

This interview with Ivor Montagu continues the investigation of the British cinema that began in the last issue of *Screen* with the Cavalcanti and Gavin Lambert interviews. Montagu's cinema career was unique. He was one of a rare species in that he was a cinema intellectual and a producer working in the orthodox commercial feature industry. He was involved in almost all of the crucial stages in the development of the British cinema. He helped to create a minority film culture in this country through his work as a founder of the London Film Society. He worked with one of the most influential producers, Sir Michael Balcon, and one of the most important directors, Alfred Hitchcock – he helped Hitchcock at two of the most important phases of his early career when Hitchcock was first establishing himself as a director in the late 1920's and when he finally discovered himself as an artist with the series of thrillers beginning with *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934). He was one of the founders of the film technicians union, the ACT (now the ACTT, Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians) which has had an important influence on the character of the British film industry. Added to all this activity he worked with Eisenstein in Hollywood and also directed a number of short films ranging from comic fiction like *Bluebottles* to political propaganda like *Peace and Plenty*.

The issues we wanted to pursue with Montagu were very much dictated by his various involvements. We were interested in the social and intellectual character of the London Film Society; the nature of his collaboration with Hitchcock and Balcon; and about the conditions and the ideas that led to the formation of the ACT. We also wanted to find out something about Montagu's own ideas and the choices he had made in his career. He was one of the few British film intellectuals who had worked in commercial feature film making as opposed to the documentary industry. How far was this a conscious choice based on a criticism of the 1930's documentary movement? As a political activist and a film-maker what kind of relationship did he see between politics and film-making? Did he have a concept of political cinema in the 1930's?

We hope the attempt to do this provides useful insights and information about the British cinema in the formative years of the 1920's and 1930's.

ALAN LOVELL

Ivor Montagu was interviewed by Peter Wollen, Alan Lovell and Sam Rohdie, in London on 24 May 1972.

How did you first get involved in the cinema?

When I was a child we used to go and see things like 'Pimple' and The Drews, and that was very early.¹ Then at Cambridge I began to be interested in the highbrow things that came along like *Caligari* – we gave a special show up there, got it down in spite of censorship and so on. After that we started film criticism at Cambridge in several papers – one or two we began ourselves. We managed to get some into the *Granta*, which was the sort of establishment paper. After Cambridge, looking for a job, imagining one was a journalist because one does undergraduate journalism, I got an assignment from *The Times* to go to Germany to report on the German film industry. I went over for a short time and made the acquaintance of a number of people, saw Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner.² The trouble was that, having had a scientific training, I found it much more difficult to write about something when I knew a little about it than when I knew nothing. I would have been delighted to write about it before I went, but when I came back I told *The Times* that I didn't know enough and turned it in. On my way back I met Hugh Miller, the actor, who is still alive, and we got talking in the corridor of the train – he was on his way back from making a picture in Munich – and we had the idea of starting a film society, and we sort of both talked about it as a society like the Stage Society.³

The Stage Society introduced Ibsen, gave performances of Shaw, when he couldn't get on the commercial stage, and Strindberg, who was never done, and others, either for censorship reasons or because they weren't thought to be popular. We thought there are such a lot of films that we are interested in that are being made abroad, that we would like to fertilise British film ideas by seeing some of them. If we could get a film society together like the Stage Society (which gets enough people to pay for sets and organisation) we could pay for an orchestra, and put film titles into English, and the audience – a small audience – would be able to see films under the best possible circumstances. In this way we could draw into film, artists, sculptors, writers, who up to then disdained films. Films were in general disdained. It was supposed to be low taste. Intellectual snobs would have nothing to do with film but of course when it was organised on the lines of the Film Society, they poured in. Also, we could get the newspapers to take an interest. Apart from Iris Barry, who was given a chance to do some film criticism in the *Spectator* by the Stracheys, there was no film criticism in any of the serious papers – *The Sunday Times*, the *Observer*, *The Times*, the weeklies. We thought that by organising special shows we would be able to interest such people. In that respect it was entirely

successful. We had, of course, very considerable difficulties to contend with. The trade was bitterly opposed to the Society. We in our innocence had thought that we would only deal with films that were otherwise unmarketable. We would demonstrate that there was an audience for this or that film so the trade should have been pleased. Also, we would be drawing new people into the cinema and perhaps, as well, new people to work in the cinema, new talent, and that should have pleased the trade. But no. The fact that something could be found entertaining which had no place on the popular screen implied, they felt, criticism of the trade. And so the two trade papers – there were two in those days – both criticised us severely.

On what grounds?

Interfering. That the cinema was a business, a commercial operation, and that we were going to arouse a lot of people who would be critical of the popular cinema and praise things that could never be shown to the public . . . that was the line.

We also found difficulty from quite unexpected quarters, among newspaper critics. For example, C A Lejeune, who was such a good influence in those early days in getting people interested in films, in not being just a paid hack, was opposed to the Film Society from the start. She said we were operating on the wrong basis by not showing pictures directly to the public. Of course that was absolutely true, but it was a question of doing what you could and trying to create a demand. It did result in a number of public cinemas up and down the country opening some years later.

You said one of the ideas behind the Society was to influence British ideas about the cinema.

Yes.

Was it successful from that point of view?

