual language that, unlike the cinema, lacked a formal grammar.'<sup>51</sup>

Cinema had established its grammar of continuity editing during the 1910s. According to LeMahieu, popular newspaper editors' revision of their papers' layouts in the 1930s signified an equivalent development of a common, recognisable presentation of content that was unique to the written press. Rather than establishing a one-way link between cinema and newspaper content, LeMahieu considers both media as part of a 'common culture', consumed by the same audience.<sup>52</sup> This audience became sophisticated in garnering meaning from the new mass media through these new 'grammars'.

The above section has summarised the key scholarly works on interwar cinema and press history, and the developments in each of these fields in recent years. It has established how the current research, with its exploration of the interplay between newspaper reporting and fiction films around particular topics, adds to the existing literature and makes fruitful new connections between adjacent fields of scholarly work. The exploration of interwar ideas about the influence of cinema on the form of the popular press adds historical context to the notions further excavated in this thesis. The next section provides concrete examples of how the newspaper and film industries utilised the night.

### **Section 3: Interplays between film, press and the night**

The research conducted for this thesis has uncovered that newspapers and journalists featured prominently in British interwar cinema as characters and plot devices. This suggests an interaction at the content level as well as at a formal level. This research project is narrowed down to London nightlife, both to set a manageable restriction on the wealth of available films and newspaper content and because London nightlife developed considerably in this period. It is a topic which brought novelty and no small amount of suspicion and fear to audiences. To consider how this new and changing topic was mediated by films and popular newspapers, then, serves as a fruitful prism through which to consider the interaction between films and newspapers.

Both the newspaper and film industry had close practical links with the night. Although newspaper content was drawn up in the afternoon or early evening to allow for timely printing and distribution, the editorial offices were open round the clock.<sup>53</sup> This enabled journalists to work at night and swiftly report on night-time events. Occasionally, papers included a 'stop press' column for last-minute additions of late-night incidents to the paper. Final editions of papers were typeset and printed at night. Although some national papers decided to open secondary printing presses in the north of England (primarily Manchester) during the interwar period to cut down on transportation costs, the bulk of the printing and all of the editing for the national popular press was done in and around Fleet Street in Central London. The same was true for film production: the majority of film studios were based in and around London, even if some of the biggest stars of the interwar period hailed from the north of the country.

Newspapers often advertised and reviewed London night-time activities, primarily theatre and cinema offerings. Newspaper content generation never halted, so

newspapers were able to report on what was going on in the capital's centre when most Londoners would be in their (likely suburban) homes, allowing the paper content to act as a window onto an unfamiliar world for their readers. Writing about the night became increasingly incorporated in standard reporting practices, although what happened after dark retained an illicit air.

For example, big events such as the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, which ran in 1924 and 1925, generated strings of articles commenting on the night-time aspects of the exhibition.<sup>54</sup> This culminated in reports of an apparent all-night party on the Exhibition's final day.<sup>55</sup> Although the last day was reported to be 'its greatest, its merriest and its most exciting', the reporter also noted '[s]mashed windows, overturned paper-baskets, and debris scattered in all directions' left in the wake of the thousands of visitors to the Exhibitions' closing day. A crowd of party-goers had the potential to turn destructive after sunset, a possibility of threat wrapped into the festivities.

Although film production did not follow the diurnal rhythm of newspaper print, the film industry did use the night-time to its advantage. There were a number of independent film producers active in the interwar British film industry. As film production remained dependent on studio space, those producers who gained control over studio space had a higher chance of becoming and remaining successful, and they could use the night-time to commercial advantage.<sup>56</sup>

For example, Linda Wood has described how film producer Julius Hagen gained the lease of Twickenham Studios and then made money by renting out the studio space to other producers. Hagen maximised his revenue by renting out all the studio space during the day, and using the space at night to shoot his own films.<sup>57</sup> An additional advantage of shooting at night was the lack of disturbance from nearby train tracks,

which during the day hindered the recording of sound films.<sup>58</sup> Hagen used the night-time to maximise productivity and financial gain. A previously un-utilised time became an opportunity to double production output, in particular because inside the studio walls it made no difference from a production perspective whether it was daytime or night-time outside.

The night-time provided film and newspaper producers with a useful timespace to maximise their operational efficiency. This happened in a period where both industries expanded and professionalised their outputs as marketplace competition increased. Although the London night was generally represented as a time for leisure pursuits, for newspaper and film producers the night was primarily a time for labour and for enhancing the commercial value of their product. The function that the night fulfilled for the producers of popular media was different from how the media represented the night and its functions to audiences.

The following section provides an outline of the development of the British film and newspaper industries during the interwar period which provides a historical framework for understanding the primary source materials used in this thesis. Both industries underwent significant changes during the 1920s and 1930s which impacted on the shape of their outputs.

## **Section 4: Historical context**

### **British film studios in the interwar period**

The British film industry matured during the interwar period and several domestic production companies were established during this time. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, production companies merged with one another or were taken over by foreign studios. This was against the backdrop of the major legislative interference in the film industry by the British state. A small number of key players moved around between studios and sites, forming and re-forming professional partnerships. This has made it tempting for historians to reduce this period in history to the work of a handful of male producers, directors and studio owners. The contribution of talented individuals notwithstanding, this thesis takes the view that all films are collaborative efforts and that the influence of individuals on the final output should not be overstated.

The key British studios in the interwar period were Gaumont-British; Gainsborough; British International Pictures; and Associated Talking Pictures. There were some independent producers in addition to these bigger studios. Many twentieth-century British studios were located in and around London.<sup>59</sup> This physical proximity to one another, and to the capital's centre, meant that there was ample scope for key staff to influence one another and to move from one studio to another. It also aided mobility from staff working on West End stage productions to films and vice versa. Location shooting could be done in London's streets and public spaces with relative ease, particularly in the silent period, when film crews were more mobile because their movements were not restricted by heavy sound equipment. Film studios' location in the capital thus facilitated a greater visibility of London's night-time on screen.

Of the major studios listed above, the first one to be formed was Gaumont-British. This was originally the British branch of the French-owned Gaumont studios, but in 1922 Gaumont-British broke ties with its parent company and became wholly British-owned. In 1927 Gaumont merged with two film distribution services (Ideal and W&F) and the 14-venue Biocolour cinema chain, to create the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation.<sup>60</sup> This was the first British cinema company to own its means of production, distribution and exhibition. The W&F distribution company had until that point been tied to a smaller British studio, Gainsborough. Gainsborough itself became part of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1928.<sup>61</sup>

Prior to this merger with Gaumont-British, Gainsborough had been producing films for four years. The studio was founded by Michael Balcon, one of the key producers in British interwar cinema. From August 1925 he was joined on Gainsborough's board of directors by director Graham Cutts and journalist and writer Charles Lapworth. In the early years Gainsborough wanted to make 'international' pictures, and the studio had particularly close ties with the German UFA production company.<sup>62</sup> In the silent era there were naturally fewer obstacles to having an international cast and crew on a film, as there was no language barrier to the audience's comprehension of the plot. Such international collaboration became more difficult from the late 1920s onwards when sound films became the norm, and Gainsborough's output became increasingly British-oriented in the 1930s.

Balcon left Gainsborough in 1936 to work for the British branch of the American studio MGM.<sup>63</sup> He only stayed with MGM for two years due to professional differences with studio co-owner Louis B. Mayer.<sup>64</sup> Balcon then moved to Associated Talking Pictures (ATP) which, at the same time, became known as the Ealing Studios. ATP had been founded in 1929 by Basil Dean, and the Ealing-based studios that would later make

the company so famous were finished in 1931.<sup>65</sup> Dean intended to produce films for the British market using British stars.<sup>66</sup> His two biggest box-office stars during the interwar period were the Lancashire-born comedians Gracie Fields and George Formby. After the Second World War, Ealing studios would turn out some of the most well-known British films of the late 1940s and the 1950s. Ealing promoted a professional image of friendly, small-scale production and cooperation, in contrast to the wealthy and high-powered Hollywood studios.

Ealing Studios became synonymous with their site of production, but there were other key studio locations in London at the time. Gainsborough produced their films in Islington, and Gaumont's studios were situated in Shepherd's Bush. After Balcon's departure from Gainsborough, Gaumont closed their Shepherd's Bush studios and moved all production to Islington.<sup>67</sup> MGM-British operated from Denham Studios which were newly opened in 1936.<sup>68</sup>

### **The 1927 Cinematograph Films Act**

Prior to the interwar period, Britain had already had a thriving newspaper industry for centuries. Press freedom has been guaranteed since 1695 and there were no major legislative interventions during the interwar period that affected the shape or content of newspapers. This was not true for the film industry, which was a much younger sector and subject to closer scrutiny due to its perceived risk to corrupt young people. The 1927 Cinematograph Films Act was the most significant top-down intervention in the British interwar film industry. As domestic film production figures were declining in the 1920s, the British government decided that a legislative intervention was necessary to bolster the national film industry, create jobs, and keep the perceived



threat of American cultural influences at bay. The 1927 Act was designed to expire in 1938, at which point a second Act was passed.<sup>69</sup>

Under the 1927 Act, distributors and exhibitors of films were obliged to include a certain percentage of British productions in their portfolio. This percentage increased during the decade the Act was in force: from 7.5% of exhibited films in 1928 to 20% of exhibited films in 1938. As British film production was small-scale prior to 1927, the forced and sudden demand for domestic film products after the implementation of the Act resulted in hastily set-up production companies and speculative investments in the British film industry. American studios initially opted to buy films from British independent producers rather than setting up their own production facilities in Britain, because they considered that a permanent investment would be risky and that Britain lacked the expertise and technical facilities required to make high-quality films.<sup>70</sup> Later, big Hollywood players set up their own British studios and took over existing British production companies. Because there was no stipulation under the Act of the quality required of British films, a large number of those British films produced between 1927 and 1938 have low production values.

The traditional view that the vast majority of British films produced between 1927 and 1938 are not worthy of academic interest due to these low production values has now largely been refuted by, amongst others, film historians such as Lawrence Napper and Steve Chibnall. The films produced as part of the 1927 Act quotas are often referred to as 'quota quickies', a term initially meant to be dismissive. Chibnall's comprehensive review of quota quickie production defines this type of film as 'a picture made in less than four weeks, at a cost of approximately £1 per foot of film, with the primary purpose of discharging the legal obligations (...) of American rental companies.' He estimates that around 770 British interwar films fit this definition.<sup>71</sup>

Chibnall argues that these films are the British equivalent to the American 'B-movie' and that they provided a training ground for numerous young British filmmakers in the 1930s.<sup>72</sup> His research is mainly concerned with the production history of the films, rather than their content. Chibnall relates many anecdotes about how time-pressure and low budgets hampered the filming of quota quickies. He uses these vignettes to argue that there was a sense of camaraderie on the sets of these films, in contrast to the slick production modes of Hollywood films. However, audiences were not privy to the goings-on on set. It is therefore not immediately useful to consider anecdotal production histories when assessing the interplay between two media at a macro level.

Unlike Chibnall, Lawrence Napper has focused in his work on the content and form of interwar British films as well as on their overall production history. Napper concurs with other historians that the 1927 Act had a direct influence on the form and content of British films from 1927 to 1938, but argues that the Act gave films a 'middlebrow aesthetic' rather than making them of downright low quality. This middlebrow aesthetic, Napper argues, came out of a 'balancing act between the cultural demands of government and critics and the need to address and entertain a popular audience.'<sup>73</sup>

In their content, middlebrow films 'were largely flattering to the Baldwin government's conception of the nation as an essentially stable society, but addressed an audience whose very existence was the result of the social and economic dynamics of the interwar period.'<sup>74</sup> The 'middlebrow' provides a conceptual framework with which to critically engage with these often cheaply-made films and assess how their form and content relates to the socio-political situation in interwar Britain. The interwar period saw great social change in a number of areas. Films were primarily concerned with promoting continuity to curtail the potential for social disruption, which led to tensions in their representations of the contemporary world.

Napper points out that the 1927 Act was as much about ensuring that British films promoted British values which stood in opposition to American values, as it was about creating film industry jobs. He further argues that the British films produced under the Act served two audience segments: older generations of the industrial working class, which were interested in films based on music hall tradition; and suburban middle class who preferred 'middlebrow' films that resonated with their preoccupations of class and social position.<sup>75</sup> These films sit between the avant-garde productions made in Europe at the same time and the genre films with mass commercial appeal primarily produced in Hollywood.

Middlebrow productions are often adapted from literary sources that received popular and critical acclaim in Britain; Napper extensively analyses the 1928 production *The Constant Nymph*, a film based on a popular novel, as a prime example of a middlebrow film.<sup>76</sup> Their plots are known and valued by British audiences. However, this meant that the films were often not of interest to foreign audiences, and British films initially had a very limited export value.<sup>77</sup> The films' storylines and characters were largely a reflection of British values and concerns.

The concept of the middlebrow aesthetic is useful when considering British interwar cinema, as it recognises the impact of political discourse on fiction film form and content, and allows for a critical engagement with films that have previously been largely dismissed as not worthy of attention. A number of the film texts this thesis highlights fit in the 'middlebrow' category. They are considered here alongside genre films and films made by directors who have since been recognised as auteurs. All these different types of films were distributed and seen in interwar Britain by audiences who were often indiscriminate in their tastes. The films are all outputs of the same cultural industry, and the depictions of the London night across this spectrum of films

demonstrates which beliefs about the London night were perpetuated in British popular culture.

The legislative intervention of 1927 irrevocably changed the British film industry. The Cinematograph Films Act ensured a significant increase of film production which led to the professionalization of the industry and provided budding filmmakers with a useful training ground. At the same time, the artificial demand that the Act created arguably had a detrimental impact on the quality of the films, and it ensured that commercial appeal was given precedence over artistic exploration. Yet in recent years the dismissal of 1930s British cinema as being unworthy of scholarly attention has been re-assessed.

This thesis considers its primary sources as valuable cultural texts regardless of their aesthetic merit, as each text comments and reflects on the society in which it is produced. As the British film industry professionalised during the interwar period, the popular press also matured, as is outlined in the next section of this chapter.

In addition to the imperative to depict British values in British films after the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, film content was policed by the Board of British Film Censors (BBFC). This body, founded in 1912, was industry-led instead of government-imposed, and implemented a rating system which restricted the screening of some films to adult audiences. Studios submitted all films destined for commercial distribution to the BBFC, sometimes as early as the script writing stage.<sup>78</sup> By 1916 TP O'Connor, the Board's President, had established a list of 43 elements that would be cut by the censor, many of which were activities commonly associated with the night-time such as 'men and women in bed together' and 'First Night scenes'.<sup>79</sup> The BBFC

saw its mission as explicitly concerned with protecting the morals of the cinema-going public.<sup>80</sup>

The BBFC's extensive power to control which films were rated and therefore able to be shown in cinemas had a significant impact on the content of British films in the interwar period, and further promoted the depiction of narratives that conformed to conventional notions of Britishness. British film production in the interwar period thus navigated a tension between an industry-led desire for international collaboration and a government-led agenda to promote British values. As a result, film narratives often reinforced a set of values (stability, domesticity) that were at odds with notions typically attached to the night such as transgression and liminality. When films did opt to show London nights, the texts had to adopt strategies to reconcile these two competing sets of associations.

### **History of the popular press in the interwar period**

For this work I sampled three newspaper titles: the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*. These are three still existing original 'tabloid' papers and all were founded between 1896 and 1905. During the interwar period they dominated the market for the daily printed press. Circulation of each title peaked at a different point of the 1920s and 1930s. Each paper adopted different strategies for revising their layout as a result of mutual competition during the 'newspaper wars' of the 1930s. Taken together, their content provides a robust insight into the types of news that the mass readership was presented with, and the shape and tone in which the news was written.

The *Daily Mail* was the first of the three papers to be founded, in 1896. Its founder and owner was Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe. Northcliffe built up a newspaper empire that also included *The Times*, which he bought in 1908.<sup>81</sup> In 1903 he launched

the *Daily Mirror*, which he initially planned as a paper written by women for women. After this strategy proved a commercial failure, Northcliffe reframed the *Mirror* as an illustrated paper printed on a smaller 'tabloid' format.<sup>82</sup> After Northcliffe's death in 1922, ownership of his papers moved to his brother, Lord Rothermere, who had already been involved in the *Mirror* since 1914.<sup>83</sup>

Northcliffe founded the *Daily Mail* with the ambition to provide a newspaper for the emerging lower middle-class. The paper's mix of political news, reviews of leisure activities and human-interest stories proved popular from the start, but the *Mail's* reputation was most firmly established by its reporting of the Second Boer War from 1899 to 1902. The *Mail* made extensive use of its own correspondents in South Africa which, during the war, boosted its circulation to over one million copies a day.<sup>84</sup> In the run-up to the First World War the *Mail*, influenced by Northcliffe's personal views, printed anti-German pieces as early as 1906.<sup>85</sup>

After the War and the death of Northcliffe in 1922, the *Mail* stopped innovating and its circulation stagnated.<sup>86</sup> It retained high sales figures but was no longer trailblazing. A redesign in 1933 modernised the *Mail's* format and allowed it to compete with the other popular papers which relaunched themselves at the same time. However, the *Mail* would not become market leader again for the remainder of the interwar period. Today, the *Mail's* interwar years are mostly remembered for Lord Rothermere's pro-Nazi and pro-fascist sympathies, on which he published articles in the *Mail* throughout the 1930s.<sup>87</sup>

Outside of Northcliffe's Amalgamated Press consortium, newspaper entrepreneur Arthur Pearson founded the *Daily Express* in 1900. The *Express* was bought by the Canadian Lord Beaverbrook in 1916.<sup>88</sup> The heavy involvement of these three Lords

(Northcliffe, Rothermere and Beaverbrook) in the newspaper industry, and their political ambitions, has resulted in an historical assessment of the 1900-1939 period as the 'era of the press barons'. Traditional histories of the press have duly focused on the life stories of these barons, and have sought connections between their personal lives and the content of their papers.

Although the influence of newspaper owners over editorial content was undoubtedly greater in the interwar period than it is today, not least because Northcliffe and Rothermere regularly wrote copy for their papers themselves, it is a mistake to see the newspapers in this period as mere mouthpieces of their owners. Although Northcliffe's approach to newspapers, which was adopted by the other owners, did blur 'the division between the editorial and business aspects of the industry', all three titles received a significant portion of their income from advertising, which shaped their content more than anything else.<sup>89</sup> This was ultimately translated into the papers espousing conservative values and supporting the status quo, as that was the most commercially appealing approach. This is underwritten by the fact that the *Daily Herald*, which at the time was the only left-wing paper and which published counter-establishment views, struggled financially throughout the 1920s.<sup>90</sup>

After Northcliffe's initial plan for the *Daily Mirror* as a female-run paper failed, the paper re-launched in 1904 as an illustrated publication. Northcliffe's amassed capital gave him the means to produce illustrated papers at a higher volume than anyone else.<sup>91</sup> In addition to printing illustrations, the *Mirror* sought to increase its audience by organising regular stunts and competitions. Politically, the *Mirror* followed the *Mail* until the mid-1930s. In 1934, the *Mirror* re-invented itself as a left-of-centre tabloid, described by its supporters as speaking 'for the crowd.'<sup>92</sup> Prior to that, the political left had been represented by the *Daily Herald* which maintained a formal link to the trade

union movement, which the *Mirror* did not. This enabled the *Mirror* to present itself as the paper of choice for the non-radical, non-unionised working classes.<sup>93</sup> Editorially, the *Mirror*'s political stance against non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and later against appeasement of Hitler's Germany, set it apart from the *Mail* and the *Express*.<sup>94</sup> The *Mirror*'s circulation rose throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and from 1949 to the late 1960s the *Mirror* was the most-read newspaper in Britain.<sup>95</sup>

When Alfred Pearson founded the *Express* in 1900, he used an 'American' layout which, most notably, included news on the front page of the paper instead of advertisements. For most of the interwar period the *Express* remained a solid but non-threatening competitor to the *Mail* and the *Mirror*. This changed in 1933 when a new editorial team radically changed the layout of the *Express*, introducing wider spacing and clearer headlines, and abolishing the strict use of columns. Politically, the *Express* followed a moderately conservative but optimistic editorial line which helped it to increase circulation to the detriment of the *Mail*. Kurt von Stutterheim wrote in 1934 that 'the *Daily Express* resembles not so much a paper as a collection of anecdotes from all parts of the world; but as such it is excellent. It is full of life, youth, and energy.'<sup>96</sup> This strategy made the *Express* the best-selling national newspaper from the mid-1930s until the late 1940s.

During the interwar period the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* were established as three key popular newspapers in Britain. Although all of them were founded before the First World War, the interwar period was when they consolidated their readerships and editorial practices. Each paper aimed to deliver something unique to its readership, and all tried to constantly increase their market share. The three titles led major changes in the British press landscape by adopting a sensationalist tone in their reporting, running competitions and creating events on



which they could subsequently report. The interwar period marks the point where Victorian populist journalism professionalised into the tabloid press as it still exists today.

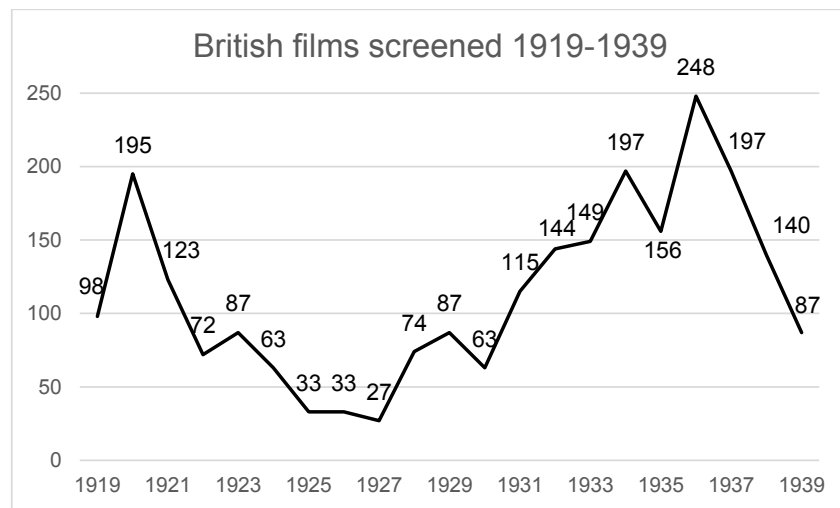
The historical context provided to the establishment of the British film and popular press industries in this section lays the foundation for the remainder of the chapter, which considers the primary research data that this thesis is based on. First the research methodology of the project is set out. The final section of the chapter surveys the main points of interest that this data raises.

## **Section 5: Methodology**

### **Establishing the corpus of films**

For this thesis, I have undertaken two distinct sets of data gathering: one in relation to newspapers, the other in relation to fiction films. My methodology for each data-gathering exercise has been based on common practices in the respective fields. In collecting and analysing the sources, I have been mindful of the distinctions in form between newspapers and films. At the same time I attempt to draw possible parallels between the two.

In order to get an understanding of the proportion of British interwar films that included night-time scenes, I have undertaken a data-collection exercise. Working with the BFI Filmography, an online tool launched in September 2017 which contains every film released in British cinemas since 1911, I have identified the total number of British films screened each year in the interwar period.<sup>97</sup> As this thesis is solely concerned with British films, the data collection was limited to films which met the criteria of a 'British Film' as set out under the 1927 Cinematographs Films Act.<sup>98</sup> Particularly in the silent period, films could have very international casts and crews, which makes the nationality of, for example, the director, not a consistent measure of a film's primary national origin. Funding, on the other hand, was generally located in one country only during the interwar period which makes it a clearer mode of categorisation for this research project. See graph 1 for exhibition figures over the interwar period.



Graph 1: British films screened in British cinemas between 1919 and 1939

As is visible from this graph, British feature film production and distribution fell considerably in the 1920s, with only 27 British films being shown in British cinemas in 1927. After the introduction of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, as discussed above, feature film production increased. A high point of 248 British films were screened in British theatres 1936 – an increase of 818% compared to 1927.

I have attempted to ascertain how many of the films included in the figures above were feature films depicting London nightlife (see table 1). For this I have used the descriptions of the films in the National Film and Television Archive catalogue, as well as user-generated reviews and plot summaries available through the Internet Movie Database (IMDb).<sup>99</sup> For a number of films included in this research, these descriptors contained explicit confirmation of the existence of night-time scenes. However, as the information available on a film's plot is often brief, particularly in cases where the film is no longer extant, for a number of films I have had to use my judgement when determining whether a film likely contains London night scenes or not. This judgement was based on the plot summary or scene descriptions in combination with an

understanding of generic conventions of popular films in this period. When watching the available films in full, it has become clear that night-time scenes can be included in films even if the plot summary gives no indication of the scene's presence. As a result, the figures provided here are estimates only and actual figures may be slightly higher.

Contemporary trade press usually contained plot descriptions of films that were made available for distribution and exhibition. Using those sources could have yielded a more comprehensive list of films containing night-time scenes, than the more limited plot descriptions available through IMDb and the NFT catalogue. However, trade publication reviews are still unlikely to have made mention of all night-time scenes. Weighing up the additional time that would need to have been spent locating each of the films in multiple trade press publications, against the likely limited additional material this would uncover, I judged that using online resources would provide a sufficiently robust methodology for identifying relevant films for this research project.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of British films shown in cinemas</b>	<b>Of which have possible London night-time scenes</b>	<b>% of total films containing night-time scenes</b>
<b>1919</b>	98	10	10.20%
<b>1920</b>	195	11	5.64%
<b>1921</b>	123	7	5.69%
<b>1922</b>	72	6	8.33%
<b>1923</b>	87	7	8.05%
<b>1924</b>	63	7	11.11%
<b>1925</b>	33	5	15.15%
<b>1926</b>	33	3	9.09%
<b>1927</b>	27	7	25.93%
<b>1928</b>	74	7	9.46%
<b>1929</b>	87	11	12.64%
<b>1930</b>	63	11	17.46%
<b>1931</b>	115	18	15.65%
<b>1932</b>	144	18	12.50%
<b>1933</b>	149	20	13.42%
<b>1934</b>	197	24	12.18%
<b>1935</b>	156	20	12.82%
<b>1936</b>	248	31	12.50%
<b>1937</b>	197	22	11.17%
<b>1938</b>	140	16	11.43%
<b>1939</b>	87	12	13.79%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,388</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>11.43%</b>

Table 1: Estimate of British interwar films containing London night-time scenes, in absolute and relative terms

Apart from a drop in the early 1920s, the share of British films which contain night-time scenes is between 8% and 18% each year, except for 1927 where a quarter of the British films shown in cinemas contained night-time scenes. However, this high percentage is also a reflection of the low number of British films screened in Britain in 1927 overall. In absolute terms, the number of British films including London night-time scenes remained steady until 1927, and then increased proportionally in line with increased overall exhibition. The year with the highest volume of British film

exhibitions, 1936, also saw the highest number of films including London nightlife. As British film production and exhibition increased, the proportion of films including London nightlife steadied around 12.5% of total output.

Films that did *not* include London night-time scenes are, for example, any films set abroad, either in a real country or in 'Ruritania'; any films set in rural areas such as Scotland or Cornwall; and any films set wholly in country mansions, the latter being a popular setting for studio sound films and also a setting which communicates a typically British upper-class atmosphere. Despite the night making up a significant part of each 24-hour cycle, films only used night-time to depict a rather limited set of activities. Interwar British films favoured the daytime for their narrative action even when they were set in a city with a vibrant night-time industry such as London. This was likely influenced by technological limitations which made the depiction of night-time scenes difficult and potentially costly.

For this thesis I have watched 80 films that were produced and filmed in Britain between 1919 and 1939. As is evident from the data provided in table 1, I have identified a total of 273 British films distributed in this period, which may contain London night-time scenes. Of these, 175 are available for viewing either online, on DVD or VHS, or through the National Film and Television Archive. The sample reviewed for this work therefore represents 29.3% of the total number of films produced in this period that meet the criteria to be included in this thesis, and 45.7% of the films that are actually available to view.

I have accessed the films viewed for this work through a variety of methods. Some films are available on DVD; others I have been able to view at screenings at film festivals or specialised venues. A small number were available through online portals

such as the BFI Player and the Internet Archive.<sup>100</sup> The remainder have been accessed via the BFI Mediatheque, a publicly available digital collection of materials from the National Film and Television Archive.

For each film viewed, I have noted the location(s) in which these night scenes are set: whether they are set outdoors or in a variety of locations most commonly associated with the night-time entertainment industry (restaurant, theatre, nightclub, cinema, music hall, pub). I have also noted whether there are instances of crime taking place at night. Seeking pleasure and pursuing illegal activities represent the two types of activity most commonly associated with the urban night.

In films that did include London night-time scenes, these were often set in a narrow range of locations: restaurants, theatres and nightclubs. Locations such as these reinforced the notion that urban nightlife was about public consumption and pleasure. Particularly after the introduction of sound film, these settings became more popular as they allowed for the inclusion of song-and-dance numbers within the diegetic world of the film. Subsequent to the film's release the song lyrics and music could then be sold, allowing for additional revenue streams. Sound films also acted as vehicles for established stage-stars to 'cross over' into a new medium whilst utilising their well-known skits and characters from stage performances. George Formby and Gracie Fields, two of the biggest film stars of the 1930s, both built their fame on successful stage careers.

Finally, I made a note of any police officers or journalists appearing in the night-time scenes of any of the films. I chose these groups as it became clear when watching the films that these are professional identities that are regularly included in films. Journalists also provide a link with the other medium considered in this thesis. Chapter

4 takes a closer look at the representation of journalists in interwar British film. The depiction of the police in both newspapers and films is further explored in chapter 5.

### **Newspaper sampling**

This thesis considers the representation of London nightlife in the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*. Because the total number of editions produced by the three titles under consideration during the interwar period is very large, I have used cluster sampling to make the amount of data more manageable. For this thesis, I have sampled two months' worth of copies of each newspaper, for each year of the interwar period (1919-1939). I read the March and April editions of the *Daily Express* for each of these years; the September and October editions of the *Daily Mail*, and the November and December editions of the *Daily Mirror*.

These months were chosen at random although autumn and winter months are more prominently represented. This may have affected the number of newspaper articles reporting on night-time events that are included in the sample, as the nights in Britain are longer and colder during the autumn and winter months. I chose not to read the same months across titles in order to increase the chances of finding representative news coverage and to maximise the number of key historical events that would be covered by my sample. I accessed all newspaper editions on microfilm at the British Library Newsroom.

Reading the newspapers in full on microfilm, as opposed to using keyword searches on digital databases, allowed me to view articles in the context of the printed page. It enabled me to view the physical placing and lay-out of articles and note articles placed in adjacent columns. It also circumvented the risk associated with keyword searches where relevant content is missed because an incorrect search term is used. However,



the disadvantage of reading newspapers on microfilm is that the sheer volume of material means that it is possible that relevant articles are missed. It is therefore not possible for me to definitively state that the content found through my sampling methodology comprises all relevant articles published in this period. However, as the same methodology was consistently applied throughout the research project, any margin of error is also consistent across topics and newspaper titles. The sampling methodology applied therefore allows me to determine with confidence which topics were covered most often, as well as general trends in reporting for each newspaper title.

For each newspaper, I counted articles about events taking place in London at night. I have not considered sports news except on those occasions when it was reported in the 'regular' news section of a paper to signal an occasion of particular importance or magnitude. Sport culture and sport reporting are distinct phenomena that require separate analysis to which this thesis cannot do justice, so I have excluded this type of reporting. I conducted content analysis on the articles I found relating to London nightlife, and labelled and categorised the collected data according to both the type of content (article, advert, cartoon) and the topic(s) of the content. Sampling papers of the same months over a period of twenty years enabled me to identify changes in the way each individual title reported on London's night.

I categorised the articles reporting on elements of London's night, according to their form and topic(s). The *Daily Mail* included, on average, 20 articles about London night-time over the two months sampled (September and October), in each of the years under consideration. This averages out to one article in every other edition. I found the highest number of reports in 1927 and 1928, when there were 29 articles on night-time activities in each year's sample. The lowest number of articles on nightlife were

written in 1932, when the two months together only included 9 articles. The *Mail* reported less on nightlife than the other two titles: I found a total of 401 articles pertaining to London nightlife in the *Mail*, against 417 in the *Mirror* and 505 in the *Express*, across the whole twenty-year period. The 1920s saw a slightly higher number of reports in the *Mail* than the 1930s. The economic downturn in the later decade inspired fewer reports on pleasurable night-time activities and more reports on the growing international political unrest.

As noted above, some films were almost completely set in London after dark, but many more included only the occasional scene in a restaurant or bar. This is mirrored in interwar newspaper reporting on the London night, in which some stories about night-time reached the front page, whereas others were tucked away in the inside of the paper. The artificial nature of fiction film allowed directors and writers to choose locations for the film's action that reinforced audiences' preconceived notions about these locations. As cinema itself participated in shaping audiences' expectations, this created a self-perpetuating cycle of films confirming actions that previous films had already shown.

Journalists and newspaper editors were more restricted in their reporting, limited as they were to writing about events that really took place. However, as popular newspapers were heavily dependent on advertising, editors, too, chose to report on similar issues and in a similar tone as consistently as possible from one edition to the next in order to provide a reliable platform to advertisers. This cohesion of content made it easier to predict newspaper sales. Despite the difference in where their content originated from, both films and newspapers were likely to maintain the status quo in their output.

By reporting almost exclusively on night-time activity in Central London, as opposed to that in the suburbs or indeed in any other British city, the *Mail*, *Mirror* and *Express* provided their readers with a point of access to a world most of them would not regularly experience in person. Readers from outside London, or those readers in the capital who did not have the opportunity to partake in West End nightlife, were able to keep up to date with the latest theatre shows, nightclub openings and celebrity gossip by reading their daily paper. It enabled readers to feel part of the 'London scene', whilst at the same time firmly giving that scene more importance than the nightlife in any other British or foreign city. The bright lights of London were constantly reaffirmed as the only nightlife worth experiencing and as something important enough to be written about in a newspaper.

This research project has reviewed a large number of primary newspaper and film texts, which forms the foundation of the research. Both media have been sampled, but sampling methods have varied between films and newspapers to accommodate for the differences in volumes of each type of media. Both sample sets represent a significant proportion of the overall output of the media in this period. As a result, any conclusions drawn from the analysis of the gathered data are robust. The final section of this chapter draws out key topics of interest that become evident when the data is analysed.

## **Section 6: Analysis of the data**

### **Occurrences of night-time news in newspapers**

Sampling allows for a quantitative analysis of newspaper content, but it cannot on its own provide a comprehensive view of how these newspapers covered London nightlife. It is not enough to note how often London nightlife is reported on, but it should also be considered what language was used and on which position within the newspaper the articles were printed. Any newspaper content is shaped not only by editorial practices, but also by technological constraints, commercial interests, and organisational factors. The editorial powers of the 'press barons' were not as absolute as some newspaper historians have suggested. All three titles received the majority of their income from advertising and sales. This likely impacted on the topics newspapers editors chose to highlight.

The three newspaper titles that are considered in this thesis all went through some radical editorial change during the 1920s and 1930s. This was partly due to cinema's increased popularity, which pushed newspaper editors to make their papers' content more visually stimulating, as noted above.<sup>101</sup> The *Mirror* shifted its politics from the right to the left of the political spectrum, and the *Express* to some extent re-oriented itself to provide positive news.<sup>102</sup> However, all three papers remained primarily reliant on advertising income and this shaped their editorial policies. Newspaper historian Kevin Williams has pointed out that 'popular newspapers (...) have to maximise their audience appeal to compensate for readers with low purchasing power. This was to lead to increasingly cut-throat competition between popular newspapers during the inter-war years.'<sup>103</sup> Rather than acting as a fourth estate that held politicians to

account, newspapers became channels for the 'people's voice' and editors tried to deliver what 'the public' wanted.

Popular newspaper owners' goal was to raise profits by increasing circulation, rather than to serve as a public sphere in the Habermasian sense: as a 'forum of rational-critical debate'.<sup>104</sup> This has informed analysis of these papers' content as it was considered how the topics newspapers covered, and the language journalists used, aided the papers in increasing their circulation. This section of this chapter gives an overview of the general topics reported on by films and newspapers, and note variations in content between the three newspaper titles. The subsequent case-study chapters draw on specific film texts and newspaper articles to illustrate how films and newspapers represented the topics which are explored in depth.

In the early years of the popular press, newspaper editors experimented with their format and layout. By the interwar period, the national newspapers all had a clear daily order, with the same pages each day dedicated to foreign news, domestic news, business news, sports, arts, and 'women's pages'. This uniformity of the layout strengthened each newspaper's brand as a convenient source of news for busy working people, as it made it easy for regular readers to find the articles in which they were most interested.

News on London's night-time activities could usually be found in the same sections of the paper, although this did change when a newspaper changed its layout. At the start of the interwar period, in the *Daily Express* most of the night-time news was printed in the domestic news section on pages 4 and 5. By the mid-1920s these sections had moved to pages 7 and 9, as the newspaper's overall length increased. In the mid-to-late 1930s the *Express* included more space dedicated to entertainment news further

into the paper, on pages 11 and 13. As a result, more night-time news appeared on these pages.<sup>105</sup>

The *Daily Mail* underwent fewer formal changes throughout the interwar period. For most of the period, news on nocturnal London could be found on pages 6, 7 and 9, in the domestic news section of the paper. This part of the paper usually also included reports on magistrate's court proceedings, which often concerned incidents that had taken place at night. Like the *Express*, the *Mail* devoted more time to entertainment and 'gossip' news from the second half of the 1930s onwards. This news could be printed as far back into the paper as page 20. The place of an article within the paper could signal the importance bestowed upon it by the editorial staff. However, the 1930s were also a period of experimentation for newspapers, and the importance of design and layout had only recently been acknowledged. In some instances, the position of an article was determined by where sufficient space was left over, rather than by any real intent. This explains why theatre reviews were printed on page 7 one week, and page 20 a few weeks later.<sup>106</sup>

The *Daily Mirror* had, due to its smaller size, less printing space available. It also included large numbers of photographs and advertising, which further limited its space for newsprint. Most of the articles on London night-time could be found on pages 2 and 3 of the paper, throughout the interwar period. As the front page of the *Mirror* was always given over to photographs, pages 2 and 3 covered the main news reports. This indicates that the *Mirror* reported less 'hard' political and foreign news than its competitors, thus leaving the main news pages free for domestic and entertainment news. Occasionally, the *Mirror* printed further society and entertainment news on page 12, adjacent to cartoons and fiction serials.

At the start of the interwar period, the *Express* was the only one of the three titles investigated that printed news stories on its front page, rather than adverts. In 1921, out of the 37 stories on London night-time printed in the *Express* in March and April, only 5 appeared on the front page (13.5%). In 1925, 11 articles on night-time London, out of a total of 42, got placed on the front page (26.2%). By 1930, the figure was 11 out of the 20 stories printed on the first page (55%), and in 1939, 9 out of 18 stories on London night-time appeared on page one (50%). This shows that although the *Express* wrote less about London nightlife in the 1930s, the articles that did appear were given more prominence within the newspaper. It implies that the goings-on in the night-time city were increasingly considered on an equal footing with day-time events. No longer was the night a separate time-space; instead the *Express* helped promote the notion that day and night were equal parts of a continuous cycle that were both of interest to readers.

As noted above, the *Express* included the highest number of articles about London night-time in the period sampled – 505 pieces. Nearly 10% of these articles were advertisements (45 in total, against 32 in the *Mail* and 31 in the *Mirror*). Advertisements were for film screenings and other evening shows, but also included adverts that depicted characters consuming products at night-time. Food producer Lyons & Co. for example produced an innovative marketing campaign in the late 1920s. It published a number of adverts which featured the character of 'Nippy' and her beau Bob. Nippy (a generic representation of a Lyons Cornerhouse waitress) and Bob went on several dates in this advertising series. The campaign culminated in 1928 with a real-life appearance of Nippy and Bob at the Palais de Danse dancehall in Hammersmith.<sup>107</sup>

In this instance fiction and reality, and marketing and entertainment, converged. The campaign demonstrates the close links between night-time entertainment and material

consumption. Lyons & Co was not primarily part of the night-time entertainment industry but it knew its customers read the *Express* and frequented dance halls. This campaign is also typical of the types of stunts the *Express* organised to increase its readership.

Unlike the *Express* and the *Mail*, the *Mirror* was printed from its inception on 'tabloid' format, which resulted in a much smaller paper that was more easily read like a magazine, by folding the paper out and reading two pages left to right rather than top to bottom. Although an initial idea of a paper solely produced by women for women was quickly abandoned, the *Mirror* maintained an interest in producing illustrated news for a female audience. As a result, the paper contained less hard-hitting or political news than its competitors, and included more cartoons, serialised fiction and many more photographs.

The *Mirror's* aim to provide entertainment as well as news clearly emerges from the sampling: out of the 417 articles that considered London nightlife, 112 articles (26.9%) described the pleasure economy and 106 articles (25.4%) discussed crime – by far the two largest sampling categories for this newspaper.<sup>108</sup> For both topics the peak of reports is found between 1925 and 1935. Like the other two titles, the *Mirror* reduced the number of articles on nocturnal activities in the run-up to the Second World War, when political news took precedence. The prominence given to both crime and pleasure demonstrates how the *Mirror's* reporting supported the idea that the night was a time for pleasure and vice: a time when traditional rules could be broken, both for better and for worse.



### General data from newspaper sampling

One of the particular aspects of London life that newspaper reports liked to draw attention to was the frequent congregation of crowds which regularly filled the streets at night. Each Whitsuntide (August bank holiday) was followed by obligatory reports on the holiday-maker exodus to the seaside and their return to the city late in the evening. Any report on the daytime or evening public engagements of the Prince of Wales included references to 'throngs' and 'crowds' gathering to see the popular member of the Royal Family.<sup>109</sup> The sheer volume of people living in the capital appeared to be a point of fascination for reporters and audiences alike.

As film premieres became part of the social calendar, they too started to attract crowds. For example, the people who came out to catch a glimpse of Merle Oberon at the 1935 premiere of *The Dark Angel* were reported by the *Mail* to have rushed the cinema door five times prior to the start of the screening.<sup>110</sup> Annual celebrations such as Christmas and New Year's Eve could also attract unusually large crowds. The *Daily Mirror* reported that the Boxing Day crowds in 1924 were of 'record' size and 'thronged' the streets to visit a number of theatre shows and sports events.<sup>111</sup> Crowds were also routinely reported on 11 November, when the Armistice Day drew large amounts of people to Whitehall for a night-time vigil at the Cenotaph. Reports such as these made London-based readers part of something bigger, and reaffirmed London's central importance to news production to all newspaper readers across the country.

The six general elections that took place in interwar Britain (in 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929, 1931 and 1935) were all preceded by large rallies. Those of the political right were often supported by, and extensively reported on, by the popular newspapers considered in this thesis. In 1924 the *Daily Mail* hired out the entire Albert Hall for

election night, an event which was then duly reported in the paper the next day with a large photograph evidencing the popularity of the event.<sup>112</sup> Crowds were both a tool to reinforce national identity (used, for example, to imply that all Britons respected Armistice Day) and to highlight a feature of urban living, where individual action became usurped in the movements of the masses. By reporting on them regularly, papers acknowledged that crowds were unusual enough for special attention, but these reports also provided the pleasure for readers to see something reported of which they themselves were likely a part.

Virtually all 401 articles on the London night in the *Mail* reported events in Central London, not in the suburbs of the capital. The same is true of the other papers – in total only six articles were identified which related to suburbs across all titles and years. As is discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, there are also only a handful of films that concern themselves with London suburbs after dark. These films play on the stereotype of the suburb as a site of quiet domesticity, where little appears to happen at night. Newspaper reports reinforced this perception by focusing all their attention on Central London's nightlife and providing scant coverage to the edges of the city, where a considerable number of their readers resided. What occurred in the suburbs at night was not considered newsworthy, which supported the notion that both excitement and danger occurred away from the domestic sphere.

The *Mirror* also reported more on accidents, fires, and poor weather circumstances that took place at night, than the other two papers. Throughout the interwar period, the *Mirror* wrote about such incidents 73 times, compared to 44 articles in the *Express* and 45 articles in the *Mail*. Most of the reported incidents were caused, or much worsened, by the urban environment in which they occurred: electrical failures in particular could have large consequences in densely populated areas.<sup>113</sup> These

reports implied that living in the city was unpredictable and highly dependent on unreliable technological products. At night, comfortable and safe living was even more dependent on external factors that could fail or cause danger at any moment. The *Mirror*, more so than the *Express* or the *Mail*, presented the urban environment rather than the urban population as the primary danger to the safety of its readers.