Well, yes it was, but that took some time before results appeared on the screen. We attracted young talent, people like Asquith, and they would bring their families, and their families would let them if they needed 'letting' and gave them encouragement, because this had become a popular thing. What made it possible was Bernstein's backing because he had influence with the trade and he helped us a great deal.⁴ Although the trade also somehow despised him because they said he was trying to live in two worlds, the intellectual and the commercial, and they were very jealous of someone who was an egghead and a successful financier. Also important was the fact that my father knew Lord Ashfield, who was connected with the New Gallery, and this helped to get the New Gallery free

74 for the Society – things like that. The local council was opposed to us because they thought us a group wanting to show dirty pictures. But of course censors are always that way – the only film that Edinburgh Council ever asked to be shown in advance from the list that we had to supply of the films to be shown (Edinburgh imitated us and founded its own society) was a film that was based on a piece of music which had the same title, I think an eighteenth century piece called *In der Nacht*. The title must have made them thoroughly suspicious. With the London County Council we only narrowly got through the censorship, by pulling every conceivable string, with voting something like 57 to 53 or 47 to 43. The press wasn't even very welcoming. They objected to being asked to give up their weekends and come and see a film on Sunday. There were also journalists who were after sensation. For example, the *Express*, who encouraged me when I went to the Soviet Union for the British Museum on a zoological expedition to try and get Soviet films. They said 'your idea of the Film Society will never be of any use to anybody unless you get Russian films'. Well I didn't succeed in getting them then, but I came back to find an enormous attack on me and on the Film Society, saying that I had had a diplomatic passport and had smuggled Russian films into Britain, and that kind of thing. We had to have a libel action.

*Close Up*⁵ was obviously very much taken with the German film and the Russian film. Did the screening of those films at the LFS and the criticism in *Close Up* have any influence on British film making?

Not until a great deal later. A new generation grew up with a wider perspective. What did happen at once was that, as is usual, film magnates tried to cotton on to anything that was successful, and to use it. For example if a film was very much praised, they would try and engage the star or the director and make them do something totally unsuitable, or miscast the stars. Americans of course did that deliberately, they could afford to, and often miscast people, ruined them, made them unpopular and then sent them back home. In England, it wasn't quite like that. People did not have enough money; they hoped they would be successful. And there were exceptions like George Pearson.⁶ I don't know that it shows in his work but he was a very keen and decent man with high principles and some kind of education. He was not like a lot of them who could not make their mark on contracts or sign their names. Mick Balcon was another, although he was working for a company which put pressure on Adrian Brunel⁷ (who was one of the pioneers with us in the Film Society), so that he was forced to resign from all connection with the Society, or he would never have been allowed to make another picture. He helped us in every conceivable way and we worked from his office, but his name did not appear on

our notepaper. These were the sort of pressures that were brought to bear. 75

What was the relationship of the group that formed the Film Society? You put it casually, that you met Hugh Miller, but were they a group of people who knew each other already?

We met at parties. I can't remember how I met Iris Barry, but she brought in Sidney Bernstein. Sidney Bernstein brought in Frank Dobson. I don't know whether Hugh Miller brought in Adrian Brunel; Sidney also brought in McKnight-Kauffer. Dulac also came in. They were people in different cultural fields interested in the cinema. And Mycroft – of course he mustn't be forgotten – of the *Evening Standard*. He was associated with us from the start.⁸

Would it be fair to describe it as a social grouping – I mean that you knew each other socially rather than culturally or . . .

No, culturally, because we hadn't high society people in at all, except as relatives. Wells and Shaw immediately came in and helped; they gave it their names. We founded a non-profit making Society with a pound a year guarantee share paid up, with the little group I've named as directors. We formed a limited company and this owned the Society. And we ran it entirely democratically, re-electing the people each year for its committee and so forth, and discussing policy with them.

Would you say that Close Up accurately reflected the taste and interests of the Film Society.

No. No I would say in this sense they would run parallel. Later, after we were successful, two or three years later, Herring joined as a director, as far as I remember, and of course we brought in Grierson and Anthony Asquith. We always tried to see that there were no groups outside who were approximately similar to our thinking. The only thing that preceded us that I know of was Vieux Colombier – you know they had a cinema.⁹ When we started, I went over and saw the Vieux Colombier people to try and find out what sort of films they were getting and from where. When we approached people to get films we would say to them: we're not going to pay you anything, but for heaven's sake don't give us the picture unless and until you find that you can't sell it to anybody else. And of course this made them think we were liars – the first reaction being not that we were mad and eccentric, which might have been reasonable, but that we were liars trying to swindle them out of everything. It seemed so incomprehensible.

Were you talking about American films at that time or was it exclusively the . . .?

Could you give us some idea what kind of films these were?

Yes, well we began with *Waxworks*. And we went on with things that did not pass the censor like *Caligari*, but we showed it uncut. We showed the whole of *Dr Mabuse*, both parts stuck together. Also *Greed*, we revived *Greed*, and we revived for instance Sjöström's first American picture *Emperor of Portugalia*. And we showed anything that hadn't had an opportunity to be seen and properly reviewed before. Now this meant very few English pictures. Walter Summers gave us a picture from British Instructional, because we knew British Instructional well. Another thing we did was to try to show the potentialities of the medium – we ran a number of *Secrets of Nature* films¹⁰ and compared them with scientific films which exhibited particular techniques that showed the powers of cinema. We began to be known and to have a certain influence. For example Hitchcock was always interested in our pictures though I hadn't made his acquaintance.

One day Mick (Balcon) asked me to lunch at the Monaco (I remember I ate fried onions and mashed potatoes because I was a vegetarian at that time). Mick asked me to see *The Lodger* to consider editing and titling it. Hitch had by then made three pictures. Hitch was subject to exactly the same feeling from the British trade and his immediate bosses as the Film Society. There was the most bitter jealousy between everybody in his studio including the white-haired boy Cutts who directed the successful *Rat* pictures with Novello.¹¹ The worst thing for anybody in the film industry in those days to overcome was the 'I knew him when'. Hitch had started drawing the letters for titles, not writing the titles, and then he became an assistant director and when it was a question of his being a director, all the other directors felt that they would be belittled if this fellow came up, irrespective of what his talents were. It wasn't jealousy of his talents at that time, you didn't know what kind of pictures he was going to make, but the people who are already in place don't like others being promoted.

Hitch had made three pictures. The first they wouldn't show because they didn't think it was good enough; the second the same. The distributor was entirely in the pocket of and conversed with and felt more comfortable with, types like Cutts than types like Hitch. Then he had done *The Lodger*. And they wouldn't show that either. They had investments in three pictures wrapped up and the distributor refusing to show them, and Mick in the weak position of being in charge of a production company whose distributor wouldn't show three pictures by a man in whom Mick had placed his confidence. They were in complete despair. The argument ran something like: they won't show these pictures because they're too highbrow but don't let's destroy what we've got by changing it from

what it is, but rather see what we can do if we handle it in a more highbrow way. I am sure that was why I was called. Brunel was never given a picture to do but he'd been under contract with the studio for a long time and he must have suggested it. They said would I do it and if necessary re-shoot it, or arrange with Hitch for things to be re-shot. Hitch was awfully nice about it, he could have been very bad-tempered and irritated, but he wasn't. He did re-shoot one or two shots and I completely re-titled it, without any original thoughts, but simply pinching ideas from other pictures and things like that; after all, most original ideas have just been pinched unconsciously.

What sort of pictures were you pinching from?

Well, one of these was *The Gold Rush*, and the other was *Shadows*.¹² You see with *Shadows* we'd seen a picture without any titles at all which mean that you had a successfully sinister atmosphere without interrupting it with titles. Long titles especially came as an interruption to the sort of hypnotism of the silent film. *The Lodger* was an enormous success with the Press. It had a sort of influence and I think it opened the door for a number of young people to come into the industry. All the people who had been working with Brunel and Montagu Ltd,¹³ all those I had been associated with at University, started to come in. It was very interesting indeed. Adrian and I felt a certain amount of joy and self-satisfaction though we noticed that when talkies did come in everyone we'd employed was in work and we were the only ones out of work.

It took that amount of time. When you were saying 'did it influence . . .' I said not at first, but gradually people began to see . . . You must remember that there was a lot to be said on their side. It wasn't a matter just of will, of not appreciating something that is beautiful, or effective or intelligent. The whole industry in those days was far less structured than it is now to deal with anything out of the ordinary. People were regular film-goers. Three or four times a week was quite common; hardly anybody went less than once or twice a week. It was a sort of weekly dose and pictures couldn't stay on long because there was such a lot in the pipeline. The cinemas were largely under the control – although not so much as they became a little later – of the distributors. You had to give a regular diet. Anything irregular, even if it was liked by the public, could ruin the exhibitor.

After talkies came in Flaherty's *Man of Aran* was made. Flaherty was an intelligent man and unlike most other creative artists who, when they've finished a picture, are no longer interested in what happens to it, he was interested. People who were intelligent and who wanted to make a second picture realised that it was a job to make a success. Flaherty went round everywhere trying to get his picture booked. The chief distributor, C M Woolf, was the same

78 man who was down on Hitch (when we wrote the script of *Thirty Nine Steps*, Mick was in America and before he came back, Woolf, as soon as he read the script cancelled the production, gave Hitch and me notice and put us on adapting a musical by someone called Phillips, called *The Floradora Girl*. Mick came back in time to restore *Thirty Nine Steps*, but I mean that was the sort of level of influence the distributors had). They were not entirely wrong. Flaherty by going round from cinema to cinema and locality to locality would arrange that *Man of Aran* did extremely well in each cinema that it was shown. He approached the local gentry; he did everything he could for snob, intellectual, educational appeal on the *Man of Aran*. It was that sort of a picture, it appealed to those sort of people. They would come in and the figures would not be bad for that particular show. But what happened? The regular visitors, the regular people who patronised the cinema every week would not come, or if they came, were so disgusted that it wasn't what they wanted to embody their dreams and identify with and see sexual and social triumph in the identified figure, that they would go off to the other cinema or swear they would never go back and it would take weeks for the cinema that showed *Man of Aran* to win back its audience.

But Hitchcock's movies are more like 'the other cinema' than Man of Aran.

They were, but the distributors were afraid. People might have said 'we didn't like so and so because it's unusual'. You must remember what was said about the close-up when Griffith brought it in. The crowds are supposed to have shouted 'Show us their feet!' They thought that they weren't getting their money's worth because it was an unfamiliar technique. One of the things the distribution company was afraid of in what was quite an ordinary theme of Hitchcock's, one of the two films he made in Germany, *The Pleasure Garden*, was that he had a shot either directly above or below chorus girls going down an open iron staircase. It was thought that this would make people sea-sick. You saw this kind of thing in German films where Hitch no doubt picked it up, but not in English films. English people weren't accustomed to it. It was not just theme but style. Then again *The Lodger*, with all its sinisterness; what they feared would be objected to in it was that a man who was a popular hero, Ivor Novello, with whom everybody identified and every woman wanted to identify for sexual purposes (or to be more exact, for the purposes of sexual dream) should play a sinister character who's thought to be murdering everybody. It wasn't in their eyes compensated for by the happy ending when it turned out he wasn't after all. The distributors thought it would be repulsive to the public.

But was this just a question of the distributors? I mean, what

seems rather curious is that if this situation prevailed in England, why didn't a similar situation prevail in the United States or in Germany? Why was it so different in Germany, for example, than here?

Well I can't really tell you, but you must appreciate that the Americans ruled the cinema, that there was no large independent British cinema. There was an inheritance of a pre-war independent English cinema, but this had died very largely during the war as far as commercial films were concerned. If you were running twice or sometimes thrice weekly changes with double feature programmes, you wanted 300 pictures – nearly all were changed at least once a week – you would want an average of say 200, and it might be as many as 300 pictures, a year. You couldn't get those from England. It would have meant a loss to English investment.

But the American films were rather more inventive than English films.

Well I think that that was simply spin-off from two things; the importation of foreign talent which fertilised it a bit before it took root, and, not to decry native talent, the fact that the more pictures you make the more margin there is for variety.