Throughout the interwar period the *Daily Mail* became increasingly interested in reporting on 'London Life': human interest stories about life in the capital without obvious news value. Overall numbers of these stories were low, but there was an increase of them in the 1930s compared to the 1920s as newspapers became more concerned with providing entertainment as well as news reports. These articles often covered minor news that had no impact on world events, for example, an article published on 1 September 1933 which noted that people who left their windows open when they listened to the radio, could cause a nuisance to their neighbours.<sup>114</sup> This article was written as a call for justice, asking when 'the loud-speaker fiend [will] be dealt with.' The piece claims legitimacy by referring to the expert opinion of unnamed doctors on the damage too-loud music could do, and it sensationalises the topic by inferring that at least one person committed suicide after being subjected to the noise from his neighbour's radio. In this way, the piece's appearance in the newspaper is justified.

Other articles reported on new fashions or habits, such as the 'restaurant shuffle': a new way of slow dancing that the *Mail* spotted in restaurants in 1935.<sup>115</sup> This topic was reported by 'a woman correspondent', highlighting how these frivolous topics could provide a way for female journalists to get their work printed, but also how this perpetuated the idea that women's interest stories were less serious. These human interest articles elevated the quotidian to newsworthy events. Prior to the First World

War journalists had written about the leisure activities of the aristocracy, but in the interwar period the *Daily Mail* also reported on middle-class people's activities and interests. The paper also employed young aristocrats as gossip columnists, a feature discussed in more detail in chapter 4, but the human interest genre had expanded to include the lives and habits of the middle-classes.

Rather than providing a window on how 'the other half' lived, the *Mail* increasingly started to act as a mirror in which its readers could recognise themselves. This is also reflected in the increased reporting on cinema at the expense of higher-brow theatre shows.<sup>116</sup> Through human interest reporting, popular newspapers provided affirmation to their readers that middle-class lives deserved attention. This was a break with the more aspirational reporting of upper-class activities that had previously been published in newspapers.

### **Newspapers in film**

This thesis draws on examples where film and papers followed or imitated one another, to demonstrate the close interaction between the media in interwar Britain. Newspapers usually printed which films were showing in which cinemas. Cinemas advertised heavily in daily newspapers during the interwar period and, as the film industry matured, newspapers increasingly included film reviews and news about upcoming productions. When director Anthony Asquith, son of former prime minister H. H. Asquith, was filming his 1928 feature *Underground*, the *Daily Express* reported on the night-time shooting at Waterloo station.<sup>117</sup> In return for this publicity, a personification of the paper's popular cartoon character 'Little Strube' appears as a minor character in one of the film's scenes (see fig. 1). Asquith's family and connections undoubtedly increased his access to the media, but this reciprocal

arrangement shows how the newspaper and film industry recognised one another's influence and occasionally used this to mutually beneficial effect.

[Image withheld in relation to copyright]

Fig. 1: Scene from *Underground* (Anthony Asquith, 1928) The man in the bowler hat is a personification of 'Little Strube', a popular character of the *Daily Express*

In other cases, a film's whole plot was indebted to the popular press. The plot of the 1932 comedy *Let Me Explain, Dear*<sup>118</sup> revolves around a pair of men who try to fraudulently claim money from their newspaper insurance scheme. Popular newspapers really did run these insurance schemes, and they regularly included reports on readers who had sizeable sums paid out to them after injury or death befell them or their loved ones. In *Let Me Explain, Dear* the lower-middle-class protagonists read the popular newspaper as a matter of course, and the viewer needs to do the same in order to be able to accurately understand the film and its jokes. The film depends on audiences being familiar with these insurance schemes, and with the details of their operation: a significant part of the film's comedy depends on the protagonists having to convince the insurance inspector that they truly suffered an injury.

Of the 80 films watched for this thesis, newspapers featured in 31 films (39%). In all cases the newspapers are produced and/or read at night, or feature reports of events taking place at night. Of these 31 films, 14 featured journalists as well as newspapers. Another six films featured journalists but not newspapers, increasing the total number of films featuring journalists and/or newspapers to 37 (46% of 80). Nearly half of all films featuring London nightlife included journalists or newspapers, which demonstrates how closely London nightlife was linked to the press. In nearly every

instance it was the popular press, rather than the broadsheets, that were depicted in fiction films.

Of the 31 films showing newspapers, only three used papers simply as a prop for characters to handle. All other films used papers to further the plot. Most often, newspaper headlines or articles were used for the establishment or development of the plot, or to provide exposition to the audience. For example, in *Downhill*<sup>119</sup> the audience is informed that the film's protagonist Roddy has married through a close-up of a newspaper article reporting the event, rather than by showing the wedding itself. This device was cost-effective (as it removed the requirement to shoot a wedding scene) and also signalled the importance of the event within the film's world. This use of newspapers to relate action that has taken place away from the camera is the main way films used newspapers.

In the silent era, newspaper copy could provide a more dynamic alternative to regular intertitles. *Blighty*<sup>120</sup> uses this trope when close-ups of newspaper headlines inform the audience of the progression of the First World War in Europe. The use of headlines for plot development would not have been possible prior to the establishment of the popular press, as Victorian newspapers did not use big headlines. This demonstrates how the visual appeal of the popular newspaper was adopted by cinema for its own purposes. Sound films also used newspaper headlines, for example to condense events that take place over a period of time. A swift montage of newspaper headlines successfully conveys the passing of time as well as informing the audience of key plot developments.

The headlines used in *The Squeaker* (1937) are an example of this: after one of the characters, Larry Graeme, is arrested, a series of headlines summarises the progress

on the case: 'Larry Graeme detained'; 'Pearls found on Graeme'; 'Yard questions Graeme'; 'Graeme's story unshaken' (see fig. 2) Generally speaking, in these films the characters whose exploits are reported in fictional newspapers are actors, performers or other show business types; or they are (believed to be) criminals who capture the press's attention. In this way, the fictional newspapers' main areas of interest mirrored the topics which were frequently reported in real-life popular newspapers.

[Images withheld in relation to copyright]

Fig. 2: Close-ups of headlines in *The Squeaker* (William K. Howard, 1937)

In interwar British films, the press could be an anonymous source commenting on the action of the film, or papers could be shown to be written by journalists who also appear on screen. In other words, some films choose to depict the production of newspapers whilst others only show the end result – the finished paper. In the 80 films viewed for this work, only two included characters which actively manipulate the press for their own means. One of these examples is *It's Love Again*,<sup>121</sup> where a journalist and a budding stage star agree to pretend that the starlet is a socialite called 'Mrs Smythe-Smythe.' This fake character quickly becomes the most talked-about person in London society. The journalist's career is boosted as he has exclusive access to

Mrs Smythe-Smythe, and the starlet finds herself invited to upper-class clubs and parties. Eventually, though, the story grows out of their control and the deception is revealed. The journalist has the power to produce a news story, but he cannot control the story once it is in the public domain.

The other instance identified in the sample of characters using newspapers is the comedy *Break the News*.<sup>122</sup> In this film, a theatre actress ensures that she is always in the papers by feeding journalists with constant bits of 'news', such as her dog being missing (and then found again). The journalists in this film are shown to be eagerly reporting on all these updates, and the actress can summon journalists at any time. Unlike the characters in *It's Love Again*, the actress is shown to be a seasoned stage performer who deftly manages her own image. The actress remains in control when using the press to further her own career.

When papers are not used to simply provide plot development or exposition, film characters are actively pursued and hounded by the written press. This was a favourite ploy for Hitchcock, who used it in *The Lodger*, *The 39 Steps* and *Blackmail*. In this group of films (6 out of 80 or 7.5%), a character is on the run (either because they are a criminal or because they are wrongly suspected of being one) and newspapers make it increasingly difficult for them to remain at large. The press is always anonymous and faceless in these cases: articles are not written by specific journalists but by an anonymous group. Newspapers in these films act like a communication network to alert people across the country about the suspect. The suspect has no control over the newspaper content, but must hide from it. Films generally used newspapers as a force that could disseminate information and influence public opinion in a way that furthered the film's plot.



## Cinema in newspapers

Over a quarter of the *Daily Mail*'s articles on London night-time activities covered pleasurable pastimes: 119 articles in the sampled editions related to the pleasure economy, of which 74 articles discussed the theatre, and 69 were on the topic of cinema.<sup>123</sup> Overall, reports on the theatre, which includes reviews of West End productions, slowly decreased throughout the interwar period. However, in the two months after Britain entered the Second World War on 4 September 1939, the *Mail* included nine articles on London theatre, compared to only three articles in the same period in 1938. Similarly, the *Mail* reported on cinema five times in September and October 1939, compared to only twice in the same months of 1938. This could be an indication that newspapers included increased reporting on leisure activities to counterbalance war reporting.

The *Daily Express* extensively reported on London's night-time pleasure economy in the 1920s, publishing 152 articles on the topic in that decade alone. The *Express* wrote more regularly about modern forms of entertainment than the *Mail*, as 105 articles in the 1920s concerned cinema, and only 55 related to theatre. As noted above, the *Mail*'s coverage of these two key forms of evening entertainment was much more even-handed. The *Express* frequently printed reviews of new film releases throughout the 1920s, and in that way legitimised cinema as a respectable form of entertainment. It also included celebrity news and announcements about upcoming film projects, thus folding content, which was normally found in film fan magazines, into the popular newspaper.<sup>124</sup> This served to attract younger audiences but also lifted the reputation of cinema from its fleapit origins.

All the *Daily Mail* articles on theatre and cinema in 1939 related to the initial closing of places of entertainment after the declaration of war and the institution of a blackout, and the re-opening of most venues in the subsequent weeks. The re-opening was presented as a return to 'normality', and a mark of resilience of Britons in the face of grave danger. The string of articles started on 2 September, the first day of the formal blackout. This first article described how streetlights, hotels and even Buckingham Palace were thrown into darkness, but tellingly the headline of the piece is 'London Cinemas, Theatres, Carry On in Dark.'<sup>125</sup> Cinemas and theatres are singled out as the two sites whose continued operation most exemplifies how life goes on. Cinemas and theatres continue to be bundled together and given equal importance in the second article on 7 September, which announces that theatre and film chiefs are 'standing by' in expectation of an imminent return to business as usual.<sup>126</sup>

Two days later the 'Brighter Side of Britain' is front-page news: 'Cinemas, theatres and football grounds in safety zones last night received the 'All clear' to carry on with the job of assisting to maintain a cheerful Britain.'<sup>127</sup> The article presents the night-time entertainment industry as vital for keeping up the morale at the home front. The *Mail* considered this development so important that a second article on the topic was printed on page 5 of the same paper. Its opening line – 'A million people will go to the pictures to-day for the first time in a week' – illustrates how embedded cinema-going had become into British culture at that time, given that even closure for one week had a big impact.<sup>128</sup> A few days later, London theatres started re-opening as well, albeit initially only in the suburbs as Central London was still deemed to be under threat of bombing.<sup>129</sup> When Central London cinemas and theatres were finally reopened on 15 September it was front page news again, and the article immediately listed which films would be showing where. The article ends with the sage reminder that '[i]f you do go

to the cinema to-night, don't forget your gas mask.'<sup>130</sup> Despite this indication of possible danger, the *Mail* assumed its readers would rush to visit the cinema, as implied by the listings provided. In the space of two weeks the *Mail* had given cinema front page coverage several times. Editors understood films to be an important part of their readers' lives, even in wartime.

### **Crime in newspapers**

In addition to reporting on night-time entertainment, as noted above, the *Mail* also made frequent note of the other side of the night: criminal activity. A total of 95 *Daily Mail* articles across the twenty years under consideration referred to criminal activity (23.7% of the total number of *Daily Mail* articles considered). Fewer than half of those articles (42) also included mention of the Metropolitan Police. Crime was often reported without reference to formal efforts to control it. In the *Mail*, criminal activity was regularly reported to take place within nightclubs and related to typical night-time offences, such as the illegal sale of alcohol.<sup>131</sup> Sensational crime reports were a tried and tested way to attract readers. Reporters favoured murders and cases involving glamorous women over petty burglary or non-fatal assault.<sup>132</sup> The consistent attention to night-time crime perpetuated the notion that the city after dark was a dangerous place.

Overall, the *Express* contained fewer reports on London night-time in the 1930s compared to the 1920s, but there was a proportional increase in reports of nocturnal crime. As with the reports found in the *Mail*, most crime stories had an aspect of the unusual or sensational about them. In March and April 1930, for example, the *Express* reported, among other crimes, on: a kidnapping; the freak death of a typist attached to the US delegation of the Naval Conference; the assault and robbery of an elderly

man; the spectacular theft of eighteen paintings from an art gallery; the brutal murder of a mother and child by her husband; and a man who was being blackmailed for homosexuality.<sup>133</sup> By foregoing reporting on more quotidian occurrences, newspapers' reports distorted the image of the night for the audience.

The articles referenced above include words like 'mysterious', 'tragedy', 'savage', 'outrage' and 'threat'. These words reinforce the notion that crime is not an ordinary part of life, but something unusual and unpredictable that should elicit an emotional response in the reader. The increased attention on crime stories in the *Express* in the 1930s possibly reflected a perception that the world became increasingly volatile and dangerous. This type of reporting is at odds with what is frequently described as the *Express*' upbeat and positive tone of reporting in this period. It suggests that although the *Express* reported positively on the general state of the world, it also increasingly gave space to domestic stories of disruption, an aspect of the paper's interwar reporting which remains unexplored in existing scholarship and commentary.

Like the *Express*, the *Mirror* often reported on those crimes that were particularly gruesome or violent. But the language used in these articles was more factual than sensational. For example, when a Hackney maid was found murdered in November 1928, the news report consisted of the formal police statement, without colourful details.<sup>134</sup> Even the murder of a young girl in 1931, the type of crime that could elicit exploitative reporting, was largely covered factually through police statements.<sup>135</sup> In addition to murders and violent assaults, the *Mirror* also regularly reported on robberies and crimes connected to nightlife such as the illegal serving of alcohol after 11pm. The paper is less exploitative than the *Mail* and the *Express* in its descriptions of victims, suggesting that the difference in target audience led to a distinctive approach to crime reporting.

The *Mirror*'s primary readership was female, and it is probably for this reason that the paper reported frequently on smaller crimes affecting women, such as a spate of handbag robberies in South Kensington and the robbery of a postmistress in 1932.<sup>136</sup> These articles described the victims sparingly, without adding detail about their appearance, marital status or profession, as was common when reporting on women in other newspapers.<sup>137</sup> The female victims were usually named by the *Mirror*, whereas the male perpetrators remained anonymous. This reinforced the notion that the city was a threatening place for women, where they could fall prey to unknown aggressors. But the factual language used to describe the women limited their objectification and did not imply that they were in some way to blame for the crimes committed against them.

Of the three newspaper titles considered in this thesis, the *Daily Express* was the one which most often reported on women in night-time London. The two months' worth of newspapers sampled across 20 years contained 112 *Express* articles about or including women, compared to 75 articles in the *Mirror* and 67 in the *Mail*. This is despite the *Mirror* being founded with the express intention to be a 'women's paper'. Women were particularly often reported on by the *Express* in the 1920s, when the 'flapper' was popularised as the new female archetype and the recent enfranchisement of women caused considerable anxiety. Many of the articles served to evoke the moral and physical danger women put themselves in when they went out at night. The death of nightclub dancer Freda Kempton in 1922 sparked a whole series of articles in the *Express* on the danger of 'dope dens' to young women.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, young society women in restaurants and clubs provided attractive subjects for photographs, and newspapers increasingly included photos of women that were

unrelated to news reports.<sup>139</sup> The representation of women in both newspapers and films is explored in more detail in chapter 6.

### **Crime in cinema**

In cinema, night-time crime was also a popular topic. Out of the 80 films viewed with night-time scenes in them, 34 include the depiction of crime (42.5%). The proportion of films including night-time crime is far higher than the proportion of newspaper reports on this topic, which supports the argument that fiction films augmented stereotypical beliefs about the dangers of the night, rather than reflecting the reality.

A total of 23 of these 34 films (67%) also include the presence of police. This means that in around a third of the films that show crime taking place, there is no formal state-sanctioned pursuit or punishment for this crime. This may seem to be at odds with the argument made in this thesis that interwar cinema represented Britain as stable and safe. However, in the newspapers only half the articles reporting crime also included a mention of the police. Films appear to give the police more credence, but it was also easier to write a police presence into a fictional story from the start. Films were more likely than newspaper reports to include police officers in an active and positive role. In the films that depict crime without police intervention, either the criminal is caught by the film's hero, who is not a police officer but nonetheless embodies the values of truth, honesty and integrity; or the crime in question is one that the film sets up as not morally wrong or serious.

There are, for example, a number of films which play with the notion of impersonation and misrepresentation of identities, which were criminal offences. In Victor Saville's 1934 film *Evergreen*<sup>140</sup> the main character, Harriet, is a woman who pretends to be her mother in order to gain success on the West End stage. When the deception is

revealed at the end of the film, there is some reference to impersonation being a crime. But the film's main characters regard this to be an overly zealous interpretation of the law. *Evergreen* is mainly concerned with how Harriet's ruse has nearly thwarted her chances at a romantic coupling. The film makes a distinction between a crime that is morally wrong and a crime that is technically criminal but not harmful to anyone. It playfully challenges what is considered to be criminal behaviour in Britain, and makes fun of police officers trying to enforce the law to ostensibly no purpose. The film allows for limited freedom in interpretation of the law and criticism of the police in a low-stakes scenario, which makes strict enforcement of the law in other areas more palatable for audiences.

Of the films watched for this thesis, there is only one where a hardened criminal escapes without punishment: *The Gaunt Stranger*, made in 1938.<sup>141</sup> In this film, police attempt to catch a mysterious killer, the Ringer, who was believed dead but has returned to London and has announced his next intended victim. At the end of the film, the Ringer and his wife are able to outwit the police and they manage to escape the country on a plane, departing from Croydon airfield. In a time when international search warrants did not yet exist, the modern transportation method of the plane provides a secure means of escape for the criminal.

The representation of crime and criminals in *The Gaunt Stranger* reflects contemporary fears that international criminals could easily permeate and infect British society. Although forensic investigation methods were improving in the interwar period, journalists regularly reported on unsolved murders or criminals who went on the run and escaped abroad. It is particularly notable that this film was produced by Ealing Studios, which would only a few years later become known for their films representing Britain as a community-minded and safe country. On the eve of the Second World

War, the studio instead produced a story which warned of the risk of international criminal activity in a modern and increasingly transnational society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has established how a research project considering the representation of the London night in the British cinema and popular press of the interwar period delivers a significant contribution to the fields of film history and media studies. It has provided historical context to the project and positioned it in relation to previously published scholarly research. The research methodology has been justified. The final part of the chapter interrogated key findings of the data analysis of both films and newspapers. It has made apparent that both media foregrounded pleasurable and criminal activities that occurred at night, and that these two categories frequently overlapped. The analysis has also highlighted the regular interactions between the two media, in the way newspapers were used in films, and how cinema-going was reported on in newspapers.

The remainder of this thesis investigates more closely how specific elements of London nightlife were represented on the page and on screen. The first two chapters consider how an expansion of suburban developments and the associated growing public transport network were mediated by films and popular newspapers. The latter three chapters look at three groups of Londoners whose identities were in flux during the interwar period: journalists, police officers, and women. All three groups were commonly shown to navigate the nocturnal city in the films of the period, but their appearance in the pages of a newspaper could be more incidental. The representation of journalists highlights the interaction between newspapers and films in the interwar



period. Each of the five case study chapters provides a jumping-off point for a wider exploration of social changes in interwar Britain.

## Chapter 2: London suburbs at night in interwar British films and newspapers

This chapter and the next explore how, while the development of suburbs alongside train and underground lines provided a common living experience for many of the capital's inhabitants, it also drew attention to differences between Londoners. Many suburban workers commuted into London by public transport and read their daily newspaper during this travel. Local cinemas provided a key source of entertainment and community focus for suburban households: by the end of the interwar period each suburb usually housed at least one cinema.

The cinema was so pivotal to the suburban community that space was earmarked for it at the start of most new developments, particularly after the coming of sound film.<sup>1</sup> The sound film era saw significant increase of the number of suburban cinemas as a small number of chains aggressively expanded their reach, and it became more difficult for independent cinemas to afford the expensive wiring and equipment required for screening sound films.

By exploring how the mass-consumed newspapers and films portrayed the London suburb at night, this chapter seeks to determine how the mass media utilised the concept of suburbia, which was relatively novel at the time. The chapter focuses on how suburbia became a proxy for anxieties about class and wealth distribution. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of suburban development in interwar London. The chapter then provides a detailed discussion of interwar newspaper articles which were concerned with events taking place in suburbs at night. The final part of the chapter analyses two feature films with a suburban setting and night-time scenes: *A Cup of Kindness* (1934) and *Laburnum Grove* (1936).<sup>2</sup> The primary sources

used in this chapter represent the extent of sources found in the sampling that relate to night-time suburbs.<sup>3</sup> Despite the prevalence of the suburban experience for Londoners in the interwar period, popular films and newspapers infrequently highlighted this experience. Unlike the other chapters of this thesis where the most evocative sources have been selected out of a multitude of available material, this chapter provides an initial exploration of all that which was identified during the sampling of primary material.

While there have been historical explorations of London's suburban development, as well as considerations of the representation of suburbia on film, no work has yet considered the representation of the night-time suburb specifically, and there has been limited work on British suburbs (as opposed to American suburbs). Existing scholarly works on cinematic depictions of suburbs do not explore the period under investigation in this thesis due to the small number of British films with a suburban setting made before the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter argues that the rhythm of suburban life means that the night-time takes an important place in the suburban experience: it is the time when the whole family is together in the domestic environment that is often a family's key reason to move to a suburban home. The night therefore becomes the time when the suburban experience is fully realised. As is further explored in the next chapter, the longer reach of Tube and train lines encouraged property developers to build ever further from the centre of the city, creating an expansive network of suburbs around London. This chapter takes a closer look at these suburbs, many of which were built or developed in the interwar period. During the 1920s and 1930s, an increasing number of Londoners chose to move to the outskirts of the city, which made suburbs a defining feature of life in the capital in this period.

## **Definition of a suburb**

Sociologist David Thorns defined suburbs as: within the urban orbit of a town, but beyond its heart; intermediate between town centre and countryside; within commuting distance of the town centre; primarily residential in nature; and dependent upon the town centre as a source of goods and services.<sup>5</sup> This definition of the suburb highlights the interdependency of suburb and town centre: the suburb cannot exist without the centre, and the centre needs the suburb to house residents. Thorns also draws attention to the transitional nature of the suburb, which makes it difficult to draw a distinguishable border around them. As is further explored below, some of London's suburbs were 'purpose built' on empty land, whereas others formed around existing villages and townships that grew and developed until they merged with the main city. This makes it difficult to determine the exact moment at which a suburb was created.

For the purposes of this chapter, this thesis considers parts of London which were purpose-built during the interwar period to provide Londoners with housing, as well as those existing villages and towns that saw a sharp increase in their population during the interwar period. In all suburbs discussed in this chapter, both actual and fictional, most of the developments were residential; many of the inhabitants travelled to the centre of London for work or leisure.

In addition to the spatial definition of a suburb, the Oxford English Dictionary also notes that in modern parlance, the word suburb is often used in a way that is 'depreciative, implying a homogeneity, monotony, and dull ordinariness within such areas.'<sup>6</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, this emotional conception of the suburb developed during the interwar period.<sup>7</sup> A suburb was not just a physical space, but also represented a set of ideas which the mass media utilised and commented on.

Indeed, in the second half of the interwar period some suburban developers started to market their houses as 'away from suburbia' or 'non-suburbanised' as, in the upper echelons of society, 'suburb' could be considered a 'dirty word' representing dullness and small-mindedness.<sup>8</sup> This negative view of suburbs was also echoed in newspaper reports and films of the second half of the 1930s, as is explored in the latter part of this chapter.

### **Class and the suburbs**

The development of suburbs allowed many Londoners a new opportunity to choose where to live, away from the area in which they had grown up or settled. Urban historian Mark Clapson has argued that people generally wanted to live amongst those of a similar class and status to themselves, and that hence, 'class is of central importance in our understanding of the suburban aspiration.' He further states that 'in England, the suburban pecking order was largely based upon class and status perceptions.'<sup>9</sup> This thesis argues that popular films and newspapers also closely linked suburban living with questions of class. As is illustrated further below, in the popular imagination of interwar Britain, the suburban development became a key site for the articulation of class anxieties. This is a marked difference from later representations of British suburbia, of which it has been argued that '[q]uestions of social class and the dynamics of intra-class politics are rarely visible in the fixed representation of the suburb as a middle-class narrative space.'<sup>10</sup>

The first London suburbs were built by private investors during the nineteenth century, when the introduction of tramcars and other modes of public transport opened up areas further away from the city centre, for residential development. By the end of the nineteenth century the London County Council also ordered the development of

suburban estates, to provide healthier living quarters to poorer Londoners.<sup>11</sup> These two types of suburbs – private developments and council estates – continued to co-exist in the Edwardian and interwar periods. Private developments were mostly aimed at the aspirational middle-classes, who would look to mortgage a semi-detached or detached house. Council estates were built to re-home poorer Londoners who were living in East End slums that were unfit for habitation. The two films analysed in the latter part of this chapter are set on privately developed suburbs, and class tensions between neighbours are given prominence in the films' plots.

As stated in the opening chapter of this thesis, the middle classes also served as the main audience for the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*. It is this group of clerks, bookkeepers and other office workers who would develop into the stereotypical suburbanites. As is noted below in the analysis of newspaper reports on suburban living, popular newspapers rarely included reports on night-time suburbs. Suburban newspaper readers did not see their own lived experience reflected in the pages of the paper. As the interwar period wore on and their experience became more commonplace, it was not considered newsworthy. The lack of newspaper reporting on suburban events confirmed that suburbs were safe havens.

### **Life in the interwar suburb**

The interwar period saw a combination of an increase of Londoners who were looking for suitable living space; an increase in disposable income and a reduction of housing costs; and a greater availability of accessible building plots around the outskirts of the city. These factors led to a veritable suburban 'boom' during the 1920s and 1930s, at the end of which London's size had increased threefold and the population of its suburbs had grown by 2.5 million compared to the start of the century.<sup>12</sup>

Because the new estates consisted almost exclusively of residential developments (as opposed to commercial developments) they have been likened to 'dormitories.'<sup>13</sup> Suburban living encouraged a new daily rhythm where the family's main earner travelled into the city centre to work during the day, and the homemaker stayed in the suburb where houses were built with privacy and isolation in mind. Limited social spaces in the suburb meant that most leisure activities in the evening were undertaken within the domestic sphere.

In the evenings those living in the working-class suburbs were largely confined to their houses and their immediate surroundings as they could often not afford to keep a car. The cinema provided a key form of entertainment here during the evenings. As noted above, almost every suburb boasted at least one cinema, and cinemas were often one of the first facilities to be built when a new suburb was developed. In the case of the Odeon cinema chain, its suburban cinemas were deliberately designed to be 'modern and fashionable, functional and stylish' to mirror the appeal of suburban homes.<sup>14</sup> One council estate, Becontree, had no fewer than four cinemas by 1934. In Edgware, the local newspaper saw the establishment of a cinema as proof that the suburb was now the bustling centre of the district.<sup>15</sup> But, as is explored further below, very few British films of the time portrayed life in the suburbs. Clearly, most of the films consumed by these suburban audiences did not reflect their daily lives.

Although suburban evenings were quite staid once the new suburban dwellers had moved in (something also explored in feature films of the period), property developers did not shy away from utilising night-time spectacles to sell new housing developments. In the early 1930s, the new development at Rayners Lane had been advertised with bonfires, and in 1933 developer George Ball tried to sell houses on his

new estate in Ruislip Manor by providing a free fireworks and searchlight display. Other estates used neon lighting or floodlights to market houses.<sup>16</sup>

These marketing events took place in the night time because many aspiring homeowners had office jobs and were unable to take much time off work in their search for a new home. Property developers therefore shaped their promotional activities around the working day, making it as easy as possible for workers to come and visit the new developments. The use of lighting displays also visually tied the new developments to the glitter and glamour of the West End and implied that suburban life could be just as exciting as visiting the West End; another part of London which aimed to provide experiences normally out of reach. Such experiences were desirable upon one's first time attending the suburb, but as a suburb's selling point was its peace and quiet, big displays should not be repeated once families had settled in.

### **Suburbs and national popular newspapers**

As noted elsewhere in this thesis, early twentieth-century popular newspapers were specifically designed to be read on the move. The short articles, big headlines and numerous sub-headlines allowed the reader to get an understanding of the main news of the day by simply scanning the page.<sup>17</sup> This made the newspapers ideal to read during short commutes to and from work. Alongside the national morning papers considered in this research project, Londoners could also buy evening papers to read on the way home. A report compiled in 1938 calculated that London and the South East of England had a newspaper coverage of 106%, which indicates how wide-spread the practice of buying and reading (multiple) newspapers was in interwar London.<sup>18</sup> The same report noted that men were slightly more likely than women to read the



national daily newspapers; probably a reflection of the fact that men were also more likely to commute to work and thus have a time in their day for newspaper reading.<sup>19</sup>

Most suburbs also had a local paper which typically appeared once weekly on Fridays. Examples of these are the *West London Observer, Hendon & Finchley Times, Uxbridge & West Drayton Gazette* and the short-lived *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*. The Friday publication date allowed families to pore over this local paper on Saturdays, before buying a Sunday paper for sports news and comics. The local papers were generally shorter than the national papers, running between eight and sixteen pages, and contained advertising as well as local news. As D.L. LeMahieu has pointed out, during the Edwardian and interwar period newspaper ownership in Great Britain consolidated into fewer and fewer hands, and starting a new paper became increasingly expensive.<sup>20</sup> During the interwar period many of the suburban papers were owned by a syndicate, which eroded local differences in news reporting.<sup>21</sup> This thesis does not further explore the content of local and suburban newspapers, but instead investigates the representation of the urban night in nationally available media.

The *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* were certainly read in the suburbs, but they only sparingly reported on suburban night-time activities. Across all the newspaper sampling conducted for this thesis, spanning 120 months' worth of issues over 20 years, only five articles have been identified that are concerned with events happening in suburbs at night: three in the *Mirror* and one each in the *Express* and the *Mail*. This dearth of reporting underlines that very little happened in the suburbs at night that was considered newsworthy for national newspapers. Local newspapers covered some of the events that did take place in suburbs after dark. In addition, suburbs were perceived as places in which not much was going on – a stereotype which possibly led to a self-perpetuating cycle of underreporting.

As has been noted earlier in this thesis, crime constituted one of the major topics of night-time news in the London area. A strong sense of social control, a visible police presence and segregation by socio-economic backgrounds ensured that suburban areas were largely free of incidents and behaviours considered criminal at the time. The focus of suburban life was domestic, and some behaviours and actions in the domestic sphere that would currently be considered criminal were perceived as private matters in interwar Britain. This lack of social disturbance in suburbs reduced the number of newsworthy events taking place in these estates after dark. The other main source of night-time news, leisure pursuits, remained centred in the West End, where suburban Londoners would occasionally venture for a night out.

### **Becoming familiar with the suburb: newspaper reports on nocturnal suburbs in 1920**

Given the small number of articles on suburban nights found in the newspaper sampling, it is possible to consider each newspaper article in detail here. Three of the five articles (one in each of the three newspapers titles) appeared in 1920. As noted above, suburbs were rapidly expanding immediately after the First World War. As many Londoners moved to these new areas, what went on in them became briefly newsworthy.

The other two articles appeared in 1931 and 1933. For the remainder of the 1920s, newspapers reported on nocturnal events in Central London or elsewhere in Britain, but from the sampling work done it appears that the capital's suburbs received little attention. Both the dearth of coverage identified and the pieces of existing early coverage in the interwar period are significant for understanding public ideas about suburbs. As discussed below, the sense of uneventfulness in the suburbs, passively generated by newspapers, promised a quiet and peaceful residential life to people

interested in moving to them. The few newspaper articles that were published represent the active public perspective on the experience of night-time suburbia which affected a considerable share of London's population.

The first article in this project's newspaper sampling that discussed a suburb after dark appeared in the *Daily Express* on 7 April 1920. Headlined 'Madman Leaps to His Death', the report was included in the section 'Special Reports from the Court.' It relates how 70-year old Alfred William Daniels attempted to kill his wife at about 4am on the morning of 4 April. After a struggle between husband and wife, Daniels jumped out of the bedroom window and ended up 'impaled on a spike of the railings in front of the house.'<sup>22</sup>

This grisly scene took place in Haig Road. In the newspaper article this street is identified as located in Plaistow, but a contemporary map places the road more precisely in Upton Park. In 1920, this area was part of Essex rather than London, but was connected to the centre of the capital by the District Railway. The road first appears on Ordnance Survey maps published in 1919 – a map from the 1890s indicates that the street's eventual location is occupied by a farm.<sup>23</sup> The area was rapidly and densely populated with housing between the turn of the century and the start of the 1920s (see figures 3 and 4). The plots on which the houses stand are modest, and each house only has a small strip in front of it rather than a proper garden. This, along with the location of the suburb which was relatively close to the East End, marks it out as a residential area for families of limited means.

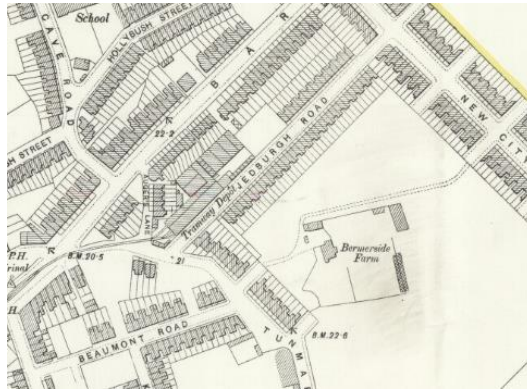


Fig. 3: Detail of 1897 Ordnance Survey map of Plaistow, including Bermerside Farm

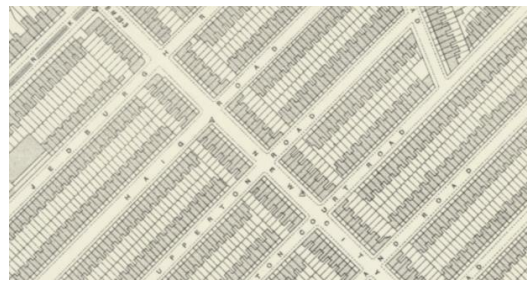


Fig. 4: Detail of 1919 Ordnance Survey map of Plaistow, now including Haig Road

Alfred Daniels was described by the *Daily Express* as a 'Port of London pensioner' which confirms his status as a blue-collar worker. The article further noted that the man's daughter had been 'sent to an asylum some weeks ago.'<sup>24</sup> This detail indicates to the modern reader that there was possibly a history of what would now be understood to be mental health difficulties in the family which may explain Daniels' attempt on his wife's life.

The article also stated that 'Daniels had worried that 'people would consider him lazy' now that he was a pensioner' which speaks to the intense social pressure Daniels perceived himself to be under from those in his vicinity. Living at close quarters with dozens of other families in small, terraced houses may have exacerbated his sense of failure as he was constantly physically reminded of his neighbours. The small front

garden allocated to the house eventually directly contributed to Daniels' rather gruesome end as it placed the gate close to the house's façade.

At the conclusion of the court report, the *Express* states that a verdict of 'suicide whilst of unsound mind' was returned, as was common in suicide inquests at the time.<sup>25</sup> Although the total report is brief, it seeks to both entertain the reader with a sensational story with graphic detail, and reassure that this was the action of an unbalanced individual that will have no impact on society as a whole. The horror is contained within the suburban house and takes place between the marital couple. No strangers have infiltrated the suburb, and only the perpetrator himself was punished for his actions. Conversely, the report does not blame anyone other than Daniels himself for his actions – he was a single deviant, and there is no exploration of the potential contribution of institutional failings towards his death.

Criminal activity did not always stay within the domestic sphere of the suburban home. The murders of two young women are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, which are examples of crimes affecting the public residential space; the residential street and suburban park respectively. A similar case was reported in the *Daily Mail* on 21 October 1920. A 24-year old woman, variously called Bessie, Catherine, or Katherine Jarvis by the paper, was found dead in Epping Forest, some thirty miles north-east of Charing Cross. She was reported to have been 'a waitress employed at a Finsbury pavement refreshment establishment' but lived in Edmonton, about ten miles south of Epping Forest. Waitressing was not the most glamorous job, but the paper was initially at pains to point out that Jarvis 'was respectably connected and was engaged to be married', thus implying that she was not to blame for her death.<sup>26</sup> Jarvis' fiancé was not a suspect in the case. Instead, her murder could be the work of a rogue outsider, which highlighted the unknown threat this murder posed to the community.

The *Mail* reported that a doctor had examined the body and had estimated the time of death to have been between 9pm and 10pm on 19 October. A subsequent newspaper article printed the following day reported that a 24-year old labourer named Albert John Bartlett had been arrested for the murder. He too lived in Edmonton. According to Bartlett, on the day of Jarvis' death the pair had spent the afternoon and evening together:

We went to Chingford and visited the Forest Hotel, and had a drink about seven o'clock. We went for a walk and back to the hotel at 9.30. We had a whiskey each, and I left her for a few minutes. When I came back I said 'What is the matter, Bess?' She ran away towards the trees. I followed her and missed her. I saw her taking her clothes off. When I caught her up she said she had taken some salts of lemon which she had bought. [...] She was foaming at the mouth and appeared to be in great pain, and I finished her off.<sup>27</sup>

The 'salts of lemon' referred to are more appropriately called potassium hydrogen oxalate, which is toxic to humans. Bartlett's account of the day he and Jarvis spent together seemingly contradicts the *Mail's* previous statement that the woman was respectable. The contemporary reader can glean from the article that Jarvis had sexual relations with Bartlett on 19 October, and it is possible that this affair was long-standing. The pair also engaged in day-time drinking and visited a hotel room as an unmarried couple. Regardless of whether Bartlett had genuinely tried to humanely finish a suicide attempt, or whether he murdered Jarvis, the couple's behaviour had been far from what was considered respectable at the time.

Bessie Jarvis' murder attracted little more attention from the press beyond the two articles quoted above. She had engaged in transgressive behaviour with Bartlett, and potentially committed the crime of suicide herself. In the normative view of the time the act of murder had not, after all, come out of nowhere, but could be explained by Jarvis's own behaviour and character. There was no risk that there was a dangerous

random killer on the loose in Edmonton. With Jarvis' death and the arrest of Bartlett, the suburb had been 'cleansed' of two questionable individuals.



Fig. 5: Katherine Jarvis and Arthur Bartlett as they appeared on the back page of the *Daily Mail* of 22 October 1920

The final article that appeared in 1920 in relation to night-time suburban activity was of an altogether different nature. On 9 December the *Daily Mirror* reported that on the previous evening, a council-organised dance had been disrupted in Acton, West London.<sup>28</sup> The dance had been planned to raise money for the council, to lower the so-called 'ratepayer burden' for Acton residents. A group of unemployed men had taken over the local baths that were the location of the planned ball.

The *Mirror* article is good-natured in tone and fits the tradition of 'human interest' stories commonly found in the popular press of the period. The stand-off between the council and the unemployed is presented as a comic scene. However, the last sentence of the report notes that 'in Acton, Hanwell and Ealing the number out of work is 17,000,' signposting that even in the relatively wealthy suburbs of West London a

significant number of people faced financial difficulties. The article also notes that there had been a 'big demonstration of the unemployed earlier in the day.'<sup>29</sup> The unemployment issue is pitched as a local dispute between those out of work and the council representatives, rather than a problem that is the responsibility of the national government to address. The *Mirror* also opted not to report on the formal day-time demonstration, instead choosing the more whimsical angle of the evening sit-in. This diminishes the seriousness of the unemployment problem in the suburbs and frames it as a local dispute that causes only minor disruptions.

The three reports on suburban nights that appeared in newspapers in 1920 depict suburbs as spaces where disruption is not caused by, and does not affect, wider society. The troubles of the Plaistow family remained within their domestic environment; Katherine Jarvis brought her death upon herself and Alfred Bartlett was not likely to murder anyone else; and the Acton unemployed protested against their council rather than against the national government. These early suburbs were not yet the safe havens away from modern life's transgression that they would later become in the public imagination, but neither did they bring Londoners into danger.

### **Electric adventures: newspaper reporting on nocturnal suburbs in the 1930s**

The newspapers sampled for this work did not contain any other articles pertaining to suburban nightlife for the remainder of the 1920s. The national popular newspapers instead included reports on nocturnal events in Central London, or about events happening elsewhere in the country. The large groups of Londoners that moved out to the suburbs in this decade therefore did not consume any representations of suburban nights in the newspapers many of them read. The consequence is that readers could assume that suburban nights were completely uneventful, and not worth



reporting on or reading about. Popular films used this idea of the quiet life to dramatic effect.

As is noted above, cinemas were a key part of the development of any new suburb, and cinemas usually functioned as one of the main forms of night-time entertainment that was available locally. In the 1930s, cinemagoing was an established part of daily life in London and newspaper reporters were regularly writing about popular film. On 5 November 1931, the *Daily Mirror* devoted its last four pages to film news wrapped around promotion for the new Herbert Wilcox film *Carnival*, starring Matheson Lang. This production had invested heavily in advertising, as the *Mirror* printed no fewer than four large advertisements for the film on 5 November 1931.

The four pages are built up in a sequence: the first page lists which films one can see in the West End cinemas that weekend, the second page includes gossip on Hollywood actors. The third page gives an update on British studio news, and the final page discusses what was showing in local suburban cinemas. This order means that a suburban reader started with reading aspirational reports about glamorous cinemas and international stars, then moved to read about the national context, and finally arrived at what is accessible locally. The order of the reports therefore links the local cinema-going experience to the film screenings in the West End and the personal affairs of the stars on the screen. But the position of the suburban cinema news was subordinate to Hollywood and cinemas in Central London.

**Matheson Lang**  
**CARNIVAL**  
WITH  
**DOROTHY BOUCHIER & JOSEPH SCHILDKRAUT.**  
*World Premier at the*  
**TIVOLI NOW!**  
STAND, W.C.

## WHAT TO SEE AT YOUR LOCAL CINEMA

**Suburbs Agree with West End Over Chaplin Film**

**MOROCCO COMING**  
**Marlene Dietrich's New Picture Extensively Booked**

"THE big winner at the suburban cinemas this week is "City Lights," which, in trade terms, has been cleaning up. Chaplin's popularity seems undiminished. Another picture which has done well is "The Chance of a Night-Time," the Ralph Lynn comedy, which is going the rounds this week and next.

**New Dietrich Release.**—I hear that Amner's Band, which is at the Brixton Astoria this week, is to go to Finsbury Park on Monday, where the new Marlene Dietrich picture "Morocco," is also to be held. This excellent entertainment is generally released on Monday and should not be missed.

**Foreign Legion Story.**—In this picture Marlene is a cabaret artist who has drifted down to a low cafe in North Africa. There she meets and falls in love with a Legionnaire, played by Gary Cooper. He, however, does not take the affair seriously, and goes off with his regiment. To console herself she turns to Lewis Stone, the rich man who has been hovering in the background and wishes to marry her.

**A Camp Follow-up.**—But Marlene receives the news that her soldier has been wounded. She is taken to the hospital by her kind-hearted protector. Gary Cooper turns her down, thinking she will be happier married to a rich man, but when he is well and ready to leave again she follows him into the desert.

**A Much-Disputed Ending.**—Marlene Dietrich is one of the greatest box-office draws in America, and she is equally popular here. The final scene in "Morocco," in which she follows her Foreign Legion lover into the desert, has proved one of the most vigorous topics of discussion in pictures.

**Good Gangster Picture.**—"Quick Millions," which is also being shown this week, is a first-class gangster story, notable for good acting by Spencer Tracy and Sally Eilers. Technically, this picture is perfect.

**Bobby Hoeses Comedy.**—"Third Time Lucky," due for release on Monday, is a really amusing comedy featuring Bobby Hoeses and Gordon Barker. It is produced by Walter Forde, who made "The Ghost Train," and is based on Arnold Ridley's comedy. The plot deals with the devastating effects of a "penny dreadful" on a charming country view.

**Gordon Barker Again.**—Bobby Hoeses as the vicar is very funny, and is ably supported by Gordon Barker, whose characterization is superb. "Third Time Lucky" bristles with comedy situations and is well worth seeing.

**Singing Film.**—Lawrence Tibbett, the American opera star, sings several haunting songs in "The Prodigal," an unusual triangle drama to be screened locally on Monday. Father Hailson is feminine lead.

**War Picture.**—"Beyond Victory," one of the last of the war films, featuring Bill Boyd, is also generally released next week. It is a good entertainment.



Sally Eilers and Spencer Tracy in "Quick Millions."

## LONDON AND SUBURBAN CINEMA GUIDE

WEST-END		TIVOLI	
ASTORIA	Woolton, 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	Woolton, 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	Woolton, 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
CAPITOL	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
CARLTON	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
EMPIRE	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
LEICESTER	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
LONDON PAVILION	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
MAJESTIC	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
METROPOLE	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
NEW GALLERY	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
NEW PAVILION	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
NEW TIVOLI	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
PALACE	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
PRINCE OF WALES	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
ROYAL	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
STRAITS	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
THEATRE	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
WARRIOR	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.
WINDMILL	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.	12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE DARK CAMEL," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15. "THE CHANCE OF A NIGHT-TIME," 12.15, 2.15, 4.15, 6.15, 8.15, 10.15.