But it does seem that the English industry was particularly conservative. So even if you say about the Americans that they were willing to invite Swedish or German directors there was that kind of openness.

The point I am trying to make is that the English cinema was dependent entirely on American films. I would however take it culturally further. I remember the first international film festival that I went to abroad, the English films all advertised their wares in English. They said that if people wanted to buy their films they should learn English. That was the mentality of the people in films. Now the people who started the American film industry from the business point of view were immigrants. They had a European background. There you have a clue to the wider scene. They worked as clothing manufacturers and that sort of thing and they were a damn sight better for the cinema than these banks and business and insurance people put in since, who ruined it because they don't understand the showmanship angle at all. These immigrants came with a bit of a dream and a bit of a showmanship feeling, however vulgar and uneducated. (I use the word not contemptuously but merely to indicate a limited range of variety of background that they couldn't avoid). They had come from Europe so they knew there were more things in heaven and earth than the English lot dreamt of, as it were. Now the English strength, and it was a strength, and

80 it occurred even in films that were very very simple, the things of which Pearson was perhaps the climax, the last example of films that were very 'English' and had a feeling, because people always prefer their native product, because they can identify with it better. Even bad English films would do as well as American films for the same investment and so on, because people identify more easily.

I thought that it really was the case that the American films were just intensely popular in Britain and British films were not.

No. No. This was an illusion that was spread. The financial set up was always so odd. You take for example, when we made *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934); Hitch said – you're not making it for the public because by the time the public sees it it doesn't really matter what happens to it. The main thing is the public will never see it if the distributor doesn't like it. Are you making it for the Press? He decided that you were making it for the Press, and the trade was quite right in smelling this out and feeling that he was trying to get good notices. Though I worked on all those pictures with Hitch and I was devoted to him because it was a great chance to work with somebody who was thinking intelligently about films (and there weren't many in England at that time), we used to quarrel and one of things we used to quarrel about chiefly was that I used to cut out things that I didn't think were successful. He wanted to have them in because they would have got good press notices. For example, when he had a scene with the husband and wife and a third party to the triangle, coming back from the theatre and he wanted to show the lover and the wife touching knees in the taxi. He showed a shot from above. But he used the wrong lens and you would have been viewing from a helicopter, if you'd had a helicopter in those days, with no roof on the taxi and to my mind it destroyed the illusion entirely. I always used to quarrel with him on those sort of grounds but it didn't matter to him, everyone would have said 'what a wonderful and original shot'. And he was right. As you could tell from Danston's audience questionnaire: 'Who is your favourite director?' – the only English director the public had heard of was Hitchcock. Most of the others were American names that had been publicised. The public generally did not know who directed the films they saw, but they had seen Hitchcock's name in the Press. The result was that every group that was floating a new company during the Quota Act wanted Hitch under contract in order to attract money. Hitch was able to go from company to company improving his position and contract each time. This is the way his career was made. I'm not suggesting that his films didn't occasionally get a very great public response as for example *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, but you can get a good public response without having a good career in the film business. He thought it out. He was intelligent and worked in that

sort of way.

What I'm trying to show you is how difficult it was. The trade, you see, couldn't offend the Americans. When Gaumont-British was created everybody said, here is a group with a big circuit and they will at last be able to fight the American circuits, but they couldn't. They couldn't get enough British films. They were even more dependent on the Americans because they were so big and they had more cinemas. When, later on after the war, Cripps tried to benefit the British film industry by putting on that tax and the Americans stopped supplying any films so that the cinemas had only old films to show and British films, we went on a delegation from the union and expected the British film industry to say: 'Ah, now we will make more British films', but they wouldn't. They were only too anxious to get this protective tax off so that they could get the American films back in. The Americans cancelled their boycott, not because it was successful, but because the public was going just as often to the cinema to see revivals.

People don't go to the cinema so much now because they've got alternatives. I remember in Spain during the war, all the cinemas were packed although the films were old and had been revived and were scratchy and falling apart and so on. It's the experience of getting away from home and having warmth and music and forgetting the outside world and it doesn't matter terribly much how the film does. In competing for the proportion of total money spent on entertainment it depends on your rivals, the weather and all those kinds of things. The only success you get is as against another film. And that's another thing that the film industry didn't fully understand. I remember I came back – this is an entirely irrelevant anecdote but shows how those sorts of things work – I came back from my first visit to the Soviet Union, no not first, the first after the war, where I saw they were still using tiny, poky little cinemas with tiny screens and there were no big cinemas at all. I discovered that most of my Soviet friends had never seen their glorious pictures and wonderful compositions on a big screen as we had and I realised that this was what gave the Soviet cinema freedom to create great pictures. They had a different system of distribution. What ruined the British film industry was this dependence on American films. When the Americans made a picture that everybody wanted to see, like a new Charlie Chaplin or a new Fairbanks or Pickford or whatever it might be, British distributors would be desperate to get it. They would take it as a 'loss leader'. For example take *Charlie's City Lights* (1931). When it went on – it was *City Lights* I think – at the Dominion Theatre, the company agreed to pay as rental 105 or 110 per cent of the take because the more they paid the more it proved that the picture had helped in establishing that theatre as a new centre for people to go to in rivalry with all the others in the West End. It was worth it to them to get a picture even at a loss. They would all bid up like that

82 against one another to get the big picture and in order to be able to bid they would make bigger bricks and mortar and when they had the bricks and mortar they *had* to have pictures that would be enormously successful. Even if they were popular they couldn't fill it for more than a few days and the result was that you had this system of showing pictures only for a week or less and very seldom having first runs, that is you sometimes had a bit of a first run, but it wasn't only in the West End, every town had its big cinema, its White Elephant, and you had to fill it. And not only that but if you had to fill it that meant you had to get fifty big pictures a year if you were going to run each for a week. Whereas if you had a small cinema, and the picture cottoned on, you could run it for several months, and you only needed a dozen pictures in the year and that could return so much more money to the producer rather than it all having to go to the exhibitor. Also a big whack went back to the distributor in the old days. And you see it didn't matter whether it was a good or bad film because if there was a new one coming every week or twice a week, who would have time to find out if it was a good picture or not! That's what made the star system, you may have seen the star before, you've never seen the film before. You went perhaps ten per cent for the title and ninety per cent for the stars, the kind of thing that gave them self-identification and dreams.

Only American pictures could supply enough for Britain and when talkies came in American domination increased. In all foreign countries the American film had to be changed and the change of language of course means that except the spectacle or the sex picture it doesn't work. The more it depends upon acting or characterisation, the more it loses because even if you get it in the title you haven't time to watch the face and see the title at the same time. It always happens. The other day the Mongolians showed me a film and I said: this is marvellous, very, very good, and they said: Do you think we could show it in England? and I said: No, hopeless. It was a very well acted domestic picture of domestic life. That you can't do with talkies; but you see in England, American is more widely understood in Britain than any particular English intonation. The American is classless and American is better understood in Scotland than Scots is in England. Any picture you produce in England is a local, a dialect picture even for the British market and so the Americans dominated even more when talkies came in than they had before.

Do you think if it would have been possible to be free of the American influence it would have been beneficial to the British industry?

Without question.

In what way?

Well because people wanted cinema entertainment in those days and they would have had to get it from England. 83

Yes, but you talk for instance about the conservatism of English distributors and people like C M Woolf, you don't think there was a kind of basic conservatism built into the English industry?

No, because I think most of the American scene was like that too. Only as I say they looked to abroad as well. That was the advantage they had and the English didn't look abroad.

But that's surely very important isn't it? The fact the Americans were willing to learn from the Germans and the Swedes and the Russians . . . ?

Oh yes.

Whereas the British don't seem to have been very willing to learn.

Yes, I would agree that you have a point there, but all the same if they hadn't had the Americans they would have had to get things.

They didn't seem to learn from the Americans though.

Well, you couldn't afford to buy the Americans, but you see you didn't get to see the American films until they were the sort of top films that came in, except for the rubbish that was never reviewed. Every country produces rubbish of course that no other country sees. Every country's reputation abroad is much higher than it is at home for the quality of its films.

Can we talk a bit about the development of the London Film Society. You were I think absent from England for . . .

I went away for a year.

A year. Was there much change in attitudes?

No. We'd lined up our pictures. There wasn't much change in that first year. I was in Hollywood for a year, you see.

But right throughout the thirties, was there much change do you think?

No, you see, what happened was there began to be wider influence coming out of the London Film Society. We began to get this cinema, the Academy, to take some pictures. When you said to me did we have an influence, all this had been an explanation of my

84 first remark, 'not immediately'. Later, yes, this developed, certainly, but it was a very delayed influence. The people who had seen our films at the Society began to go into the industry and they themselves influenced choices. More open-minded people began to come into some of the distribution organisations.

The people associated with the Film Society, what kind of response did they have to directors like Hitchcock or indeed to the American cinema? The impression I get from Close Up is a very stolid kind of concern with what one might now characterise as the 'art movie', the European 'art movie', rather dismissive of anything produced in England and totally ignoring most of the productions in the United States. That is a very narrow kind of . . .

I think to be fair you have to see two strands. I don't want to criticise *Close Up* in that respect but I would entirely agree with you about *Close Up* in the sense that I think they did like those things and I think its pay-off comes in the British Film Institute's programme to a large extent. But let's be fair on the other side. Into all these things goes a great, great deal of amateur effort. By that I don't mean crude and incapable, but I mean work for love, the literal sense of amateur. People don't want to do anything, as I already said, that somebody else is going to do. If the other people are going to show the American stuff you don't spend all your time doing it. And if the critics are all writing about American films you don't write about them. Now we in the Film Society never had that sort of feeling. The fact that we had very close contact with people who ran cinemas like Bernstein, people who were popular film critics like Iris Barry and Mycroft, that alone would have saved us if it hadn't been that a number of us were reasonable social people with a good deal of social commonsense. We never had that sort of outlook. We would keep on sometimes reviving bits and trying to show people what people had been interested in. For example when I went on, as I did later, on the Film Archive Selection Committee of the BFI, I remember again and again staggering the Committee by urging that something should be included because it was a popular success and that seemed to us just as important in the history of the cinema as the fact that it might have some art element in it. But as for showing and writing about the cinema we were crusaders, propagandists for something that would otherwise have been neglected and ignored. So that I think that you have to see the two strands and before you blame any particular person, before any blame of mine is allowed to be anything more than a suspicion or a prejudice you should realise the situation. People might have been a clique but they might have looked like a clique even though they had completely open ideas. Indeed I used to go around saying the American cinema was the best in the world and the only reason why I was more interested in

the Soviet cinema was because the Soviet cinema was self-conscious. The American cinema didn't know what it was doing and produced marvellous results like people who bred animals before the science of genetics and produced more remarkable animals in the domestic dogs and horses than anybody else with genetics since. The Russians who studied the science of cinema tried to find out why things were good or bad or effective or non-effective. I being a scientist was interested in the Russians for that reason, not because I regarded them as superior. Most of us were like that, so that a person might appear to be a part of a clique because his work leads him, his catholicity leads him into the only field that is neglected. Is that a fair point?

It's not so much personal responsibility as a kind of structural thing you choose your task as making films available that aren't available normally. British and American films are pretty much available in this country, but even within the system of exhibition, you get some cinemas which show British and American films and other cinemas which – starting with the Academy and now growing into something much wider – show European art films. That curiously becomes sedimented into the structure.