Fig. 6: The back page of the *Daily Mirror* of 5 November 1931

The suburban cinema news appears on the *Mirror's* back page in this issue (fig. 6). The left half of the page is made up of an advert for *Carnival*. The top half of the right-hand side of the page contains a series of brief reviews of films that are being shown that weekend. The main feature under discussion is *Morocco* starring Marlene Dietrich. The bottom half of the section is headed 'London and Suburban Cinema Guide' and lists the screenings in cinemas in the West End, Catford, Harlesden,

Kensington, Kilburn, East Ham, Edmonton, Enfield, Leytonstone, Plumstead, Tooting, Walthamstow, West Ham and Willesden.<sup>30</sup> *Carnival* is only playing at the Tivoli on the Strand in the West End, so the film reviews given in the top article help the suburban reader decide which of the films that are showing locally, they will want to see. The order and placing of the articles acknowledges that most readers will be visiting their local cinema rather than the West End super cinemas, but also positions the West End screening as the most glamorous and desirable option.

The final instance of a national popular newspaper report discussing the night-time suburb in the interwar period occurred on 7 December 1933. On the night of 6 December, a large electrical failure plunged large parts of London suburbs into darkness. This news made the front page of the *Daily Mirror* the next day. According to the *Mirror*, 'twelve square miles of suburban London' were affected by the power cut which originated in Willesden. As a result, trains were stopped, shops had to stop trading and cinema screenings were disrupted. The city's reliance on electricity was evident in the war-like tone of the *Mirror's* reporting: housewives were 'desperate', factory girls had to 'desperately beg' and 'people fought for places on buses'.<sup>31</sup>

The disruption of cinema screenings warranted its own subheading within the main article, indicating how important journalists perceived the cinema to be in suburban life. The reporting on cinemas takes precedent even over reporting on how hospitals managed with the outage, even though nurses in Wembley hospital had to rely on hand-torches rather than proper emergency lighting. According to the *Mirror*, various cinema managers decided to keep audiences entertained with live stage performances, which in some cases were delivered by audience members themselves.<sup>32</sup> This highlights the community spirit which the newspaper was hoping

to convey and which manifested itself in public suburban spaces, if not in and around the home.

The *Mirror's* report continued on the second page of the newspaper. It is only in this final part of the article that the paper discusses that the power failure was caused by melting cables. The very final paragraphs of the article quote one of the power plant workers, who indicates that he and his colleagues are lucky to have escaped unharmed: 'The fumes were overpowering, and choking and spluttering we felt our way through the smoke and darkness and got out.'<sup>33</sup> There is no reflection on the safety risks posed by the malfunctioning, or any attempt to hold responsible parties to account. Instead, the main body of the article is concerned with the effect the power cut had on the daily life of the average Londoner, who also made up the readership of the *Daily Mirror*. The effects are presented not just as an inconvenience, but as a major danger to modern life.

By 1933, many Londoners were reliant on public transport for their commute, so any outage of the transport system caused chaos. The *Mirror* states that young girls 'living in distant parts of London' had to hitch rides from passing motorists to get home. The vast size of the capital put these young women in danger, they were not able to simply walk home as they would have been able to prior to suburbanization.

The power cut probably had a significant impact on many Londoners' lives on 6 December 1933. Reading about the power cut in the newspaper the next day allowed suburban Londoners to recognise their own experience in the newspaper and enhanced a sense of community among suburbanites who had lived through the ordeal together. The portrayal of the events in the *Daily Mirror* highlights which elements of modern life were most significant to both the reporters and the target

audience. The newspaper was more concerned with reflecting how regular Londoners were affected by the situation rather than by determining the cause of the power cut or uncovering possible structural problems with the safety of the electrical power plants in the capital. The power cut was something that happened *to* the suburbs, rather than an event taking place *within* the suburb, such as the Plaistow murder/suicide had been. It was also outside of the control of suburban residents. The notion of the suburb as an essentially uneventful space was preserved by the *Mirror's* presentation of the power cut as extraordinary, incidental, and located outside the suburb. The dramatic language used in the reports highlights how *uneventful* the suburbs normally were – a brief electricity outage was enough to cause profound chaos.

The report on the 1933 power cut was the final instance in which the night-time suburb was reported on in the newspapers sampled for this thesis. However, there was one more instance where suburban residents were referenced during an evening event. On 30 April 1935 the *Daily Express* reported on its front page that on the previous evening, the Dean of Canterbury spoke at the Queen's Hall and noted that suburban girls did not know important Christian rites. The Dean related a conversation he had had with a headmistress of an unspecified but apparently 'well-known' secondary school. According to the headmistress, her pupils did not know the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments or the story of the Holy Week. The Dean considered this 'sheer paganism.'<sup>34</sup>

The newspaper report is very brief and does not provide any clue as to what the overall purpose or theme of the Dean's speech was. The *Express* reporter decided to highlight only the comments about suburban girls, which the Dean was reporting second-hand. It appears that by 1935, the 'suburban girl' could be used as shorthand to evoke a particular type of uneducated and unsophisticated young woman, whose existence

raised concerns for the establishment. The newspaper article combines fears about modern womanhood with fears about the decline of the influence of the Church in society and locates both those fears in the London suburb.

The newspaper articles discussed above demonstrate that the popular newspapers during this period moved from considering the suburbs as spaces of potential, but contained and incidental, danger to spaces in which nothing of note happens after dark. At the start of the interwar period, the novelty of the suburb raised concerns over its potential to threaten the stability of society. Near the end of the period, the suburb was established as a locus of common culture that could act as the antithesis to that of the sophisticated and cosmopolitan central Londoners. Cinemas were considered an integral part of suburban life throughout the 1930s and journalists considered it a given that suburban residents spent a significant amount of time of their evenings in the local cinema. This was not reflected in the content of British films of the same period, of which very few were set in the London suburbs.

### **Suburbs in interwar film**

The majority of fiction films were set in the East End or the West End of Central London, which made feature films set in suburbia a rarity in interwar Britain.<sup>35</sup> Media scholar Andy Medhurst has argued that suburban cinema audiences would not be interested in seeing themselves and their own lives represented on the screen.<sup>36</sup> The role of cinema was generally to entertain and take audiences out of their daily experience. Arguably, television, with its role within the domestic environment, was more suited to depicting day-to-day life. This echoes the argument made above that the appeal of suburban life was that it was largely uneventful; the suburb 'suffers in comparison because of its connotations of conformity and retreat' and is not portrayed

on screen as a result of these connotations.<sup>37</sup> Audiences enjoyed watching films about the criminal underworld in the East End, but would not want to live in such a part of town. Conversely, they enjoyed their quiet lives, but attended the cinema for the ability to escape into a thrilling fiction.

As with the newspaper reports discussed above, both the general lack of suburban settings and the exceptions to the rule provide crucial insight into the public imagination of suburbia. When a film's action did take place in a suburb, its location was a significant plot element. Of the films viewed for this thesis, only two are partly set in suburbs and include night-time scenes. Both were made in the 1930s, when suburban life was fully established: *A Cup of Kindness* was released in 1934 and *Laburnum Grove* appeared in 1936. By this point suburbia had become shorthand for a certain lifestyle, and both films utilise this in different ways. The films play with the preconceptions audiences had about suburban life and typical suburban Londoners.

*A Cup of Kindness* is a film adaptation of a farcical play first performed in the Aldwych theatre in 1929. This theatre was known for a set group of actors who wrote, directed and performed a cycle of farces in the 1920s and 1930s. A number of these were made into film productions. Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn and Robertson Hare were the key players of this company and the three of them perform the main roles in *A Cup of Kindness*. The film is about two neighbouring families, the Tutts and the Ramsbottoms, who cannot stand each other, but whose son and daughter, Charlie Tutt and Betty Ramsbottom, want to get married. Although the couple want both sets of parents to approve of the engagement, it is even more important to them that Mr Tutt gives them financial support because Charlie has just recently lost another job. The remainder of the film is made up of increasingly farcical situations as neighbourly disagreements over the engagement and subsequent marriage come to a head.

The mutual resentment between the families is mainly based on class differences. The Tutts are wealthier than the Ramsbottoms: they have one son at Oxford; Mr Tutt appears to be of independent means and does not have a job; they are able to sup in West End restaurants; and the family have a habit of dressing for dinner, a convention generally observed by the upper classes. However, their lack of a maid implies that they are living beyond their means and are keeping up appearances. Although they may think of themselves as upper middle-class, in reality they are living in the same street as lower middle-class families. Throughout the film, the Tutts appear appalled at having to live in close proximity to people of lower income.

The Ramsbottoms, on the other hand, are upwardly mobile – as a lower middle-class couple, their suburban house is an achievement of which they are proud. In turn, they look down on the Tutts' airs and graces – Mrs Ramsbottom notes that Mrs Tutt 'once was a barmaid' and by implication, is less respectable than Mrs Ramsbottom herself.

In *A Cup of Kindness*, the London suburb functions as a site where new class identities rub up against one another. The physical environment of the new suburban development does not reflect pre-War class distinctions. Instead, the houses on the estate are all similar in size and appearance, implying equality of opportunity. However, the inhabitants of this modern space are shown to not be willing to let go of the traditional markers of superiority. The suburbanite's class identity is no longer made apparent through material possessions, but instead is communicated through behaviour, manner of speech, and most of all through comparison with their neighbours.

The Tutt family live on one side of the street in a detached house with a driveway and a portico. The Ramsbottoms live across from them in a more modest house with a



smaller front garden. In this fictional suburban street, families with different social and economic backgrounds end up living alongside one another. The modest sizes of the plots mean that there is no possibility of avoiding one another, which does not lead to integration but rather to friction between families with different standards and expectations. In *A Cup of Kindness* the suburban street becomes the site of class battles being fought out. The film makes fun of both families: of the Tutts for acting as if they are better than the Ramsbottoms, and of the Ramsbottoms for thinking that their uneventful suburban life is aspirational. Both families in the film are trapped in their suburb and spend their days obsessing over their neighbours. In this sense, the film offers a critique of suburbanites failing to overcome mutual class barriers. The whole plot of *A Cup of Kindness* relates to the ongoing status battle between the two families. As a comedy, it draws on widely understood cultural signifiers to support its jokes. The film's setting in a new suburban development implies that these neighbourhoods were, by the year of the film's release, generally understood to be prime sites for such intra-familial disputes. The film does not draw on the representation of the suburb as a 'high-quality residential environment' with plenty of green space, although this was arguably a key motivator for moving to the suburbs, at this time.<sup>38</sup> Instead, it reinforces the narrative that suburbs are primarily inhabited by small-minded and status-obsessed families who have little to amuse themselves with. In order for the comedy to work, audiences have to both be familiar with this stereotype and consider it harmless. *A Cup of Kindness* opens with an Underground train pulling into a fictional suburban rail station in the early evening. Mr Ramsbottom gets off the train and walks home. He is shown to be the quintessential middle-class man, wearing a bowler hat, carrying an umbrella, and clutching gloves and a newspaper. Before reaching his front door he passes Mr Tutt, who stands at his garden gate dressed in an evening jacket. The Tutts'

habit of dressing for dinner marks them out as following the conventions of the upper classes, and makes them snobs in the eyes of the Ramsbottoms. Mr Tutt appears to stand outside solely so that he can keep an eye on Mr Ramsbottom, signalling the intense social scrutiny under which both families keep one another. The men exchange some snide remarks and each go into their own house. The daily commute which gives Mr Ramsbottom's life rhythm and binds him to the suburb, does not apply to Mr Tutt. He appears to have no profession at all, like a wealthy landowner, but this is not reflected in the size of his suburban house.

Class differences also affect the relationship of Betty and Charlie. Betty strongly feels that the Tutts' wealth does not make them better than the Ramsbottoms. Charlie feels otherwise – at various points in the film he lets slip that he thinks Betty should consider herself lucky to be engaged to someone of his standing, regardless of his inability to provide for them. Charlie also thinks that his father is right to believe the Ramsbottoms are beneath the Tutts. Betty's friend Tilly encourages the engagement because the Tutts 'matter' socially. Tilly thinks of relationships as tools for social betterment whereas Betty considers them to be equal partnerships. The audience is encouraged to align themselves with Betty, who is the moral centre of the film.

The key night-time scene in *A Cup of Kindness* largely, and tellingly, takes place outside of the suburb. About half-way through the film, Mr Tutt takes Tilly out for dinner, ostensibly to try and seduce her. It is not clear whether this is their first date or whether it is part of an ongoing affair. The pair go to a West End restaurant where Mr Tutt tries to charm Tilly. The film sets the West End up as a space that lures main characters away from their sensible lives into danger and transgression. Mr Tutt and Tilly return to the suburb in a taxi; both a reflection on the lack of public transport available in the suburbs at night and of Mr Tutt's aspirations to a wealthy lifestyle. This transgressive

act that undermines the family unit has to happen away from the family home and from the entire suburb; once the pair arrive back in the suburb there is no further indication of any liaison between them.

The other family members stay in the suburb at night, venturing no further than the houses and gardens. Nocturnal suburban life in *A Cup of Kindness* is depicted as geographically limited. Once Mr Ramsbottom arrives home for the evening at the start of the film, he does not leave the suburb again. The wives appear to be permanently present in their respective houses. This sense of being 'stuck' in the suburb enhances each family's obsession with the other – there appears to be nothing else to do in the evenings but thinking of what the neighbours are doing.

Where *A Cup of Kindness* takes the suburb as a setting for social comedy and class tensions between characters to whom very little happens, in *Laburnum Grove* a criminal uses his dull suburban life as a cover for his money laundering activities. *Laburnum Grove* is based on a J.B. Priestley play which was first staged in 1933, at a time when suburbia was still growing, but equally some families had lived in the suburbs for several decades. The title of the film refers to the name of the street in which most of the action is set. Although the setting is fictional, London also has several real suburban streets called Laburnum Grove, rendering the plot more relatable for suburban audiences.<sup>39</sup>

*Laburnum Grove* introduces Mr and Mrs Radfern, who live on the titular street. The Radferns have a daughter, Elsie, who has recently become engaged to Joe, a young man who is keen to get ahead in life but not willing to work hard for it. Mrs Radfern's sister and brother-in-law, Mr and Mrs Baxley, are also staying at the house. The plot of the film revolves around Mr Radfern's secret life as a key player in a criminal

network. At the start of the film his family are unaware of these activities, as Mr Radfern has successfully cultivated the appearance of a non-threatening suburban husband. As a Scotland Yard investigator starts asking questions, however, Radfern decides to reveal his secret to the family as he attempts to plot his escape from Britain.

The film opens with some of the main characters leaving the local church. The priest stands at the door of the church to bid everyone goodnight – he knows everyone by name, which stresses the small size of the suburban community and enhances the sense of social control.<sup>40</sup> Immediately, the film aligns the suburban experience with imagery more traditionally connected to a small country village. Unlike the opening of *A Cup of Kindness*, where the arrival of the commuter train emphasised the modernity of the suburb and its proximity to the capital, the suburb in *Laburnum Grove* is represented as tranquil and traditional. *Laburnum Grove* repeatedly highlights factors of suburban life that indicate that everyone knows everyone, such as the priest personally greeting each of the parishioners. This provides a strong contrast with the criminal activities which Mr Radfern is revealed to be secretly pursuing. Mr Radfern is able to utilise the appearance of social cohesion and control to throw off criminal investigators.

*Laburnum Grove* does not refer to the presence of a local cinema, even though, as noted earlier in this chapter, each of the new London suburbs had at least one of these. The plot of the film leans heavily on dialogue and depends on a sense of neighbourhood surveillance. The cinema is not a suitable location to draw these elements out, as they are dark spaces that require audiences to be quiet. The plot of *Laburnum Grove* hinges on everything in the suburb appearing to be completely visible and transparent, and drawing attention to a cinema would be counterproductive to that. Additionally, the script was originally developed for a stage play; cinemas were

considered theatre's biggest competitors, so it is possible that Priestley preferred not to draw attention to their existence.

The newly engaged Elsie and Joe aspire to live 'somewhere posh', and for them the suburb is decidedly not that. For Elsie, who has lived in the street her entire life, Laburnum Grove represents drudgery and boredom. Elsie says she cannot wait to get married and leave, because the only thing that happens in Laburnum Grove is that neighbours buy new cars or have babies. If the absence of suburbs in most films might have implicitly promised a nicely quiet life there, *Laburnum Grove* uses a young woman's voice to expressly paint this life not as nice but as monotonous and suffocating. However, Elsie's criticism is ultimately not supported by the film, as the suburb is revealed to be the setting for high-level criminal activity.

Mr Radfern, too, is used as a vehicle to express a more conservative view of the benefits of suburban living. He points out to Elsie that for him and Mrs Radfern, Laburnum Grove represents a successful life. He notes that it is 'one of London's newest suburbs' and that it is respectable, clean and without scandal. He also points out to Elsie that some of their neighbours had to work very hard to be able to afford a house in the street. Inter-generational conflict is played out within the domestic sphere of the suburb and acts as a stand-in for similar conflicts that can take place at a national scale. The film assures audiences that in the end, the older generation knows best and that suburban life is, indeed, a promising form of living to which people should aspire.

Historically, Londoners moved to the suburbs from the city centre. In the new developments they were able to buy their own house with their own garden, where they had more space. However, both the Ramsbottoms in *A Cup of Kindness* and the

Radferns in *Laburnum Grove* have a lot of people living in a relatively small house. Both families see their suburban lives as a step up from where they used to be, yet they still seem to have the habit of living together with half the family. For the Tutts on the other hand living on the outskirts of London is a step down from what they are used to, and they are trying to cling on to the trappings of upper-class life. Their household is only made up of three people in a spacious home. In both films the homogenous look of the suburb masks something else: class tensions or criminal activity. Although the suburb may appear to be a dull place to the casual observer, behind the closed doors there is much more going on.

In *Laburnum Grove*, the repeated references to the suburb's safety serve to increase the contrast to the eventual revelation that Mr Radfern is running a comprehensive criminal money-laundering network. He has chosen the quiet suburb specifically because it acts as a cover for his activities. It is also suggested that he would not have been able to afford his spacious house if he had only held down a regular job.

Over Sunday night dinner, Mr Radfern explains to Elsie and Mr and Mrs Baxley that he is part of a money laundering network, after he gets frustrated with family members relying on him for money. Dinnertime is normally a scene of domestic harmony, where the whole family sits together. Instead, Mr Radfern's revelations cause consternation and disbelief, disrupting the family unit. Immediately afterwards, a local police officer knocks on the door. Elsie and Mr and Mrs Baxley are terrified, as they assume the police have come to arrest Mr Radfern. In reality, the officer is there to return their dog who had wandered from home. To thank him, Mr Radfern donates some money to a charitable collection. The local police think they know Mr Radfern well, but they are expecting him to be like any other suburban family man. This makes them unable to see the truth of his activities. There is strong social control in the suburbs, but

stereotypes and preconceptions make neighbours and law enforcers unable to objectively assess Mr Radfern's activities.

In the end, it is a Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Stack, who is able to puncture Mr Radfern's pretence. Stack initially visits the house during the day but is told by Mrs Radfern that Mr Radfern is at work, so he has to return later in the evening. Stack has perhaps assumed that criminals do not keep regular office hours – again, Mr Radfern is using these preconceived notions to his advantage. When Stack returns, Mr Radfern is pottering about in his vegetable garden, looking every inch the unthreatening and innocent middle-class man. He keeps this role up throughout his conversation with the inspector, in which Stack alludes to the evidence Scotland Yard has gathered on Radfern's criminal activities. Mr Radfern can fend off the allegations by pointing out that everyone knows he is but a quiet family man.

Although Stack has to leave the suburb that evening without having made an arrest or eliciting a confession, Radfern is spooked by the evidence that Scotland Yard have accumulated so far, and he alerts his criminal partners. At the end of the film, Radfern arranges for Elsie and Mrs Radfern to go on a 'vacation', to ensure they are safe and out of the country. The film leaves it unresolved whether Radfern himself is able to escape. In the end, Stack, as an outsider to the suburb, is the only one who is able to look past Radfern's constructed image and see the truth. As the family leave the suburb, Laburnum Grove is purged once again of criminal activity.

As with *A Cup of Kindness*, most of the action in *Laburnum Grove* takes place in and around the house, emphasising the domestic nature of suburban living. The narrative appeal of *Laburnum Grove* lies not in the comic attention to interpersonal conflicts, but in the apparent disconnect between the accepted view of suburbia as uneventful, and

the criminal activities undertaken by Mr Redfern. Notably, his criminal behaviour is solely to do with fraud and money-laundering, and does not physically harm anyone. Unlike the real-life cases reported in the press, which brought the possibility of murder to the suburbs, the cinematic suburbs remain preserved as physically safe, even when illegal behaviour does take place in them. Whilst *Laburnum Grove* exploits the narrative appeal of transgressive behaviour and a wily criminal who tries to evade justice, it does not compromise the overall representation of the suburb as an essentially pleasant and aspirational living space.

## **Conclusion**

By the end of the interwar period, living in a suburb had become a common and established experience for many Londoners. Whilst suburbs were developing, films and newspaper articles largely refrained from commenting on them. Instead, they remained primarily focused on reflecting events in Central London. The suburban experience was largely ignored by the media until the second half of the 1930s. By that point, so many people were living in suburbia that stereotypes had developed about them, which newspapers and films could respond to. It became understood that generally, Londoners living in suburbs had little to distract themselves with other than observing their neighbours. Films, in particular, were able to utilise these stereotypes to comic effect. Interwar feature films treated it as a given that those living in the suburbs were concerned with the class identities of their neighbours. At the same time films suggested that harmonious integration of neighbours of different backgrounds was preferable to constant division.

At night, suburban Londoners returned to their homes rather than staying out in Central London. The neighbourhood cinema was one of the few amusements



available in the suburb. Despite the regular appearance of the suburban cinema, they were little commented-upon in newspapers and films. Instead, the most common representation of the cinema remained the West End picture houses. Both developers and residents had a vested interest in maintaining an image of the suburb as quiet and uneventful, which may explain why representation of domestic affairs took precedence over depictions of public amusements.

The limited amount of primary source material available that concerns nocturnal suburbs necessarily means that the conclusions drawn in this chapter are preliminary. Suburban development was one of the biggest changes to London's physical environment in the interwar period, and by their very nature suburbs harboured many of London's inhabitants during the night. Yet their existence is little reflected on in the popular media of the period, presumably because suburbs were not thought of as locations in which events of interest took place. While films and newspapers had to relate topics that connected to their audiences' lived experience, suburban events were potentially thought of as too similar to daily life. This chapter has given an insight into what the mass media chose to explore about suburban living on the rare occasions when they did cover suburbia in their output.

### **Chapter 3: Newspapers, films, and nocturnal public transport**

The previous chapter considered the development of London's suburbs and their limited representation in popular media during the interwar period. This chapter moves to explore how popular media gave more attention during the 1920s and 1930s to the representation of night-time public transport, often the primary means of moving to and from the suburbs. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, new modes of transport opened up new travel experiences and gave people greater mobility. First an extensive rail network was introduced, followed by underground trains, affordable bicycles, and motorcars. Existing hansom cabs were also motorised. All these inventions allowed people to see the world in different ways, and at different speeds. Early cinema closely aligned itself with rail travel in particular, and it became popular to read newspapers during the daily commute on public transport.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter constructs two arguments about the relationship between public transport, cinema and popular press. First, it argues that, as using public transport was an integral and often necessary part of living in the capital, the press had to balance sensationalist reporting with the need not to raise readers' alarm about using transport. Despite frequent reporting on accidents and attacks on (female) passengers, newspaper articles in the 1920s and 1930s did not describe in detail injuries or death, in contrast to the way they reported on murders of young women. There were also few visual depictions of rail accidents. Interwar fiction films, on the other hand, did provide incidental imagery of public transport crashes but balanced these with matter-of-fact depictions of transport use in daily life. Film and newspapers fulfilled different functions in their treatment of public transport. Newspaper articles considered it such a part of

the fabric of the city that it disappeared from view, whereas film highlighted it both as a space of positive possibility and one of danger.

Second, this chapter argues that public transport, cinema, and the press all challenged notions of public and private space. Transport historians such as Colin Divall have persuasively argued that train carriages were consciously designed to mimic private domestic space in order to attract bourgeois customers.<sup>2</sup> Motorised taxis were modelled on hansom cabs, which meant that until the mid-1930s the driver was located outside of the carriage. Taxis and trains therefore granted different levels of privacy – taxis were usually only shared with people one knew, whereas trains required interaction with a limited number of strangers.

But, trains offered different fare levels which ensured that travellers from different classes were kept in separate parts of the vehicle, so the risk of cross-class communication was minimised. The cost of taxis was normally too prohibitive for the working classes. Underground trains and buses, by contrast, charged a single fare for all passengers, and used large communal carriages for everyone. This obliged travellers to mix in a public space. Some newspaper articles and films used these real-life features of public transport spaces to dramatic effect.

Popular newspapers displayed the city for consumption at low prices, and made the entire capital accessible to working-class audiences through words and images. Cinemas likewise provided a window on the world of the upper classes, visible for a cheap ticket price. It was increasingly possible for working class audiences to penetrate aspects of city life that had previously been closed to them.

This chapter compares the depiction of a range of different transport methods in the interwar press and film to explore the interaction of both media with different modes of

transport and the night-time. The chapter starts with an overview of the development of the London public transport network, and the provisions it made for night-time travel. It then considers how newspapers wrote about public transport by drawing on articles that were identified in the newspaper sampling, before comparing this to the depiction of public transport in film texts from the period, such as *Underground* (1928). This film, as indicated by its title, puts public transport at the heart of its plot; it is compared to other films that feature public transport incidentally, such as *Blackmail* (1929) and *Dead Men Are Dangerous* (1939). Together, these films allow for an analysis of the breath of public transport representations in interwar British cinema.

The second half of the chapter turns to taxis, which were the form of public transport that remained available even after trains and tubes stopped running at night. After a short summary of the history of the London cab, it considers how the taxi functioned as a privatised public space both in newspapers and film. Whereas newspaper reports regularly commented on crimes which had taken place in taxis, films instead tended to highlight the romantic and sexual possibilities of this vehicle. Finally, the chapter looks at the taxi in connection to class and gender.

The interwar period saw the unification of London's public transport system into the London Underground. It also witnessed the establishment of the motorcar as a viable transport option for the upper- and middle classes, which fundamentally changed the London taxi system. As is demonstrated in the previous chapter, there was significant suburban expansion in the interwar period which greatly increased the number of Londoners who used public transport on a regular basis. This chapter also shows how the operating hours of public transport were debated in relation to night-time work. Public transport democratised the access to night-time London, making it possible for working class people and women to independently travel through the nocturnal city.

## **The development of a unified transport system**

Like most western capitals, London developed a public transport system between 1870 and 1914. Prior to this, the cost of keeping a horse and carriage or using hansom cabs would have been prohibitive to most people. In addition, bicycles were not mass-produced until the end of the nineteenth century, which limited the transport options available to the working class up until that point.<sup>3</sup> The introduction of affordable public transport meant workers no longer had to live within walking distance of their place of employment.<sup>4</sup> London was the first city in the world to build an underground railway system. The first line, from Baker Street to King's Cross, opened in 1863. Over the next decades several companies developed eight different underground lines.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, these were all merged into the London Underground Company, which operated a single ticketing and fare system.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of London Transport in 1933 brought all underground and bus services in London together in one publicly funded operation, creating a cohesive structure to the urban experience.

Transport historian Ralph Harrington has argued that the development of a city-wide public transport system can 'contribute importantly to the creation of a sense of the wholeness of an urban society' while also arguing that a transport network may equally 'contribute to the development of divisive internal tensions that militate against any universalizing sense of overall identity.'<sup>7</sup> Harrington's theory applied to London Transport, which worked hard during the interwar period at unifying the branding of London's public transport network by ensuring that all underground stations and buses looked the same throughout the capital to enhance a sense of unity across the city.

Public transport was fast and cheap, and opened up access to a larger part of the city. As Harrington puts it: 'The corporate identity of the underground system [...] unites

suburbs and centre into a whole, countering the fragmentary nature of the urban experience and establishing a structure of uniformity and regularity beneath the disorderliness of the city.’<sup>8</sup> This view supposes that the experience of any city large enough to require an underground system is necessarily fragmentary. Once an urban area becomes too big to navigate by foot, the city dweller’s perception of the metropolis becomes less cohesive. Public transport also greatly expanded London’s built-up surface area. The Chief Executive of London Transport, Frank Pick, had presumed that the maximum time a commuter would want to spend on a train was thirty minutes. This would give a natural boundary to the public transport system and by extension, to the city. But it transpired that some Londoners were willing to travel up to an hour by train to get to and from work, if this meant they could own a house with a garden in the newly developed suburbs.<sup>9</sup>

The inhabitants of the newly developed estates in the suburbs reached other parts of London by Underground. According to historian Christian Wolmar: ‘The 1930s were the point at which the underground was probably most crucial as a means of transport to the widest range of social classes and it enjoyed its highest ever modal share of journeys in London.’<sup>10</sup> This is not to dismiss the importance of car ownership to suburban Londoners. Cultural historian Michael John Law has evidenced that suburban car ownership rapidly increased throughout the interwar period.<sup>11</sup> However, privately owned cars were mostly used for day trips to the seaside and other places outside of the urban space, whereas public transport and taxis were predominantly used to navigate the city itself, which is why this chapter’s focus remains on the latter types of transport.

Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued that rail travel fundamentally changed people’s perception of space and time.<sup>12</sup> Films and newspapers reflected and reinforced the

fragmentary perception of the city by offering content in small snippets and emphasising the 'gap' between topics or images as much as the topics and images themselves.<sup>13</sup> These new media also reduced spatial difference by providing a cohesive media consumption experience across a city or even across an entire country.<sup>14</sup> Early film production was closely related to rail travel through phantom rides and other forms of entertainment which combined the novelty of rail travel with that of moving images.<sup>15</sup> The interwar period in Britain was a moment where these three elements of modern city life reached an apogee and provided a decisive influence on Londoner's lives.

By the interwar period, narrative fiction film had developed and now linked spaces through narrative conventions in a way reminiscent of how the London Transport system linked disparate spaces into a coherent whole. The first films, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, consisted of single shots, or a small number of shots between which the spatial or narrative connection was not immediately obvious to the viewer. As longer narratives and editorial conventions developed, feature films became able to coherently tie together any number of spaces and actions in a way that made sense to the viewer. Narrative film and interlinked public transport networks are parallel developments which both served to order large amounts of information in a way that makes sense to the consumer.

### **Night-time transport and its intended users**

From its earliest days the Underground operated services before sunrise and after sunset. In 1864 the Metropolitan Railway started offering special workmen's tickets, which, at threepence, were cheaper than the regular five-pence tickets. These workmen's tickets were valid for trains leaving Paddington at 5.30am and 5.40am.<sup>16</sup>

At the other end of the day, in 1910 a special West End train service ran between Golders Green and Leicester Square: the return train left Leicester Square at 11.15pm as theatre shows finished and arrived in Golders Green at 11.29pm.<sup>17</sup> Before the First World War the hours of train service were extended so that the last trains left Central London as late as 1am, but operating hours were reduced again during the War.<sup>18</sup> Early-morning and late-night transport systems initially accommodated labourers, but in the interwar period they increasingly served to transport pleasure-seeking Londoners. Indeed, London Underground often used access to theatres and cinemas in the West End in their marketing materials to encourage use of the train network (see figures 7-9).

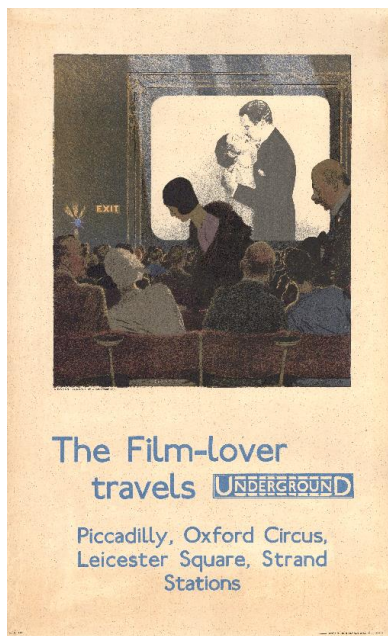


Fig. 7: London Underground poster (1930) © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection



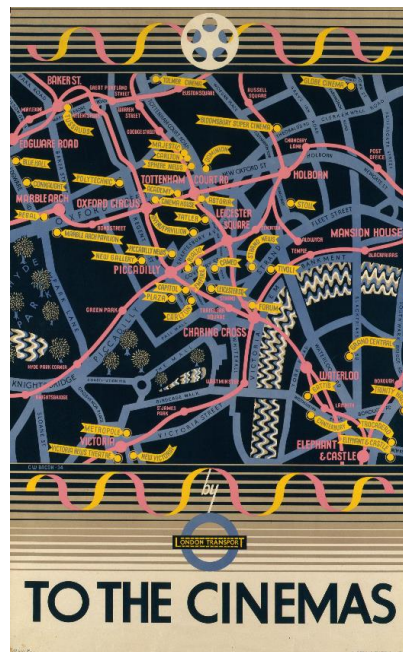


Fig. 8: 'To the Cinemas' London Underground poster (1934) © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection

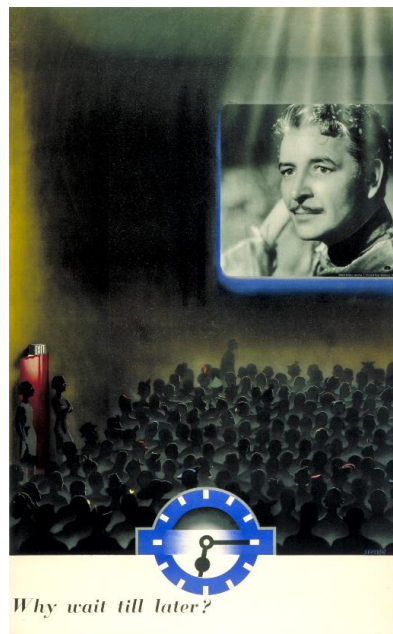


Fig. 9: London Underground Poster (1938) © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection

The popular press regularly advocated the need for late-night transport, as has emerged from the newspaper sampling conducted for this thesis. The *Daily Mail*, for example, ran a number of articles on this topic in September 1922, with reporters even going so far as counting the number of passengers using the last trains, which at that point all left at around half past midnight. The *Mail* articles criticised the railway marketing campaigns which 'incited' people to move to 'distant parts of London, where they find themselves without a train service sufficiently late to enable them to enjoy fully a theatre and supper in the West End.'<sup>19</sup> Although the sub-headline of one of the newspaper articles speaks specifically of 'London Workers' Hardship,' the body of the text comments on the negative impact on theatre audiences. This indicates the newspaper's ambivalent position: it wished to maintain the support of their blue-collar audience while not wanting to alienate more affluent readers. The newspaper campaign was successful: a few weeks later the *Mail* was reporting that last trains would be running 20 minutes later.<sup>20</sup>

The inconvenience of travelling home to the suburbs early in the morning or late at night on public transport remained a known issue, as evidenced by an advert for motor cars published in 1925. It argued that by owning a motor car one can avoid having to take early or late trains, and spend more quality time at home with family.<sup>21</sup> This upholds the notion that motor cars were vehicles that bolstered family values whereas public transport was used by people who wished to access West End entertainment. As demonstrated in the previous chapter's analysis of newspaper articles and films, however, trains continued to be the transport of choice for many suburban commuters.

## **The impact of public transport on daily life**

This development of public transport and the normalisation of daily travel on (underground) train and bus led to fundamentally different encounters with London. Previously, the lived experience of the city for a large group of Londoners was completely ambulatory. People walked to the places they needed to go, socialised with those who lived close to them, and developed a strong local identity and support network.<sup>22</sup> The development of suburbs marked the physical separation of work space and domestic space.<sup>23</sup> Whereas previously Londoners had worked and lived in the same part of the city, it now became common to live and work in distinctly different parts of the capital, and use public transport every day to travel between the two areas. The use of mass public transport 'served to embody and express that 'sense of the city' and its associated ideas of civic 'dignity' in a particularly pervasive and effective way, through its influence on the daily lives of the urban population.'<sup>24</sup> Public transport reinforced on Londoners that they were part of a capitalist metropolis in which daily travel to a place of work which was outside of the home, was the norm.

Except for instances where popular newspaper content advocated an extension of night-time public transport, as discussed above, papers generally reported on public transport if a strike, an accident, or attack on a passenger took place. Accidents leading to injury or even death of passengers appear to have been relatively frequent, especially during the 1920s when bus and tram services were not yet part of London Underground but were provided by small, profit-driven independent businesses.<sup>25</sup> Bus routes, even more than trains, were usually operated by very small companies. The range of operators made any quality control very difficult until the London Transport organisation subsumed bus routes. The fierce competition between independent

operators meant that fares were kept very low, but also that the safety of the routes was sometimes compromised.<sup>26</sup>

Newspaper reports about transport crashes focused primarily on the victims of such incidents. For example, a 1925 *Daily Mail* article headlined '16 Hurt in Triple Smash' listed the names and addresses of the victims which remained in hospital after a crash between a bus and a lorry. The article also specifically pointed out that '[m]ost of the injured were young women' in this crash which took place on a Friday evening in Leytonstone. The bus had been transporting people living in the suburbs of Leytonstone and Walthamstow back to their homes during the evening commute. As more women were now working, they were more likely to use public transport for commuting. The report of the crash highlighted the danger women put themselves in by choosing to work and use public transport.<sup>27</sup>

The *Daily Mail* article also includes a quote from the driver of the lorry, who caused the crash. He is quoted as describing the lorry and crash as things that were outside of his control: 'I cannot tell how it happened [...] it seemed as though the steering gear was wrenched from my hand and we swung right across the road.'<sup>28</sup> A similar semantic tactic is used in a second report on the same page, about a woman who got injured in a car accident on Gray's Inn Road the previous evening. According to the report's final line, 'The car suddenly swerved across the road and struck the rails of the Royal Free Hospital' – as if the car moved independently of the driver.<sup>29</sup> These descriptions remove the agency from drivers of motorised transport, and instead present these modern machines as responsible for any crashes and injuries.

Regular reporting on public transport crashes could draw readers' attentions to the danger inherent in living in the capital city and navigating it with modern means of

transport. Press historian Peter Sinnema has argued that with the advent of rail travel in the mid-19th century, London publications such as the *Illustrated London News* sought to minimise readers' fears of technology and modernity by never visually depicting the details of a train crash, and stressing the way rail travel allowed for speed and convenience.<sup>30</sup> Interwar newspapers similarly did not normally show photographs or illustrations of accidents, and they also did not include graphic descriptions of train crash victims in the way they described murder victims.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, on occasion, transport crash victims were praised for being 'plucky' and 'cheerful', such as 23-year-old Grace Stewart who got trapped under a bus on Cheapside on a Friday evening in 1924. Her clothes got tangled with the bus's gear system, which gave her multiple injuries including a broken collarbone and a ripped muscle. Her predicament was made worse by the bus driver not having the appropriate tools to remove her; and apparently no doctors or police attended the scene either. It took half an hour for Grace to be removed, but a passer-by admiringly described that 'Although she suffered terribly she talked cheerfully and even smiled.'<sup>32</sup> Public transport was an unavoidable part of modern city life, so newspaper reports would not dwell on its dangers but instead sought to demonstrate how one should respond to occasional adversity.<sup>33</sup>

### **Trains and stations in film**

The Central London train station functioned as the gateway into the capital, and the suburban rail station acted as the point of access to the city. For those films that are set on the edges of the city, the train station is the transitional point between the centre and the outskirts. *A Cup of Kindness*,<sup>34</sup> which is wholly set in a London suburb and discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, starts with a train pulling into the

station and commuters disembarking, returning home after a day's work. This tapped into a common audience experience and set up expectations about the film's characters and narrative. The crime thriller *Dead Men Are Dangerous*<sup>35</sup> features a scene at Templemere train station after dark. The film's protagonist, Aylmer Franklyn, arrives at this station in Surrey by a steam train from London, and alights together with a number of other men. All men greet Jim, the station master, by his first name. Jim tells Aylmer he has asked the baker to set a loaf aside for him. Then a portly man approaches Aylmer and reminds him of an outstanding account. When Aylmer tells him he will pay the next week, the other man happily agrees.

The overall sense is of a friendly community where everyone is on first name terms, and where there is considerable social control. At the same time the train station is an exclusively male space in the evening, acting as a gateway between the professional sphere and the domestic environment. For these men the commute has become a daily ritual, marking the transition between their life in the city and their life at home. In the afternoon there may perhaps be more female travellers who use the train to access shops in London. *Dead Men Are Dangerous* exaggerates the gendered divide at the train station. Other films, as discussed below, portray a mix of men and women using trains late at night. The Transport for London poster shown in figure 7 (p. 127) also presupposes that both men and women use late-night transport to access Central London.

In film, the London Underground is commonly presented as a space which brings together people from different backgrounds. Any discussion of the representation of the London Underground in British cinema of the interwar period would be amiss not to include the 1928 film *Underground*.<sup>36</sup> This film takes as its premise that the London Underground is a space where people from all backgrounds and classes meet by

chance. The plot is concerned with four characters: Nell, a shop girl in a department store; Bill, an attendant in an underground station; Bert, a rogue who works in Lots Road power station; and Kate, a seamstress and Bert's long-suffering girlfriend.

The film opens with the following title:

The "Underground" of the Great Metropolis of the British Empire, with its teeming multitudes of 'all sorts and conditions of men', contributes its share of light and shade, romance and tragedy and all those things that go to make up what we call 'life'. So in the "Underground" is set our story of ordinary work-a-day people whose names are just Nell, Bill, Kate and Bert.

The first shot of the film is taken by a camera mounted on the front of an Underground train pulling into a busy station. The film ends with a shot taken from the back of a train pulling out of a station into a tunnel. This elliptical formal device frames the film's narrative as a contained whole, and the 'slice of life' window on the world of ordinary people. It was also a popular device in the early days of cinema.<sup>37</sup> The opening title makes much of the supposed mixture of characters and events on the Underground, which was partly achieved because there was one standard low fare for all passengers.<sup>38</sup>

Matthew Beaumont's remark about the rail carriage is even more true for the Underground train: 'It is a space characteristic of modernity because it is structured by the most contingent of intimacies, because it is dependent on anonymous, accidental and strangely personal encounters in public.'<sup>39</sup> In the train carriage one could meet a small number of strangers who were from the same social background, but in the Underground carriage a passenger shared space with dozens of others from all walks of life. The Underground carriage in *Underground*, however, rather than facilitating accidental encounters, functions as the site of a number of premeditated meetings between characters who are shown to interact outside of the Underground as well.<sup>40</sup>

This suggests a level of social cohesion that in reality was largely absent from the capital.

The first sequence of the film is set during a morning rush-hour commute. Nell and Bert meet in an Underground train, but the film also gives ample attention to the other 'types' in the carriage, such as the stern female police officer and the young sailor and soldier who try to impress a girl by offering their seats. In the scene Bert tries to flirt with Nell. The tightly packed communal carriage space forces her to endure his advances against her will. After a scene in the department store where Nell works, which further establishes Bert's designs on her, we return to the Tube station for the evening rush hour. Some of the people walking down the escalator wear evening dress and appear to be going to the theatre, again reinforcing the Tube's function in facilitating nightlife and its place at the bookends of the working day.

Bill works in this Underground station and this sequence spends some time depicting his activities on the job: we see him at the bottom of the escalator patiently giving the same directions to a woman three times over. He assists an older lady who carries a large number of parcels, and returns a lost puppy to its owner. Finally, he catches a soldier who nearly trips up whilst trying to step off the moving staircase. This segment both functions to establish Bill as a kind, caring, and trustworthy character, and again to highlight the variety of people mixing in the London Underground system. Many Underground travellers seem unsure about how to effectively use an escalator, or how to navigate the station. Bill is confident in this space: he is a herald of modern urban society, and guides those who need help with new-fangled inventions.

Then Nell appears on the escalator and when she reaches the bottom she and Bill strike up a conversation. Bert sees the pair as he arrives at the top of the staircase,



and he rushes down to interfere. While doing this he pushes into a woman and sends her shopping parcel flying down the handrail, a movement which is caught in a dynamic swooping shot. Before Bert gets to the bottom of the escalator Bill and Nell have moved to a quiet spot on the emergency staircase. While they talk, the camera pans up to show the shadows of another couple, hidden from view by a bend in the stairs. While Bill and Nell say goodbye with a handshake, the shadow couple embraces and kisses, acting out both Bill and Nell's latent romantic desire, and Bert's jealous fears.