No, you see that is what is happening now and that is because the cinema has been forced to turn to smaller sized cinemas. Because of the decrease in the total number of people going to the cinema, which depends largely on the development of television, largely but not wholly. The total output is less, therefore you cannot change the programme so often at the cinema and you have to find ways of making a picture stand up. And the way of doing that is to find smaller cinemas and smaller audiences, so without having used the test of simple arithmetic which I used, the cinema trade by its experiences is coming to this business of splitting up its big cinemas into three or four auditoria and that sort of thing. Now this leads, as you say, to segregation. But on the other hand you have that segregation in literature too don't you? I don't see that you can do any more with a culture, I mean any better with a culture, so long as you have a class structure and a class structure which reflects itself in differences of taste and differences of perspective and all that sort of thing because of the opportunities people have of developing taste, that you can do anything more than build up the widest and most flexible system that you can which will cater for everybody.

It is the peculiar nature, though, of the tastes of this class structure, as opposed say to France, where the American cinema has been fantastically influential in the kinds of films they've produced, whereas the upper and middle class response to popular cinema here has on the whole been very, well not negative, but quite negative.

Well, you must remember that the cinema when it started thought it was going to be international, because it was silent and it could change these titles and so on. It ceased to be so when talkies came in and then this domination in England ceased, but when the failure of the cinema came we began to get a wider thing. I mean I look around at the films being made by British people, English people, and its fantastic the variety and the themes and things, it's not a question of liberty but it is a question of the style of things. You see, take for example, Mick Balcon who as a man was very very pleasant and very nice to work with and a joy I think for a lot of other people, but you know, everybody has their quirks and their difficulties and so forth, but I remember I couldn't get him for years to make a costume picture because he'd made one which was a flop. And now people are making costume pictures all over the place, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* were two pictures I was very anxious to make and I couldn't get anywhere near either of them. And now dozens are being made, almost every year someone does something like that but all these things were absolutely excluded. Well you could never make a picture that had an unhappy ending. You see, things were rigid when you had this regular visitation thing, things were absolutely rigid in the cinema. It's in that atmosphere that the Hitchcock pictures must be seen and defined. Now they wouldn't be notable in any way.

Can we talk a bit about your role with the Hitchcock films, with The Man Who Knew Too Much? How did your involvement actually come about?

Well my involvement came about in this way. I went to America with Eisenstein but quarrelled with him and left before the Mexican expedition; I came back here and plunged into political work. I hadn't joined the Communist Party before . . .

This is about what year?

1929-30. I hadn't joined the Communist Party before then. I had worked closely with it from boyhood, and was a member of the British Socialist Party which was ancestral to the Communist Party. But I hadn't joined, I did about 1929-30. I started working on *The Daily Worker*, and Mick got onto me because he had another crisis like *The Lodger*. This was a quite different one. He was doing a re-make at Beaconsfield of a musical by Carmine Gallone with Martha Eggert, and they discovered that they couldn't get the floor schedule down below whatever the figure was and it was going to cost them too much. It was just an accident that all his staff were busy that he had to go outside for a somebody, and was reluctant in an emergency to go outside for somebody he didn't know. So:

What was I doing? Could I come there? and so on. I was a person who by good fortune didn't have to, or hadn't got the habit of speaking as modestly as perhaps from the point of view of employment in the film business prospective employers expected me to. And I said that this picture can't go on the floor and that we must cut out so and so. And they said that it must go on the floor, if the studio is empty for one week it will cost £5,000, and you know in those days pictures didn't cost more than £40-£50,000 to make and so it was quite considerable. And I said, No, I can cut much more out of it but I must have a week to do it in. And I got the job of associate producer on it and cut the script and so on and we did that.

And then: Would I work with Hitch? He'd been made to do a musical which had flopped and so I came back on that. I was working then with a German in the anti-fascist struggle who was a friend of Peter Lorre's so we got Peter Lorre for *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

At what stage was The Man Who Knew Too Much when you became involved with it? I mean had Hitchcock decided already to make that?

No. That was really an original of Hitchcock's. You see Charles Bennett had the credit for story-making in that but you see what happened with Hitch's stories was that he would want an amanuensis. He originally used Alma Reville on a lot of these things. He would have the idea, but I don't mean to say at all he couldn't, he wouldn't, it wasn't his style of work, to put pen to paper. He wanted a screen writer to talk to and the screen writer would get the credit. The screen writer and the associate producer who was me or anybody else we brought in would throw out ideas. Hitch would go around London and he'd see something from a bus, he would go, for example, to the Albert Hall. We would work these into the stories. And that's how he would get the atmosphere of local scenes and local sets, and the sets would develop collaboratively like that. The writer would be given the credit because Mick wouldn't allow associate producers to have any credit at all.

That series of pictures, I mean Thirty Nine Steps and Secret Agent, was that ad hoc and based on the success of The Man Who Knew Too Much or did you have a conception of that kind of film?

No, we had a conception that Hitch wanted to go back and make those kind of pictures. He always liked those kind more. He'd gone away to the others. He'd tried to make ambitious pictures, you know they did the Galsworthy and the Sean O'Casey and things like that and they were no worse than other people's pictures but they had no Hitchcock . . . What he had specially to contribute

88 was a sense of tension which comes from suggestion and a sense of suggestion in composition because he was always a superb visual director and he never built an inch of the set that wasn't needed for the shot, which he'd worked out beforehand. Many of the British producers in those days used to build a four-walled set, stand in the middle of it and make up their minds what the action was to be, and then move away the wall that got in the way. And that of course was very expensive to build so that our scripts would always be estimated at much dearer than the pictures actually cost.

Mick would be inclined to make pictures that his contract directors wanted to make. They would ask to do a thing and he would say no or yes but they would be expected to make suggestions. Every now and then he would get sold a picture or story by somebody else or by the distributor pressing it or by it being a part of a big deal in some other way with some other company, and then the position would be that the unfortunate associate producers would be asked 'who will take this?' and everybody tried to get out of it. Hitch could choose his own picture and we were choosing these sort of pictures to go back to.