The site of the emergency stairs fulfils an important function in a later scene, when Bert convinces Kate to go to the station during the evening rush hour, lure Bill to the emergency stairs under the pretext of feeling ill, and then accuse Bill of assaulting her. Bert makes sure this is timed so that Nell witnesses the scene on her way home, which causes a disruption in her relationship with Bill. In both scenes the emergency staircase is used because it is a quiet area, and an almost invisible space, in an otherwise busy station, which makes it a suitable space for sexual encounters. When Kate raises the alarm a crowd of commuters quickly gathers around the entrance of the side corridor, but none of them enter it. The stairs function as a more private space within the public train station and allow for encounters that are denied in the ticket hall, on the platform, or in the shared train carriages.

In the film's closing scene, again in an Underground carriage, we see an older man who persuades the young man sitting next to him to give up his seat for a young woman. As soon as the woman sits down the older man starts flirting with her. When she does not reciprocate, the man turns his attention to the man sitting on his other side, and tries to get him to give up his seat to Nell, who is standing with her back to them. Nell politely refuses the offer of a seat, as she is travelling with Bill and is happy

to stand. The old man is lecherous and he uses the pretence of politeness to get young women to sit close to him. The only reason Nell can escape this fate is that she is already married and has a male companion to travel with; if she had been alone, politeness would have required her to accept the offered seat. The Underground trains in *Underground* are presented as spaces where all classes of people mix, but also as spaces where women are frequently annoyed and imposed upon.

Uncomfortable proximity to others in the Underground is also depicted in *Blackmail*.<sup>41</sup> Near the start of the film, the protagonists Alice and Frank board an Underground train on the way from Frank's work at Scotland Yard to the Lyons' Corner House restaurant in Piccadilly Circus. The train carriage in *Blackmail* is shot in a classical framing which invokes early films such as the 1899 text *A Kiss in the Tunnel* (see fig. 10)<sup>42</sup>: Alice and Frank are sitting facing each other in a four-seat booth (see fig. 11). The characters in the rail carriage all interact with each other. They seem annoyed by their mutual proximity. This Underground scene serves little narrative purpose other than to indicate that Alice and Frank travel some distance between his work and the restaurant. Hitchcock scholars have largely ignored or dismissed this short scene except to refer to the director's cameo appearance in it as the man sitting behind Frank.<sup>43</sup>

[Image withheld in relation to copyright]

Fig. 10: Shot from *A Kiss in the Tunnel* (George Albert Smith, 1899)



Fig. 11: Frank and Alice on the Underground in *Blackmail* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1929) courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

Yet the train scene reinforces the idea that the Underground is a space where people are forced to exist in close proximity to each other, much to the annoyance of everyone. The convenience of fast travel has to be traded off against tolerating the behaviours of others and the endurance of ambient noise made by the train. During the scene Alice and Frank are unable to speak to each other due to this noise. It is also worth noting that Hitchcock initially intended *Blackmail* to be a completely silent film, and large parts of even the sound version do not have dialogue. The Underground scene depends on the physical comedy of the boy, and therefore works well in a silent film. The busyness of the carriage highlights the breakdown of Frank and Alice's relationship as they are able to interact with the boy next to them, but not with one another.

Before Frank and Alice enter the Underground they are having an argument about how they are going to spend their evening. By taking a noisy train, they are forced to suspend this argument, which builds the tension between them.<sup>44</sup> Taking the Underground gets them to their destination quickly, but at the cost of communicating with one another. In a city of millions, the characters are isolated. *Blackmail* repeats

this message in a later scene when Alice walks through the busy West End at night after killing her rapist. Despite the large crowds around her she is alone: the trauma she has experienced makes her unable to connect to others.

### **Vulnerable travellers**

Films did not depict just the Underground system as vulnerable to foul play. The 1929 film *The Wrecker*<sup>45</sup> deals with an above-ground train network plagued by sabotage. A mysterious 'Wrecker' deliberately derails trains coming in and going out of London, to persuade people to use long distance motor coaches instead, from which the Wrecker makes his profits. The film's main selling point was the realistic depiction of a train crash, which was shot using a real train and a disused set of tracks, and was filmed at different angles by multiple cameras.<sup>46</sup>

The visual depictions of train crashes in the film are explicit, unlike the representations of railway accidents in newspapers of the same period. The audience is not left in any doubt of the high number of casualties caused by the Wrecker's actions. Unlike newspaper articles, which sought to temper anxieties about real-life crashes, *The Wrecker* looks to entertain its audiences with explicitly fictional train crashes. Because they are part of an action-adventure narrative with a happy resolution, there is less chance of audiences attitudes towards public transport being affected by viewing *The Wrecker* than by reading news reportage on the dangers of taking the train.

One of *The Wrecker's* climactic scenes takes place on the 'Rainbow Express,' an evening express to Portsmouth. Mary, the hero's love interest, boards this train at a London station at 11.50pm. The hero, Lucky, is supposed to join her on the train but his car breaks down and he is not able to reach the station in time. This enables him to intercept the train at a later stage of the journey, just before it is set to crash outside

of London. It also means that Mary travels on the train alone. The film shows several other women also travelling on the train by themselves, despite the late hour. This arguably increases the emotional impact of the pending crash. The train is made up of compartments which could accommodate six to eight passengers, giving more privacy. This sets it apart from the Underground trains which had shared compartments and therefore allowed all passengers to observe one another. Mary does not have to contend with pushy male travellers, but newspaper evidence shows that this was not the only thing female passengers had to worry about.

It is not just trains that are at risk of crashing in interwar fiction films; buses are also occasionally shown to put passengers in danger. Perhaps the best-known example of a bus crash in interwar British cinema takes place in *Sabotage* (1936).<sup>47</sup> In this film a group of terrorists plan to blow up Piccadilly Circus station, 'the centre of the world', on the day of the Lord Mayor's Parade. The group's ringleader sends his wife's little brother, Stevie, to Piccadilly Circus with a film reel tin full of explosives. Stevie is unaware of the real contents of the parcel he is carrying, he simply knows he needs to leave it in the luggage collection point in Piccadilly Circus station by 1.30pm. The audience knows that the bomb will go off at 1.45pm. Initially Stevie intends to walk to Piccadilly Circus, but due to the Lord Mayor's Parade the streets are cordoned off. When the Parade has passed and he is able to continue, Stevie decides to take a bus in the interest of time.

The bus should be the faster option, but the amount of traffic in Central London makes the bus Stevie boards go very slowly. *Sabotage* then heightens the tension by a series of close-ups alternating between the parcel of explosives, Stevie, and various clocks which he sees on shop fronts along the way. As the clocks inch closer to 1.45pm, the individual shots become shorter and shorter, culminating in an extreme close-up of

the hand on a clock moving to 1.45pm. The bus explodes, and Stevie and all the other passengers are killed in the blast. The bus is shown to be a vulnerable mode of transport, as a single small parcel of explosives can completely destroy it.

[Images withheld in relation to copyright]

Fig. 12: *Sabotage* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1936): clockwise from top left: shots of a parcel of explosives, clocks, and a boy unwittingly delivering a bomb, culminate in the explosion of a bus

The sequence of events also highlights the irony that, if Stevie had stayed on the street, the explosion would likely have claimed fewer casualties. By boarding the bus Stevie tries to do honour his commitment to deliver the parcel to Piccadilly Circus on time, but this results in more deaths. The sense of irony is strengthened even further by the bus conductor's initial refusal to let Stevie board; Stevie is ostensibly carrying a film reel and this highly flammable product is not allowed on public transport, for safety reasons. The conductor relents after Stevie protests and he sees that the film title on the tin is of a popular film. In *Sabotage* the authorities realise that buses can be vulnerable and dangerous, and safeguards are put in place to prevent accidents, but these rules are then ignored in personal interactions because staff operating buses do not perceive any real danger. The general public in *Sabotage* consider buses and Tubes to be safe modes of transport, and it is precisely this complacency that leaves them open to attack.

In *Friday the Thirteenth*,<sup>48</sup> which was made three years prior to *Sabotage* and which is also discussed in this thesis's final chapter, riding a bus also means putting your life

at risk. The premise of the film is that a group of people, who are strangers to each other, all board a bus late in the evening on Friday the thirteenth. At a minute to midnight, lightning strikes and the bus crashes. The audience is informed that two of the passengers died, but which of the passengers is not revealed until the end of the film. For the remainder of the film's running time the audience is introduced to each of the passengers, who all have secrets and complications in their lives.

The bus passengers in *Friday the Thirteenth* are an extremely diverse group of people, coming from all backgrounds and walks of life. One is a chorus girl; another criminal; a third is a brow-beaten suburban husband. The bus was a low-cost travel option and also one available until late at night. As is the case for the London Underground train in *Underground*, in *Friday the Thirteenth* the London bus represented the type of democratic space where all people would sit alongside one another. Unlike the high speed and modernity conveyed by the trains in *Underground*, however, the bus in *Friday the Thirteenth* is a vulnerable vehicle which can kill its passengers through no fault of the driver.

The passengers in *Friday the Thirteenth* bond together over their dramatic experience, perpetuating the idea that small-town community-mindedness continued to exist in London. In reality, one could fall victim of foul play at the hand of fellow travellers. The press chronicles a number of attacks on female passengers, ranging from a 16-year-old girl whose plait was cut off when travelling home from work on the Underground, to the discovery of a girl's dismembered body in a suitcase on a suburban train.<sup>49</sup> In newspaper reports, attacked passengers were almost always young women travelling alone, and the reports stressed how the seemingly random attacks were carried out by strangers. A typical article appeared in the *Daily Mirror* in December 1929. It describes how a Miss Organ, who was in her mid-twenties, was 'suddenly attacked by

a youth who followed her into a compartment' on the suburban train from Bromley to Charing Cross.<sup>50</sup> The isolation of the train compartment meant that Miss Organ was quite seriously hurt, and her attacker managed to escape before other passengers could come to her aid. Train compartments were designed to be like private domestic spaces, so that passengers would feel at ease in them. But their public accessibility made them dangerous, too.<sup>51</sup> The repeated attention on female victims reinforced the notion that travelling was especially dangerous for women, and implied that they were perhaps better off by avoiding using transport on their own, thus limiting women's freedom to move around the city.

Stations, buses and (underground) trains in interwar films were largely depicted as spaces where strangers must mingle, whether they wanted to or not. This could be annoying or enjoyable. Underground train carriages broke down class boundaries, as there was a single fare system for all passengers. Rail transport maintained both a system of differently priced tickets, and of relatively private carriages. Both modes of transport are shown to be under threat from hostile groups, whether this is a terrorist cell or violent individuals. The use of public transport is presented as a matter of course in the daily life of characters, but also one which may expose them to danger. Newspaper articles underpinned this by reporting on public transport accidents without providing sensational detail.

### **Being private in public: the possibilities of taxis**

The other main type of transport that was publicly available to Londoners, and one that is arguably one of the symbols of the capital, is the taxi or cab. Hansom cabs have driven around London since the seventeenth century, and the fleet was augmented with motorised vehicles from the start of the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the First



World War the vast majority of cabs in use were motorised vehicles. The typical cab user in the nineteenth century was assumed to be a well-to-do gentleman, or otherwise a foreign visitor who had no other means of navigating the city.<sup>53</sup> Taxis occupy a unique position in the transport landscape: they are open to all users who can afford them but provide a private transport experience; they are essentially urban and predominantly found in big cities; and they are 'the only form of transport where the passenger fare is unfixed and liable to be contested.'<sup>54</sup> Using a taxi therefore requires direct interaction, and causes potential disagreement between the driver and the passenger. This could place cab drivers in danger: in May 1923 passengers stabbed a driver to death after they had an argument, possibly about the fare.<sup>55</sup>

With the increased appetite for nocturnal entertainment in the interwar period, demand for night-time taxi services also rose. The biggest providers of cabs, the London General Cab Company, even went as far as to offer a free bus ride home to their cab drivers after they had finished a night shift, to entice more cabbies to work at night.<sup>56</sup> Ironically there was no public transport available to help night workers in the transport sector to and from work. Despite increased popularity, taxis remained a mode of transport for the upper and upper-middle classes, especially because the Underground and bus services made more affordable transport alternatives readily available. As is made clear in the section below, films played on this notion of class-based modes of transport.

The designs of the motorcar taxis were based on the hansom cab that preceded it, which meant that the driver was seated in the open air, or under a canvas roof, and was physically separated from the passengers. This increased the privacy of the carriage, and this may be partly why taxis appeared in the press to be popular spaces for murder and suicide. The taxi engines were apparently so noisy that gunshots went

undetected; for example, in the case of the Swedish man who shot himself in a taxi one evening in November 1926. According to the newspaper report 'nothing occurred during the journey to attract attention.' But when the man did not alight the taxi at the end of the journey, the cabbie opened the compartment and found that his passenger was shot dead and a gun was lying on the vehicle's floor.<sup>57</sup> A few years earlier a young man named George Iggulden slit his fiancée's throat in a taxi, the night before their wedding was to take place.<sup>58</sup> Like an empty train carriage, the taxi was a private public space which could endanger its passengers by providing a safe space for illegal behaviour.

In films taxis fulfil several different functions linked to these increased possibilities. One of these functions was as a site for illicit romantic or sexual encounters. In film, the taxi is often used for pleasure rather than crime. In *A Cup of Kindness*, for example, Fred Tutt, an upper middle-class patriarch, takes the young flirtatious nurse Tilly out for dinner in the West End. They return to the suburb where Fred lives with his wife and sons, by taxi. When the vehicle pulls up outside their house, Fred asks the driver why he stopped. The cabbie replies that he heard the lady shout 'stop,' so he presumed they must be at their destination. Fred retorts: 'How did you know she was alluding to you?' When Tilly persuades him to leave the taxi because they are, in fact, home, Fred informs the taxi driver that 'he enjoyed every minute of it.' *A Cup of Kindness* is a farcical comedy and it does not shy away from implying that an illicit sexual encounter had taken place in the taxi. It is good-natured about this: Tilly is portrayed as a modern young woman who has no serious romantic designs on Fred, and the episode has no impact on Fred's marriage. The privacy offered by the closed doors of the taxi is a space to experiment outside of the accepted social norms,

especially since the cab driver was a stranger whose potential disapproval would be of no consequence.<sup>59</sup>

A taxi is used in a similar way in the 1932 film *Let Me Explain, Dear*. In this comedy married man George falls for glamour girl Marnie, who the film presents as a gold-digger. They meet on a water taxi during the day. When George goes out that evening to try and find Marnie again, he hails a cab and opens the door to get in. At the same time Marnie crosses the street and opens the vehicle's other door. When the driver asks them where to go, George tells him to drive on until he is told to stop. In the taxi, Marnie lies in George's arms. The couple giggle and joke, but Marnie also asks George whether he is married. George tries to persuade her to kiss him, but Marnie offers her hand to kiss instead. She maintains her refusal even when George repeatedly asks her to give in. As the drive progresses the couple cuddle more closely and at the end of the ride Marnie and George are fast asleep. They have driven through the night and as the driver interpreted George's request to 'drive on' literally, they are at the seaside.

The taxi in *Let Me Explain, Dear* gives George and Marnie an opportunity to have a private conversation in an everyday space. As married men, both George and Fred Tutt have very limited opportunities to speak to young women, privately. But the taxi offers them an arena for this. It is a vehicle which an upper or middle-class man can use without raising any suspicions, and as the driver was usually seated outside of the carriage the space was very private indeed. Compared to George's uptight wife, Marnie is presented as a more relaxed and fun, but ultimately untrustworthy woman. She uses taxis to visit her various admirers and keep social engagements. George's wife, or Mrs Tutt for that matter, would not travel alone by taxi as it could make them the topic of scandalous gossip.

## **Mysterious drivers**

As noted, the taxi driver was usually physically separated from his customers due to the design of interwar taxis. As with its predecessor, the hansom cab, taxi required that you put your trust in its driver. The dramatic potential for this was explored by, for example, Arthur Conan Doyle in his first Sherlock Holmes novel *A Study in Scarlet*, in which the murderer is a hansom cab driver whose victims are customers using his cab.<sup>60</sup> Some films also play on the implicit trust placed in the anonymous taxi driver.

In the horror film *The Human Monster* (1939)<sup>61</sup> the heroine, Diana, is put into a cab after visiting the ominous home for the blind where she and the police suspect murders are taking place. The servant who hails the cab for her also gives the driver the address of her house. After they depart, however, Diana notices they are going in the wrong direction. She asks the driver to stop. The film has built up a tense atmosphere to make the audience suspect that Diana is going to be the next murder victim. But it transpires that the taxi is being driven by the police inspector who is investigating the recent murder of Diana's father, a case which has been linked to the home of the blind. He has used this disguise to have a private conversation with Diana about the investigation. He is able to use the omnipresence of the taxi in London to his advantage to speak to Diana alone outside of formal frameworks.

Similarly, in the 1935 quota quickie *Death Drives Through*<sup>62</sup> the race driver Kit has gone missing. He has chosen to disappear after his best friend and colleague died on the race track, for which Kit blames himself. Near the end of the film, his love interest Kay and her father have been looking everywhere for him. During their search they hail a taxi. Only when they are dropped off at their destination and the taxi drives off, do they realise that the driver was Kit. He too has been able to use the anonymity of

the taxi to disappear in the capital. But Kay and her father manage to memorise his taxi number plate, which enables them to find Kit and the taxi back. In both these films taxis are vehicles that are such a common part of the London street that characters do not really notice their or their drivers' presence. It is worth noting that in all these cases the male characters have the agency to use the taxi to their benefit: to disappear or to have private conversations which will not have a consequence on their home life. Women can use taxis but the power lies with the men, who dictate how this space is being used.

### **The taxi as a class-specific site**

Taxis also remained bound to class distinctions. The taxi is coded as a mode of transport for the rich in *Sally in Our Alley* (1931),<sup>63</sup> a film which also puts class character at its forefront. It was the first feature film for comic actress Gracie Fields, for whom her working-class Lancashire accent was a key component of her star persona. She plays the titular character in *Sally in Our Alley*, a woman who sings and performs for fun in the East End café she works in. The film is set a few years after the First World War and Sally believes her fiancé George has been killed at the front, but he is, in fact, still alive.

During the film some upper-class women hear Sally sing in her café. One of them is the daughter of the Duchess of Wexford, and she persuades her mother to invite Sally to sing for them at a private party. After Sally has finished her performance the other party guests ignore her. It becomes clear Sally was only invited her as a novelty act, and the party's attendees have no interest in getting to know her. This turns Sally's initial respect for the partygoers into rebellion. She decides to leave the party and asks a servant to arrange a taxi for her. Sally's manner is matter-of-fact, as if she is used to

being around servants and giving them orders. She declines to 'act her own class' by gratefully accepting the money and quietly disappearing from the party. But the servant refuses to obey her as he does not think he needs to take orders from someone who is of the same social standing as himself. Despite her elaborate dress, Sally does not fool the servant when she behaves 'above her station'.

Sally leaves the house and tries to hail a taxi herself. Initially she attempts to hail one verbally but when this has no effect she whistles on her fingers: a decidedly more 'common' and masculine method which causes the taxi to stop immediately. Once inside and on her way, Sally uses a funnel to communicate with the driver. She makes it clear that she knows he is taking the longest route, and gives him specific instructions on how to drive instead.

Sally proves herself to be a savvy woman who will not let herself be conned by a taxi driver, and the driver respects her for it. She wants to establish that despite the fact she is in a taxi and wearing a frock, she nevertheless identifies as working-class. She has triumphed over the upper-class snobs by wearing their clothes, using their mode of transport, earning money, and keeping her independence at the same time. Sally presents an aspirational figure for working-class audiences.

Whilst Sally is at the party, one of her neighbours is also using a taxi. Florrie, a girl who lives in the same alley as Sally and who has an abusive father, has stolen George's wallet earlier in the film. After Sally showed faith in Florrie, the girl sobbingly admitted to the theft and proved remorseful. Florrie is now looking for George to return the money. When her taxi arrives in the place she believes George to be, Florrie jumps out of the vehicle. The driver comes out straight away and demands payment. Florrie

asks if he has change for a pound note. When the driver is slow to respond, the girl offers him the whole pound.

The driver then notices that the wallet she is holding contains nearly a hundred pounds, and he whistles for a policeman. Both the policeman and the driver are extremely sceptical when Florrie says she is trying to return the wallet to its rightful owner. The men are only happy to release Florrie when George shows up and confirms that the wallet is his. Florrie's class and gender make her immediately suspicious as she does not fit the profile of a normal cab user, or of someone who would have independent wealth. Women could use cabs alone but were subject to much closer scrutiny than male users. Films do not dwell on male characters using cabs, but instead often portray them merely entering or exiting a taxi. The use of taxis by women is problematized by films in a way that use of them by men is not.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has considered how films and the press reported on the use of public transport and taxis at night. Both modes of transport challenged the boundaries between public and private space, and boundaries between social classes. This led to potential conflict but also created the opportunity to forge new connections and experiment with new behaviour. In this way, public transport served as a microcosm for the capital as a whole. Social mores in London during the interwar period were rapidly changing and old gender and class distinctions were increasingly challenged.

Public transport gave more people access to the city streets both during the day and at night. As is further explored in the remaining chapters of this thesis, newspapers and films of the period both encouraged this change and warned against it. As has become clear from the analysis of primary sources in this chapter, popular media

presented public transport spaces as both exciting and potentially dangerous. Men generally had more agency in these spaces, whereas women were more likely to be under threat, or to be reactive to male fellow passengers.

The new technology driving these modes of transport introduced anxieties about transport safety. Newspapers usually only reported on trains, the Underground, and taxis in the context of crime or accidents. Using transport had become an inevitable fact of life in a city which ever-increasing size made it impossible to traverse by foot. As a commonplace activity it had limited news value. Popular papers consequently only reported on this new technology when it went 'off the rails' both literally and figuratively, creating a hazardous impression of this aspect of modern city life.

Films, on the other hand, focused more on the interpersonal aspect of public transport, highlighting both the annoyance and happiness it could bring to passengers. Fiction films' concern with the intimate stories of a small number of characters made this medium more suitable for exploring the impact of quotidian public transport use on the lives of individuals. Public transport spaces in films gave opportunities for private conversation and personal connection amongst crowds of people. They allowed for interactions during any time of the day or night. Where newspaper reports highlighted the spectacular, films focused on the trivial; but for both media the development of London's public transport system was a key point of interest during the interwar period.



## **Chapter 4: Journalists in interwar Britain**

This chapter ties together the two forms of media that this thesis considers, the popular press and the cinema, by evaluating how British interwar films and newspapers represented the figure of the popular journalist. The expansion of the popular press in 1920s and 1930s Britain meant that there was also an increased demand for journalists to provide newspaper content. This increased influence of the press also led to a larger interest in the figure of the journalist. The journalism profession developed and established itself during this period as a career path for enterprising young men and women in a time when raised education standards also increased general literacy.

Journalism appealed to the imagination in the 1920s and 1930s: journalists made frequent appearances in British feature films and real-life journalists described their work in memoirs which were distributed on the mass market. The journalist remains a recognizable type, and scholars have considered the representation of the journalist in written fiction and in American or British post-war film.<sup>1</sup> None, however, have explored the representation of the journalist in interwar British film, as this thesis does.

This chapter demonstrates that in interwar British cinema, journalists did not conform to later stereotypes, which portray them as fighters for truth who work hard to reveal injustices. Instead, cinematic journalists in the interwar period on occasion displayed unethical behaviour and are sometimes shown to be colluding with the government. When fictional interwar journalists investigated crimes, they treated them as isolated incidents and did not reflect on the possible causes or impact of these crimes on wider society. In this way, films treat journalists not as agents of a fourth estate or as

watchdogs, but instead they appear primarily as amateur detectives who work in tandem with the police and other law enforcers to maintain the status quo.

This chapter starts with an exploration of the make-up of the journalism workforce of Britain of the 1920s and 1930s. It reviews the existing scholarship on the cinematic 'type' of the journalist, before moving on to close reading of two interwar British fiction films with journalists as the main characters. The second half of the chapter considers how journalists sought to shape the image of their profession through autobiographical writings which were published for mass consumption, and explores the position of female journalists during this period. This final section illustrates how cinematic depictions of reporters in interwar Britain did not conform to later, more familiar, representations of journalists in film. Unlike the other case-study chapters in this thesis, this chapter does not draw on examples from the newspaper sampling. The newspaper articles found in the sampling did not comment on journalism practices itself. Instead, journalism practices are only inferred through articles about other topics, with reporters' views on their own profession remaining unarticulated.

### **Working conditions of journalists in interwar Britain**

Historical research into the day-to-day working practices of interwar journalists in Britain has been limited.<sup>2</sup> As noted in chapter 1, most historical research on popular newspapers has been concerned with the biographies and quirks of newspaper proprietors. Alternatively, secondary research is focused on famous editors of national papers, such as Hugh Cudlipp, editor for the *Daily Mirror* in the 1950s and 1960s, and Paul Dacre, editor of the *Daily Mail* from 1992 to 2018. Both types of research focus on the characters of individuals who wielded considerable influence, and little attention has been given to the work of staff writers and freelancers.

The *Report on the British Press*, written by the non-political think tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP) in 1938, on the other hand, focuses on statistical data rather than individual biographies. It notes that, by the end of the interwar period there were 'nearly 200,000 persons employed in the production and distribution of newspapers and periodicals in Great Britain.' The vast majority of these worked in the printing and distribution arms of the industry – the writers of the report estimated that only around 9,000 people across all of Britain were employed as full-time journalists or press photographers. Despite journalism being a growing profession, the absolute number of journalists working in the country was small. However, this group was perceived to have a disproportionately large impact on society due to the considerable influence of the press.<sup>3</sup>

Other than the PEP report, the main source of information on the day-to-day work of journalists in the interwar period are books and memoirs published by journalists and editors themselves. Editors were more likely to be given the opportunity to publish their memoirs than staff writers or freelance journalists. This has shaped the information available to us today about newsroom practices. Hugh Cudlipp's 1953 memoir *Publish and be Damned!* discusses various newspaper proprietors and editors, but does not mention individual staff journalists by name, possibly because Cudlipp's seniority as editor of the *Daily Mirror* removed journalists out of his sphere of reference. Wareham Smith, who worked as advertising manager for the *Daily Mail* in the Edwardian and interwar periods, solely relates the managerial aspects of running a newspaper. Many of the staff journalists who published their memoirs in the second half of the twentieth century only started working on Fleet Street from the mid-1940s.<sup>4</sup>

A staff journalist in the interwar period was expected to work 44 hours a week, or 38.5 hours a week if they worked night shifts.<sup>5</sup> The reduced number of hours for night-shift

workers indicated a recognition that night shifts were more demanding than day shifts. These hours were negotiated by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in 1919 and they remained sector practice throughout the interwar period.

However, the PEP report noted in 1938 that

Official agreements, however, are poor guides to actual working conditions, and newspapermen, especially reporters, have more irregular hours than most workers. News is no respecter of 44-hour weeks, and a reporter who refused to rush off to a sudden important assignment on the ground that he had done his quota for the week would get short shrift from the news editor.<sup>6</sup>

As the wages were agreed on a weekly, not hourly basis, any overtime was worked for free. Journalism was widely acknowledged to be a varied profession, a characteristic of the job that both journalists themselves and feature filmmakers tried to fashion as a positive rather than a negative. Journalism was framed as a profession for which one must have a passion, so that any overtime was gladly worked in the interest of getting the story. It was understood that journalists were highly mobile and flexible workers, who could traverse the city day and night in pursuit of good copy.

Feature films of the period subscribed to this image of journalists being always 'on the job' and having no leisure time. In the thriller *The Phantom Fiend*<sup>7</sup>, for example, the boyfriend of the protagonist, Daisy, is a journalist called Joe. Joe uses Daisy's family phone to ring a story through to his editor when he is spending an evening at Daisy's house. Although Joe is supposed to be off duty on this evening, he does not hesitate to report a story Daisy tells him, when he thinks it has news value. Consequently Daisy becomes front-page news, which she is unhappy about. For Joe, however, there is no question that his duty to the newspaper supersedes any consideration to Daisy's personal feelings about being the subject of a news report. Within the universe of *The*

*Phantom Fiend*, it is accepted that journalists will be looking for stories to report on at all times, even when spending leisure time with their family or friends.

### **Journalists in cinema – a brief literature review**

Before this chapter considers the representation of journalists in interwar British films, it first establishes how film scholars have approached the study cinematic journalists in other temporal and national contexts. Since the 1970s, various film and journalism scholars have considered the representation of journalists in films. Depending on the academic discipline of these scholars, they have either considered the journalism film as a 'genre' (usually, if the scholar comes from a film analysis tradition) or noted the similarities and discrepancies between cinematic representations of journalists and 'real' journalism (if the author has experience of working as a journalist his- or herself).

Although some film and media scholars have explored the representation of the figure of the journalist in film, little attention has been given so far to the representation of the journalist in British interwar fiction films. Sarah Lonsdale has traced the representation of the journalist in British interwar written fiction, but in her book-length study she only considers cinematic representations of the profession for the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Journalist and scholar Brian McNair's book on journalists in film does not consider any pre-Second World War films in any depth. McNair does note that generally 'journalism is highly functional for cinema in that its nature as a professional practice generates the incidents and narratives which make a good movie.'<sup>9</sup> The conventions of cinematic storytelling are linked by McNair to the conventions of (sensational) journalism, highlighting the close bond between the two media.

Most of the existing scholarship is concerned with representations of journalists in Hollywood films as opposed to British films, and focuses on films from the 1940s onwards. Richard Ness compiled a filmography of journalists in American films from the silent era through to the mid-1990s. He argues that '[l]ike the cowboy, the journalist is a recognizable screen icon with specific characteristics and working within an established environment' and that journalism films have a lot in common with detective films. But, according to Ness, 'while the detective is often concerned with this inquiry as the means to the revelation of a specific truth [...] the truth uncovered by the journalist in the process of inquiry usually has a much broader social implication' in the film's world.<sup>10</sup> Although this observation has been demonstrated by other scholars to largely hold true for post-war Hollywood films about journalism, my research has found that in British interwar films, journalists are not shown to be particularly concerned with influencing or improving society as a whole.

In interwar films, journalists may pursue a specific investigation, but they stay within the established frameworks that regulate society. The police, courts, and government are not questioned in any of the films: they are not shown to be corrupt or failing in any way. In this way interwar films reaffirmed to audiences that society on the whole functioned best if institutions in power collaborated with one another, and journalists were part of these power structures. This corroborates Lawrence Napper's argument, referred to in chapter 1, that interwar British films generally presented Britain as a stable society.<sup>11</sup>

### **Journalists in interwar films – research findings**

In terms of the representation of the individual journalist on screen, various scholars agree that the typical film journalist is rude, irreverent, not afraid to break the rules for

personal gain, arrogant, and generally has an unattractive personality.<sup>12</sup> As will become evident in the detailed discussion of two British interwar films below, this assumption, again, does not hold true for British film journalists of the 1920s and 1930s. Journalists were often the sympathetic protagonists of films. In fact, the character description commonly used for journalists in films by these scholars more closely fits with how police officers were depicted in British interwar films, as is explored further in the next chapter.

When journalists appear in British interwar films, police officers often appear too – out of the twenty films included in this work which included journalists as characters, seventeen also featured police officers or inspectors. Whereas American films of the 1930s may have been filled with ‘omniscient reporters who spent about two minutes at their typewriters for every thirty they devoted to outwitting patently retarded police forces,’<sup>13</sup> in British films of the same period, journalists worked to help the police rather than circumvent them. Although the films also do not show much of journalists physically writing copy, when journalists investigate an issue, they often explicitly collaborate with the police, or call upon the police at the end of the investigation to dispense justice.

The press in these films is an uncomplicated one-way mechanism to disseminate information to society: once something is printed by a journalist, it becomes public knowledge and an assumed truth. Richard Ness argues that ‘the press [in film] must be able to alter the course of events in a society or at least be perceived as having the power to do so.’<sup>14</sup> This holds true for British interwar films. In every instance of newspaper reporting included in the films viewed for this thesis, the printed news has a big impact in the film’s world.

Cinema sets up the assumption that reports, once printed in a newspaper, are widely disseminated and not challenged. Films do not acknowledge the vast amount of reportage printed each day across all the newspaper titles available in the country, nor the fact that, because of the sheer volume of copy, most articles had little to no impact. In interwar British cinema, press reporting has a disproportionate influence over society, and in these films that power is wielded by professionals who are sympathetic to, and collaborate with, the government. The supposed power of the press is not something that threatens British society within these cinematic representations, in keeping with the general tendency for films to promote stability within society.

In the 1920s and 1930s, cinematic journalists and the papers they work for are fictional creations rather than based on real people or newspaper titles. Occasionally a cinematic newspaper owner may be modelled on a real-life press baron, but as real interwar journalists rarely reached celebrity status, it was not feasible for films to attempt to represent real characters. The newspaper titles in interwar films are usually also fake, with names such as the *Daily World* and *Daily Sun*.<sup>15</sup> Fictional newspaper titles are similar to real-world titles, evoking the same type of popular publication. By using made-up names, the events of the films were placed at one remove from the real world, diluting the impact of any criticism on the functioning of the press.

Out of the twenty films identified in this work that include journalists working at night, in eight cases these journalists are main characters in the film – in the remaining twelve films the journalists are minor characters that do have some lines, but are not central to the plot. Journalists are main characters in *The Squeaker* (1930); *The Phantom Fiend* (1932); *It's Love Again* (1936); *Midnight Menace* (1937); *Gangway* (1937); *I See Ice!* (1938); *Murder in Soho* (1939); and *Trouble Brewing* (1939).<sup>16</sup> It is likely no coincidence that all these films were made in the latter part of the interwar period, after



the introduction of sound film. Journalism scholar Alex Barris has argued that the depiction of journalists on film depends on conveying fast-past and snappy dialogue, something that was very difficult during the silent period.<sup>17</sup> In the British context, the newspaper wars of the 1930s (see chapter 1) also increased visibility of and interest in the popular press.

Of the eight films listed above, where journalists are major characters, four are crime/murder stories and four are comedies, although two of the comedies (*Gangway* and *Trouble Brewing*) also involve the journalists getting caught up in a criminal plot. The journalists shown in these films are crime reporters (*The Squeaker*, *The Phantom Fiend*, *Murder in Soho*); a gossip columnist (*It's Love Again*); a political cartoonist (*Midnight Menace*); a film reviewer (*Gangway*); a news photographer (*I See Ice!*) and a printing assistant (*Trouble Brewing*). There is clearly a wide range of journalists on display in these films, and their particular role is usually chosen to fit with the plot of the film. For example, the photographer in *I See Ice!* unwittingly takes a photograph which compromises the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, and the film's plot is propelled by characters who look to obtain this photograph.

In the remaining twelve films that show journalists, they are minor characters that in some way impact on the plot and/or the main characters of the film. They are, in chronological order: *The Lodger* (1927); *Harmony Heaven* (1930); *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932); *Evergreen* (1934); *Aunt Sally* (1934); *Love, Life & Laughter* (1934); *The Clairvoyant* (1935); *Cheer Up!* (1936); *Men Are Not Gods* (1936); *Pygmalion* (1938); *Break the News* (1938); and *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939).<sup>18</sup>

Other than *The Lodger*, *Pygmalion* and *The Dark Eyes of London*, all these films are set in the world of theatre and show business, with performers as their protagonists.

Journalists appear in these films to interview the budding stars or write a crucial review which launches their fame. Some films use this trope in a knowing way: in *Break the News*, for example, the main characters are two male chorus performers who set out to become famous by pretending that one of them has murdered the other. They attempt to use the press as a tool to achieve notorious fame.

The female star, alongside whom they perform on the stage, is shown to be a careful manipulator of the press, as also highlighted in chapter 1. She engineers stories for the papers to ensure she remains in the limelight, and the journalists are shown to be lapping up her antics. They are hardly resourceful and intelligent reporters, and their appearance does not align with the professional image real-life interwar journalists liked to present. *Break the News* is, however, a satirical film and the stage performers are also shown in a less than flattering light: they are manipulative and the two male protagonists are not very smart.

The introduction of sound film increased the number of films whose plots were set in theatres and other performance spaces, because sound films allowed for the inclusion of song-and-dance numbers (and the sales of sheet music associated with these). As the list above shows, journalists commonly made guest appearances in these films to validate and cement the fame (or notoriety) of the main characters. Although their appearances are brief, these journalists as supporting characters reinforce the image that interwar journalists were primarily concerned with show business, human-interest stories and gossip news.

### **Types of journalist**

There were various categories of contributors to newspapers in the interwar period. Popular daily newspapers, such as the titles considered in this research project,

employed a small number of salaried staff reporters, who were sent out by the editor from the Fleet Street office to gather news. This group of reporters therefore necessarily operated mainly in London and its close environs. The Political and Economic Planning report estimated that each national newspaper employed about 30 reporters of this type. The vast majority of the paper content that related to news outside of London was gathered by local correspondents, who were normally paid on a 'lineage' basis; in other words, based on the length of the article. A national paper could maintain a roster of up to 1,000 local correspondents within Britain, some of whom would have been freelancers working for a number of newspapers.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these news correspondents, there were also feature writers. Features are articles that could be written a few days in advance of print and included, for example, background information on an issue currently in the news; theatre and cinema reviews; letters to the editor; columns; and the so-called women's pages. In the organisational structure of the newspaper, the features department sat, and still sits, quite separately from the news desk. Because features are not time-sensitive, they can be pulled at the last minute. During the interwar period, working for the features department was considered notably less glamorous than working for the news desk, as features were perceived to be less important.<sup>20</sup> As a result, and also because working on features did not require long hours or night work, many female journalists ended up 'stuck' in the features department.<sup>21</sup> Features writing does not conform to the stereotypical glamorous depiction of journalism as there are no tight deadlines involved. Nonetheless, features made up a significant part of the overall paper's contents during the period under consideration in this thesis.

A final category of articles was the 'leader', a main article with a high word count that was more in-depth than the average piece of news reportage. Because of this, they

were usually written either by university-educated journalists, or by high-profile experts. Those in the latter category were not normally journalists, but could be authors, scientists, or leaders of the Church. Although these experts' contributions could lend credibility to a paper, their lack of experience in writing journalism often meant that their output was not suitable for print, as they did not grasp the required style of writing. As a solution, editors of popular newspapers reportedly got the leader articles written by a staff journalist but signed by a 'famous name' as their own work.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas leader articles were commonly signed by a named individual in order to convey the expertise or seniority of the author, regular news articles were not normally attributed to any particular journalist. As the newspaper sampling for this research project has focused on such day-to-day news reporting, the vast majority of the articles considered in this thesis do not include a journalist by-line. At most, articles appeared with a by-line such as 'A Special Representative'.<sup>23</sup> This lack of attribution was a deliberate strategy: in the interwar period a journalist's anonymity was considered a virtue. In order to dissuade journalists from seeking celebrity which could lead them to exaggerate or even fabricate news, articles were printed anonymously. Journalists were supposed to do their work for the good of society, not for individual gain.<sup>24</sup> This anonymity also ensured that the journalist was essentially unknowable. It strengthened the pretence that he could be anyone roaming the city streets during the day and night. Journalists' memoirs of the period, which are discussed in more detail below, also foreground the anonymity and mobility of the low-ranking reporter.

### **Gossip columnists – *It's Love Again***

A departure from the anonymity of news reporters can be found in the columnists of the interwar press. Unlike the news reports, which were required to be objective and

factual, and the authors of which should therefore theoretically be interchangeable, a column's success depended on the individual character and singular voice of its author. As such, each columnist needed to build their own style which became instantly recognisable to the reader, encouraging them to return to the column again and again.

In the interwar period, columnists normally worked using an alias or pen-name, and in some cases columns under the same pen name were, in reality, written by several individuals, complicating the need for a recognizable 'voice'. Although they gave the illusion of having an individual tone and style, this could be consciously fabricated. In the case of gossip columns, the fact that they were signed was used as evidence in some quarters that they represented the decline of high-quality journalism.<sup>25</sup> The gossip column represents a complex type of journalism, which has been fruitfully explored by Sarah Newman in her doctoral thesis.<sup>26</sup> The columns were usually written by upper-class individuals and enabled readers to gain insight into elite parties, whilst providing an income to their authors.<sup>27</sup>

Gossip columnists were given a screen presence in the 1936 musical comedy *It's Love Again*. In this film, American gossip columnist Peter Carlton and his friend Freddie decide to fabricate a society figure, Mrs Smythe-Smythe, to increase the readership of the *Daily Record* newspaper for which they work. Because Mrs Smythe-Smythe is not real, Peter can make up exclusive scoops about her every day. After the aspiring stage star Elaine Bradford decides to impersonate Mrs Smythe-Smythe to take advantage of her celebrity, Peter, Elaine and Freddie start to collaborate for their mutual benefit. This works well until a gossip journalist from a competitor paper finds out their secret and threatens to expose them. In the end, Elaine decides to report that

Mrs Smythe-Smythe has left the country, which leaves Peter's career unharmed and allows Elaine herself to build a stage career under her own name.

Peter and Freddie are motivated by newspaper sales; the only thing that matters to them is that their editor sees that the *Daily Record's* circulation is increased as a result of their articles. Unlike the cinematic journalist more commonly found in American films, as described above, the reporters in *It's Love Again* are not interested in improving society or holding those in power to account. On the contrary: when Freddie suggests they invent a society figure to write about, neither man questions the ethical implications of this. Near the end of the film a third journalist from a rival newspaper discovers that Peter and Freddie have been fabricating news. This reporter, too, does not question the professional ethics of this but rather asks to be let in on the scheme for his professional gain.

None of the journalists in *It's Love Again* experience any negative consequences from their cavalier attitude to the truth. Instead the opposite happens: by supposedly reporting on scoops, which leads to increased newspaper sales, Peter's career advances. Peter's editor is also shown to be primarily motivated by commercial success and the possibility of social advancement, rather than by reporting the truth.

On the one hand, the fact that the men are society reporters means that the stakes of their reporting are arguably lower than those for crime reporters and the like. Fabricating society news does not do any significant damage to society. On the other hand, in the film's world the copy in the gossip columns appears to dictate a newspaper's success; the journalists on both rival papers are praised by their superiors throughout the film for increasing sales when they manage to report on a scoop.

In *It's Love Again*, journalists are presented as suitable romantic partners. Unlike later cinematic representations of journalists which can portray reporters as rude and unwilling to adhere to authority, Peter and Freddie are charming and polite. The fact that the male lead in a romantic comedy is a journalist demonstrates that in British interwar cinema, journalists could be respected members of society. This is at odds with the more commonly presented view of journalists as outsiders and loners.

In the musical comedy-world of the film, the only newsworthy events concern society figures and performers. The only newspaper articles that are shown or referenced discuss the goings-on of various high-profile individuals. The only newspaper staff that are shown are society and theatre reporters, their secretaries and their editors. The film highlights these narrow parts of the daily newspaper content above all others, thus aligning daily news reporting with showbusiness. This dilutes the importance of news reporting and ignores its function of holding those in power to account. The journalist is reduced to a harmless society figure who sells entertainment news.

At the same time, the impact of Peter's reporting is shown to be significant. Like other interwar films, *It's Love Again* suggests that the *Daily Record* is universally read. As soon as Peter starts writing about Mrs Smythe-Smythe, everyone, from upper-class society figures to Elaine's working-class landlady, is aware of Peter's columns. The reach and impact of the popular newspaper is presented as universal. On the one hand newspapers are shown to be a pivotal part of modern urban society, but on the other hand their importance is downplayed in this film as they are shown to only deal with society news.

Peter and Freddie are mostly seen working from Peter's art deco-style apartment, occasionally whilst wearing a housecoats rather than actual clothes. Peter only attends

the *Daily Record* offices twice during the film: once when he is called in to a meeting with his boss, and once when Elaine visits him to tell him she does not want to proceed with their scam any longer. Peter's habit to work from home, rather than from an office or whilst roaming the streets, further undermines the professional image of journalism as a real job and viable career. Peter certainly does not treat journalism as his calling; instead it appears to be a role that he has taken on to pay off his gambling debts.

The journalists in *It's Love Again* do not conduct their role in the stereotypical manner. The 'news' they gather is shown to only have an impact on a small section of society: the upper classes. They do not display the personality traits that journalists in the interwar period prided themselves on: Peter spends most of his time in his apartment rather than out and about; he does not display an interest in a wide range of subjects; and he does not appear to be a 'born' journalist but rather to have taken up the profession out of financial necessity. The cavalier attitude to fabricating news displayed by Peter, Freddie and Montague is not questioned or challenged by any other character in the film, and the audience is not expected to question it either. Arguably, precisely because they are covering society news rather than 'hard' news, it is presented as less problematic that the news is fabricated.