But when you say 'he wanted to go back', you mean films like The Lodger and Blackmail I take it. He had in mind those kinds of films?

Yes, that's right, of course yes.

But what is striking about the middle thirties films is that they are much less portentous. I mean The Lodger does have a certain 'art' quality to it, whereas the thirties films don't have that kind of pretension.

Well *The Lodger* was made directly under the influence of the German films. You see, Hitch was working in Munich on the previous two and he'd seen the pictures of the Film Society and it was made directly under the influence of the German films, I think there's no doubt about that. Of course he had a German actress in *Blackmail* but what really made *Blackmail* what it was was the fact that it became a talkie half way through so that what he had to think of was ingenious ways of saving the silent picture with a certain amount of talk and it became the best talkie to that date, because it was the only one in which the whole picture wasn't shot in blimp – that really was the accident that give it its character.

But would it be true to say that he had drifted away from the kind of influence of the German cinema and the 'art' cinema by the time he came to make The Man Who Knew Too Much?

Well I would say he had become his own man in the sense that he

always wanted to take the suspense and the dramatic contrast from incidents of everyday life. He was trying to strike the public with incidents and settings with which they could identify – ‘that could happen to me’. In fact it’s an interesting thing that his secretary of a later time, Harrison, married Eric Ambler, because that’s what Ambler always does in his books. But I think that’s just a coincidence. I don’t think there was anything special in that although she was a very able woman and later directed pictures. In our stories and things she didn’t seem to play a very constructive role. She was learning at that time.

The interest that Hitchcock puts on the editing, was that another self-developed thing? I mean, you think immediately, well he must have been familiar with the Russians to put so much weight on editing as the kind of crucial thing in film making.

No. Well, yes and no. The point is that no, I would bring that to another influence. That was his youth. You see, he began as a visual man, that is to say, designing the letters on the cards, and then, I don’t know, I don’t think he became an art director but he was the art director on every film and the editor of the film before he began. As he explains, the picture was finished for him when the script was finished. He visualised every shot, designing the set for the shots he wanted to have on it. The art director only carried out what he was told to do, what he was told to build.

Hitch said that at every phase of a film you have to have your plan of campaign worked out. You have to analyse your subject and before you begin you must be able to express it in a single sentence and then everything you do develops an aspect of that guiding subject, that guiding sentence. When you are on the floor you work out *exactly* what you’re going to do. Hitchcock edited in the writing of a script and carried out that editing process in filming. It was entirely the director’s thing; I think that was why he was so reluctant to accept criticism from me in the later stages of a film.

You joined the Communist Party in 1929; did you have any idea of trying to make a political effort in films at all?

I did make some political films as you know.

But at that time?

No. I knew that I couldn’t make political statements in films that would reach the general public because of all the barriers that there were. Nowadays you can get a certain amount in. I used to be derisive towards my dear friends and really noble characters, many of them of the documentary film world, who had such an important influence and did really magnificent work in documentary, out-

90 standing on a world scale, because in the political sense they were working for either Government sponsors or rich multi-million companies and they would sit in the projection theatre saying: Look what I managed to put in there! Well they could see it, but the public never could. To reach the screen you had to be so restrained with it. They got away with that film that was made about rents (*Housing Problems*) but it was so rare, so rare. Really it was impractical. Take for instance Basil Wright making *Song of Ceylon*, a lovely picture, or making the Post Office things. They were political films for those days. They were teaching the English who hadn't thought of it that alien people far away and of another colour had a culture and a beauty and a music that they had never thought of. Normally they would never think of it. The Documentary films were teaching people that working class people were human beings. The only working class person you saw on the screen was the kind that my mother would say she always had the best relations with – how nice the station master was when she was down on the platform at Southampton and how well she got on with the people at Fortnum and Masons. You never saw anything on the screen except a butler pouring out a drink. Mind you, they weren't always caricatures any more than they were in the Conan Doyle stories.

It was a curious politics, the politics of documentary.

What they did do was that they showed the working class as human beings and people worthy of respect. I was busy working in politics as a vocation. I did things related to film in the anti-fascist struggle. We brought films in on Spain and made films and so forth and fought the censor tooth and nail. We made a little film called *Britain Expects* about the bombing of Potato Jones who ran the blockade up to Bilbao and then no cinema would put it on; it was five minutes long and it couldn't have kept the audience out of the cinema. We used every influence we could; I managed to get the Duchess of Atholl to persuade the ABC to try it in six theatres. The reason the trade refused to put it on was that they said it wasn't the sort of film the British public wanted. No controversy was ever supposed to come into the cinema and they said that there would be riots in the cinema, wherever it was shown and then they showed the managers' reports and these all said what they'd obviously tipped them to say, you know, about how the audience didn't like this very much, they seemed bored. How can you tell if an audience is bored in a five-minute film? You couldn't get political films on, but you would fight, we did fight. But you see, on my little film on Madrid (*Defence of Madrid*) we collected about £6,000. The point is how did we do that? You can't collect money to make film. The film cost us only a few hundred pounds, it was on 16mm and there were things we had to find out of our own pockets and you can't go round collecting money to reimburse the

people who put up the money for it. We collected money for the Medical Aid – people will pour the money out for a film then because it's a thing that touches their hearts. But you can't do that commercially. But I expect the same people would have resented it if they'd gone to the cinema expecting to be entertained and had seen *Defence of Madrid*.

Where was that screened in fact?

Oh, halls Co-op halls and things like that, because they're outside the censorship you see.

Did you try to set up any kind of distribution network?