### **Interwar journalists' memoirs**

As briefly referred to earlier in this chapter, memoirs of famous editors and journalists have enjoyed a large distribution, and in some cases remain in print. They primarily provide a view into the upper echelons of newspaper production. This thesis has identified a second category of autobiographical writings: books by interwar journalists who did not enjoy much fame and whose works have not been reprinted after the Second World War. Because the authors were not well-known, the works were not



written with the intention to preserve a kind of legacy. Instead they show how average journalists sought to present themselves and their profession to a contemporary mass audience. This chapter draws on these sources as they provide insight into how interwar journalists sought to present the journalism profession to a wider audience.

Two examples of these books are the anonymously authored 1929 work *The Autobiography of a Journalist* and the 1932 book *When Fleet Street Calls*, written by *Daily Sketch* journalist J.C. Cannell.<sup>28</sup> By publishing his work anonymously, the author of *The Autobiography of a Journalist* perpetuates the notion of the hack as a mysterious figure who needs to remain unknown in order to do his work successfully. The title of the work also presents the book as a common story that could apply to all popular journalists. Cannell, on the other hand, had achieved fame a year before the publication *When Fleet Street Calls* with his book-length exposé of the magic tricks of Harry Houdini, *The Secrets of Houdini*. Cannell's publisher capitalized on the popularity of the Houdini book in the marketing of *When Fleet Street Calls*, which required Cannell's name to be on the cover of this second work.

Although both books claim to be memoirs, they are also conscious constructions of the journalism profession by their respective authors, and they accordingly position journalism in a particular way. Both books seek to present journalism as an exciting and (financially) rewarding profession: '[i]n no profession are contrasts so swift and strange, or is life more full of the unexpected than in that of Fleet Street journalism.'<sup>29</sup> But, at the same time, the authors stress that the skills required to be a good journalist are innate and cannot be learned. They both present the born journalist as a person who is distinctly different from 'normal' individuals. The anonymous author states, for example, that 'nothing is surer than that the born journalist will sooner or later, and probably sooner, find in journalism the only completely satisfying career.'<sup>30</sup>

Cannell argues that '[b]ecause Fleet Street journalism is so unlike every other profession or occupation, the people who follow it are totally different from, may I say, the normal folk.'<sup>31</sup> These books served to give the general public an insight into the somewhat mysterious world of professional journalism. They depict journalism as an exciting profession, but at the same time imply that one cannot simply choose to become a journalist. This preserved an aura of exclusivity to a profession that was rapidly expanding, and served to dampen the ambition of readers who were looking to move into journalism themselves, thus preventing the labour market from becoming overcrowded.

Despite the nominal maximum working hours agreed by the NUJ, noted above, both Cannell and the anonymous author make frequent reference to working at night and working long hours. Rather than seeing this as an infringement of their worker's rights, the authors present themselves as restless individuals who much prefer roaming the city than sitting behind a desk for fixed hours, even if they do not necessarily get paid for all their work. Cannell relates how, during the illness of King George V during the winter of 1928-1929, he spent eight nights outside of Buckingham Palace. During this time, 'each night, crowds from theatres and cabarets came to read the late bulletin, but usually such visits ceased about 2am' whereas Cannell himself purportedly stayed until 8am.<sup>32</sup> Here the night work of the journalist is explicitly juxtaposed with the crowds of pleasure-seekers who also navigate London at night in a variation of the theme explored by the journalist whose piece was quoted at the start of this thesis. Cannell presents the journalist as determined and willing to endure hardship, whereas the 'crowd' prioritise their revelling over engaging with current affairs.

The anonymous author of *The Autobiography of a Journalist* writes that he was introduced to Fleet Street's unusual working hours at his first meeting with an editor of

a national paper. The meeting took place at 8pm – when the budding journalist commented on the late hour, the editor supposedly responded: ‘clocks don’t exist for us’.<sup>33</sup> This statement both sets journalists apart as separate from the rest of the population by adopting ‘us-and-them’ terminology, and indicates that, despite best efforts from the NUJ, in reality working hours were very fluid.

The only instance where this working at night is presented as a nuisance, is when it interferes with the journalist’s home life:

When the telephone at home rings, the London journalist sometimes hesitates as to whether he will answer it, particularly if he is on the point of taking his wife to the theatre. If it is a call from the office, as it probably is, there is an end to his dream of a night’s leisure.<sup>34</sup>

This passage serves to highlight a number of things. Firstly, that journalists, despite their irregular hours and supposed difference from the general population, are still able to maintain a romantic relationship. Secondly, that journalists should always be available to respond to the demands of the editor. Thirdly, that home life is the only area of his life where the journalist begrudges the intrusion of his job, but that the intrusion is accepted as inevitable.

Where the Political and Economic Planning report is concerned about preserving and increasing accuracy of reporting across the whole media industry, these autobiographies instead champion the individual and apparently innate values that make journalists resourceful and successful. The books foreground the personal satisfaction that journalists get from the varied work. They do not argue that journalists go into their profession because they have a need to pursue truth or improve society. The PEP report, too, is not concerned with journalists contributing to a fairer society. Instead its main argument is that journalists should be able to accurately convey the facts of public events, and in order to do that, more university-educated people should

be encouraged to become journalists. Neither source appears to consider journalism as a mechanism to hold those in power accountable, as later became one of the preferred ways to champion the profession.

The examples from these two interwar journalist memoirs highlight how journalists of the period sought to fashion themselves as individuals who were distinctly different from the general population; who enjoyed working irregular hours and agreed to forego pleasurable activities as long as it was in the interest of getting a story; and whose intelligence was based on their life experience rather than on a university education.

The positioning of journalism as being on the margins of 'normal' society tallies with the professional image fashioned by journalists in the United States, in the same period.<sup>35</sup> Journalism scholar Matthew C. Ehrlich has highlighted how in US popular culture, fictional representations of journalists oscillate between 'officials', who respect existing power structures and work within them, and 'outlaws', who rebel against authority.<sup>36</sup> The British interwar autobiographies used in this chapter align the reporter with an outlaw; *It's Love Again* to a certain extent does the same, although the stakes of refusing to accept authority are low in the world of gossip journalism. As becomes evident in the final part in this chapter, other British films did not perpetuate the image of journalist-as-outlaw but instead side journalists with 'officials'.

### **Female journalists**

As noted above, both autobiographical writings from journalists and secondary writings about journalists are generated by, or concerned with, celebrity journalists, editors and newspaper owners, who were generally male. Although female journalists did work in the British press from the nineteenth century onwards, the economic imbalance between men and women meant that women were not able to rise to a position of

prominence within these papers during the nineteenth century and the interwar period.<sup>37</sup> As a consequence, their experience as journalists is little described or referred to in extant sources.

According to historian Barbara Onslow, this situation has been further exacerbated by the tendency of twentieth-century press historians to categorise female writers as novelists rather than journalists.<sup>38</sup> This classification is possible because many female authors wrote across a number of genres and formats, which included non-fiction, poetry, and short-form fiction for periodicals and newspapers. Such a range of writing blurred the distinctions between 'journalist' and other types of writer. As male journalists embraced their professional identity and fashioned the reporter as typically tenacious, willing to work all hours and sacrificing their personal life for the job – which is testified to by the autobiographical writings referred to above – female journalists were unable to find a comfortable place in that same professional identity.

The general conditions of work for interwar journalists, which included long hours, night work, and a requirement to mingle and relate to people of all walks of life, did not lend themselves to be fulfilled by women, and especially not by women with care-giving responsibilities.<sup>39</sup> Journalism also had a persistent reputation as a slightly disreputable profession and the 'free-and-easy atmosphere' of the newsroom was considered positively unwomanly.<sup>40</sup> For interwar women, being employed at all was potentially damaging to their reputation, let alone working in a profession known for its close relationship to the margins of society. Women would also simply struggle to access some of the spaces that a journalist needed to get access to in order to do their job, such as the press gallery in the Houses of Parliament.<sup>41</sup> As noted above, female journalists were often restricted to writing features or articles about fashion or domestic concerns. This put female journalists in the conflicted position of writing for an audience

of housewives, when they themselves were working women whose lived experience differed markedly from that of their readership.<sup>42</sup>

Onslow's book-length study is concerned with female journalists working in the Victorian era. The press landscape at this time was primarily one of long-established broadsheets that aligned closely with political parties; and periodicals for the upper and upper-middle classes. The introduction and swift expansion of the popular daily newspapers from 1896 onwards had the potential to create more opportunities for female journalists, and to level the playing field. Journalism historian Sarah Lonsdale has noted that in 1901, around 9% of journalists were women; by 1931 this share had risen to 17%, or about 1 in 6 journalists. However, differences in basic education between boys and girls meant that women continued to face hurdles getting into journalism or any other educated profession.<sup>43</sup> Unlike male journalists, the majority of whom had little formal education, many female journalists were of middle-class backgrounds, and were well-educated with personal connections to editors and other journalists.<sup>44</sup> Working-class women, who lacked education and a network, were simply unable to access the profession.

From their foundation, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* included so-called women's pages, recognising women for the first time as a core part of the papers' readership.<sup>45</sup> These pages covered tips on home-making, cooking and child rearing. Alfred Hamsworth sought to take this a step further when he founded the *Daily Mirror*, envisioned as a newspaper created by women for women. At the *Mirror's* founding in 1903 there were enough female journalists working in Fleet Street that Hamsworth was able to populate the paper's entire editorial staff with them. Unfortunately, the gender inequality in the industry was still such that none of the female journalists or editors hired on the *Mirror* had any real experience in managing a daily newspaper, and the

venture quickly turned into a financial disaster. Harmsworth hired a male editor with experience to turn the newspaper around and position the *Mirror* as an illustrated paper for a general readership instead.

Lonsdale has demonstrated that in British interwar fiction, women journalists were either portrayed as mannish 'deviants' or as incompetent.<sup>46</sup> In this, written fiction reflected the bind in which real-life female journalists of the period found themselves:

Those who refused to accept restrictions on what they could write about and who were not suitably feminine at work were branded as personally deviant, while those who accepted the limitations imposed on them and allowed themselves to be treated as feminine were professionally marginalized. By marking out the gender of women journalists as odd and abnormal while treating the gender of male journalists as neutral, male editors created an effective barrier to women's success.<sup>47</sup>

Interwar fiction films do not follow this model – instead, they rarely portray female journalists at all. In the films researched for this thesis that include journalists and newspaper offices in their plots, the women are often secretaries of editors, girlfriends of journalists or criminals, or family members of crime victims that form the topic of journalists' reports (and sometimes one female character fulfils a number of these roles). Even when a female character appears to be a journalist, such as in *Midnight Menace* discussed below, she identifies herself as a 'newspaper girl', adopting a diminutive and less threatening label.

### ***Midnight Menace* – journalists as investigators**

As noted above, most of the films included in the sample for this research, which prominently featured journalists, also included an element of criminal investigation. To demonstrate this more fully, what follows is a detailed analysis of the way journalists are represented in *Midnight Menace*, a 1937 crime thriller. This film includes a male and female journalist as its main characters and includes interactions between staff

journalists and their editors. It also shows how interwar cinema perceived journalism to intersect with police work.

From the journalist memoirs explored in this chapter, it becomes clear how some real-life journalists sought to portray their relationship with the police. J.C. Cannell wrote: 'The police are well aware that they cannot ignore the Press in their fight against crime, and I know of many cases in which detectives of national repute have asked the opinion of journalists covering a big murder story.'<sup>48</sup> In this version of reality, a challenged police force depends on journalists to aid them, and police officers supposedly consider journalists experts in criminal investigations. Although it is likely that Cannell exaggerates the importance of journalists to the police in order to inflate the professional standing of reporters, the below analysis shows that some fiction films in interwar Britain also gave journalists a key role in the detection of crime.

*Midnight Menace* starts with a *Daily World* journalist who gets murdered just as he is about to publish a big scoop. The journalist's sister Mary and best friend Brian, who are a reporter and cartoonist for the *Daily World* respectively, decide to investigate his death. The pair, aided by a secret service agent, eventually uncover an arms-dealers plot to launch the world into war. They plan to start the war by bombing London, which they hope will trigger a chain-reaction of retaliation. The journalists manage to halt the bombing shortly after it starts, thus preventing war from breaking out.

*Midnight Menace's* ending provides a stark example of how films endorsed government influence on the press. During the bombing attack on London, the editor of the *Daily World* is shown to be excitedly composing the next day's paper with a splash headline declaring that war has broken out. Once the attack is scuppered, Brian and Mary rush back to the newspaper offices and tell their editor to stop the printing



presses. Then, the Prime Minister rings the editor and conveys that a general order has been given to the press to stop printing announcements of war and destroy all copies of papers already printed that night. The editor is upset by the order because of the loss of earnings it represents, but not for any ethical hesitations about withholding news from his readership. There is no question that he will comply with the order and he duly destroys all the printed papers.

The ending to *Midnight Menace* is curious, not least because the film has previously shown that bombs *are* falling over London, the electricity has been cut and panic has broken out. The general order given to the press at the end of the film is presumably designed to prevent papers from crying 'war', but it is so broad that papers are also stopped from printing a factual record of the bombing; an event that was clearly witnessed by thousands, if not millions, of people. The newspaper becomes complicit in hiding the truth to prevent disruption of society, rather than informing the public of events that have taken place.

In *Midnight Menace* there is nothing odd about the Prime Minister having a direct line to the editor of a newspaper – and the editor instantly knows who he is speaking to even though the caller does not introduce himself. The film portrays the editor as somewhat immoral for valuing money and circulation over not causing an unnecessary panic among the population. Brian and Mary, the protagonists and moral heart of the film, agree with, and indeed pre-empt, the government censorship order. The press is presented as a tool that can be used by the government for its own needs, and that this is not something that worries the journalists in the film.

As a cartoonist, Brian uses his daily published cartoon as a method to communicate with the criminals. During his investigation, Brian realises that the word 'SASKA' may

have some significance to the criminal network. He duly incorporates the word into his next cartoon. This not only alerts the criminals that he is on their trail, but also leads to the Secret Service contacting Brian, as they too have identified 'SASKA' as a key clue to uncovering the criminal activities. Brian's operations expand beyond that which was typically expected of a cartoonist; his instigation of an investigation more closely aligns him with traditional reporters than with cartoonists.

However, as a cartoonist, Brian is guaranteed a daily published spot in the newspaper. He does not have to vie with other journalists to get his pieces published. He also has relative autonomy to decide on the contents of his cartoon, which makes it easier for him to decide to include the code word. The plot of *Midnight Menace* is aided by the fact that Brian does not have to negotiate the publishing of his cartoon with his superiors. His character still displays the tenacity and determination more commonly linked to investigative journalists, which implies that it is purely the visual nature of cartoons, which translates well onto the cinema screen, that is the reason why the filmmakers opted to make Brian a cartoonist rather than a regular journalist.

Popular newspapers in interwar Britain regularly included cartoons both as political commentary and as entertainment. Cartoonist David Low, who worked for the *London Star* and then the *Evening Standard* during the 1920s and 1930s, has received more attention from press historians than any other cartoonist of this period.<sup>49</sup> Low is primarily remembered for his political cartoons that were critical of the governments of the day. His cartoons have been analysed as expressions of dissent. There has been much less scholarly interest for the non-political cartoons that often appeared in the popular press as well. Brian in *Midnight Menace* appears to be a political cartoonist, but he is not shown to be caricaturing government figures, as Low was wont to do. Instead, Brian turns his pen against a common national enemy – a shady foreign

terrorist investigation. In this way, *Midnight Menace* neutralises the potentially critical figure of the journalist and turns him into an ally of the government.

The journalists in *Midnight Menace* clearly do not fit the 'outlaw' archetype. As opposed to their American counterparts in Hollywood films of the same period, Brian and Mary respect the authority of their boss and the government, and appear to have no qualms about hiding the truth rather than uncovering it.<sup>50</sup> The film's message is unequivocal in its support for the fictional government and its expectation that the popular press will support that government.

The inquiry that Brian and Mary pursue throughout the film is not presented as one that has a 'much broader social implication' as Richard Ness argued is common for cinematic journalists. Although the bombing plot does have the potential to affect the whole of British society, its uncovering does not lead to any changes being made to this society. Rather, it is the opposite: the threat comes primarily from foreign agents, and at the end of the film the British government reasserts its supremacy over them. The plot is driven by arms dealers, but the film does not explore the conditions of capitalism that has led to weapons traders profiting from a continent at war.

Throughout the film, Brian and Mary are pursuing the investigation without the consent of their editor. Brian, as a cartoonist, is expected to deliver a cartoon at the end of each working day, and he has to ask permission to leave the office to attend the peace conference. This is in stark contrast to how the working day of regular reporters was described by interwar journalists in their autobiographies, which emphasise that journalists are normally constantly on the move. It further works to limit Brian's agency: he is not an independent investigator but bound by what his editor and the secret service instruct him.

Mary's exact job is never specified, but when she interviews Mr Peters in a veiled attempt to get information out of him, she assures him that she is writing for the female readership. Mary, with knowing sarcasm, asks Mr Peters if there is no love angle for her to include in her interview. In turn, he asks her whether she needs to know any more trivia about him, such as the name of his dog. The implication is clear: female readers are only interested in interviews with politicians if these are interspersed with 'human interest', and it is up to female journalists to provide this for them.

The film occasionally subverts these sexist assumptions by presenting Mary as a competent journalist, but it is not consistent in this. When the secret service agent Frears first appears, Mary is the one to make sure to check whether he really is a secret service agent, showing her to have a healthy dose of scepticism whereas Brian is gullible. In the final part of the film, when Brian is being kept prisoner by Mr Peters, Mary goes looking for him and she outwits Mr Peters' henchmen to gain entry to the house. However, at the start of the film Mary does not believe that there is anything untoward about her brother's death. She readily accepts that it was an accident, and initially makes fun of Brian's suspicions. Despite her being a journalist and Brian a cartoonist, he is shown to have the more inquiring mind. *Midnight Menace* prevaricates between depicting a 'plucky' female character who supports the leading man; and reaffirming stereotypes about working women.

In both *Midnight Menace* and *It's Love Again* the truth does not end up on the front pages. Newspapers in these films are not straightforward messengers of factual events, but rather are used as tools by journalists and, in the case of *Midnight Menace*, the government, to manipulate information provision. In *It's Love Again* the stakes are fairly low as the news reported on is gossip and the impact on society is minimal. In *Midnight Menace*, on the other hand, the press is used to cover up an attack on Britain,

under the guise that it is better not to needlessly alarm the population. In either case, the journalists in the films do not question the way news reports are manipulated, and the films do not criticize newspapers which do not print the truth.

## **Conclusion**

There was an increased interest in journalism as a profession in interwar Britain, not least because newspaper circulations increased and journalists were perceived to have a substantial influence over society. Reporters were often not explicitly visible in the pages of the newspapers itself, as it was not considered appropriate for them to become famous. Journalists themselves participated in the fashioning of their professional image, by writing autobiographies for mass consumption. In these memoirs, they took care to stress that journalists enjoy variety, and that working at night was part of the job. These memoirs and films presented reporters as an essential part of the London night. In films, too, journalists were often depicted as active participants of the city's nightlife.

Female journalists became more commonplace in interwar Britain, but they were still a minority. Women struggled to be taken seriously as journalists and were often only able to write for the 'women's pages' section of newspapers. Their access to London's nights was limited by the risks the night-time posed to women. In film, female journalists were, on occasion, shown to be shrewd and talented, but also conformed to stereotypes by reporting on human interest stories rather than 'hard' news. As with the depiction of female police officers explored in the next chapter, newspapers usually did not highlight the existence of female journalists, and films treated them largely as comic relief.

This chapter has explored the real-life figure of the British interwar journalist alongside their cinematic counterpart. In interwar films, journalists were not depicted as fighters for truth and justice. Rather, when journalists were main characters in films they were usually undertaking an investigation in tandem with the police. Once the investigation was resolved at the end of the film, the society depicted in the film resumed its status quo. Films show journalists actively collaborating with the police and government to minimise any possible disruption to society. This is a significant difference from later cinematic depictions of journalists, which have been more widely explored in existing scholarship. During the British interwar period, the role of the journalist was primarily perceived as disseminating information, rather than holding those in power to account.

## **Chapter 5: The Metropolitan Police in interwar film and press**

This chapter explores the representation of the professional group with the most ubiquitous presence in the London night in the interwar period, in British films and popular newspapers: the police. The London Bobby functions, both then and now, as a sign for British national identity. His (or her) trademark uniform was shorthand for positive values such as temperance, justice and kindness.<sup>1</sup> The British police force was commonly viewed by contemporary commentators as the 'best police in the world', and the Metropolitan Police in London was the oldest and best-known of the British police forces.<sup>2</sup> The police was also inextricably linked with the night-time, as patrolling the city after dark was one of the Met's core activities from its inception. As this work has found, the police officer was one of the types most likely to figure in imaginations of nocturnal London during the interwar period, further confirming the relationship between the police and the night.

In the 1920s the Metropolitan Police came under increased scrutiny after a string of scandals dented its reputation. All these scandals were linked to night-time activities, which highlights the transgressive potential of the night. This chapter considers how police activity was reported on in the popular press, and how police officers were depicted in fiction films. It makes a distinction between the figure of the Bobby and that of the detective inspector working for Scotland Yard. As the first female officers entered the force in 1919, the chapter also considers how this sub-set of officers was presented in the popular mass media.<sup>3</sup> The primary sources that are discussed in this chapter are considered in relation to these two areas of change for the interwar

Metropolitan Police: the inclusion of female officers and the increased public scrutiny the police were subject to.

Scholars have argued that during the interwar years, British films depicted police officers primarily as comic characters, and that this trend only ended with the release of *The Blue Lamp* in 1950.<sup>4</sup> This thesis undertakes a systemic assessment of the representation of police officers in interwar British film, and has not found evidence to support the argument that these roles were exclusively comic. This chapter argues that the interwar period was not a monolithic period of comedy representations of the police, as assumed by other scholars. Instead, the depiction of police officers in popular mass media during this period supports the image that British society was essentially stable, regardless of any political upheaval, or scandals relating to the Metropolitan Police itself during this time.

In British films of the interwar period, the police were the professional group most often shown to be at work in night-time London. Police activity was also regularly reported on, and scrutinised, by the popular press. Journalists and police officers had a symbiotic relationship, with each depending on the other for information. Police officers were also concerned with the control of newly mobile women, as is explored in this thesis's last chapter in relation to soliciting legislation. The physical expansion of the city, explored in chapters 2 and 3, posed new challenges for the Met as officers' patrols now had to cover a much larger area. As the front-line face of law enforcement, the police functioned as a stand-in for the powers of the state in day-to-day life. An exploration of police representations in the interwar mass media is therefore essential to understanding how the influence of the state on London night-life was viewed in this period.



## **Police scandals in the interwar period**

Long before the Metropolitan Police was founded, law enforcement entities were intimately associated with controlling the night-time. Prior to the establishment of a formal police force, the patrolling of London's night-time streets was done by night watchmen, a profession that dated back to the thirteenth century. The night watchmen were one of the first clearly identifiable and sanctioned groups which worked solely after dark in the early modern period. The Metropolitan Police force was founded in 1829 in response to an apparent increase in criminal activity in the capital, and government fears of riots and crowd actions. The force was responsible for maintaining order in the whole capital, excepting the City of London, which retained its own police force as part of its unusual administrative duties. The police directly descended from a system that was established specifically to govern the night-time city, and this remained a key task for the Met's officers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Metropolitan Police patrolled the streets of the capital round the clock. Bobbies carried a police whistle which they blew to call for assistance from colleagues. According to police historian Clive Emsley, on night-time patrols 'the officer looked out for open doors and windows, checked that premises were locked' and 'had a relatively free hand in spotting and questioning anyone out late.'<sup>5</sup> In the night-time city, the Bobby was a constant presence to remind Londoners of the increased state control over the previously relatively unregulated night and the individuals moving through the city during these hours.

During the interwar period the Metropolitan Police's reputation for trustworthiness and respectability was challenged by a series of scandals which were all concerned with

the way the Met policed night-time vice. This thesis argues that the scandals had both a direct and an indirect influence on how cinema, in particular, displayed police officers during the interwar period. The impact of the scandals on the representation of the police in newspapers was limited, as newspaper reporters, more so than filmmakers, were mindful not to undermine the police's status in society, given that, as noted in the previous chapter, journalists often depended on police officers for information and vice versa.

In 1927 and 1928, the Met's tackling of street prostitution came under scrutiny. One of the force's key objectives was to tackle prostitution and other 'street offences', in particular in the West End, where this type of crime could negatively affect the important night-time pleasure economy.<sup>6</sup> It was the act of soliciting that was a crime (see also chapter 6). Convictions in soliciting cases often relied solely on the testimony of a police officer who witnessed the crime taking place.<sup>7</sup>

After a string of soliciting cases collapsed in court, a Street Offences Committee was set up which concluded that prostitution laws should be reformed, and that in future a prosecution for prostitution would require evidence from the 'aggrieved party.' In other words, it would no longer be enough for a police officer to determine that a woman was a prostitute on the basis of her appearance or behaviour. The Committee's recommendation implied that police officers were unable to accurately identify criminal behaviour, a suggestion underwritten by the lack of convictions for soliciting. Despite the press's positive response to the recommendations, they were not implemented and police powers of arrest were not curbed.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, the press reported on concerns about the Met's tactics for questioning suspects, particularly if they were female. Historian John Carter Wood has

explored how police were criticised for exercising so-called 'third-degree' questioning which involved placing suspects under considerable psychological pressure during cross-examination. Some instances of this were reported in the first half of the 1920s, but the matter was pushed into prominence in 1928, in no small part due to extensive press reporting. In March of that year newspapers reported on the 'third degree' questioning of Beatrice Pace, whose husband had died under mysterious circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Pace was acquitted of murder a few months later.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after the Pace arrest, police arrested 22-year old Irene Savidge on suspicion of soliciting in Hyde Park in a separate incident. In April 1928, Savidge and economist and former minister Sir Leo Chiozza Money were arrested for 'indecentcy' in Hyde Park.<sup>11</sup> They were arrested by a plain-clothes police officer. Because of the public profile of Sir Leo, the case attracted a lot of attention. However, it was based solely on police evidence and collapsed when brought to trial.

Subsequent to the case's dismissal, Irene Savidge was interrogated by the police for five hours as part of the investigation into the wrongful arrest. When her rough treatment by the police was reported in Parliament, it resulted in a public outcry and two parliamentary investigations which the press extensively reported, so audiences would have been well aware of the incident.<sup>12</sup>

Before these investigations had a chance to start, however, yet another scandal developed. In July 1928 a 21-year old woman called Helene Adele was arrested by two police officers, and charged with insulting behaviour and breaching the peace. However, according to Adele, the police officers had propositioned her, rather than the other way around, and had even threatened to sexually abuse her. Her story could be

corroborated by witnesses and the two officers were brought to trial. They were found guilty, dismissed from the force, and sent to prison.<sup>13</sup>

This string of scandals, all of which were reported in the press, damaged the Metropolitan Police's reputation. A picture started to emerge of a police force that was unchecked and increasingly felt able to dispense justice by its own measures without apparent fear of repercussion. In all cases the behaviour and decision-making of ordinary patrolling officers was questioned and challenged. The biggest scandal, however, was still to come, and centred around a sergeant rather than an ordinary PC.

The Goddard case has been extensively researched from various perspectives by historians.<sup>14</sup> In 1928, Sergeant George Goddard was found guilty of accepting bribe money from a range of Soho night-club entrepreneurs, in return for giving them prior warning of police raids, and turning a blind eye to the illegal sale of liquor in their clubs. One of the co-respondents in the case was 'nightclub queen' Kate Meyrick, who ran a series of notorious nightclubs in interwar Soho. The Goddard case stood out because of Goddard's seniority and long career within the police force. His arrest uncovered wider cultural problems within the force that had allowed Goddard to continue his corruption for years, despite anonymous tip-offs about his misconduct.<sup>15</sup>

Police monitoring of nightclubs had also come under scrutiny for different reasons. The practice of sending plain-clothes police officers into clubs to gather evidence of illegal activities did not sit comfortably with the public.<sup>16</sup> As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the police reports filed after such observations raised questions about how much the officers used these evenings for their own entertainment rather than for gathering evidence.<sup>17</sup> Judith Walkowitz has considered these undercover police officers as transgressive figures, 'crossing class boundaries in a social masquerade

that set the nightclub apart from everyday life.’<sup>18</sup> Walkowitz notes that the press set the plainclothes undercover police officer up as ‘both humorous and troubling, precisely because they inverted the conventional idea of the bobby as a highly disciplined, regimented servant of the state.’<sup>19</sup>

Some cinematic depictions of undercover officers were more nuanced. The 1932 film comedy *A Night Like This*,<sup>20</sup> for example, centres around a traffic control police officer who decides to do an undercover observation of a nightclub to investigate a secret gambling den. The officer, Michael Mahoney, wants to use the case to get promoted to be an inspector. In a film full of farcical comedy characters, Mahoney is one of the straighter personalities. He is shown to enjoy his time in the nightclub, not least because his girlfriend works there, but Mahoney never loses sight of the purpose of his visit and does not partake in any illegal activities. At the end of the film, he has gathered enough evidence of the illegal gambling activities going on that he can alert the officers at the local police station, who duly sweep in and clear the place.

Unlike the real-life cases that were criticised in the press, where officers undertook multiple observations of nightclubs without it resulting in any action, Mahoney puts an end to the illegal activity in the club after a single night’s observation. *A Night Like This* offers Mahoney as a sympathetic and resourceful individual and his undercover work has clear purpose. The film works hard to present undercover activity in a rather more positive light, by making the fictional version more effective than its real-life counterpart. *A Night Like This* acts as a positive antidote against repeated negative press reporting on police observations of nightclubs.

The late 1920s, then, saw a peak in negative press reporting on police activity. In all the scandals related above, the popular press played a key part in raising awareness

and applying political pressure. The Helene Adele case was used by the press to point out systemic issues with the Metropolitan Police. After the police officers' trial, Adele published her version of events in the *Sunday News*, thus capitalising on the case's notoriety and using it for financial gain.<sup>21</sup> The popular press in turn used these female-centred scandals to attract more women readers.<sup>22</sup>

The Savidge case got copious press attention because the man with whom Savidge was seen turned out to be a prominent Labour Party member.<sup>23</sup> Kate Meyrick was a well-known figure in the London entertainment scene, and her clubs were visited by debutants and film stars.<sup>24</sup> This gave her a second-hand fame which caused journalists to write about her. Despite the string of scandals, police historian Clive Emsley has argued that these reports were 'not typical of the policeman's portrayal in the press.'<sup>25</sup> However, due to the substantial press interest in the cases, these 'few instances' significantly impacted on the reputation of the Met.

In Emsley's view, both the press and the cinema primarily considered the Bobby as 'honest and moderate in his behaviour'<sup>26</sup> and the scandals are no more than 'a few instances of clumsy, oppressive behaviour towards individuals.'<sup>27</sup> By reporting on the 'scandals' as isolated incidents that could be blamed on misconduct of individual officers, the press did not investigate possible structural problems within the Metropolitan Police. The primary press sampling conducted for this work supports the stance that on the whole, popular newspapers' reporting on the police in the interwar period was respectful and positive. Although journalists held the police accountable in cases of gross misconduct, generally it was not in the popular press' interest to undermine the credibility of the police.

Journalists and police officers depended on one another for information and assistance. A consistently negative representation of the police in the press would damage those relationships and potentially diminish the police's standing in the community, which in turn could cause disruption in society. A generally positive representation of the Metropolitan Police therefore fitted with the interwar mass media's interest to perpetuate the status quo in society and allowed journalists to execute their profession more efficiently.

The 1930s were a less turbulent decade for the Metropolitan Police: the decade was spent on modernisation (through the increased adoption of patrol cars)<sup>28</sup> and, in the latter half of the decade, preparation for war.<sup>29</sup> The increased number of motorists on the road shifted the Met's attention from moral crimes to road traffic incidents.<sup>30</sup> However, the scandals of the 1920s echoed through in the cinema of the 1930s, which, in some cases, problematized the figure of the London police officer.

Even in the late 1930s films still represented police officers as being primarily concerned with eradicating 'moral' crimes such as prostitution, gambling and gang-related crimes. None of the films reviewed for this thesis showed police officers tackling motor-related breaches of the law such as speeding, despite the apparent cinematic appeal of car chases. The equipment required for recording sound film severely limited the mobility of the cameras used in 1930s filmmaking.<sup>31</sup> Hitchcock's *Blackmail* clearly illustrates this difference: the film's famed opening sequence, shot on cameras without sound equipment, is a dynamic montage of the Metropolitan Police's crime detection methods which includes speeding through London by car. The portions of the film shot with synchronised sound, by contrast, deploy static camera positions.

Partly due to these technical limitations, cinema instead remained primarily concerned with police officers who tackled morally transgressive behaviour, and continued to present police work as ambulatory and not reliant on technical innovations. As a result, the representation of the police in interwar cinema is fairly narrow and clichéd and, as the interwar period progressed, it became less and less aligned with the reality of police work.

### **Newspaper reporting on the police**

In the newspapers reviewed for this work, police officers are featured in articles on night-time London in 65 reports in the *Express*, 42 reports in the *Mail*, and 45 reports in the *Mirror* (12.8%, 10.5% and 10.8% of all night time reports in the *Express*, *Mail* and *Mirror* respectively). Compared to the number of films that featured police officers (57% of the sample for this thesis) it is clear that newspapers represented police officers a lot less frequently and explicitly than films did. Part of the reason for this has to do with the medium itself: newspaper articles usually only foregrounded police officers in stories relating to major crimes or to the aforementioned police scandals - instances where the police force itself was the news. Where a film features a Bobby in the background of a scene, the equivalent would not be included in a newspaper article as the journalist would simply remove the police officer as interlocutor, and relate the event to the public directly. Journalists erased the police from day-to-day reporting whereas films consistently positioned police officers as part of the normal London community.

For both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* the year with the highest number of articles about the police was 1928 (there was no discernible peak year in the coverage included in the *Daily Mail*). 62.5% of the articles included in the *Mirror* in 1928 which



were concerned with the police and London nightlife, related to the arrest of Sergeant Goddard and the persecution of Kate Meyrick. This high-profile case clearly had a significant influence on the representation of police in the popular press in that year. The increase in articles on the police in 1928 was directly caused by negative reporting on this scandal.

Mrs Meyrick had a certain, carefully cultivated, celebrity as the 'Night Club Queen of London' prior to her arrest.<sup>32</sup> This is likely a reason why the corruption case involving her and Goddard received significant press attention. None of the other police scandals referenced earlier in this chapter generated any news reporting in the newspapers sampled for this thesis. Other historians who have written about the interwar police scandals do state that these scandals received significant press attention.<sup>33</sup> These press reports did not emerge from the sampling done for this work because this thesis looks at a small number of titles, across an extended period of time. Other historians have considered a much wider range of newspaper titles in relation to specific incidents and dates. As a result, they have unearthed numerous reports relating to each police scandal. The sampling methodology used for the current research shows that these articles notwithstanding, compared to the overall output of the three most popular newspapers the police scandals did not generate a significant amount of publicity.

As noted in chapter 1, nocturnal crime was a popular topic for newspapers to cover during the interwar period, with a total of 356 articles in the sample relating to criminal activity. This is 26.9% of the total number of articles relating to night-time activities in the sample. As also noted in the first chapter, many of these articles did not include reference to the police – but almost all articles that did refer to the police were concerned with criminal activities. The research sample includes 129 articles that

relate to both the police and criminal activity across all three newspaper titles and the whole 20-year period. In the same time span there were only 23 articles which related to the police but not to criminal activities. In other words, 84.9% of articles about the police related the police to the investigation and resolution of crimes.

It was rare for newspaper articles to report on police officers or actions in a context that did not include criminal activity. Newspapers sometimes published background reports on the workings of the Met, such as in 1921, when the *Daily Express* reported on the 'Grim and Eerie Task of the River Police' which patrolled the Thames.<sup>34</sup> The features of urban living also occasionally meant that the police were called in for assistance to manage the ever-present crowds. In 1927 a hoaxer led people to believe that the popular Prince of Wales would be attending the Mile End Pavilion theatre. So many people thronged the streets that police officers had to be called away from their annual celebratory dinner to assist with crowd control.<sup>35</sup>

These sporadic reports highlighted some of the other duties of the police force of the capital: keeping the peace, managing crowds, and navigating busy traffic. The vast majority of reports, however, directly linked the police to serious criminal activity. Reporters used formal police statements in their articles on criminal cases to provide detail on the crime and on any fugitive suspects to their readers, as demonstrated in the reporting on murders discussed in the next chapter. Police statements were taken to be the formal account of the crime and suspects, which journalists then embellished with interviews with neighbours and atmospheric pieces. Ultimately, though, journalists deferred to the police to provide the 'truth' on any crime.

The discrepancy between the prevalence of police officers in films, and the relatively low number of newspaper reports including police officers, indicates that cinema

ascribed the police a much greater role in night-time London than newspapers did. In newspaper reports, police officers are only occasional participants, and generally are only referenced in the context of serious crime. In films, the police officer is a staple of the nocturnal city, the professional group that is most regularly featured in the night-time city. Cinema frequently ascribes police officers the role of guardian of morals and mores. Arguably, the press itself fulfilled the role of policing immoral behaviour in society at large, and therefore it did not require to refer to police officers to undertake this function. By reporting on cases of supposed 'deviance' such as cross-dressing,<sup>36</sup> newspapers aligned themselves with the cinematic police officers who monitored the behaviour of courting couples.

Only a small number of articles across the complete sample of newspapers relate to the policing of inappropriate behaviour, as is demonstrated by the Bobbies at the end of *Pygmalion* who admonish a young couple for kissing in the street. Such reports were only occasionally included in the newspapers included in the primary material sampling undertaken for this thesis, for example in December 1925 when the *Mirror* reported that Lord Suffield, a 28-year-old aristocrat, had been remanded for drunk and disorderly behaviour as he was trying to gain access to the Cabaret Club on Noel Street in Soho.<sup>37</sup> The drunk man's family title, which was made explicit in the article's headline 'Peer's Visit to Night Club', no doubt ensured that this particular arrest was reported on in great detail. The article included references that the Lord's friends had insisted to the police that they could not arrest a 'peer of the realm.' It allowed the middle-class readers of the newspaper to reflect on the poor behaviour of those supposedly above them in standing, and the lack of respect they showed for the police.

Occasionally there were also instances of gender policing. In March 1937 police were reported by the *Daily Express* to have arrested a woman dressed in man's clothes.<sup>38</sup>

The cross-dressing in itself was not the reason for the arrest, but the woman had been employed as a male servant in a house where a theft was subsequently discovered. The woman's ambiguous gender identity was quoted as the main reason for her to be considered a suspicious character by the police. These reports were fairly rare, though, despite the historical evidence for widespread gender and sexuality policing, particularly in the first half of the interwar period.<sup>39</sup> That 'moral' crimes were not regularly reported on in the popular press indicates that newspaper editors did not consider these reports to be responding to readers' interests.

### **The police on film**

The Metropolitan Police is the single most visible organisation active at night in British films between 1919 and 1939. Of the 80 films included in this work, 45 contain police officers working at night (57%). There are two distinct types of police officers shown in films: uniformed police constables patrolling the streets, and inspectors investigating specific crimes. Their different duties dictate what their characters are shown to be doing: Bobbies keep an eye out on the street, to ensure that order is maintained, and they are first on the scene when a crime has been committed. Sometimes Bobbies are presented in large anonymous groups that swarm into the frame to dispense justice. The inspector is given more prominence and individuality: constables are usually shown briefly and their characters are not named - in fact they often do not even have dialogue. The inspector on the other hand tends to be a main character, or *the* main character, and he (as he is always male) normally provides a significant contribution to the plot.

Of the 45 films identified that include police officers (either Bobbies, or inspectors, or both), 17 are crime or gangster stories, 17 are (musical) comedies, and 11 are

(melo)dramas. Two of the films include women officers. The depiction of police constables is serious as often as it is comic. These figures show the extent to which police officers were a common-place part of interwar films across genres, and they complicate assumptions that in the interwar era films generally made fun of police officers. The spread of genres also shows that police officers were depicted as being involved in a range of night-time activities: not just the tackling of hard crime, but also stage performances (the usual topic of musical comedies of the period) and interpersonal relationships (the primary topic of melodramas).

Although the BBFC did not have an explicit rule about the acceptable depiction of the police in film, its annual reports from just before and just after the First World War do make reference to films being censored for including 'incidents injurious to the reputation of Governmental Departments' and 'Scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions'.<sup>40</sup> Both categories are suitably broad that they could allow the BBFC to apply restrictions to the depictions of police officers. The BBFC, however, was an industry-led organisation and there was general consensus in the industry on the type of representations the BBFC should seek to restrict. The existence of limited restrictions on the depiction of police officers should, therefore, not be seen as an external imposition on the industry's freedom, but rather a reflection of an agreement between film professionals that it was not appropriate for films to negatively portray the government or its representatives.

### **The cinematic police inspector**

My research has found that in interwar British cinema, the detective inspector character tended to appear in crime films, where he was tasked with resolving the case at the heart of the film's plot. None of the films that this thesis has identified to

include a detective inspector make fun of said inspector, even if the overall tone of the film is light-hearted. Generally speaking, the inspectors are presented as competent and ultimately able to bring the right culprit to justice. In the aforementioned *A Night Like This*, an aspiring police inspector is shown to be clearly enjoying his time undercover in a nightclub. He spends most of the film's running time chatting with his girlfriend, who happens to be working in the club. The inspector is charming and witty, and, despite a number of farcical mishaps, ultimately successful in his mission by the end of the film, when he is able to mop up the illegal gambling party that is taking place on the club's top floor. The film's main comedy character is a wealthy but clueless patron of the club, next to whom the inspector appears street-wise and capable.

It was more common to see a Scotland Yard inspector featured in crime thrillers. A number of popular crime writer Edgar Wallace's stories were adapted for film in the interwar period, and they tend to focus on a male detective. In the late 1930s pulp crime film *The Dark Eyes of London*, Detective Inspector Larry Holt investigates the murder of a man whose corpse washes up on the Thames embankment one night. He is assisted by an American colleague who is in London to gain experience at Scotland Yard, which underscores the perception that Scotland Yard is such a high-quality force that it has an international reputation. The American character allows the film to include a dramatic scene at the film's climax, in which the American officer manages to shoot and injure the murderer. British police officers were never armed, but in the film's world foreign agents are allowed to carry and use their weapons on British soil, which enhances the dramatic climax of the film.

Compared to the American inspector, DI Holt is professional and reserved. He does, however, in the course of his investigation, pretend to be a taxi driver in order to make contact with the daughter of the murder victim. She then assists the police with their

investigation and acts as a love interest for Holt. Holt is resourceful and, although he engages in flirtations with the woman, he ultimately abides by the rules and processes of the Yard and does not engage in inappropriate behaviour.

In *The Squeaker*, another Wallace adaptation, the audience is introduced to Barrabal, a hard-drinking ex-cop who has fallen on hard times, and who is offered a chance of professional redemption if he manages to catch the mysterious jewel thief 'the Squeaker.' Barrabal fits the mould of many fictional detectives of the second half of the twentieth century: troubled, alcohol-dependent and unorthodox. However, these potential character flaws do not impede his professional judgement. At the end of the film, he is reinstated in the force after successfully solving the criminal case. During the film he gets assistance from a friendly crime reporter, in return for which he provides the reporter with scoops on the ongoing investigation. The film presents this mutually beneficial relationship as unremarkable and unproblematic.

The main female character in *The Squeaker*, Tamara, is a nightclub performer, and part of the film's action duly takes place in the nightclub, which Barrabal also visits. This linking of police, crime, and nightclubs is a common trope in British interwar cinema, and is, for example, also found in *Murder in Soho* and *Night Birds*.<sup>41</sup> As plain-clothes detectives, inspectors are able to freely access potentially criminal spaces where they are able to mix with people of all parts of society.

None of the films challenge the appropriateness of police officers visiting nightclubs on duty, even though this topic was hotly debated in the popular press of the period, as noted above. In the films viewed for this thesis, there is no question that the inspectors will behave professionally, regardless of the environment they are in. This further strengthened the message to audiences that police officers were upstanding

characters, which may have gone some way to counterbalance the more critical reporting in the popular press at the time.

DI Holt and DI Barrabal both end up resolving their respective cases, which is the case for the majority of police inspectors in films reviewed for this thesis. There are exceptions, however. *Blackmail* features the junior inspector Frank, who is the love interest of Alice, the film's main character. The focus of the film is on the increasingly fraught psychological state of Alice, who murders a man in self-defence. A large part of her anguish is caused by the fact that her boyfriend is a Scotland Yard inspector who is assigned to the murder case; she is sure that Frank's investigation will eventually lead to her. The film's opening famously demonstrates the Yard's use of modern technology, such as radio equipment and finger-prints, in the pursuit of criminals.<sup>42</sup>

Frank himself, however, comes across as amiable but not particularly shrewd: he does not initially pursue Alice as a possible suspect in the murder he is investigating. Their emotional proximity means he is unable to fathom her as a suspect. This is despite Alice's nervousness and changed behaviour, and despite the fact that a man named Tracy tells him that Alice is the culprit. Instead, Frank chooses to believe that Tracy is the real murderer. He lets his personal feelings cloud his professional judgement. Frank's pursuit of Tracy is so vigorous that ultimately, Tracy dies as he is being chased across London by the police.

Frank is one of the least competent police inspectors appearing in the films this thesis covers. His incompetence is a commentary on how technological developments may not necessarily lead to better resolution of criminal cases as the human factor is still key. It also leaves the ending of the film ambiguous: although Alice escapes



punishment for the murder, the implication is that she has to keep this secret for the rest of her life, which will be an intolerable burden to her.

The fact that Alice walks free of criminal charges at the end of *Blackmail* is an exception compared to other interwar crime films. No other film in the sample surveyed for this thesis included wrongful imprisonment of an innocent person. Either the right person is caught and convicted, or the criminal dies and the case is closed. In *Blackmail* a variation on the latter happens, as the suspect who dies is not the real killer. That an overwhelming number of films end with the right person being punished for the crime demonstrates that interwar cinema was invested in presenting the British criminal justice system as functional and trustworthy. In the press, too, the general depiction of the police is as a professional body fulfilling an important function in society.

Despite doubts about individual police officers or police practices during investigations, on the whole Scotland Yard were presented in the interwar mass media as capable of bringing the right people to justice. There was no deeper probing in films or newspapers of potential underlying issues with the Metropolitan Police. Any such challenges could have caused social unrest in a country which already witnessed political upheavals, in particular during the 1920s. Causing further disruptions would have affected the commercial stability of both the popular newspaper and film industries, which was not in the interest of newspaper editors or filmmakers.

### **The British Bobby on film**

Aside from inspectors, the Metropolitan Police was also regularly represented on film by its patrolling officers, the Bobbies. Bobbies in interwar cinema are often represented as conducting policing of behaviours as well as policing actual crime. They are

normally recognisable by their distinctive uniform, and, except for in two films discussed below, they are always (white) men.<sup>43</sup>

The 1930 film *Escape!*<sup>44</sup>, which is discussed in the following chapter in relation to its depiction of prostitution in its opening scene, also features police officers in the same key scene. In the film's opening, the main character, Captain Denant, is approached by a prostitute in Hyde Park. Denant good-naturedly rejects her offer of company and is about to go on his way, when a plain-clothes police officer stops the woman and asks Denant to confirm that she was soliciting. Because Denant does not want to get the woman in trouble, he tries to brush the officer off.

When the officer blows his police whistle, the film shows that uniformed Bobbies, which were regulating traffic around Marble Arch, start off in the direction of Denant and the woman. Before they arrive on the scene, Denant punches the plain-clothes officer in an attempt to silence his whistle. When the Bobbies appear moments later, it becomes clear that Denant's actions have killed the plain-clothes officer. The Bobbies immediately cordon off the area and call for an ambulance. The accidental killing of the officer leads to Denant being locked away in Dartmoor Prison. The rest of the film is concerned with his escape and his eventual voluntary return to serve out his sentence.

The Bobby whistling for reinforcement is a regular occurrence in interwar cinema, and also happens, for example, in *The Lodger* when a Bobby finds one of the victims of the eponymous murderer. The Metropolitan Police's patrolling system did work like this in reality: it depended on each officer patrolling a separate 'beat' or area of London, but each beat was close enough to the next that the sound of a whistle would be audible to officers patrolling nearby. Its depiction in *Escape!* portrays the Metropolitan

police as a well-oiled machine that is immediately responsive to any threats. Although the initial officer on the scene in *Escape!* is not clearly identifiable, once a crime is committed the force is shown to be able to quickly become very visible. The film does not challenge the view that the Metropolitan police functions well, is omnipresent and is able to detect and apprehend criminals. The police's ability to monitor all of the capital's citizens is also not challenged.

The police in the film conduct themselves appropriately, and it is Denant who commits a crime when he attacks the officer, although the attack is not premeditated and not intended to do the harm that it does. The film therefore does not problematize the functioning of the Met in the way that had happened in newspaper reporting on the scandals. It does not question the police's ability to identify and tackle crime. Although the remainder of *Escape!* chronicles Denant's attempts to escape from Dartmoor prison, at the end of the film he willingly returns to prison to sit out his sentence. The film's messages are clear: you should not obstruct the police; and if you commit a crime you should accept the penalty as proscribed by law.

The scene in *Escape!* highlights the difference in role and remit of the uniformed Bobby and the plain-clothes officer. As Denant enters the park, a uniformed Bobby is visible patrolling in the crowd. When the criminal act occurs, however, it is observed by the officer who is not immediately identifiable, precisely because the woman would have known not to solicit Denant in the vicinity of a Bobby. The plain-clothes tactic employed by the police is shown to be effective for the initial detection of crime, but the solitary unarmed officer is also at risk. The group of Bobbies which arrives at the scene a few minutes later are immediately able to take control over the crowd by virtue of their numbers, uniforms, and truncheons. Denant does not attempt to question their authority or fight his way out of the situation, as he knows he will not be able to escape

the group of uniformed officers. The individual officer posed to Denant an opportunity of stopping the application of the law. When faced with a group of Bobbies, Denant knows that any attempt at resistance is useless.

The soliciting incident in the film can be read as a commentary on the real-life Irene Savidge case, as this also involved an upper middle-class man getting caught up in an accusation of soliciting in Hyde Park. The difference between the real case and the fictional representation is that in reality both woman and man were cleared of any wrongdoing, whereas in *Escape!* there is no ambiguity that the woman is soliciting and therefore is engaging in criminal behaviour.

Bobbies are regularly shown in other interwar films, too, to operate in groups or masses. At the end of *A Night Like This*, Inspector Mahoney telephones the station once he is confident there is an illegal gambling ring operating in the club he is observing. A large number of uniformed officers then enter the club and proceed to take the details of everyone present in the gambling room. As in *Escape!*, a single plain-clothes officer detects the crime, after which a group of uniformed police come in to make the arrests.

The Metropolitan Police Force is also shown to operate as a well-oiled, if perhaps not very effective, machine in the 1939 film *Dead Men Are Dangerous*. The main character of this film, Aylmer Franklyn, is being sought in connection with a murder which he has nothing to do with. Franklyn initially manages to stay out of the police's hands. However, around half-way through the film, the police have located him in Hyde Park. The officers surround the park and then form a large dense line to sweep through the park step by step. This should be an effective way of searching the vast open space, and the Bobbies are shown to arrest four homeless men they find in the park. But the

film allows Franklyn to escape by climbing up a tree, and subsequently to get into a garden of one of the houses adjacent to the park. *Dead Men Are Dangerous* depicts the Metropolitan Police as efficient and organised, but also as unable to flexibly respond to the wits of an individual. Franklyn's innocence makes it acceptable for him to stay out of the police's hands until he can prove that he has nothing to do with the crime.

Bobbies could also be shown to undertake a 'moral' policing of the community. Near the end of the 1938 film *Pygmalion*, the film's heroine, Eliza, walks down the night-time street with Freddy, a young man who has fallen in love with her. When Freddy kisses Eliza, the pair are admonished by a Bobby who grumbles 'This isn't Paris, you know!'. After the Bobby walks off, Freddy and Eliza kiss again, only to be told off again by a second officer. The film presents these interventions as entirely normal: Freddy and Eliza do not protest them or question the police officers' authority to monitor their behaviour in this way. The police in this scene fulfil a function that goes beyond mere law enforcement and moves into enforcing a particular set of behaviours.

The first Bobby's comment here references the supposed difference between London and Paris: the first prides itself on being respectable and staid at night, whereas the population of the second had looser morals. It is significant that it is a Bobby who establishes in this scene what is appropriately 'British' behaviour. The Bobby itself functions as such an emblem of national identity and as noted above, the Bobby's role and uniform were explicitly articulated to be in opposition to the French police. As a representation of the British State and its national identity, the Bobby has the power to decide what is, and what is not, appropriate British behaviour.

Another example demonstrates how the recognisable uniform allowed filmmakers to subvert the representation of the Bobby. In the 1936 musical comedy *Cheer Up!* two down-on-their-luck playwrights manage, by the end of the film, to put on a successful musical stage production called 'London Town'. This show purports to portray typical features of the capital, and includes a male chorus line dressed up as Bobbies (see fig. 13).



Fig. 13: Bobby chorus line in *Cheer Up!* (Leo Mittler, 1936) courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd

The final ensemble piece of the fictional theatre show (which also marks the end of the film itself) puts together a range of 'typical' London characters and includes a Bobby. The Bobby's uniform makes him a clearly distinguishable and compulsory part of the London street scene, as represented in the theatrical production within the film. But the dancing chorus line of Bobbies also subverts the assumed type of the masculine representatives of the law. Within the theatrical production, the Bobby becomes a playful background character, a good-natured part of the community.

In that sense, the representation of the Bobby in *Cheer Up!* comes closest to what is commonly assumed to be the only type of representation of the Bobby in British

interwar cinema: comic and not particularly authoritative. But this representation occurs *within* a fictional production that purports to show 'typical London life'. In other screen representations that show Bobbies in a less self-conscious and self-reflexive way, their representations are more varied, ranging from strong arm of the law to concerned community support officer.

### **Female police officers in film and newspapers**

At the end of the nineteenth century there was an increased interest in appointing women in the police force. This interest came from two distinct groups: suffragettes who saw the introduction of female police officers as a step towards gender equality; and social reform activists who felt that women could give better moral guidance and leadership to other women who may be at risk of becoming prostitutes. The Met started employing 'Police Matrons' in the 1880s. The role of these women was to visit and support female convicts, rather than conducting day-to-day policing.<sup>45</sup>

Women started serving as voluntary police officers during the First World War. This development was enabled by the increased flexibility of gendered activities during this period. The women undertaking patrols in this period were primarily concerned with protecting women and children from a patriarchal justice system, and preventing women's slide into prostitution. Their role was formalised after the war, when the Met appointed 110 women police to serve in the force.

However, women police were expected to do jobs commensurate to their gender, which generally meant dealing with women and children only. The number of women police officers remained small until the Second World War.<sup>46</sup> In the newspapers sampled for this work, no reference is made to female police officers. This is likely partially because there were few female officers in the force, but it also demonstrates

that their presence was not considered to constitute something newsworthy. Instead, newspaper reporting perpetuates the notion that all police officers are men.

Female police officers are absent in the newspapers sampled for this thesis. This is partly explained by the general appearance of police officers in newspapers: except for the scandals outlined at the start of this chapter, newspaper reports tended not to identify individual police officers. Police officers worked as representatives of the force and, by extension, the state. Their individual characteristics should not matter and rank-and-file officers should not become well-known to the public.

The absence of female police officers in the popular press can also be explained by the constitution of the journalism workforce in the same period. Like police officers, journalists were also mostly men, a characteristic that was further explored in the previous chapter. As indicated above, journalists and police officers could have mutually beneficial relationships: journalists helped police officers in gathering information about crime investigations, and in return police officers tipped off journalists about new stories. It is likely that male journalists sought to cultivate those relationships with male police officers, and vice versa. Female police officers therefore remained outside of this symbiotic relationship with the press. Finally, the kind of work that women officers were expected to do centred around supporting women and children, groups that were also less likely to receive attention from the press.

Two of the 80 films sampled in this research project included speaking roles for female police officers: *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939) and *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932). As was noted in chapter 3, a stern-looking female police officer makes a very brief appearance as one of the characters in a Tube carriage, in the opening scene of *Underground*. Her presence here, amongst other instantly recognisable characters,



highlights how, by the middle of the interwar period, the female police officer already summoned instant stereotypical ideas. In her basic form she was strict, unfeminine and a kill-joy. The two films explored here which depict the female officer at greater length, both subvert that stereotype in different ways.

In *The Dark Eyes of London*, the presence of female police officers at the Met is much commented on by the American officer, Lieutenant O'Reilly, who is present throughout the film. He implies that the women are there for the benefit of the male police officers, who may find their presence comforting. O'Reilly also laughs when a female officer walks past him in the police station's corridor. His surprise at finding a female police officer in the station implies to the viewer that female officers did not exist in the US, and that Britain was more progressive in this area. In reality, female police officers held a similar position in the US as in Britain during this period.<sup>47</sup>

*The Dark Eyes of London* shows the female officer assisting and supporting the daughter of a murder victim as she comes to identify the body. This reflects the pastoral care roles that female officers were primarily assigned during the interwar period. In *The Dark Eyes of London* the female officer is competent, but has to suffer confusion and disparaging remarks from a foreigner. The British male officers in the film, on the other hand, are presented as enlightened in their acceptance of the female staff on the force. However, women were still only accepted in those roles that were considered to be suitable for them.

In *The Dark Eyes of London*, the female officer is a minor character with no dialogue. The other film in this thesis's sample that includes female police officers gives them a more prominent role. In *Looking on the Bright Side* the main character, Gracie, played by Lancashire-born comedian Gracie Fields, decides part-way through the film to

become a police officer. Early on in the film one of Gracie's neighbours is shown to be a female police officer. When Gracie's love interest and musical partner Laurie gains solo success as a popular songwriter and starts to move in upper-class circles, away from Gracie, the latter decides that she should join the police to earn her own living.

A significant segment of the film deals with Gracie's travails as a female officer. In line with Fields' comic persona, Gracie struggles to fit in to the authoritarian regime of the Met, as she shows up late to patrol and finds it difficult to march into step with the rest of the all-female squadron. The film sets up a difference between officers and sergeants. The female sergeant is mannish and strict, indicating a stereotype against women in uniforms. Both Gracie and her neighbour, however, are shown to be maternal and caring towards the neighbour's daughter. Ordinary officers are working women who, despite their tough job, exhibit traditionally 'feminine' virtues. The higher-ranking female police in the film display the negative stereotypes of authoritarian bureaucrats and adopt what are more typically considered 'male' behaviours.

The film gives no explicit rationale for Gracie's choice of career. The strict order and discipline of the police force serves to provide a stark contrast with Gracie's previous ambitions to become a singer and performer. Working as a police officer is depicted as a job that stifles all creativity. On the other hand, the police work offers a career path and stability that Gracie believes to be unavailable if she tried to make a living working on the stage. Whilst the film makes fun of the female sergeant, it does not challenge the existence of the police as a whole.

In a sequence in the second half of *Looking on the Bright Side*, Gracie is patrolling a street in the evening when she arrives at a pub just as two male officers are breaking up a fight. The male officers ask her what a female officer like her is doing in that part

of town. The film makes a clear distinction between male police officers' work and female officers' work, with some tasks or even parts of town deemed to be unfit for women to get involved in. When the two male officers ask all the working-class people in an alley to break up and go indoors, Gracie specifically speaks to a woman who is chatting to two men. The woman appears to possibly be soliciting – a crime with which it was considered appropriate for female officers to get involved.

The working-class inhabitants of the alley do not take Gracie seriously as a police officer, and they laugh at her attempts to direct them. In fact, they intimidate her so much she gets chased away just as another fight breaks out. Police whistles are audible in the background, announcing the imminent arrival of more officers. As the reinforcements arrive, Gracie punches one of the men involved in the fight, in his face. The next day she is praised by her sergeant for this heroic action, but the incident, together with the strict regime, is enough for Gracie to decide to leave the force. Her two careers are reconciled when at the film's end Gracie gives a public performance in her housing estate, and the female police force marches in and sings the background chorus to her song.

*Looking on the Bright Side* offers being a police officer up as a respectable and appropriate career for a single working-class woman or mother. However, the job is also set up to be one of discipline and ultimately boredom, which is unsuitable for Gracie. Her alternative career by the end of the film is to become a performer, a profession which the film sets up in diametrical opposition with, and in an elevated position to, being a police officer. When Gracie is in the force, other working class Londoners have little respect for her authority. As a performer, on the other hand, she is able to bring diverse groups together rather than having to separate them.

## **Managing nightlife**

Both in films and in newspaper reports, police officers were often shown to be managing typical night-time activities. Newspapers, and popular newspapers in particular, would always report on the unusual and sensational in order to sell more copies. Much of the day-to-day work done by local police officers was unremarkable from a news perspective and therefore went unreported. In fact, most of the work done by Bobbies would never be reported in the newspapers. The police were such a normal part of daily life that their presence blended in with the background. Except in occasional articles highlighting the operation of the police force, such as the aforementioned report on the work of the river police, newspapers generally did not take much of an interest.

32.5% of articles relating to police action against criminal activities at night reported crimes in the night-time economy, such as the illegal sale of liquor or the illegal operation of gambling clubs. In nearly one in three articles about the police's night-time work, newspaper audiences could read about how police officers attempted to curb vice and transgression. This encouraged the belief that the London night-time economy was a major enabler of criminal activity, and that police officers spent a significant amount of time raiding clubs and house parties.

In 1922, newspapers reported widely on the death of nightclub dancer Freda Kempton, who had died of a cocaine overdose which was supplied to her by Chinese criminal Brilliant Chang (see also p. 85). In 1926 the popular actors Ivor Novello and Constance Collier became embroiled in a minor scandal when the club he part-owned, the Fifty-Fifty club in Wardour Street, was raided by the police.<sup>48</sup> In the end no charges were made against the management of the club, who insisted that they had not breached

liquor licensing laws.<sup>49</sup> The *Express* printed the article reporting on the raid as front-page news, whereas the follow-up article which clarified that no criminal activity had taken place was printed on page 9 of the next day's paper. The fame of the club's managers clearly made the incident high-profile enough for significant press attention. It also allowed Collier to be quite critical of the raid, stating that she 'expect[ed] to receive an explanation' from the police about their action.

At the end of 1926 police officers conducted another high-profile nightclub visit, this time to the popular Kit-Cat club. All those present in the club were asked to provide their personal details, so that the police could check whether they were legitimate members of the club. The police also removed administrative papers from the club. The club's secretary was quoted as saying it was an 'ordinary police visit [...] there was no raid.' The *Mirror* report itself, however, cast doubt on the police methods by describing the undercover detectives as 'mingl[ing] unsuspected with the members' until they 'cast their disguises aside'. The visitors of the club were stated to have been 'too startled to protest.'<sup>50</sup> The language used presents the club visitors as the innocent party, and the police as unreasonable and devious.

Nightclub raids and visits continued, also after the Meyrick/Goddard case in 1928. Mrs Meyrick herself continued to run nightclubs, and her new club the 'Bunch of Keys' was reported as having been raided in February 1932. When Meyrick appeared in the dock a few months later, she was alleged to have escaped the raid via an exit on the roof of the club, demonstrating her continued resourcefulness in the face of police pressure.<sup>51</sup>

In March of 1932 police also raided the New Burlington Club, which officers found to be serving liquor without a license.<sup>52</sup> However, the changing context in which the police

was operating at this point, and the increased scrutiny they were under, meant that officers involved in the club raid were questioned about their conduct and spending during their time undercover in the club.<sup>53</sup> In the original article, published on 11 March, the testifying police officer is described as ‘a debonair young police constable with beautifully curly hair and a public school voice’ – a description which implies that the constable himself would have felt quite at home in the club. The officer was identified as ‘young Oxford graduate London policeman, P.C. Moore’ in the second article, published a week later on 18 March. Moore was accused by the club’s solicitor of having got ‘friendly’ with some of the women in the club, implying that his testimony was not reliable. Perhaps as a result of the increasing questions about police conduct during night club raids, there were fewer nightclub raids in the 1930s as the police focused their attentions on other types of crime. In this decade very few newspaper articles linked police activity with London’s leisure night-time industry.

## **Conclusion**

Police officers were well-known to conduct plain-clothes inspections of nightclubs. In the films considered for this thesis, the police regularly frequent nightclubs or find murder victims in the street at night. Characters who believe they may be in danger look out for patrolling Bobbies to ensure they are safe. This happens in *Blackmail* and *The 39 Steps*; in both these films a female character looks out of the window and sees a Bobby standing under a nearby street light, which reassures the character and makes her feel safe. In both cases this device is used ironically as the women are victims of violence regardless, and the police are oblivious to this. Although these scenes may be a result of Hitchcock’s own alleged fear of the police,<sup>54</sup> they could also be read as an oblique commentary on the police scandals of the 1920s, which showed

to the public that for women alone at night, the police could be threatening as well as helpful.

The police are certainly one of the most prevalent groups of people in the public spaces of night-time London in interwar cinema. Their presence does not require any explanation or excuse, as they would be expected to be patrolling around. Fictional Scotland Yard detectives were already being portrayed as hard-drinking sleuths whose natural habitat was the night-time city, and as such there is no explanation required as to why inspectors are out in the city at night, monitoring criminal behaviour.

Despite the real-life scandals to which the Metropolitan Police was subject in the interwar period, as related at the start of this chapter, both in newspapers and in films, the police were generally shown to act appropriately and prevail over criminal behaviour and catch criminals. There was no fundamental questioning of the authority or effectiveness of the Police, or its moral position. My research has not found any instances where films or newspapers depict a police officer as corrupt or otherwise criminal. Both the press and the cinema reinforced the notion that the Metropolitan Police was a necessary and good institution that stopped criminal behaviour and retained the status quo. Additionally, there was no real questioning of the power balance between an overwhelmingly male police force and the female half of the population.

Regardless of the number of scandals around male officers abusing their position of power, there was no wider questioning of how widespread this behaviour was. None of the films reviewed for this work include details of a male officer misbehaving towards a woman. Instead, all police officers in films are upstanding citizens who try their best to keep London, and by extension Britain, a safe place. The newspapers, too, did not

normally report critically on police officers' behaviour. Instead they usually considered the police to be a reliable and objective source of information.

My research has not found any evidence that representations of police officers in interwar cinema were solely comic, as has been contended by some scholars. Even in comedy films such as *A Night Like This*, the police officer is ultimately a respectable figure and not a character to be ridiculed. As noted above, the chorus line of police officers included in *Cheer Up!* does play with notions of masculinity and comedy in relation to the Bobby, but as this is in the context of a fictional performance within a fiction film, the impact of this is diluted. In addition to this, this thesis has uncovered numerous examples of police officers and inspectors who are depicted as law-abiding, serious and intelligent, and who may have more similarities than differences with cinematic police officers of the post-Second World War era.

Female police officers became more common during the interwar period and they were a figure of interest for the media. In the figure of the female officer, the depiction of the police officer as structured and serious was problematized by stereotypical perceptions of women as naturally caring and 'soft'. Popular newspapers avoided this conflict by not portraying female police officers at all. In films, the female officer role could be used to comic effect, to highlight women's unsuitability for the rigid work. The primary research undertaken for this thesis has not found any evidence that either media form championed the emancipation of women in this area. Instead, the introduction of female police officers was either ignored or used as a subject for jokes.

Elsewhere, the representation of the Metropolitan Police force both in popular news reporting and in fiction films underwrites Lawrence Napper's contention that interwar British films largely served to reinforce the notion as Britain as an essentially stable



society.<sup>55</sup> Real-life scandals that led the public to question police methods, did not have a significant impact on the treatment of police officers in popular media. Newspapers and films also did not raise any concerns about potential structural issues with the governance of the police. During a period of political upheaval, with the increased popularity of communism and fascism on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, the two most popular mass media of interwar Britain ensured that their outputs instructed audiences that that most unruly space, the London night, was ultimately governed in an orderly manner by representatives of the British state.

## **Chapter 6: Women on the night-time street**

This chapter explores how films and newspapers in interwar Britain negotiated young women's access to public spaces, particularly the streets, in night-time London. Historically, women had limited access the night-time street, but this changed in the interwar period, in part due to the expansion of the city and its public transport system explored in chapters 2 and 3. This chapter argues that, in the popular press and films of interwar Britain, both the mobile woman and the night-time city signify sexual transgression and danger, which must be contained in order to promote a stable society. This containment was actioned by, usually male, police officers and journalists, which are considered in more detail in the preceding chapters.

As noted in previous chapters, all three newspaper titles used in this thesis directed some or all of their content at a female readership, and women made up a small but increasing proportion of journalists during the interwar period. Cinema provided another opportunity for movement and liberation to interwar women. As explored by Chris O'Rourke, the number of young women who were looking to start acting careers in the interwar period, and who were perceived to be roaming around London in search for work, were considered a cause for concern by interwar journalists and commentators.<sup>1</sup> Film acting provided young women with the potential to earn their own living, but the press considered these aspirations largely something that put women at risk of (sexual) exploitation. It was not just appearing on the silver screen that held appeal for young women; the young, working-class, urban woman was also most likely to be a film enthusiast, visiting the cinema at least once a week.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter starts with an exploration of the representation of a specific group of mobile and sexualised women: prostitutes. It begins with a summary of relevant

legislation in place in 1920s and 1930s Britain to limit prostitution, and the press's role in reporting on prostitution offences. The chapter then moves to an analysis of the depiction of the prostitute in three interwar British films: *Maisie's Marriage* (1923); *Escape!* (1930) and *Friday the Thirteenth* (1933). This range of films allows for an exploration of changing attitudes to prostitution throughout the interwar period.

The second part of the chapter broadens its scope to consider the representation of all women who navigated London at night. This part starts with an analysis of how the murders of two young women in the 1920s were reported in the national press. Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver were both killed in the London night-time streets by young men they had been dating. The women's fates raised uncomfortable questions about the safety and liberty of women in interwar London, and the safety of the city. These news stories are chosen because their ordinariness makes them illustrative. Neither story is remembered as a notorious murder, because it was all too common for young women to be attacked at night. These stories therefore provide an insight into commonly accepted views on women's mobility at night.

The chapter then compares these two real-life murder cases with the representation of similar crimes in the silent film *The Lodger* (1927) and its sound remake *The Phantom Fiend* (1932). Each of these films features a serial killer who murders young women at night, as well as a heroine who escapes such a fate. Choosing two versions of the same story allows for a comparison of changing mores at different points in the interwar period. The chapter ends with an analysis of the representation of the sexualised foreign body in the British silent film classic *Piccadilly* (1929), which starred Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong as the nightclub performer Shosho.

There has been extensive scholarly exploration of the social and cultural impact of increasingly mobile women in London's public spaces, but there has not yet been a specific consideration of the intersection of this increased mobility and the opening of night-time spaces.<sup>3</sup> As the night-time became increasingly democratic and accessible due to technological developments and changes in legislation, women's ability to enjoy nocturnal London was an area of contention and negotiation throughout the interwar period. On the one hand, women's night-time navigation of the city was seen as a positive feature of an increasingly modern city. On the other hand, it raised concerns about transgressions of traditional gender roles.

### **Prostitution and legislation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century**

The first part of this chapter explores the position within London nightlife of a specific group of women: prostitutes.<sup>4</sup> Historically, prostitutes were one of the few groups of women who would be expected to be found in public spaces in the nocturnal city. Prostitutes remained participants in London's street life during the interwar period. During the 1920s and 1930s, varied depictions of prostitution on film reflected changing opinions about prostitutes.

In the nineteenth century women obtained more opportunities to participate in the public life of the metropolis; for example, through the development of shopping as a leisure activity, and the establishment of department stores, which stayed open until late in the evening.<sup>5</sup> But throughout the nineteenth century, a woman walking on the street was still associated with prostitution and was subject to frequent sexual harassment.<sup>6</sup>

The State accused prostitutes of a physical corruption of the nation. The Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs) of the 1860s gave police the power to arrest suspected

prostitutes and subject them to a forced physical examination to ensure that they did not have a sexually transmitted infection. In the following decades, against a background of rising pressure of feminist campaigners and an increased number of moral reform groups, the public narrative shifted from seeing prostitutes as responsible for their circumstances, to considering them as victims of social and moral degeneracy.<sup>7</sup> In law, though, women were always punished, as historian Julia Laite has pointed out: 'the British method of prostitution control relied upon a system which criminalized prostitution-related activities rather than regulated them.'<sup>8</sup>

Prostitutes were also considered to be a public nuisance and members of the public frequently complained about their presence.<sup>9</sup> The 1839 Metropolitan Police Act became the most important law under which prostitutes were arrested after the CDAs were repealed. Although prostitutes were considered an inevitable by-product of a morally corrupt society where men sought sex outside of marriage, the 1839 Act reflected that they were also considered as a problem in and of themselves. The Act did not forbid soliciting, but only made a prostitute causing an *annoyance* by soliciting, subject to legal action.<sup>10</sup> Prostitutes could also be arrested under the 1824 Vagrancy Act, if they displayed riotous or indecent behaviour in a public place.<sup>11</sup> Both of these Acts remained in force at the start of the interwar period.

After the First World War there were moves to reform the 1839 Act as its text was gendered and only applied to women. In the late 1920s, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) campaigned to have the laws on soliciting revised. The AMSH wanted to make the language of the law gender-neutral to counteract the disproportionate application of the law against women. They also wanted to ensure that the evidence of a third party was needed to prosecute an alleged prostitute. There was a concern about the number of cases that were presented to the magistrates'

courts based on police evidence alone.<sup>12</sup> This tied in with wide-spread uneasiness about the operations of the Metropolitan Police, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. Despite the AMSH's campaign and the appointment of a Street Offences Committee, prostitution law was not changed until the late 1950s.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1930s, prostitution debates focused on a perceived increase of foreign, as opposed to British, prostitutes in London. A number of murders of foreign prostitutes caught the attention of the press, which fuelled a moral panic that probably exaggerated the actual number of non-British prostitutes, although solid figures are difficult to establish.<sup>14</sup> Prostitution was a visible issue, as the women were often out on the street to pick up new trade. The press increased anxieties by reporting on this and other moral issues in an urgent and sensationalist tone.<sup>15</sup> There were also the aforementioned concerns about prostitutes being a public nuisance, despite somewhat sympathetic views on prostitution by the reform movement. The dualistic perception remained that prostitutes were either tragic fallen women who should be encouraged to find a way out of their plight, or criminals who should be punished for their actions. This duality also affected the penalties applied to prostitution. Magistrates' courts tended to try and reform young prostitutes by sentencing them to a term in prison or the workhouse, whereas more experienced prostitutes were seen to be 'irredeemable' and were therefore merely fined.<sup>16</sup>

### **Prostitution legislation in practice**

As the interwar period wore on, the relationship between the Metropolitan Police and the magistrates' courts became tense because of the number of arrests made on police statements alone. Those cases subsequently often collapsed in court, wasting the court's resources. Magistrates were increasingly reluctant to convict alleged

prostitutes if they were arrested solely based on police evidence.<sup>17</sup> The prostitution law reform debate took place in 1927 and 1928, but, as indicated above, in the end no new law was passed.<sup>18</sup> The primary research conducted for this thesis included newspaper evidence which suggests that this led to a stalemate between the police and the magistrates' courts. On 23 March 1929 the *Daily Express* reported that a Miss Peggy Lee had been arrested in Lisle Street, Soho, at 10.50pm, because she had spoken to two male passers-by.<sup>19</sup>

The police reported that both men had '*appeared annoyed* and waved her aside' [emphasis added], which gave the police the license to arrest Miss Lee under the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act. When presented to the magistrate, the girl explained that she was a professional dancer and had been waiting for a friend, to go to a restaurant. When her friend was delayed, she had had a chat with the men. The magistrate dismissed the case, stating that she had probably not been 'soliciting for immoral purposes,' although she had certainly been 'indiscreet.'

Although the verdict is in line with historical evidence that magistrates became reluctant to convict because of police witness statements, the magistrate in this case felt the need to add a moral judgement. The *Express* report highlights a tension between the police and the courts (the headline is 'Police Charge Dismissed') which ties in with contemporary newspaper reporting on the police scandals. This indicates that historian Jennifer Davis' assertion was no longer true for the interwar period: Davis contends that press reporting on magistrates' decisions served to communicate lessons of the police court and the law to the popular masses, and thus to uphold state power.<sup>20</sup> The police scandals challenged that view of state power, but as explored in the previous chapter, by and large mass media continued to be supportive of the police.

The *Express*'s sub-headline on the article about Peggy Lee ("Indiscreet" Girl Dancer'), draws attention to supposedly salacious behaviour of women in performance professions, thus moving part of the reader's attention away from the issues with police practices and towards ostensible problems with women walking the street at night. The explicit reference made to Miss Lee's job as a dancer draws on the long-established connection between prostitution and stage performance.<sup>21</sup> Although this was not completely unfounded, only roughly 10% of convicted prostitutes in the interwar period worked or had worked in stage and performance roles.<sup>22</sup> It was hardly a common occurrence but it was made to appear so by reiterations in articles such as this. The magistrate's ruling demonstrates that although there was no legal restriction on women's access to the street in the interwar period, their presence upset the moral framework through which order was maintained.

### **Prostitutes on screen: victims of a morally degenerate society**

In cinema, the figure of the prostitute remained mostly obscure. Given her illegal and immoral status, it was only possible to portray her as part of a narrative about larger issues. As noted in chapter 1, the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) was founded in 1912. Some of the 43 elements that would be cut by the censor established in 1916 included:

'indecorous, ambiguous and irreverent titles and subtitles; vulgar accessories in the staging; unnecessary exhibition of under-clothing; offensive vulgarity, and impropriety in conduct and dress; excessively passionate love scenes; subjects dealing with White Slave traffic; scenes suggestive of immorality; indelicate sexual situations; men and women in bed together; scenes laid in disorderly houses; and prostitution and procuration.'<sup>23</sup>

It is clear from this list that the depiction of prostitution or any other sexual conduct on film in the interwar period was extremely difficult. According to film historian Jeffrey



Richards, throughout the 1930s alone 37 films were banned wholesale because of their depictions of sex, including prostitution.<sup>24</sup>

Some films, nevertheless, managed to include representations of prostitution, usually by ensuring that the film's overall narrative did not undermine the ideal of heterosexual matrimony.<sup>25</sup> *Maisie's Marriage* (1923)<sup>26</sup> is loosely based on Marie Stopes' highly successful and controversial work *Married Love*, a guidance book which argued for birth control within marriage. The fame of both author and book gave the film ample publicity. The film's narrative is ostensibly in part about the dangers of prostitution, but its sub-text comments on class mobility.

*Maisie's Marriage* follows Maisie, a young woman from a large and poor family. She rejects the courtship of her suitor Dick because she is worried that marriage will lead to more children than they can maintain, and that this will result in the poverty that she herself grew up in. Maisie's parents cast her out of the house for spurning this chance at domesticity and she ends up alone and out on the street at night. She walks through the West End, where a group of smartly dressed men and women stand outside a club. A woman in a fur coat walks up to a man and strikes up a conversation. This action alone is enough to 'code' this woman as a prostitute, as the law so explicitly described soliciting as the key feature of prostitution. When Maisie then approaches this woman and one of her female friends to ask for directions, one of them responds: 'Come along with us, Duck, and 'ave a jazz...Nothing like a jazz to keep you merry and bright.'

Maisie somewhat reluctantly follows the pair to the Palace Jazz nightclub: as a respectable woman, Maisie knows that she is at risk if she stays on the street on her own at night. The street is a democratic space but this democracy comes at a price: it

is also the place where she is brought into contact with vice. Maisie apparently approaches the women because she thinks they will help her, as opposed to the men out in the street who she perceives as a threat. As it transpires, it is these working-class women whom she should steer clear of.

The nightclub in *Maisie's Marriage* is described as 'A mystic underworld behind closed doors, where Bacchus and Aphrodite fox-trot.' Once inside, the women pay Maisie's entrance fee and hand her over to the club manager, who leads Maisie to a separate table. Shortly after this, a waiter escorts a man in evening dress to the table, and leaves a bottle of champagne with the pair.

The man is already drunk, and tells Maisie that it is 'his wife's fault entirely' that he is in the club. In an inserted flash-back scene the audience sees the man at home with his wife: he tries to kiss her while she is dressing, but she rebuffs him and cuddles her dog instead. His wife's denial of sexual relations causes the man to seek sex elsewhere. This reflects the growing belief of the 1920s that 'men's infidelity contributed to such national problems as prostitution, illegitimacy, and the spread of venereal disease.'<sup>27</sup> But in this case the wife's unwillingness to engage in sex causes the infidelity, which lays the 'blame' for prostitution firmly on women.

Consequently, in the club, the man makes a pass at Maisie. She tries to push him off and, in their struggle, they knock over the table which alerts the other patrons and the club owner. The owner comes over to the table, shakes Maisie and threatens to beat her up. He presumes that she is a prostitute because she entered the club with two prostitutes. When it becomes apparent that Maisie is unaware of these expectations, the drunken man valiantly punches the club owner and pulls Maisie out of the

nightclub. On the street he says goodbye to her and tells her that 'her innocence saved her.'

If Maisie had been a 'fallen woman' he would have expected her to comply with his wishes, but because she is still 'pure' he acted as a chivalric hero instead. Maisie is tainted by her association with the prostitutes – and by extension all women are. The club is presented as part of the prostitution network: a place where 'johns' and women can meet, with the club owner acting as pimp. There is some historical evidence that prostitutes did work in tandem with restaurant and club owners to help each other gain customers.<sup>28</sup>

The customer in the film is not presented for being at fault for attempting to buy sex: the film places the responsibility for the existence of prostitution either with the wife who is not performing her marital duties, with the prostitutes for presenting the man with a viable alternative, or with the nightclub for providing a space in which prostitutes can ply their trade. The film does not condemn the customer for being in the club and choosing to engage with a prostitute. His response to Maisie recalls the magistrates' court's argument that an experienced prostitute is 'irredeemable', but a novice prostitute may still be saved.<sup>29</sup>

After the scene in the nightclub, Maisie tries to commit suicide by throwing herself in the Thames. The brush with prostitution marks the lowest point in her life, and is enough to push her to the (at that time illegal) act of suicide. The film constructs a line between what is morally acceptable behaviour for a woman, which includes a complete rejection of sex; and immoral behaviour, which includes visiting nightclubs. Maisie's suicide attempt fails because a middle-class couple see her jump and the husband rescues her from the river. She is then led in front of the magistrate who

commits her to the workhouse both for her attempted suicide and for her presence in, as stated in an intertitle, a 'notorious dance hall.'

It remains unclear how the magistrate knows of Maisie's visit to the nightclub, as there is no visible police presence in that scene. The film suggests that a woman's body and behaviour appear to be constantly policed in the city. The legal identity of the 'common prostitute' could be solely based on assumptions of a woman's character, without any tangible evidence of her exchanging sexual activity for money. Although Maisie gets convicted for her attempted suicide and not for prostitution, the magistrate who sentences her does see it fit to refer to her supposedly illicit behaviour in the club.

Later in the film the middle-class couple who saved Maisie allow her to work as a nanny for their children, and the wife teaches her about the benefits of birth control. The film promotes a myth of upward social mobility and makes clear that association with women of her own working-class background would have led Maisie to ruin. A middle-class woman, on the other hand, teaches Maisie valuable lessons through which she can overcome her poor origins.

The film ends with Maisie's former suitor Dick, who is a fireman, rescuing her from a burning house. The couple is reunited, and Maisie is ready to embrace marital life. In reality, any woman classified as a 'common prostitute' would have been on police records as such for the rest of her life.<sup>30</sup> Because Maisie was convicted for attempting suicide, and not for prostitution, she is free to start anew once she has served her sentence in the workhouse. *Maisie's Marriage* panders to the fantasy that a 'fallen' woman can be 'saved' and safely embedded into middle-class life.

Historical evidence suggests that some prostitutes actively chose their profession to avoid becoming poverty-stricken housewives.<sup>31</sup> *Maisie's Marriage* cannot portray this:

censorship and prevailing moral beliefs meant that prostitution must be depicted as a tragedy, not a choice. Similarly, because prostitution is something that happens to Maisie out of ill-fortune, she can leave the label behind her and return to a respectable life. The fur-coated prostitute in this film is wholly condemned as an unsavoury character, and even an unwilling association with her leads to punishment. The woman is only a minor character but nearly leads Maisie to moral corruption. The film presents her as dangerous, someone with whom only the briefest contact has grave consequences.

### **Prostitutes on screen: opportunists and tricksters**

The difference in the representation of the prostitute in *Escape!*, made seven years after *Maisie's Marriage* in 1930, is striking. As touched upon in the previous chapter, this film starts with a sequence in Hyde Park. A well-dressed gentleman, Captain Matt Denant, goes for a walk through the busy park on a summer's evening. A few minutes into his walk, Denant lights a young woman's cigarette. They strike up a conversation and she suggests that he comes and 'sees her every now and then.' She is clearly a prostitute, but Denant is not horrified or put off: instead he light-heartedly declines her offer.

The representation of the police in this film has been analysed further in the previous chapter, here the analysis focuses on the prostitute. Contemporary audiences would likely have related this scene to the 1928 Savidge Inquiry referred to in the previous chapter. *Escape!* sets up the same dynamic between the well-off older man and the younger working-class girl. In reality, however, Irene Savidge proved not to be a prostitute at all, whereas in the film the character is explicit about her intentions. But Captain Denant is not concerned about her profession, and as the audience is asked

to identify with him, it implies that they too should not object to the prostitute. Due to police scandals, such as the Savidge case, Hyde Park in particular became known as a space where the police were overly zealous in their arrests, a 'happy-hunting ground for the policeman.'<sup>32</sup> *Escape!* presents soliciting as one of those offences that the police should not waste their time on unless specifically asked to do so by an aggrieved party.

Three years after *Escape!*, *Friday the Thirteenth* provided a comic expression of park prostitution.<sup>33</sup> One of the film's storylines, made up of four scenes, concerns Ralph, played by popular comedy actor Robertson Hare. Ralph is married to an attractive woman who is more interested in her dogs than in her husband: she is an echo of the nightclub visitor's wife in *Maisie's Marriage*. When the wife sends Ralph to the park to walk one of the dogs, a young woman in a flashy outfit sits next to him on a bench (see fig. 14). Her outfit, her Cockney accent, her forward approach of Ralph and her presence in the park are enough to communicate to the audience that she is a prostitute. Ralph himself, however, appears naïve, and does not realise who or what the woman, Dolly, is.

[Image withheld in relation to copyright]

Fig. 14: Ralph is approached by a woman in *Friday the Thirteenth* (Victor Saville, 1933)

When his dog rips Dolly's stockings, Ralph offers to buy her a new pair, and he asks where he should send them. Her response, 'This is my p...., I mean, I usually take the air here' removes any remaining doubts about her identity for the audience, but not for Ralph. In a later scene set in the afternoon, Ralph returns to the park to give Dolly her stockings. She puts them on there and then, suggestively flashing her legs to Ralph

and the audience. When Ralph puts the ripped stockings in one of the park bins, a passing Bobby gives him a suspicious look, but does not make any comment about it. This contradicts the notion of Hyde Park as a 'training ground' for the Metropolitan Police, as it was perceived in the late 1920s.

Although this could be the end of the story, in a subsequent scene it is evening and Ralph, by now drunk on port wine, has returned to the park to find Dolly again. He says his wife can 'go to the dogs' and Dolly gently encourages him to put his arms around her. The scene ends with the couple kissing while an umbrella screens them from the camera. In the final scene set in the park, Dolly breaks off the kissing because she spots a plain-clothes police officer. Ralph still does not seem to grasp the gravity of the situation he is in, to which Dolly retorts: 'Don't you know this is a park? A lady friend of mine got done for a lot less!' She suggests they split up and run, and Ralph leaves in a hurry. When the 'officer' approaches Dolly he is revealed to be her partner in crime, and she shows him Ralph's wallet which she pickpocketed.

Unlike Maisie and Captain Denant, Ralph's brush with prostitution does not lead to anything more serious than having his wallet stolen - he survives the omnibus crash at the end of the film. As with *Maisie's Marriage*, *Friday the Thirteenth* argues that men would not seek out prostitutes if their wives were more loving. Unlike the previous films, however, the 'john' here is depicted as hapless, someone who is lured by the prostitute without knowing what he is getting himself into. Additionally, the day-time scenes are innocent and do not include any sexual actions.

Night-time allows for Ralph to be drunk and for him and Dolly to transgress sexual boundaries. During the daytime, the scene is purely comic. And the goal of the prostitute appears to be to steal his wallet: she is not in a hurry to provide sexual

services.<sup>34</sup> Prostitution becomes harmless, a silly mistake rather than something that ruins your life once you get mixed up in it. The confident Dolly is a far cry from Maisie. The park is also not policed as heavily as it is in *Escape!*: the Bobby shown in the afternoon scene does not arrest Ralph, and the supposed plain-clothes police officer turns out to be a criminal. The systems of government control portrayed in *Friday the Thirteenth* do not seem particularly concerned with prostitution and are apparently easily undermined.

The three films discussed above demonstrate the changing representation of London prostitution in British films across a period of ten years. There are some trends identifiable across the three films, and also some marked differences. All three films use prostitution as the conduit for another type of crime: in *Maisie's Marriage* it is suicide, in *Escape!* it is manslaughter, and in *Friday the Thirteenth* it is theft. This may be as a result of censorship that would not allow outright prostitution to be portrayed, but it also means that prostitution is used as a proxy for other crimes and problems.

Over time, the impact of involvement with prostitution on characters becomes smaller. In *Maisie's Marriage*, being drawn into a prostitution network for a few hours nearly leads to suicide, and lands Maisie in the workhouse for several years. But as shown, this is still a lighter sentence than her real-life counterparts were served: Maisie is able to leave her past behind her, whereas a real woman branded a 'common prostitute' would remain that for her entire life. The film presents the legal consequences of prostitution as reasonable and just.

In *Escape!* Captain Denant appears to also pay heavily for talking to a prostitute, but his five-year prison sentence is a result of him killing a police officer, not of engaging with prostitution. If he had assisted the police with the arrest of the prostitute, Captain



Denant would have walked away from the encounter unscathed. In *Friday the Thirteenth* the punishment for interacting with a prostitute is altogether lighter: although Ralph is the only male character in the three films who actually starts having sexual relations with a prostitute, the result is merely that he loses his wallet, not his freedom. In the later films the men who are solicited are portrayed as victims of confident women, whereas the earlier film is concerned with the female as passive victim.

Although *Maisie's Marriage* allows some screen time to the 'john', and presents him as honourable at heart, the story is essentially about how innocent young women risk being drawn into prostitution if they do not marry and have families. *Escape!* and *Friday the Thirteenth*, on the other hand, focus on men who are being approached by prostitutes without actively looking for them, and in both films this has a negative impact on the men's lives. Being in contact with a (supposed) prostitute is a threat to the men, whereas these later films do not present prostitution as harmful for the prostitutes themselves.

The 'established' prostitutes in all three films are working-class women, which is mainly communicated through their accents, either spoken or as written out in the intertitles (note the 'ave a jazz' written on the intertitle in *Maisie's Marriage*, referenced above; the 'dropped h' signals a working-class background). None of them are foreign, despite the aforementioned alarm about foreign prostitutes fuelled by the press in the interwar period. The films do not attempt to portray prostitution as a foreign problem: on the contrary, the women's accents identify them as London-born. Rather than presenting prostitution as an 'alien' problem, the films pose it as a class issue. Middle-class women gained more access to the daytime and night-time street in the nineteenth century, but working-class women and white-collar workers did not freely

navigate the night-time streets until the First World War, when a labour shortage gave them access to factories and other work environments.

The working-class prostitutes in the films are the personification of anxieties about working-class women's access to the streets. Their presence threatens the middle-class men in the films, such as Captain Denant and Ralph. They articulate a tension between classes and genders, rather than between the foreign and the domestic. In *Maisie's Marriage*, a prostitute threatens Maisie's path of upward social mobility; in *Escape!*, Captain Denant's life is all but ruined after he crosses paths with a prostitute, and in *Friday the Thirteenth* Ralph is robbed of all his money by one. Significantly, none of the films show any actual prostitution taking place.

Instead, by presenting prostitution as an instigator for suicide, manslaughter, and theft, respectively, the films make clear that the real danger is not prostitution, but the supposed criminality of working-class women. The prostitute stands in for the risk the urban environment poses to the middle classes: in the big city, people of all classes can mix, which is a threat to established class hierarchies. Tellingly, in all three films the prostitutes are found in the heart of the city, whereas the middle-class couple with whom Maisie ends up living in *Maisie's Marriage* is housed in the suburbs. The films suggest that the city centre has become a dangerous place where social order is constantly under threat. The figure of the prostitute functions to unite these fears about gender and class transgressions. Her appearance became shorthand for the dangers the young, working-class, urban girl posed to the middle classes.

In the world of *Friday the Thirteenth*, prostitutes and criminals have taken over control of Hyde Park, to comic effect. The humorous tone of the story allows the film to make fun of the police, and of the presence of prostitutes and other female criminals in

London. Comedy films can more easily broach controversial subjects under the guise of making fun of them. It also demonstrates that by the second half of the 1930s film was able to treat prostitution comically. The danger of corruption of men and the nation was no longer serious. The male character in this film is pathetic and more effeminate than Captain Denant or the anonymous nightclub visitor in *Maisie's Marriage*, hinting that perhaps masculine men were no longer under threat from prostitution by the end of the interwar period.

This chapter has so far explored the representation of London prostitutes in newspapers and films of interwar Britain. Prostitutes were commonly and historically associated with navigating night-time streets. During the interwar period, however, many other women also started to participate in nightlife. The remainder of this chapter explores how these women blurred the previously accepted boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and how producers of mass media both applauded such behaviour and attempted to manage it.

### **The risks of going out at night: The murders of Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver**

In the interwar period, female participation in the workforce increased, making it more likely for working-class women to navigate the street at night on their way to and from work. It was also more acceptable for them to go out at night with friends or romantic partners; not least to visit the cinema, which offered a cheap and accessible form of entertainment. Although women had more access to the night-time street than ever, they still put themselves in danger when going out at night, no matter what their profession was. Their freedom posed a challenge, as the general belief about the night-time as a dangerous and transgressive space did not align with what was believed to be an appropriate environment for unmarried women.

This message was reinforced by the popular press: a closer look at how newspapers reported on other incidents involving women out at night, such as the murder of 16-year-old Grace Blakaller in 1925 and the murder of 21-year-old Constance Oliver two years later, demonstrates this. Newspaper editors were conflicted about what constituted acceptable behaviour for young women, and to what extent their murders could be blamed on their own actions. Reports on these two murder cases were identified as part of the newspaper sampling conducted for this thesis. There is nothing extraordinary about these cases, and they have not received any specific scholarly attention. Their organic emergence from the newspaper sampling underlines that cases such as these were commonplace occurrences, and the reports they elicited are representative of other reports on crimes against women, in this period.



Fig. 15: Grace Blakaller (*Daily Mirror*, 11 April 1925)

Grace Blakaller was murdered on 9 April 1925. She was a sixteen-year-old amateur dancer. The first reports on her death are accompanied by a photo of Grace: a girl with dark bobbed hair, looking over her shoulder into the camera and apparently not clothed (see fig. 15). The photo appears to be a professional shot and presents the

young girl as an alluring sexual object. Late in the evening of Thursday 9 April, Grace's mother found her daughter, who was bleeding profusely from the throat, on her doorstep in West Kensington. Grace was rushed to a doctor who lived a few streets away, and then to hospital, where she died on Friday morning after severe blood loss.<sup>35</sup>

The first reports mention that Grace had been returning from a trip to the cinema, which she was in a habit of visiting on her own. Before she died, Grace said that she had been attacked by a man on the corner of the street. Initially, journalists took pains to point out that Grace was 'not known to be on friendly terms with any particular man,' presenting her as a girl who was only interested in dancing and cinema.<sup>36</sup> Her good character was further established by the report that Grace had been planning to take her mother to Kew Gardens from her first earnings as a dance instructor.<sup>37</sup> This information presented her as a considerate and generous daughter. In the first days it was not seen as problematic that she had been on her way back from the cinema late at night, despite ongoing concerns regarding the corrupting effects of cinema on young people.<sup>38</sup>

The reporters only changed their tune about Grace when the story developed further, and a murderer came forward. Press reports no longer presented Grace as a wholesome girl who had fallen victim to a random attack, when it became apparent that Grace had been killed by her nineteen-year-old boyfriend, Ernest Rhodes. Ernest turned himself in to the police on 11 April, when he read in the newspaper that Grace had died - he claimed that he had thought he only injured her.<sup>39</sup> According to his account, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April the couple went to the Blue Hall Cinema in Ravenscourt Park. They got back to West Kensington at about 11pm, and Ernest walked Grace home. Ernest thought his girlfriend had been stringing him along, and he suspected

her of seeing other boys. When she did not take his concerns seriously, he took a razor from his pocket and slashed at her throat while they were kissing. Grace ran to her mother's house when she realised she was bleeding, and Ernest went home. When he saw the newspaper headlines on Saturday he confessed to his employer and reported himself to the police. The popular press's interest in the story was the catalyst for the story's resolution, demonstrating how the press sustained its own news stories.

Sympathy for the 'pretty young dancer who was fond of gaiety' gave way to concerns about young girls' 'double lives.'<sup>40</sup> At the final day of the inquest, the coroner read out a letter he had received from a concerned citizen. According to the coroner, the letter expressed 'common-sense views,' including the notion that girl murder victims 'were forward minxes and made advances to young men, stayed out late at night, frequented cinemas and dance places, and had evidently been allowed to run loose.'<sup>41</sup> The text of the letter was uncritically reprinted in several daily newspapers. The Director of the Liverpool Women's Patrol stated publicly that she agreed with the letter-writer's assessment of young girls' lives.<sup>42</sup> The coroner's decision to read out this letter during the inquest demonstrates that it was accepted that he would have an opinion on the moral aspects of the case as well as on forensic facts. As with the hearing of Peggy Lee discussed earlier in this chapter, those in positions of power were entitled to express value judgements on women's behaviour if that behaviour did not conform with traditional gender norms.

The opinion of a single member of the public was presented by the coroner as the belief of the general public, and its subsequent endorsement by the conservative press cemented it as the commonly-held view. According to the contemporary journalism trade journal *Newspaper World*, voicing concerns about the modern girl sold

newspapers in the interwar period the way a sensational murder sold them before the First World War.<sup>43</sup> In the reporting on Grace Blakaller, the popular press had managed to combine both ingredients into a successful multi-part story which reaffirmed that it was safer for a woman to stay at home and not have romantic relationships.

When 21-year-old typist Constance Oliver was killed in Richmond Park in 1927, the press did not raise the alarm about young women's lives in the modern city, in contrast to the reporting on Grace Blakaller's murder. Constance's body was found in Richmond Park on the morning of 6 October. Her body was mutilated, which implied a fierce struggle before her death, and a piece of cloth was tightly wound around her neck suggesting she died of suffocation.<sup>44</sup>

A man was arrested the next day, and the proceedings were handed over from the magistrates' courts to the criminal court, but not before several newspaper articles were able to confirm that Constance had been *virgo intacta* at the time of her death.<sup>45</sup> On 5 December Constance's boyfriend, Sidney Bernard Goulter, was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death; he was executed on 6 January 1928.<sup>46</sup>

On the face of it, the case was very similar to Grace Blakaller's: Constance was reported to be the 'perfect home girl' who worked as a typist for the same company for seven years, and wore no make-up, a further affirmation of her virtue.<sup>47</sup> Goulter stated to the police that he had killed Constance out of jealousy, because she was planning to go to the theatre with a group of both male and female friends the next day. Like Ernest Rhodes, he claimed that he had only meant to injure his girlfriend and had thought she was alive when he left her in the park.<sup>48</sup> But rather than a backlash about young women's dangerous habits, the murder of Constance Oliver provoked great public sympathy, with thousands of people, mostly women, reported as attending the

inquest and the funeral.<sup>49</sup> The extreme brutality of the murder encouraged compassion, which was aided by Constance's respectable job as a typist rather than a dancer.

The case became known as the 'Richmond Park Murder', and the first *Daily Express* report on the case made much of the crime's location. Dubbing Richmond Park 'the largest and loneliest of London's great playgrounds,' the paper was particularly concerned about the proximity of the murder site to the park's main walkways where 'hundreds of pleasure-seeking Londoner's saunter (...) on a fine summer's day.'<sup>50</sup> When Grace Blakaller was murdered in a street, it was easily assumed that an attacker had been lurking around the street corner. Streets are suitable hiding spaces for men preying on women. Richmond Park on the other hand was a largely open space which should ostensibly be easier to survey and control both formally by the police, and informally by citizens using the park. The fact that Constance's body lay in the park for around sixty hours before it was discovered rather belies the image of Richmond Park as a vibrant leisure area.

Parks were perceived as oases in the busy capital where inhabitants could relax and escape from the hustle and bustle of modern urban living. The murder of Constance Oliver was presented as a brutal disruption of this ideal. But, as demonstrated, parks were known spots for prostitution and they were the backdrop for murders with some frequency.<sup>51</sup> Newspaper articles created an idealised version of London parks which was at odds with reality. Whether the location of her death was unusual or not, Constance Oliver went on a date with a young man whom she had recently met, and by all accounts had liked very much. He killed her because he was jealous of her spending time with other men. Like Peggy Lee and Grace Blakaller, she was a victim



of the unwritten rules: although it became ostensibly acceptable for women to go out at night, they still put themselves at risk when they did so.

### **Murder, newspapers and films**

As described earlier in this thesis, censorship rules governed the content of films screened in interwar Britain. There was no such censorship for the printed press. With the exception of DORA regulation 21 during the First World War, which imposed strict limitations on what could be printed in relation to the war, there were no laws to govern the content of newspapers in early twentieth-century Britain. Technological developments meant that newspapers could include more visual representations on their pages, such as photographs, from the turn of the century. Historian Lucy Bland has argued that these photographs gave 'an immediacy of visual information that transformed the experience of reading a newspaper.'<sup>52</sup> In addition, the interwar press increasingly featured visual depictions of mostly female bodies and faces.<sup>53</sup> These depictions were generally intended to be decorative and presented women as consumable objects.

This is also the case in the reporting on the murders of Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver. Reports of both murders were regularly illustrated with a photo portrait of the victim: in the case of Grace Blakaller, this is a particularly alluring over-the-shoulder shot (see fig. 15, p. 237). Mainstream newspapers did not feature photos or drawings of the dead bodies: the 'immediacy' of the photographic medium was not suited to such shocking material. Instead, papers printed detailed written descriptions of bodies as they were found. The discovery of Constance Oliver's body was described thus:

[She] was lying in the park on her back, with her right leg drawn up and her left leg straight out. Her clothing was torn, and some pieces of white material were tied tightly round the neck, fastened by a knot on the right-hand side. Part of her clothing and the top of her right stocking were burned. The outside of her right thigh was also burnt

and so on.<sup>54</sup> Bland has pointed out that criminal trials ‘became mass cultural spectacles’ when reported in the press, and the same can be said of the murder and investigation that preceded the trial.<sup>55</sup>

The newspaper reports on the murders of Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver made the locations of the murder sites explicit, such as by referring to the second murder as the ‘Richmond Park Murder’ in the newspaper headlines. This was a familiar tactic for the popular press, which reported on a high number of sensational murders and used the geographical descriptions to distinguish them from one another. However, Bland has argued that these labels also served to convey a moral judgement.<sup>56</sup> For the *Daily Express*, the Richmond Park murder was as much about the dangers of women accessing the city at night, as it was about the supposed loss of innocence of a park, a type of London space chiefly known for its entertainment function.

### **Murder on the cinematic streets: *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend***

Films also explored the dangers of women walking on the street at night. Perhaps the best-known example of this is Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lodger*,<sup>57</sup> of which Maurice Elvey directed a sound version, *The Phantom Fiend*,<sup>58</sup> a few years later. The story of both films is essentially the same: a working-class London family takes in a lodger to augment their income. The daughter of the house, Daisy, develops a romantic attraction to the mysterious Lodger, but her parents suspect that the Lodger is actually the Avenger, a serial killer who has been murdering young women on the London streets. The audience is led to believe this, too, until a dramatic twist at the end of the film reveals that the Lodger has in fact been hunting the real Avenger all along because they have a personal connection.

Both *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* are based on the same source material, the 1913 novel *The Lodger* by Marie Belloc Lowndes. Lowndes' work in turn was based on the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888. The Ripper famously targeted supposed prostitutes who were out in the London streets at night. Both films retain the element of a serial killer who attacks young women on nightly streets, but ostensibly the victims are no longer prostitutes. When the Ripper was active, prostitutes were one of the few groups of women who would be out at night. By the 1920s and 1930s, increased participation of women in the labour force meant that many more women navigated the streets at night. According to both films, young working women were at risk when walking home from work. Films like *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* reinforced the notion that these women were in danger from unbridled male violence, and that the inner city was a menacing place for young women now that the social order had been disrupted.

The serial killer's predilection for young female victims is not questioned by characters in either of the films. The Jack the Ripper murders were still present in the popular imagination during the interwar period, not least because of the way the media had reported on these murders some forty years previously as a 'media event.'<sup>59</sup> The victims in the films are not primarily presented as possible prostitutes, but as working women, such as the group of chorus girls shown in *The Lodger*.

Daisy also has a job in both films: she is a fashion model in *The Lodger* and a telephone operator in *The Phantom Fiend*. In the first film her job is to be an object for consumption by the audience's gaze, whereas in the second film she participates in modernity by directing telephone calls. In both cases her professional work is restricted to female-dominated industries. In part this is a realistic reflection on the types of jobs women worked in at the time, but it also posits Daisy in an all-female sphere, which

cordons her off from the traditionally male public sphere. Despite women's increased mobility, men and women remain separated in the city in these films.

Two murders take place on screen during *The Lodger*. In both instances they are represented by a close-up of a blonde woman's screaming face. This is an effective way of conveying sound in silent film, but it is also a voyeuristic representation of the women's anguish. In the case of the second murder, we also see that the victim, a chorus girl, is walking on the street with a boyfriend prior to the murder. They have an argument and both go their separate ways, after which the girl is attacked. Her rejection of a heterosexual coupling immediately puts her at risk. The girl's theatre job and her boyfriend seem to indicate that she is not a prostitute, but rather someone who through a coincidence ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, Hitchcock scholar William Rothman points out that when she bends down to adjust her stocking just before she is murdered, 'it could also be a prostitute's come-on'.<sup>60</sup> The woman's sexual identity remains ambiguous.

*The Phantom Fiend* shows a lot less of the three girls who get killed as part of the film, as it makes use of newly implemented sound technology to communicate off-screen actions. For the first murder, the audience only see a brief shot of the body after the crime, but they have heard the murder happen through a telephone line. The second murder is entirely conveyed through sound: a woman's piercing scream, and then an urgent police whistle. It is jarring, then, that the third murder victim *is* shown extensively, walking down the street and turning a few corners. A few shots later another woman stumbles across the victim's dead body in a courtyard.

The shots of the third woman walking down the street are intercut with shots of the Lodger apparently walking down the same street, so they serve to strengthen the

audience's suspicion that the Lodger is the murderer. *The Phantom Fiend* presents city streets as spaces where murderers lurk in the shadows, as journalists initially did with the reporting on the murder of Grace Blakaller. The film's editing enhances this effect. The woman looks behind her when she is walking, but still does not see her murderer. The enclosed space of the street increases the sense that the woman, hemmed in by buildings, cannot escape her perpetrator.

*The Lodger* does not show the actual Avenger at any point in the film. Initially this is because the audience must believe that the Lodger is the killer, but even at the end of the film, the news of the Avenger's arrest comes through new media: telephone and newspaper. He remains an abstract figure, and the film does not provide any rationale for his actions. In his absence, he can stand in for any moral fear. Hitchcock scholars point out that the director claimed he had wanted the Lodger to be the murderer, but commercial pressures forced him to change the script.<sup>61</sup> Regardless of whether this is true, by leaving the murderer invisible he becomes more powerful, because his motives are never explained.

In *The Phantom Fiend*, on the other hand, the final scene of the film makes the Avenger very concrete. He is the Lodger's mentally ill brother, and he attacks Daisy when he finds her alone on the embankment. The high tension of this sequence is underscored by the close-ups of Daisy's face when she watches the Lodger fight the Avenger. Stylistically these are similar to the close-ups of the murder victims in *The Lodger*. The Avenger is not only a physical person, he is also a foreigner. *The Phantom Fiend* makes the danger in the city a foreign influence that can be eliminated by another foreigner, leaving British citizens unaffected by their transgressions.

The double identity of the Lodger and the Avenger mirrors the dual identity awarded to women and prostitutes. One of the identities is 'normal' and acceptable, the other is criminal. In the cosmopolitan city, the social cohesion common in pre-industrial communities was lost, and Londoners shared close quarters with complete strangers. Living in the city meant that, without knowing, you could potentially be close to criminals. Female mobility represented a similar danger, as it made it unclear which women were prostitutes and which were not. *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* take this as their starting point: the danger of allowing a stranger into your home. But the Lodger is not the Avenger, and the plot revolves around people presuming that he is. All the characters, except for Daisy, project their own prejudices on the Lodger. In *The Phantom Fiend*, the Lodger is explicitly marked as foreign, so there is also an element of xenophobia; most clearly expressed by Daisy's boyfriend Joe, who is protecting a British woman from a foreign threat. The Avenger in this film is also foreign: both the crime and the resolution operate outside control of the State.

This is a change compared to the Lodger and Avenger in *The Lodger*, who are both presented as British. The abstract threat in this film is thus portrayed as domestic, whereas, by 1932, a serial-killer attacking women who enjoy liberated lifestyles is presented as un-British, possibly reflecting an increased concern about foreign threats in the run-up to the Second World War. The conservative desire to keep young women indoors is deflected as a foreign notion. As a young woman working and navigating the city, Daisy represents modernity. She is the only one who can see the 'real' Lodger because she is not limited by traditional ideas. She is also presumably used to society's false assumptions about modern women's identities. However, at the end of both films, Daisy's modernity is neutralised by her acceptance of a traditional heterosexual relationship with the Lodger.

Both films include a scene depicting a date between Daisy and the Lodger. In *The Lodger* they go for a walk, to the site where a murder happened the previous week. They have a romantic evening until Daisy's boyfriend Joe comes up and breaks them up. Daisy gets angry with Joe and tells him she does not want to see him again. When the pair leaves Joe alone, he starts to think that the Lodger is the Avenger, which leads to the Lodger's arrest. The night-time muddles Joe's thoughts and makes him draw the wrong conclusions. In *The Phantom Fiend* Daisy and the Lodger go to the theatre for their date, after which they walk home through the park and sit on a bench. Again, Joe comes, and this time he takes Daisy home. Both Daisy's parents and Joe are worried about Daisy having stayed out late, which they indicate is out of character for her. Courting gave girls a reason to stay out of the house for the first time, but it was also posed by newspapers and films that it put them at risk. Like Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver, Daisy's parents allow her to go out with a man at night, but there remains uneasiness about this sexual freedom.

As noted above, newspaper reports on murders included explicit details about the victims and the killer's *modus operandi*. Films could not copy this practice due to the BBFC rules – 'gruesome murders and strangulation scenes' were specifically mentioned in O'Connor's list of 43 items that should be banned from films, explored in chapter 1 of this thesis.<sup>62</sup> Instead of showing the dead bodies of the victims, both *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* show the *fear* of the murder victims, both in the moments immediately preceding their deaths and in their more general experience when navigating the city streets. Additionally, they show how the Londoners in the film treat the murder sites as spectacles: in *The Lodger*, especially, crowds form around each of the dead bodies. The films show the spectacle at one remove, which allows the audience to reflect on their own behaviour.

Although *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* make clear that the murders are happening in an area close to Daisy's home and close to the West End, neither film explicitly mentions in which part of London it is set. This gives the impression that the murders could happen anywhere in London's centre, and that no area is safe for women. It adds to the general sense of fear pervading the films: the Avenger could strike anywhere, anytime. Historians have argued that newspaper stories about homicide have a message of 'morality, respectability and normality' at their core.<sup>63</sup> Once Grace Blakaller and Constance Oliver had been murdered and their murderers convicted, young women in London had been given a warning about how dangerous it was to go out at night, and 'normal' gender roles were reaffirmed. In film, the heterosexual couple is established at the end of the narrative, and the murderer is removed from the streets.

### **The sexually liberated woman**

*The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend* take as their premise that women are in danger on the street at night. But other films of the interwar period present the street as a space that can liberate women from societal expectations. The 1929 film *Piccadilly* is perhaps the most well-known British silent film to depict London nightlife.<sup>64</sup> The film's plot concerns a love triangle between nightclub owner Valentine Wilmott; his white British star dancer Mabel, and the Chinese scullery maid Shosho. When Valentine happens upon Shosho in his club's kitchen at the start of the film, he is so beguiled by her exotic beauty that he decides, much to Mabel's chagrin, to make Shosho the club's new performer. As Shosho's fame, social capital and confidence rise, her relationship with Valentine also develops.



In one of *Piccadilly*'s key scenes, Shosho offers to show Valentine the nightlife of Limehouse, an area in East London which was home to most of London's Chinese community in the interwar period. The pub is populated by sailors and girls using cocaine: a far cry from the glitz of Valentine's West End club. Shosho and Valentine, as an interracial couple, can express intimacy in this crowded space: a close-up shot shows Valentine grabbing and holding Shosho's hand when they are at the bar. They are unnoticed until a black man starts to dance with a white woman on the dancefloor. The pub owner breaks the dancing couple apart angrily, and the atmosphere in the pub turns tense. Shosho hides her face from the other patrons and Valentine suggests they leave, as he fears they are no longer safe. The crowd in the pub, which previously gave the couple protection, can now harm them.

After Shosho and Valentine leave the pub, they walk down the dark streets towards Shosho's flat. On the corner of the street Valentine bids her goodnight. Shosho holds out her hand and Valentine shakes it. After a close-up of Shosho's hand on Valentine, the camera pans up quickly to Valentine's face which expresses surprise. The camera then pans down again to show Shosho's hand lifting and leaving a house key in Valentine's hand. With this striking gesture, accentuated by the fluid and swift movements of the camera pans, Shosho declares her sexual availability to Valentine. Although the street is a very public space, at night the cover of darkness and the absence of crowds allow the transgressive couple to be unobserved. The street provides Shosho with a level playing field where she can express her personal desires. Within the confines of Valentine's club she has not been able to be open about her intentions and desires as she is Valentine's subordinate; but on the street, she is his equal.

Of course, a key aspect of Shosho's sexuality is her racial identity. Throughout *Piccadilly*, she is portrayed through a white male gaze which accentuates her exotic sexual appeal. Valentine can covet Shosho, but he cannot understand her. After she drops her key into Valentine's hand, the couple continue into Shosho's flat, where she reclines on her bed and beckons Valentine to her. Although the film was not able to show explicit sexual relations under the BBFC guidance, the scene's ending with a fade to black implies that the relationship is consummated.

Later that night Shosho is killed by her Chinese friend Jim, who is jealous of her relationship with Valentine. At the subsequent murder trial, Jim kills himself and Valentine accepts Mabel as a more appropriate partner. Although Shosho does not get murdered for walking freely on the night-time street, like the women in *The Lodger* and *The Phantom Fiend*, her transgressions still result in her getting killed.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how women's access to the night-time street was represented in film and commented on in the media of interwar Britain. Access to the London streets after dark was, for young women, still heavily regulated and subject to moral policing. One of the recurring narratives of interest to the popular media of this period was that of young women who came to harm on the night-time city streets.

These women were portrayed as putting themselves in danger, and the dominant discourse encouraged women to stay off the streets for their own safety. Although more opportunities were opening up to women in the 1920s and 1930s, popular newspapers and films did not challenge the pervasive notion that women who sought to benefit from these opportunities could expect to be punished. The perpetrators of

crimes against these women were usually depicted as foreign or isolated elements, and not representative of a wider culture of oppression of women.

This chapter has also paid attention to prostitutes as a key group of women who accessed the London streets at night, and whose legal position was debated in the 1920s and 1930s. It has argued that the prostitute takes a special place within the representation of women as a whole, as she has traditionally been the only type of woman who has had free access to the night-time city streets. As more and more women started navigating the London streets at night in the interwar period, and sexual mores changed, it became increasingly difficult to identify who was, and who was not, a prostitute. The resulting discomfort was evidenced both by real-life cases of police misconduct and cinematic depictions of mistaken or confused identities. Whereas newspaper reporting on the topic was serious, fiction films opted to treat the topic with humour, particularly as the interwar period drew to a close. This implies that as mobile women became a more common sight, the extent of moral policing to which they were subjected lessened.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored how British popular newspapers and films of the interwar period imagined London's night-time. During this period, both media consolidated as everyday parts of Londoners' experience. At the same time, social changes opened up the night for ever-increasing numbers of people, which democratised the capital's nocturnal activities. Whilst popular media on the one hand capitalised on the transgressive possibilities of the night, they also broadcast the dangers of certain groups, in particular women and working-class Londoners, acting outside of their traditional roles. This thesis has demonstrated how analysing representations of the London night in popular newspapers and fiction films can provide valuable insights in the way popular media managed disruption in a changing society.

The films and newspaper articles included in this thesis's research together provide a comprehensive sample of popular media's day-to-day representations of London's nightlife. During the interwar period, activities after dark boomed in London as war-time licensing restrictions were relaxed and standards of living improved. Even during the economic downturn of the 1930s, those living in London and the South East generally had more disposable income available to them than others did elsewhere in the country.<sup>1</sup> As the city expanded and modernised, it became easier and more acceptable for Londoners to spend leisure time outside of the home in the evenings and nights. Cinemagoing became one of the most popular leisure activities during this period, and in the West End the 'super cinemas' vied for prominence with the more established theatres.

In addition to cinemas and theatres, interwar London also boasted hotels, restaurants and nightclubs, which all provided those with disposable income with spaces to

socialise and consume at night. The public spaces of the capital also saw activity at night as street markets traded until the late evening, parks became popular leisure spaces and prostitution soliciting spots after sunset and public transport and taxis operated throughout most of the night. Increasingly, the city operated on a round-the-clock basis, and contemporary commentators invoked the image of the late-night revellers crossing paths with those starting an early work shift.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated that popular newspapers and films used the depiction of night-time activities to increase their commercial revenue. The night-time was a time when transgressive activity could take place and portraying these illicit activities could harness the attention of the audience. For staff at popular newspapers, reporting on night-time activities fitted in with the trend towards sensationalist news reporting. As the language used in newspapers became increasingly subjective, journalists created an atmospheric image of the London night. In film, setting scenes in the capital after dark opened up possibilities of displaying primarily female bodies as objects of consumption.

This research project has argued that both media balanced a need to reflect the changing world around them with a desire to promote stability, in order to safeguard their commercial interests. As a result, both media did not embrace the representation of London's nightlife without reservations. Despite the increased democratisation and normalization of the London night, newspapers and films continued to primarily highlight the potential dangers of participating in nightlife, and the importance of ensuring that the traditional powers of the government and the police retained control over the night-time city.

## Surveying interwar newspapers and films

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the findings of the primary research conducted for this project and justified the research methodology. It also set out the historical context of both the film and popular newspaper industries. This thesis has considered 80 British films made throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The sample includes films that are considered to be high-water marks of British cinema, such as *Piccadilly* and *Sabotage*, as well as films that appealed to popular taste but which have now largely been forgotten, such as *Let Me Explain*, *Dear* and *Break the News*. By considering such a wide cross-section of films, the thesis has been able to explore how the average British film audience would have seen the London night-time represented on the screen during this period. The corpus has included examples of 'high', 'low' and 'middlebrow' culture, in recognition of the fact that for interwar film audiences, cinemagoing was as much about the overall experience as it was about the particular film which happened to be playing that week.<sup>3</sup>

At the start of the 1920s, the domestic film industry in Britain was struggling against the domination of Hollywood films at the box office. To boost the production of British films, the government implemented the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, which set a legal minimum requirement for the proportion of British films distributors and exhibitors had to make available to the public. The Act and subsequent quota legislation increased the number of British films produced each year. However, many of these films were considered of poor quality as they were made cheaply and quickly. Nevertheless, the British film industry underwent significant expansion during the 1920s and 1930s, which has provided this thesis with a rich body of work to analyse.

The thesis has taken a similar broad approach to the selection of the newspaper articles used to inform it. It draws on a sample of articles from across the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror*, from all the years of the interwar period. These three titles were selected because they were the most-read daily national newspapers in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. Millions of Britons read at least one of the three titles every day, so the papers' contents had the potential to greatly influence readers' perceptions of the world around them. The sampling of newspaper issues has been democratic, favouring a general review of each issue's content over directed searches for particular topics.

Popular daily newspapers became a feature of the British press landscape around the turn of the twentieth century, but the interwar period saw the consolidation of the 'tabloid' press as it still exists today. Fierce competition between newspapers led to rapid formal innovations such as big punchy headlines, increased use of photographs, and an attention-grabbing front page. This thesis subscribes to the argument that editors of popular newspapers during this period increasingly borrowed formal strategies from cinema to increase their appeal. As audiences became used to consuming the world around them in fragments, both films and newspapers catered to these shortening attention spans by presenting information in increasingly briefer forms.

This thesis has argued that on the level of content, films and newspapers also influenced one another. Reviews and film news gained increasing prominence in newspapers as editors recognised cinemagoing as a key part of popular culture. Advertisers used the commercial appeal of film stars to sell consumer products. In fiction films, newspapers were often used as props to convey information to the audience, or to signal the importance of events within the film's world. Film plots

usually portrayed newspapers as the most prominent form of media, and newspapers were a much more common feature of films than, for example, radio shows. This is likely partly related to the visual nature of both films and newspapers, but also appears to indicate the continued cultural importance of newspapers in a period when new forms of media were also introduced.

This research project has made a contribution to existing scholarly work in the field of cultural studies by considering popular newspapers and fiction films alongside one another. These two types of media are not usually analysed together in the same research project. This thesis has argued that popular newspapers and fiction films played a significant role in the lives of most interwar Britons, and that the content of these media impacted the way audiences conceived of the world around them. Considering newspaper and film content in relation to each other has provided new and valuable insights in interwar 'common culture'.

### **Navigating the night in a changing city**

The second and third chapter of this thesis considered how newspapers and films represented London's new suburbs at night, and how both media portrayed the nocturnal use of public transport. During the interwar period, London's surface area greatly expanded as increasing numbers of people moved out into newly built suburbs. The growth of these suburbs was facilitated by an expanding public transport network including the Tube, trains, and buses. For Londoners living in the suburbs, daily use of public transport to commute to and from work became a feature of city living. This thesis has argued that both suburbs and public transport challenged existing class structures as they facilitated interactions between people whose paths would previously not have crossed. This is particularly pertinent to the British interwar suburb,



which existed in a society in which, after the First World War, previously rigid class distinctions were increasingly under pressure.

Existing scholarly explorations of suburbs and their cinematic representations has primarily focused on American, post-War suburbs. This thesis has made an original contribution by instead considering the representation of British, interwar suburbs. It has demonstrated that the different national and cultural context in which these suburbs are situated, gives them a distinctly different meaning from the American suburbs that have been more commonly analysed by other researchers.

For many interwar Londoners, living in a family home with garden in the suburbs was an aspiration. Many suburbs were built by private investors who profited from a post-war dip in building costs after the First World War, but some suburbs were built by the London County Council to relieve overcrowding in the poorer parts of Central London, most notably the East End. Suburban living promised Londoners a chance of a better quality of life. In the suburbs, people often lived next to strangers, and the make-up of neighbourhoods was determined by the cost of housing rather than by familial ties. In the popular imagination, this apparent levelling of differences between neighbours led to an increased class-consciousness.

In the extensive sampling of primary materials conducted for this thesis, very few newspapers and films were found that portrayed the London suburb after dark. A possible explanation for this is that media producers and audiences alike adopted the image promoted by suburban developers, of the suburb as an essentially uneventful space. Because the suburbs primarily functioned as environments for domestic and family life, they did not lend themselves to those elements typically associated with the night: criminal behaviour or the pursuit of leisure.

On the very few occasions when journalists did report on crimes happening in suburbs at night, criminal incidents were described as isolated events that did not represent any wider danger to the community. The two films that have been explored in this thesis for their portrayal of the nocturnal suburb are primarily concerned with generational and class conflict between family members and neighbours, reinforcing the notion that the main interest of those living in suburbia are the people around them. In this way, newspapers and films perpetuated the notion that suburbs were essentially uneventful places where not much of interest took place at night.

Whereas suburbs remained reserved in newspapers and films as spaces of shelter from disruptive events, the two media foregrounded public transport spaces as having the potential to challenge social conventions. This thesis has approached public transport spaces as spaces that challenge accepted notions of 'public' and 'private' space. Suburban living was marketed on its ability to provide privacy for the family, but when using public transport people were forced to exist in close proximity to strangers. At the same time, the expansion of London caused by suburban development made the use of public transport a necessity for many, as distances in the city became too vast to cover otherwise.

The chapter of this thesis which explored the representation of nocturnal public transport analysed a range of newspaper articles and fiction films. It concluded that, although some newspaper articles and films highlighted the possible dangers of travelling by modern means of transport, on the whole they recognised that public transport was a necessary part of people's daily lives. As such, it could not be presented as inherently dangerous. Instead, the overriding narrative is one of speed, modernity and quality. This supports the thesis' overall argument that popular newspapers and films primarily benefited from promoting stability and security. The

chapter also argued that montage film and fragmented newspaper reports tapped into a new way of seeing, which high-speed travel also encouraged.

In addition to considering the representation of trains, Tubes and buses, the chapter also explored the role of the London taxicab in the media's representation of the night. The inclusion of taxicabs in the chapter's consideration of public transport in London sets the analysis apart from existing scholarly work, which primarily focuses on the London Transport Corporation. This thesis recognises that, although trains were running to increasingly late hours, for a part of the night the taxi was the only form of public transport available to Londoners. Unlike the other forms of transport, which sported shared compartments, taxis offered a mobile, publicly available private space. In films, this space was often exploited narratively to allow for private or intimate conversations to take place between characters who would not ordinarily have the opportunity to speak to one another. In newspapers, these private conversations went unrecorded. Instead, journalists reported on taxis as the site of crimes between people who had intimate relations with one another.

The daily use of public transport was a feature in the lives of many Londoners during the interwar period. As leisure time and opportunities increased, transport operated for longer hours, which made the night more accessible, particularly to those on lower incomes. The frequency by which newspapers and films featured nocturnal transport reflected the importance it had in their audiences' lives. It also provided the media with opportunities for sensationalist reporting, for example, when portraying accidents. Generally, however, public transport was presented as safe and convenient to use, as it was a requirement for the city to operate.

## **Recording the night**

The final three chapters of this thesis each considered a specific group of people which often navigated London's streets after dark. The first of these chapters considered the representation of journalists who worked in night-time London. Journalists were one of the most prominent professional groups who regularly navigated the capital at night. As the British popular press consolidated its role in British society during the interwar period, the figure of the journalist gained increased public attention. Journalists themselves also worked to establish and mould their professional image during this period. Working in the night-time city was an important aspect of the journalist's professional identity.

The journalist as a fictional character has received ample scholarly attention, but this has mostly focused on representations of reporters in American culture, or post-war British texts. This thesis has added to this existing body of work by providing an in-depth analysis of the representation of journalists in British interwar fiction films. It has found that, unlike later depictions of journalists as fighters of injustice and independent guardians of truth, in British interwar films, journalists often operated in tandem with the police and government to maintain the status quo rather than challenge it.

Although cinematic journalists in this period were often conducting investigations, at the conclusion of the films, the investigation is generally handed over to the police. The films do not question the ultimate power of vested authorities in society. The chapter demonstrated this with a close reading of two interwar British films which featured journalists as main characters. In both cases, the fictional journalists engage in the fabrication of news, which is not presented as unprofessional behaviour. This

indicates different ethical standards for journalism in the interwar period compared to later periods.

By analysing the contemporary writings of two journalists, which have hitherto been little explored by scholars, this thesis explored how interwar journalists themselves sought to fashion their professional image. The journalist's irregular working patterns were presented as a key part of the job. Working at night was considered necessary, even whilst the National Union of Journalists tried to impose limitations on working hours. According to journalists' memoirs, being available to work at any time of the day and night was required in order to become a successful reporter. Aspiring journalists were told to embrace such hours as representing part of the variety that the job offered. As is evident from the assumption that night-time work is necessary, it was considered that much of interest happened in the city after dark.

At the same time, irregular working hours made journalism an exclusionary profession. Women already faced barriers to entering the journalism practice, and the expectation that reporters worked and navigated the city at night added to that. It was difficult for women to be mobile in night-time London in the same way as men were, which limited women's ability to do news reporting. Instead, female journalists were often relegated to writing articles that were perceived to be less critical, such as features.

### **Controlling access to the night**

The fifth chapter of the thesis explored the representation of another professional group which by necessity traversed London's night-time streets: the police. The Metropolitan Police was founded in 1829 and therefore was a well-established part of London life during the interwar period. However, the 1920s and 1930s saw the force

embroiled in a number of scandals that challenged the public's perception of the police.

Some of the high-profile scandals involved police officers acting inappropriately towards women during night-time shifts. As women gained a stronger public voice, the victims of poor police treatment were able to draw attention to their experiences. The police also came under pressure for the way they tried to control night-time leisure spaces such as nightclubs. Suspicions that police officers participated in the nightlife they were supposedly trying to eliminate culminated in a big corruption case involving Metropolitan Police Sergeant Goddard, who had taken money from nightclub owners. As it became increasingly acceptable for Londoners to participate in leisure activities after dark, the police's responsibilities in relation to these activities was challenged.

The interwar police scandals have been extensively researched by cultural and police historians, and they have become a well-known part of the Metropolitan's history. This thesis has found, however, that during the interwar period itself the impact of these scandals on day-to-day representations of the police was limited. Journalists and police officers often depended on one another for information which allowed both groups to operate more effectively. Generally, newspaper articles continued to present the police as the unchallenged authority on criminal activities. Although newspapers covered the individual police scandals, there was no wider interrogation of the role of the police in society.

In fiction films, police officers also continued to be represented as a matter-of-fact part of British society. This was particularly true for the Bobby, whose recognisable uniform could be used as a visual shorthand for national identity. Some scholars of post-war British cinema have argued that prior to the 1940s, the cinematic Bobby was always

a comic character. This thesis has demonstrated, through close analysis of a number of interwar fiction films, that, in reality, the depiction of police officers in films of this period was much more varied. Although occasionally police officer characters were used to comic effect, this was not always the case. Police inspectors, in particular, were often portrayed as clever and professional protagonists who worked hard to resolve crime. This close analysis of the representation of the police officer on films of interwar Britain is a valuable contribution to a field which has so far primarily focused on post-War representations of British police.

The interwar period also saw the arrival of the first female officers in the Metropolitan Police. This significant step in women's emancipation was not widely commented on in popular films and newspapers. This thesis has included an analysis of the small number of representations of female police officers in British interwar film that do exist. It has found that generally, films depicted women as not suitable for police work. Cinema reinforced stereotypes that police work was inherently unfeminine. Generally, popular media continued to represent the typical police officer as a white male.

### **Being a woman at night in interwar Britain**

The explorations of the roles of female journalists and police officers lead to the final chapter of this thesis, which extensively explored the representation of women who navigated London streets at night. During the interwar period, women were increasingly able to navigate the city independently after dark. Although this gave women greater freedom, it also challenged previously held beliefs about 'appropriate' behaviour. Consequently, popular media reflected a number of tactics used to manage women's mobility.

The group of women most commonly associated with the urban night were prostitutes, who had been a feature of London's nights for centuries. They continued to be part of the capital during the interwar period, but were less easily identifiable as other women now also used London's streets at night. This thesis has explored instances in newspapers and films of this period which discuss the potential for women to be mistaken for prostitutes. These examples are embedded in the historical context of ongoing political action in the interwar period, which attempted to revise the legal framework around prostitution. The legal grounds for criminalising the act of soliciting, in particular, were heavily debated by pressure groups in the 1920s and 1930s.

Against this background of political debate, the depiction of prostitutes in popular media developed during the interwar period. The government and police considered the threat of prostitution to be primarily foreign and perpetrated by nationals from other countries. In popular films, however, prostitutes were generally represented to be working-class English women. This suggested that the challenge to appropriate feminine behaviour which prostitution represented was perceived as a domestic issue. The changing role of women in British society more generally became sublimated in the fictional figure of the prostitute, who came to represent broader anxieties about women engaging in transgressive behaviour.

This thesis has demonstrated that in British interwar films, prostitutes are depicted as British-born rather than foreign, which complicates previously published scholarly work that has argued that prostitution was considered a 'foreign' threat in interwar Britain. The analysis of prostitutes on film has also shown that as the interwar period wore on, prostitutes became comedic rather than tragic figures, indicating a shift in attitudes towards prostitution.



The second part of this thesis's final chapter opened out into a wider analysis of the representation of all women who navigated London after dark. Often, media portrayed women on the streets at night as placing themselves in harm's way. The thesis compared the newspaper reports of two real-life cases of young women who were murdered, with an analysis of two films which centre on a male serial killer who murders women at night. By drawing out two real-life but forgotten female murder victims, this thesis has contributed to the continued work of feminist scholars to highlight women's stories in a historical context.

In both the fictional and real murder cases, the media perpetuated the notion that the victims were at fault as they put themselves in danger by walking on the street at night. If the victim was considered to be of questionable moral standards because she was sexually promiscuous, this blame was apportioned more definitively. When the woman in question was foreign, as is the case in the 1928 film *Piccadilly*, her sexual liberation had to be removed in order to protect conservative British values.

### **Moving forward**

This thesis has taken a democratic approach to the selection of primary source material, treating famous films and news stories the same as smaller productions or obscure press reports. It has attempted to demonstrate that taking such a broad approach allows for a thorough and genuine examination of cultural history. In a time when the production of media content is proliferating, this thesis argues that it is only by taking a catholic approach to selecting source materials that one can hope to reach any conclusion about media representations.

The thesis has combined historical research and close analysis of newspaper and film texts to explore the representation of London nights during a period of great social

change. It has combined methodologies from different scholarly fields to work across traditional academic boundaries and to consider these two media outputs as part of a 'common culture' in which popular media are consumed indiscriminately by the same audiences. Drawing on both newspaper articles and fiction films requires an understanding of the role of each medium in the cultural landscape. Although this may appear to require substantial additional work by the researcher, the benefits are also considerable. Working across media rather than within one medium allows for consideration of how both forms influenced one another over an extended period of time.

Popular newspapers and cinema both became cornerstones of popular culture in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s and audiences usually consumed both forms, and regularly did so on the same day. Only by considering the media in conversation with one another can research start to uncover the daily influence of popular media representations on audiences' perception of the world around them. This thesis has demonstrated a possible approach to such comparative work which may be taken up by other scholars in future projects.

The outbreaks of both the First and the Second World War saw major changes to the experience of night-time in London. Government-imposed blackouts during the wars made the night much darker than it had been in previous decades, and the risk of bombing attacks also made the danger the night-time posed much more concrete. Future research into these times of war which bookend the period explored in this thesis, may build on this thesis to explore changes in the representation of the night-time in popular media during a time of national crisis.

The night is increasingly becoming a topic of interest of humanities researchers. This thesis has attempted to further this existing research by considering the representation of the urban night in two forms of media whose modes of production, distribution and exhibition were indelibly linked to night-time and darkness. As modern societies increasingly operate on a 'round-the-clock' basis, and nights are becoming busier, the need to understand how these societies have reflected on the night through their cultural industries only becomes greater. This thesis provides one example of how such a research project may be approached.

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## Notes

### Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> James Stuart, 'I have investigated London's all-night life', *Daily Mail*, 1 September 1937, p. 10
- <sup>2</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 215-216
- <sup>3</sup> Although interwar newspapers increasingly included photographs in their reportage, these were not able to recreate a three-dimensional experience in the same way as cinema was.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London: Chaucer to Dickens* (London: Verso, 2015); Walkowitz, *Nights Out*; Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930* (London: Reaktion, 1998)
- <sup>5</sup> An argument made in relation to cinema, most notably, by Lawrence Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009)
- <sup>6</sup> Linda Wood, *British Films 1927-1939* (London: BFI, 1986), p. 129
- <sup>7</sup> D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-80
- <sup>9</sup> Chris O'Rourke, *Acting for the Silent Screen: Film Actors and Aspirations between the Wars* (London: IB Tauris, 2017), p. 11
- <sup>10</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 225
- <sup>11</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 1
- <sup>12</sup> LeMahieu, pp. 9-19
- <sup>13</sup> Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press: a survey of its current operations and problems with special reference to national newspapers and their part in public affairs* (London: PEP, 1938), pp. 116-120
- <sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: cinema and society in 1930s Britain* (London: IB Tauris, 2010), p. 11
- <sup>15</sup> Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture*, pp. 4-9
- <sup>16</sup> Schlör, p. 24
- <sup>17</sup> *The Love Test* dir. by Michael Powell (Fox Film Company, 1935); *Cocaine*, dir. by Graham Cutts (Master Films, 1922)
- <sup>18</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
- <sup>19</sup> A Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: A History of Nighttime* (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 25-32
- <sup>20</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 13
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5
- <sup>22</sup> The notion that mass communications, including newspapers, work to build a shared sense of identity between potentially disparate groups of people was established by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983). Anderson's ideas have been explored in relation to British cinema by Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 2-9
- <sup>23</sup> For example: Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: a social history of Britain between the wars* (London: Vintage, 2009); Walkowitz, *Nights Out*; John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the thirties: a decade in the making, 1930 to the present* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1996); Michael John Law, *1938: modern Britain: social change and visions of the future* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018)
- <sup>24</sup> M.E.F. Jones, 'The economic history of the regional problem in Britain, 1920-38', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 10:4 (1984), pp. 385-396 (pp. 386-388)
- <sup>25</sup> Miriam Glucksmann, *Women Assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 52-3
- <sup>26</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, pp. 19-22
- <sup>27</sup> Eugene McLaughlin, 'From reel to ideal: *The Blue Lamp* and the popular cultural construction of the English 'bobby'', *Crime Media Culture*, 1:1 (2005), pp. 11-30 (p. 13)

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## Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> Ekirch, p. xxvi
- <sup>2</sup> Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, pp.114-134
- <sup>3</sup> Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930* (London: Reaktion, 1998)
- <sup>4</sup> Beaumont, *Nightwalking*
- <sup>5</sup> Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, p. 89
- <sup>6</sup> Schlör, p. 66
- <sup>7</sup> Rachel Rich, *Bourgeois Consumption* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 135-145; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 164-170
- <sup>8</sup> Selina Todd, 'Young Women, Work, and Leisure in Interwar England', *The Historical Journal*, 48:3 (2005), pp. 789-809 (pp. 791-795)
- <sup>9</sup> Rappaport, p. 105
- <sup>10</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, pp. 215-216
- <sup>11</sup> Heather Shore, "Constable dances with instructress": the police and the Queen of Nightclubs in inter-war London', *Social History*, 38:2 (2013), 183-202 (p. 188)
- <sup>12</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, pp. 19-20
- <sup>13</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 225
- <sup>14</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 220
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6
- <sup>16</sup> Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture*, pp. 17-23
- <sup>17</sup> Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Britain: constructing a community through language* (London, Routledge: 2006), pp. 6-9
- <sup>18</sup> John Sedgwick, 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s', in *The Unknown 1930: an alternative history of British cinema 1929-1939*, ed. by Jeffrey Richards (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000) pp. 1-35 (p. 2); Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, pp. 11-12
- <sup>19</sup> Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp.12-16
- <sup>20</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 152
- <sup>21</sup> Mark Hampton and Martin Conboy, 'Journalism history – a debate', *Journalism Studies*, 15:2 (2014), pp. 154-171
- <sup>22</sup> Adrian Bingham has also highlighted the significance of digitisation in 'Ignoring the first draft of history?' *Media History* 18, 3-4 (2012), pp. 311-326 (pp. 311-312). For this research project I am much indebted to digitisation, which has given me ready access to high-quality copies of interwar newspapers.
- <sup>23</sup> Martin Conboy, 'The Paradoxes of Journalism History', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 30 (2010), pp. 411-420
- <sup>24</sup> Hampton and Conboy, pp. 155; 158-159; 164
- <sup>25</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 41-43
- <sup>26</sup> Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 95
- <sup>27</sup> Siân Nichols, 'Media History or Media Histories? Re-addressing the history of the mass media in inter-war Britain', *Media History*, 18 3-4 (2012), pp. 379-394 (p. 389)
- <sup>28</sup> Adrian Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 10:2 (2012), pp. 140-150 (p. 141); Bingham, 'Ignoring the first draft of history?', p. 311
- <sup>29</sup> See for example Lucy Bland, 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson', *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (2008), pp. 624-648; John Carter Wood, 'Those who have had trouble can sympathise with you', *Journal of Social History*, 43:2 (2009), pp. 440-462
- <sup>30</sup> Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the creation of a commercial popular language', *Journalism Studies*, 10:5 (2009), pp. 639-654
- <sup>31</sup> Conboy, *Tabloid Britain*, pp. 94-122
- <sup>32</sup> A prime example of this in the British context is Higson, *Waving the flag*. Both Higson and Conboy refer to Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' as a key concept in their respective works: Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995)
- <sup>33</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid century*, chapters 4-6
- <sup>34</sup> See for example Rachael Low, *The History of British Film vols 1-7* (London: Routledge, 1997); *The Unknown 1930s*, eds Jeffrey Richards, (London: IB Tauris, 2000); Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*.
- <sup>35</sup> See for example Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928* (London: BFI, 2003)
- <sup>36</sup> Wood, *British Films 1927-1939*

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- <sup>37</sup> With the notable exception of Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture*)
- <sup>38</sup> Rachael Low, *The History of British Film* vols 1-7 (London: Routledge, 1997)
- <sup>39</sup> Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928* (London: BFI, 2003)
- <sup>40</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*
- <sup>41</sup> Sedgwick, 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s', in *The Unknown 1930s*, pp. 1-35
- <sup>42</sup> Michael Hammond, *The Big Show: British Cinema Culture in the Great War* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006)
- <sup>43</sup> Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: cinema and cultural memory* (London: IB Tauris, 2002)
- <sup>44</sup> Lisa Stead, *Off to the Pictures: Cinema-going, women's writing and movie culture in interwar Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016)
- <sup>45</sup> O'Rourke, *Acting for the Silent Screen*
- <sup>46</sup> Kurt von Stutterheim, *The Press in England* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934), p.157
- <sup>47</sup> Henry Wickham Stead, *The Press* (Harmondsworth, 1938), p. 28
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Von Stutterheim, p. 144
- <sup>50</sup> LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227-233
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253
- <sup>53</sup> Stead, p. 31; Von Stutterheim, p. 172
- <sup>54</sup> See for example 'Let the Tattoo Continue', *Daily Mail*, 14 September 1925, p. 7; 'Stadium Tattoo As Drama', *Daily Mail*, 28 September 1925, p. 7; 'The Prince at the Tattoo', *Daily Mail*, 30 October 1925, p. 9
- <sup>55</sup> 'Wembley's All-Night Visitors', *Daily Mirror*, 2 November 1925, p. 2
- <sup>56</sup> Linda Wood, 'Julius Hagen and Twickenham Film Studios', in *The Unknown 1930: an alternative history of British cinema 1929-1939*, ed. by Jeffrey Richards (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp.37-56 (p. 39)
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42
- <sup>58</sup> Steve Chibnall, *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film*, (London, BFI: 2007), p. 35
- <sup>59</sup> Sarah Street, *British National Cinema, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 36
- <sup>60</sup> Allen Eyles, *Gaumont British Cinemas* (London: BFI, 1996), pp. 12-13
- <sup>61</sup> Philip Kemp, 'Not for Peckham: Michael Balcon and Gainsborough's International Trajectory in the 1920s', in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 13-30 (p. 28)
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14 and 23
- <sup>63</sup> Sue Harper, 'Nothing to Beat the Hay Diet': Comedy at Gaumont and Gainsborough', in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 80-98 (p. 85)
- <sup>64</sup> H Mark Glancy, 'Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British 'Quota' Legislation', in *The Unknown 1930: an alternative history of British cinema 1929-1939*, ed. by Jeffrey Richards (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 57-74 (p. 68)
- <sup>65</sup> Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London: Cameron & Tayleur, 1997), p. 4
- <sup>66</sup> Street, pp. 39-40
- <sup>67</sup> Harper, p. 85; Eyles, p. 40
- <sup>68</sup> Glancy, p. 67
- <sup>69</sup> Street, pp. 9-11
- <sup>70</sup> Wood, *British Films 1927-1939*, p. 2
- <sup>71</sup> Chibnall, p. xii and 66
- <sup>72</sup> Glancy, pp. 62-65
- <sup>73</sup> Lawrence Napper, 'British Cinema and the Middlebrow', in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, eds. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 110-115
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>75</sup> Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture*, pp. 23-30
- <sup>76</sup> *The Constant Nymph*, dir. by Adrian Brunel (Gainsborough, 1928); Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture*, pp. 35-79
- <sup>77</sup> With exceptions made for the likes of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* which was a US box-office success.
- <sup>78</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 91
- <sup>79</sup> <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/student-guide/bbfc-history/1912-1949> (accessed 27 November 2017)
- <sup>80</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 90
- <sup>81</sup> Paul Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe: The Harmsworths of Fleet Street* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) pp. 145-149

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- <sup>82</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, pp. 8-9; Kevin Williams, *Get me a murder a day!*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) p. 55
- <sup>83</sup> Maurice Edelman, *The Mirror: A Political History*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966), p. 11
- <sup>84</sup> Ferris, p. 104
- <sup>85</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 28
- <sup>86</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day!*, p. 58
- <sup>87</sup> Adrian Addison, *Mail Men*, revised edition, (London, Atlantic Books, 2017), pp. 91-110
- <sup>88</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, pp. 8-9. NB. Rothermere bought a 49% share in the *Daily Express* in 1922: Kevin Williams, *Read All About It!* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 168
- <sup>89</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, pp. 61-64
- <sup>90</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 70 and 175
- <sup>91</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, pp. 9-10
- <sup>92</sup> Edelman, pp. 1-10
- <sup>93</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, pp. 13-14
- <sup>94</sup> Bingham and Conboy, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the creation of a commercial popular language', pp. 648-649
- <sup>95</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, pp. 14-15
- <sup>96</sup> Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, pp. 8-13; Williams, *Read all about it!*, pp. 154-157; Von Stutterheim, p. 153
- <sup>97</sup> BFI Filmography available at <https://filmography.bfi.org.uk/>
- <sup>98</sup> Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government, 1927-84* (London: BFI Publishing, 1985), pp. 5-6
- <sup>99</sup> National Film and Television Archive catalogue available at <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web>; International Movie Database available at <http://www.imdb.com>
- <sup>100</sup> BFI Player available at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/>; Internet Archive available at <https://archive.org/>
- <sup>101</sup> Von Stutterheim, p. 152
- <sup>102</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 40
- <sup>103</sup> Kevin Williams, *Get me a murder a day*, p. 57
- <sup>104</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) p. 184
- <sup>105</sup> The even-numbered pages of the newspapers usually did not contain news reports, but instead included adverts, columns, 'women's articles' and other content not related to current affairs
- <sup>106</sup> 'New "Diagram" Comedy', *Daily Mail*, 4 September 1935, p. 7; 'New Forgery Play', *Daily Mail*, 24 September 1935, p. 20
- <sup>107</sup> Lyons Chocolates advertisement, *Daily Express*, 1 March 1928, p. 3
- <sup>108</sup> The remainder of the articles in the *Mirror* covered a range of topics such as fires and accidents; public transport; and 'women's news'
- <sup>109</sup> See for example 'The Prince in a Scrummage', *Daily Mail*, 2 October 1922, p. 6; 'Prince at Cinema – fainting women in crowd of 3,600', *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1927, p. 12
- <sup>110</sup> 'London's Film First Night', *Daily Mail*, 26 September 1935, p. 13
- <sup>111</sup> 'Record West End Crowds in Boxing Night Revels', *Daily Mirror*, 27 December 1924, p. 3
- <sup>112</sup> 'Ten Thousand "Daily Mail" Guests Watch the Downfall of the Socialists' [photo], *Daily Mail*, 31 Oct 1924, p. 16
- <sup>113</sup> 'Light Failure During Operation', *Daily Mirror*, 25 November 1927, p. 26; 'Tottenham Gloom', *Daily Mirror*, 15 December 1927, p. 2; 'Hendon Lights Out', *Daily Mirror*, 20 December 1927, p.2
- <sup>114</sup> 'Curfew needed for non-stop loud-speakers', *Daily Mail*, 1 September 1933, p. 7
- <sup>115</sup> 'The Restaurant Shuffle', *Daily Mail*, 26 September 1935, p. 11
- <sup>116</sup> Across the 1920s, the *Mail* reported on average 20% more on theatre productions than on film screenings – across the 1930s the number of reports on films and theatre shows respectively was even.
- <sup>117</sup> 'Film of Strube's "Little Man"', *Daily Express*, 28 April 1928, p. 3
- <sup>118</sup> *Let Me Explain, Dear!*, dir. by Gene Gerrard, Frank Miller (British International Pictures, 1932)
- <sup>119</sup> *Downhill*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Gainsborough, 1927)
- <sup>120</sup> *Blighty*, dir. by Adrian Brunel (Gainsborough, 1927)
- <sup>121</sup> *It's Love Again*, dir. by Victor Saville (Gainsborough, 1936); for a more detailed analysis of this film please refer to chapter 4
- <sup>122</sup> *Break the News*, dir. by René Clair (Jack Buchanan Productions, 1938)
- <sup>123</sup> As these figures show, a number of articles were about both theatre and cinema.
- <sup>124</sup> For example, 'Ivor Novello as Romeo', *Daily Express*, 14 April 1928, p. 9
- <sup>125</sup> 'London Cinemas, Theatres, Carry On in Dark.' *Daily Mail*, 2 September 1939, p. 10

- <sup>126</sup> 'Managers ready for the 'all clear'', *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1939, p. 7
- <sup>127</sup> 'Cinemas, football, start again to-day', *Daily Mail*, 9 September 1939, p. 1
- <sup>128</sup> '3,000 Cinemas Open Today in the "Safe" Areas', *Daily Mail*, 9 September 1939, p. 5
- <sup>129</sup> 'First Two London Theatre Reopen', *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1939, p. 5
- <sup>130</sup> 'Cinemas and theatres are open until 10 to-night', *Daily Mail*, 15 September 1939, p. 1 and p. 10
- <sup>131</sup> For example, 'Lido Club Appeal', *Daily Mail*, 15 September 1928, p. 7
- <sup>132</sup> Clive Emsley has noted that it is typical for crime narratives in the media to "focus on the exceptional, the scandalous and the violent" see Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in twentieth-century England* (Harlow: Longman, 2011), p. 109
- <sup>133</sup> 'Man 'Kidnapped' in a Street', *Daily Express*, 5 March 1930, p. 3; 'American Girl Tragedy', *Daily Express*, 7 March 1930, p. 3; 'Savage Attack On Old Man', *Daily Express*, 8 March 1930, p. 9; 'Old Masters Cut From Their Frames', *Daily Express*, 12 March 1930, p. 1; 'Mother and Son Battered to Death', *Daily Express*, 27 March 1930, p. 1; 'University Man as "Mr H"', *Daily Express*, 25 April 1930, p. 7
- <sup>134</sup> 'Mystery Fate of Bound Girl', *Daily Mirror*, 19 November 1928, p. 3
- <sup>135</sup> 'Man-Hunt in Mystery of Dead Girl in Garden', *Daily Mirror*, 17 December 1931, p. 3
- <sup>136</sup> 'Bag Snatchers' Busy Night', *Daily Mirror*, 9 November 1932, p. 3, 'Bandits Rob a Postmistress', *Daily Mirror*, 17 November 1932, p. 2
- <sup>137</sup> Bland, p. 626
- <sup>138</sup> See 'Alarm in the Night Dance Dens', *Daily Express*, 13 March 1922, p. 1 and 7; 'Panic in the Dope Dens', *Daily Express*, 15 March 1922, p. 7; 'Why Girls Go to Dope Dens', *Daily Express*, 16 March 1922, p. 7
- <sup>139</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain*, pp. 145-146
- <sup>140</sup> *Evergreen*, dir. by Victor Saville (Gaumont, 1934)
- <sup>141</sup> *The Gaunt Stranger*, dir. by Walter Forde (Ealing Studios, 1938)

## Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> Alan A Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900-1939*, 2nd edn, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1991), p. 142; Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 16; Robert Murphy, 'Fantasy Worlds: British Cinema Between the Wars' *Screen* 26:1 (1985), 10-20 (p. 20)
- <sup>2</sup> *A Cup of Kindness*, dir. by Tom Walls (Gainsborough, 1934); *Laburnum Grove*, dir. by Carol Reed (Associated Talking Pictures, 1936)
- <sup>3</sup> It is recognised that, like any newspaper sampling methodology, the methodology used in this thesis makes it possible that a small number of newspaper articles relevant to the topic of this chapter have been overlooked. This does not, however, negate that nocturnal suburbs were little commented-on in interwar newspapers.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, Rupa Huq starts her substantive analysis of British films set in suburbs in the 1950s: Rupa Huq, *Making Sense of Suburbia Through Popular Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 85-92; the volume *Filmurbia: Screening the Suburbs* also stays in post-Second World War territory. *Filmurbia, Screening the Suburbs*, ed. by David Forrest, Graeme Harper, and Jonathan Rayner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)
- <sup>5</sup> David C Thorns as quoted in Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: social change and urban growth in England and the United States* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 2
- <sup>6</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Third Edition*, 2012, available online at [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com) (accessed 22 September 2018)
- <sup>7</sup> The same negative connotations with suburbia also developed in the US during the same period, as demonstrated by Catherine Jurca in her study of representations of suburbia in American novels. Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 161
- <sup>8</sup> Jackson, p. 162
- <sup>9</sup> Clapson, pp. 52-70
- <sup>10</sup> David Forrest, 'Mike Leigh and the Poetics of English Suburbia' in *Filmurbia, Screening the Suburbs*, ed. by David Forrest, Graeme Harper, and Jonathan Rayner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 49-61 (p. 50)
- <sup>11</sup> Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) pp. 21 and 50-52
- <sup>12</sup> Clapson, p. 2; Stephen Halliday, *Underground to Everywhere* (Sutton: Stroud, 2001), p. 113
- <sup>13</sup> Jackson, p. 73
- <sup>14</sup> Murphy, p. 15
- <sup>15</sup> Jackson, pp. 141-143 and 213-214



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- <sup>16</sup> Jackson, p. 165
- <sup>17</sup> LeMahieu, p. 29
- <sup>18</sup> Coverage of 106% indicates that every 100 citizens bought an average of 106 newspapers between them. PEP, p. 239
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 228; ratio of readers 11:9 male : female
- <sup>20</sup> LeMahieu, p. 12
- <sup>21</sup> Curran and Seaton, p. 39
- <sup>22</sup> 'Madman Leaps To His Death', *Daily Express*, 7 April 1920, p. 9
- <sup>23</sup> Ordinance Survey maps of Plaistow published 1897 and 1919, accessed through National Library of Scotland website: <https://maps.nls.uk/> (accessed 15 December 2018)
- <sup>24</sup> 'Madman', p. 9
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Strangled Girl', *Daily Mail*, 21 October 1920, p. 7
- <sup>27</sup> 'Strangled Waitress', *Daily Mail*, 22 October 1920, p. 5
- <sup>28</sup> 'Acton Shall Not Dance To-Night', *Daily Mirror*, 9 December 1920, p. 2
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> 'London and Suburban Cinema Guide', *Daily Mirror*, 5 November 1931, back page
- <sup>31</sup> '12 Miles of London in the Dark', *Daily Mirror*, 7 December 1933, front page
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Why Lights Went Out', *Daily Mirror*, 7 December 1933, p. 2
- <sup>34</sup> 'Pagan' Girls Shock Dean', *Daily Express*, 30 April 1935, front page
- <sup>35</sup> This is borne out by my own research but also pointed out by architectural historian Paul Oliver in Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1981), p. 130
- <sup>36</sup> Andy Medhurst, 'Negotiating the Gnome Zone' in *Visions of Suburbia*, Roger Silverstone (ed), (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 240-268, (p. 244)
- <sup>37</sup> David Forrest, Graeme Harper, and Jonathan Rayner, 'Introduction. Filmurbia: Cinema and the Suburbs' in *Filmurbia, Screening the Suburbs*, ed. by David Forrest, Graeme Harper, and Jonathan Rayner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1-10 (p. 2)
- <sup>38</sup> Clapson, pp. 51-52
- <sup>39</sup> One of these is in Kingsbury Green, another in Edmonton.
- <sup>40</sup> One is reminded of the station master greeting all the commuters by name as they disembark for the evening at the start of *Dead Men Are Dangerous* (1939) discussed in chapter 3. The suburban train station functioned in a similar way to the church – a regular meeting place for neighbours who did not otherwise speak to one another.

### Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup> Fritzsche, p. 18
- <sup>2</sup> Colin Divall, 'Civilising velocity: Masculinity and the marketing of Britain's passenger trains, 1921-39', in *The Journal of Transport History*, 32:2 (2011), 164-191 (p. 164)
- <sup>3</sup> Philip S Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution from 1770* (London: Batsford, 1974), p. 137. As bicycles were normally privately owned and used by a single person they are not considered further in this chapter.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 21
- <sup>5</sup> The Metropolitan Railway, the Metropolitan District Railway, the City and South London Railway, the Waterloo and City line, the Baker Street and Waterloo Railway, the Central London Railway, the Charing Cross, Euston and Hampstead Railway, and the Piccadilly Line.
- <sup>6</sup> Halliday, p. 14
- <sup>7</sup> Ralph Harrington 'Civic Pride, Urban Identity and Public Transport in Britain, 1880-1980', in *Suburbanizing the Masses*, eds. Colin Divall and Winstan Bond (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 252
- <sup>8</sup> Harrington, p. 253
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 250
- <sup>10</sup> Christian Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway* (London: Atlantic, 2005), p. 276
- <sup>11</sup> Michael John Law, 'The car indispensable': the hidden influence of the car in inter-war suburban London', in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 38 (2012), 424-433 (p. 424-425)
- <sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey* (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers, 1977) p. 33
- <sup>13</sup> Fritzsche, pp. 23-24
- <sup>14</sup> David M Henkin, *City Reading* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1998), p. 103; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983)

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- <sup>15</sup> Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 43-48
- <sup>16</sup> Halliday, p. 24
- <sup>17</sup> Dennis Edwards and Ron Pigram, *London's Underground Suburbs* (London: Baton Transport, 1986), p. 30
- <sup>18</sup> Wolmar, p. 202
- <sup>19</sup> "The Last Train", *Daily Mail*, 14 September 1922, p. 7
- <sup>20</sup> "Last Trains To Be Later", *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1922, p. 9
- <sup>21</sup> "Motors Help Home Life", *The Times*, 9 June 1925, p. 12
- <sup>22</sup> Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About A Pound A Week* (London: Virago, 1979), pp. 40-41
- <sup>23</sup> Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), p. 27
- <sup>24</sup> Harrington, p. 251
- <sup>25</sup> See for example "Two Killed By Motor-Omnibus" *Daily Mail*, 29 October 1923, p. 7; "Several Injured in London Bus Smash", *Daily Mirror*, 3 November 1924, p. 3; and articles quoted below
- <sup>26</sup> Wolmar, pp. 258-268; Bagwell, pp. 226-227
- <sup>27</sup> "16 Hurt in Triple Smash", *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1925, p. 9
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> "Tramcar in Smash", *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1925, p. 9
- <sup>30</sup> Peter W Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page: representing the nation in the Illustrated London News* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 126
- <sup>31</sup> An example of the sometimes lurid descriptions of murder victims is explored in chapter 6.
- <sup>32</sup> "Woman Under An Omnibus", *Daily Express*, 8 March 1924, p. 1
- <sup>33</sup> On the promotion of stability and inevitability by the interwar press see Rod Brookes, "The Little Man and the Slump: Strube's Cartoons and the Politics of Unemployment 1929-1931" in *Oxford Art Journal*, 8:1 (1985), pp. 49-61 (p. 54)
- <sup>34</sup> *A Cup of Kindness*, dir. by Tom Walls (Gainsborough, 1934)
- <sup>35</sup> *Dead Men Are Dangerous*, dir. by Harold French (Welwyn Studios, 1939)
- <sup>36</sup> *Underground*, dir. by Anthony Asquith (British Instructional Films, 1928)
- <sup>37</sup> Kirby, p. 62
- <sup>38</sup> This was also true of cabs and omnibuses, see Matthew L Kerr, "'Perambulating fever nests of our London streets': Cabs, Omnibuses, Ambulances, and Other 'Pest-Vehicles' in the Victorian Metropolis", in *Journal of British Studies*, 49:2 (2010), pp. 283-310 (p. 289)
- <sup>39</sup> Matthew Beaumont, "Railway Mania: The Train Compartment as the Scene of a Crime" in *The Railway and Modernity*, eds. Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 125-154 (pp. 129-130)
- <sup>40</sup> Bert and Bill are shown to frequent the same pub; Bert and Kate live in the same boarding house; and Bert repeatedly seeks Nell out at her work and around her house.
- <sup>41</sup> *Blackmail*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (British International Pictures, 1929)
- <sup>42</sup> *A Kiss in the Tunnel*, dir. by George Albert Smith (George Albert Smith Films, 1899)
- <sup>43</sup> See Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock* (Moffat: Cameron Books, 2001), p. 84; Tom Ryall, *Blackmail* (London: BFI, 1993), p. 42; Marc Raymond Strauss, *Alfred Hitchcock's Silent Films* (London: McFarland & Company, 2004), p. 203
- <sup>44</sup> Hitchcock used train noise to dramatic effect again in *The Lady Vanishes*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Gainsborough, 1938): see Kirby, p. 247
- <sup>45</sup> *The Wrecker*, dir. by Géza von Bolváry (Gainsborough, 1929)
- <sup>46</sup> Staged train crashes were also a staple of early cinema. See Kirby, p. 60
- <sup>47</sup> *Sabotage*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Gainsborough, 1936)
- <sup>48</sup> *Friday the Thirteenth*, dir. Victor Saville (Gainsborough, 1933)
- <sup>49</sup> "Girl Robbed Of Hair", *Daily Express*, 20 April 1921, p. 5; "Girl's Limbs in a Parcel", *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1922, p. 7
- <sup>50</sup> "Girl Attacked and Robbed in a London Train", *Daily Mirror*, 5 December 1929, p. 3
- <sup>51</sup> Divall, p. 179
- <sup>52</sup> George N Georgano, *A History of the London Taxicab* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), p. 110
- <sup>53</sup> Paul Dobraszczczyk, "Useful Reading? Designing Information for London's Victorian Cab Passengers" in *Journal of Design History*, 21:2 (2008), pp. 121-141 (p. 122-129)
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 121
- <sup>55</sup> "Murdered Taxicab Driver", *The Times*, 11 May 1923, p. 11
- <sup>56</sup> Georgano, p. 92-103
- <sup>57</sup> "Shot Dead In Taxi", *Daily Mirror*, 3 November 1926, p. 2

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- <sup>58</sup> "Dead Girl in Taxi", *Daily Mirror*, 17 November 1923, p. 2
- <sup>59</sup> The same was true for privately owned motorcars. See Divall, p. 179
- <sup>60</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) [original publication 1887]
- <sup>61</sup> *The Human Monster*, or, *The Dark Eyes of London*, dir. by Walter Summers (John Argyle Productions, 1939)
- <sup>62</sup> *Death Drives Through*, dir. by Edward L. Cahn (Associated Talking Pictures, 1935)
- <sup>63</sup> *Sally in Our Alley*, dir. by Maurice Elvey (Associated Radio Pictures, 1931)

#### Chapter 4

- <sup>1</sup> Sarah Lonsdale, *The Journalist in British Fiction and Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Note that Lonsdale's discussion of interwar representations of British journalists considers representations in 'novels, short stories, major poems and plays' but not in films (p. 73)
- <sup>2</sup> As also noted by Sarah Newman, 'Gentleman, Journalist, Gentleman-Journalist', *Journalism Studies*, 14:5 (2013), 698-715 (p. 698)
- <sup>3</sup> PEP, pp. 12-13
- <sup>4</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned: The Astonishing Story of the Daily Mirror* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1953); Wareham Smith, *Spilt Ink* (London: Ernest Benn, 1932); John Junor joined the *Daily Express* after completing his army service: John Junor, *Listening for a Midnight Tram* (London: Chapmans, 1990), p. 22; Alfred Draper also decided to become a journalist after being discharged from active service: Alfred Draper, *Scoops and Swindles: memoirs of a Fleet Street journalist* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1988), p. 14
- <sup>5</sup> Tim Gopsill and Greg Neale, *Journalists: 100 Years of the NUJ* (London: Profile Books, 2007), p. 78
- <sup>6</sup> PEP, p. 140
- <sup>7</sup> *The Phantom Fiend*, dir. Maurice Elvey (Julius Hagen Productions, 1932)
- <sup>8</sup> Lonsdale, *The Journalist in British Fiction and Film*, pp. 2-3
- <sup>9</sup> Brian McNair, *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 25
- <sup>10</sup> Richard R Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A journalism filmography* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1997), pp. ix - 2
- <sup>11</sup> Napper, 'British Cinema and the Middlebrow', p. 115
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas H Zynda, 'The Hollywood Version: Movie Portrayals of the Press', *Journalism History* (1979), 16-25, (p. 17 and 23); Alex Barris, *Stop the Presses: The newspaperman in American films* (London: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd, 1976), p. 12; Ness, p. 71
- <sup>13</sup> Barris, p. 22
- <sup>14</sup> Ness, p. 3
- <sup>15</sup> Appearing in *Midnight Menace*, dir. by Sinclair Hill (Grosvenor Films Ltd., 1937) and *Trouble Brewing*, dir. by Anthony Kimmins (Associated, 1939) respectively
- <sup>16</sup> *The Squeaker* (alt. title: *Murder on Diamond Row*), dir. by Edgar Wallace (London Film Productions, 1930); *It's Love Again*, dir. by Victor Saville (Gaumont, 1936); *Gangway*, dir. by Sonnie Hale (Gaumont, 1937); *I See Ice!*, dir. by Anthony Kimmins (Associated Talking Pictures, 1938); *Murder in Soho* (alt. title *Murder in the Night*), dir. by Norman Lee (Associated British Picture Corporation, 1939)
- <sup>17</sup> Barris, pp. 12-19
- <sup>18</sup> *The Lodger: A story of the London fog*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Gainsborough Pictures, 1927); *Harmony Heaven*, dir. by Thomas Bentley (British International Pictures, 1930); *Looking on the Bright Side*, dir. by. Graham Cutts/Basil Dean (Associated Radio Pictures, 1932); *Aunt Sally* (alt. title *Along Came Sally*), dir. by Tim Whelan (Gainsborough, 1934); *Love, Life & Laughter*, dir. by Maurice Elvey (Associated Talking Pictures, 1934); *The Clairvoyant*, dir. by Maurice Elvey (Gaumont, 1935); *Cheer Up!*, dir. by Leo Mittler, (Stanley Lupino Productions, 1936); *Men Are Not Gods*, dir. by Walter Reisch (London Film Productions, 1936); *Pygmalion*, dir. by Anthony Asquith/Leslie Howard (Pascal Film Productions, 1938); *Break the News*, dir. by René Clair (Jack Buchanan Productions, 1938)
- <sup>19</sup> PEP, p. 17 and p. 134
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 19
- <sup>21</sup> Sarah Lonsdale "We Agreed that Women Were A Nuisance in the Office, Anyway": The portrayal of women journalists in early twentieth-century British fiction', *Journalism Studies*, 14:4 (2013), 461-475 (p. 462)
- <sup>22</sup> PEP, pp. 174-175
- <sup>23</sup> See for example 'Why Girls Go To Dope Dens', *Daily Express*, 16 March 1922, p. 7
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- <sup>31</sup> Cannell, p. 200
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- <sup>38</sup> Onslow, p. 2
- <sup>39</sup> Lonsdale, 'We Agreed' p. 462
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- <sup>43</sup> Lonsdale, 'We Agreed' p. 462
- <sup>44</sup> Chambers, Steiner and Fleming, p. 16
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 21 - 27
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## Chapter 5

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- <sup>12</sup> Wood, 'The Third Degree': pp. 477-78; Stefan Slater, 'Containment: Managing Street Prostitution in London: 1918-1959', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (April 2010) 332-357 (p. 343)
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- <sup>14</sup> See Clive Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard: The Story of a Rotten Apple, or a Diseased Orchard?' in *Crime and Culture: An Historical Perspective*, eds. Amy Gilman Srebnick and René Lévy (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 85-104 for an exploration of Goddard's background and position in the police force; Heather Shore, 'Constable dances with instructress': the police and the Queen of the

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<sup>16</sup> Shore, 'Constable dances with instructress', p. 188

<sup>17</sup> Mara Arts, 'Glamour and Crime: The London Nightclub in Silent Film', in *London on Film*, eds Pam Hirsch and Chris O'Rourke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 31

<sup>18</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 226

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228

<sup>20</sup> *A Night Like This*, dir. by Tom Walls (Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1932)

<sup>21</sup> Wood, 'The Constables and the Garage Girl', pp. 387-390

<sup>22</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p. 125

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<sup>24</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, p. 220

<sup>25</sup> Emsley, *The English Police*, p. 144

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<sup>27</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p. 160

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<sup>30</sup> Howard Taylor, 'Forging the Job: A Crisis of 'Modernization' or Redundancy for the Police in England and Wales, 1900-1939', *British Journal of Criminology*, 39:1 (1999), 113-135; Clive Emsley, 'Mother, what did policemen do when there weren't any motors?' The Law, the Police and the Regulation of Motor Traffic in England, 1900-1939', *The Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993), 357-381

<sup>31</sup> Barr, *English Hitchcock*, pp. 84-85

<sup>32</sup> Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, pp. 214-219

<sup>33</sup> See for example Wood 'Press, Politics and the 'Police and Public' Debates', p. 78

<sup>34</sup> 'Men Who Watch the Thames by Night', *Daily Express*, 12 April 1921, p. 4

<sup>35</sup> '20,000 People In Amazing Hoax In Whitechapel', *Daily Mirror*, 1 December 1927, p. 3

<sup>36</sup> 'Woman Dressed as Man', *Daily Express*, 6 April 1926, p. 7

<sup>37</sup> 'Peer's Visit to Night Club', *Daily Mirror*, 24 December 1925, p. 2

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<sup>42</sup> Barr, *English Hitchcock*, p.83

<sup>43</sup> Norwell Roberts, the first black officer to work for the Metropolitan Police, joined the force in 1967.

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<sup>44</sup> *Escape!*, dir. by Basil Dean (Associated Talking Pictures, 1930)

<sup>45</sup> Emsley, *The English Police*, 127

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-158

<sup>47</sup> 'Nation's First Female Police Officer LAPD Officer Alice Stebbins Wells', *Los Angeles Almanac* website, URL <http://www.laalmanac.com/crime/cr73b.php>, (accessed 22 June 2019)

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<sup>49</sup> 'Dance Club Raid Mystery', *Daily Express*, 2 March 1926, p. 9

<sup>50</sup> 'Police Visit To Kit-Cat Club', *Daily Mirror*, 13 December 1926, p. 3

<sup>51</sup> 'Roof Exit from Night Club', *Daily Express*, 22 April 1932, p. 11

<sup>52</sup> '72 People in Raided Club', *Daily Express*, 11 March 1932, p. 7

<sup>53</sup> 'Night Club Scenes – Graduate Policeman's Sandwich', *Daily Express*, 18 March 1932, p. 7

<sup>54</sup> Gene Adair, *Alfred Hitchcock: Filming our Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 13-14

<sup>55</sup> Napper, 'British Cinema and the Middlebrow', p. 115

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> O'Rourke, pp. 81-87

<sup>2</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, p.15

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- <sup>3</sup> See for example Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- <sup>4</sup> I use the term 'prostitute' rather than the, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more commonly accepted term 'sex worker', to reflect terminology used in interwar Britain
- <sup>5</sup> Rappaport, pp. 221-22.
- <sup>6</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 50.
- <sup>7</sup> Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 5
- <sup>8</sup> Julia Laite, 'The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene: abolitionism and prostitution law in Britain (1915-1959)', *Women's History Review*, 17 (April 2008) 207-223 (p. 209).
- <sup>9</sup> Bartley, p. 158
- <sup>10</sup> Slater, 'Lady Astor', pp. 533-34
- <sup>11</sup> Julia Laite, 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints: Prostitutes and Legal Identity in Early Twentieth-Century London', *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008), 96-116 (p. 98)
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-14; Slater, 'Lady Astor', pp. 534-35
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- <sup>15</sup> In addition to reporting on the 1936 murders on foreign prostitutes, Slater also mentions a *Daily Express* 'inquiry' into white slave trafficking, reported on in the same year. Slater, 'Pimps, Police and Filles de Jolie', p. 66. I have identified a similar cycle of white slave panic articles in the *Daily Express* in April 1911, which indicates that this was a recurrent concern in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s.
- <sup>16</sup> Stefan Slater, 'Prostitutes and popular history: notes on the 'underworld', 1918-1939', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, 13:1 (2009), 25-48, p. 30
- <sup>17</sup> Slater, 'Lady Astor', p. 555
- <sup>18</sup> Stefan Slater explores the reasons for this failure in 'Lady Astor', pp 533-573
- <sup>19</sup> 'Police Charge Dismissed', *Daily Express*, 23 March 1929, p. 7
- <sup>20</sup> Jennifer Davis, 'A Poor Man's System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 27 (June 1984), 309-335 (p. 317)
- <sup>21</sup> Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On stage and in society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 2-3
- <sup>22</sup> Slater, 'Prostitutes and Popular History', p. 37
- <sup>23</sup> Taken from a list of 43 elements that would normally be deleted, drawn up by the BBFC from the 1913-1915 annual reports. <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/student-guide/bbfc-history/1912-1949> (Accessed on 7 July 2016) See also: Richards, p. 92
- <sup>24</sup> Richards, p. 111
- <sup>25</sup> The illegality of homosexuality at the time meant that where representations of sex were permitted it was always heterosexual.
- <sup>26</sup> *Maisie's Marriage*, dir. by Alexander Butler (Napoleon Films, 1923)
- <sup>27</sup> Bland, p. 634
- <sup>28</sup> Slater, 'Prostitutes in popular history', pp. 36-37
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 30
- <sup>30</sup> Laite, 'Taking Nellie Johnson's Fingerprints', pp. 100-08
- <sup>31</sup> Slater, 'Prostitutes in popular history', p. 34
- <sup>32</sup> *Daily Express*, 16 October 1922, p.1, as quoted by John Carter Wood, 'Watching the Detectives (and the Constables): Fearing the Police in 1920s Britain' in *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media: Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Sian Nicholas and Tom O'Malley (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 147-161 (p. 154)
- <sup>33</sup> *Friday the Thirteenth*, dir. by Victor Saville (Gainsborough, 1933)
- <sup>34</sup> A recollection quoted by Slater suggests that in reality, prostitutes' transactions could take as little as five minutes, see Slater, 'Prostitutes in popular history', p. 37
- <sup>35</sup> 'Dance Girl Murdered in London', *Daily Express*, 11 April 1925, p. 1 and p. 7; 'Girl's Death Wound Mystery', *Daily Mirror*, 11 April 1925, p. 1
- <sup>36</sup> 'Dance Girl Murdered in London', p. 7
- <sup>37</sup> 'Murdered Girl: Woman's Story', *Daily Mirror*, 11 April 1925, p. 15
- <sup>38</sup> *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. by Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 135-141. These concerns lasted beyond the Second World War, as evidenced in Agnes Pearl Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), pp. 120-25.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Dead Girl Dancer: Story of Youth's Written Confession', *Daily Mirror*, 14 April 1925, p. 2
- <sup>40</sup> 'Murdered Girl: Woman's Story'; 'Double-Life Girls', *Daily Express*, 23 April 1925, p. 2

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- <sup>41</sup> 'Dancing Girl's Death', *The Times*, 23 April 1925, p. 14; 'Dead Dancer: Boy For Trial', *Daily Mirror*, 23 April 1925, p. 21; 'Double-Life Girls'.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Girls' Double Lives', *Daily Mirror*, 24 April 1925, p. 2
- <sup>43</sup> *Newspaper World*, April 1927, as quoted in Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 48
- <sup>44</sup> 'Typist Strangled in Park: Search For A Man', *Daily Mirror*, 6 October 1927, p. 3
- <sup>45</sup> 'Dead Typist Inquest', *Daily Express*, 11 October 1927, p. 2
- <sup>46</sup> 'Richmond Park Crime'; 'Two Executions', *The Times*, 7 January 1928, p. 12
- <sup>47</sup> 'Perfect Home Girl', *Daily Express*, 6 October 1927, p. 1
- <sup>48</sup> 'Richmond Park Crime'
- <sup>49</sup> 'Murdered Typist', *Daily Express*, 7 October 1927, p. 1; 'Funeral of Richmond Park Victim', *The Times*, 13 October 1927, p. 16. Other murder cases of the period were also reported to invoke sympathy from women in particular: see Bland, p. 643 and Wood, 'Those who have had trouble' p. 443
- <sup>50</sup> 'Richmond Park Death Struggle', *Daily Express*, 6 October 1927, p. 1
- <sup>51</sup> See for example 'Epping Forest Tragedy', *Daily Express*, 31 October 1920, p. 1 and 'Murder in Hyde Park', *Daily Express*, 2 April 1921, p. 5
- <sup>52</sup> Bland, p. 626
- <sup>53</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, pp. 145-146
- <sup>54</sup> 'Burn on Body of Dead Girl', *Daily Express*, 7 October 1927, p. 2
- <sup>55</sup> Bland, p. 626. Barbara Leckie has demonstrated that Victorian newspapers also utilised divorce court proceedings for spectacular reporting. See Leckie, *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
- <sup>56</sup> Bland, p. 637
- <sup>57</sup> *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Gainsborough, 1927)
- <sup>58</sup> *The Phantom Fiend*, dir. by Maurice Elvey (Julius Hagan Productions, 1932). This film is sometimes also known as *The Lodger* but for clarity I will use the alternative title.
- <sup>59</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 191-92.
- <sup>60</sup> William Rothman, *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 27.
- <sup>61</sup> Barr, *English Hitchcock*, p. 34.
- <sup>62</sup> '1912-1949: The Early Years at the BBFC', <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/student-guide/bbfc-history/1912-1949> (accessed 14 August 2016).
- <sup>63</sup> L Parry Curtis as quoted in Bland, p. 647
- <sup>64</sup> *Piccadilly*, dir. by E.A Dupont (British International Pictures, 1929)

## Conclusion

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<sup>2</sup> As is done, for example, in the quotation which opens this thesis: James Stuart, 'I have investigated London's all-night life', *Daily Mail*, 1 September 1937, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, pp. 23-24



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