Yes, we set up a thing and, in order to snub the British Film Institute, we called it the Progressive Film Institute. And again we approached the Russians with the old slogan 'please give us any films you can't get anybody else to show'. So we showed quite a number of excellent pictures that way. We used the Forum Cinema in Villiers Street just before the war, and we made those Spanish films and I made a film for the Party, *Peace and Plenty*. We showed that at the House of Commons. The Tories walked around saying: 'Why can't we make pictures like these?'

It is very striking seeing Peace and Plenty. It is stylistically very different from the sort of film which the Documentary Movement was making, more kind of agit-prop than documentary.

I still feel that violent caricature and violent political contrast, the simple thing, has a certain effect. I'm told that *October* was shown in Paris two or three years ago and everybody was astounded because they said this was an entirely new way of film making simply because of the number of cuts in it and the alternation of things which gave no time for people to be bored in any way. But the film industry very rarely revives its stuff, only the old stars, it rarely revives a film . . .

What was your own response to the Documentary Movement, the kind of films which they made?

The only films I ever directed, first and last, were documentary. But I felt that the Documentary Movement was a very exploited field. People were paying and accepting salaries under the Union rates because they were keen to work on this at all costs. The documentary people could never get the sort of money people received for feature films. But the trouble was that the documentary people began to feel they were superior in some way because they were working for art. The reason they distinguished between art

92 and non-art as equivalent to documentary and non-documentary was because they were taking less wages, so it must be art.

When you made Peace and Plenty, were you conscious you were modelling that to some extent on the Russian films?

No, not at all. I did it in the style of how I'd write an article, a literary article, and then translated it into visual terms. The logic of it would be the logic of if I'd sat down to write a pamphlet or a leading article on the necessity of overthrowing the Chamberlain Government for the harm it was doing in England and internationally. I never thought of anybody else's films. How much unconscious influences come in, I don't know.

Your own sense of Peace and Plenty – 'caricature and violent contrast' – brings it quite close to a Russian silent film.

Well I used an enormous number of stills. We found stills with each of the politicians in some utterly ludicrous position. For example Chamberlain in a top hat, in a conservatory, in this attitude (Montague mimed it) looking at a bunch of grapes.

Very reminiscent of Kerensky in October.

I didn't want an actor, I wanted to have the real people. I thought it would carry more conviction to an English audience. It's the style of the cinema to carry conviction, but it's not exaggerated because this was in fact Chamberlain. But I did do other things. For example, Elsa Lanchester's mother who was a great puppet master made me a beautiful puppet of Chamberlain which we used. I had thought to myself, English audiences don't like documentaries, and I'm going to give them an argument in the film that they won't be necessarily particularly sympathetic to it – so I will try every moment to give them something else to entertain them, so they won't have time to be bored. That's how all those sort of things came in.

What's very curious is that the Documentary Movement self-confessedly took things from the Russians, but they characterised the Russian films as very 'realistic'. But yours is quite the reverse of theirs. Yours was, when you think of it, agit-prop.

Yes, well agit-prop didn't go into the Russian cinema, certainly not into Russian documentary. The Russian documentary became lyrical. The English documentary was more didactic. They kept on trying to teach things, and the Russians didn't like the English documentary at first. The Russians had a number of poets doing documentary and then when they gave up doing documentary, it reached an all-

time low. They tried to do lyric things without any sense of rhythm. And they never to my mind mastered the instructional thing which is why when the best English documentaries about weather and things like that went over there they were far better than anything the Russians were making at the time. They also did not use caricature in documentary because the documentary to them was naturalism. As documentary developed, the misinterpretation of socialist realism as naturalism became popular. Because documentary seems a 'document' you make it more plausible by using natural objects. So I'd never seen caricature in Russian documentary and I never knew until much later about Russian caricature cinema.

The English documentary boys were influenced by quick cutting (the idea of montage) and by the fact that by cutting they could create new things. You must remember the most influential of all the things in all cinema, English and American, even the commercial cinema, I dare say, was the Pudovkin book that I translated. I was once in an aeroplane coming back from Hamburg, very crowded American aircraft, and the man next to me turned out to be a film director who was just finishing one of the big films made in India – the name might come back to me if I heard it but I've forgotten what it was – and when he discovered, because our passports were examined, what my name was, he at once said that as a boy he had read this Pudovkin book and this had been the whole basis of his work and so on. That Pudovkin book was so simple, no Eisenstein book could have had the same influence. What is in it was pinched either from Kuleshov who taught it directly to him or from Eisenstein, but he translated it as the simple, idealist and poetic-minded person that he was, into simple language that everybody could understand, and anybody even the simplest amateur can get ideas from Pudovkin.

What Russian films had been shown in England? I don't know what Russian films people had actually seen.

One thing you should look at is the list of Film Society programmes in *Close Up* and there you'll find out what dates they were shown, because hardly anybody else showed any. The only ones shown before the Film Society were one or two of those made by Moscow Art Theatre actors, *Morosko* (1925) and *Polikushka* (1919) and *The Captain's Daughter*, the Pushkin story, although I'm not sure that I'm not mixing up the fact that I'd seen that, and one documentary of travel, and those were the only ones that were around before we started showing Russian films. And then a few came in that weren't shown at the Film Society or the Workers' Film Association like *The Ghost That Never Returns*. But all the other Russian films were shown at the Film Society. Bernstein and I had the idea of writing the history of the Film Society and I wanted to include in it facsimiles of all the programmes because I thought

94 that together with the contemporary programme notes and all the details of production credits they were a body of information that would be of use to students. Various publishers turned down the idea but a publisher just nibbled at it the other day, Vision Press, the people who re-did the Pudovkin thing. Just as we were arranging the contract and making all the plans we discovered that about a year ago it was pirated by an American and he's reprinted them all. So you can get a book containing facsimiles of all the programmes from this Arco press, I think. They've stolen books from everyone, from Basil Wright, from Thorold Dickinson. Thorold's caught up with them and now they're offering minimal royalties. America's outside the Copyright Act and they can steal what they like.

We began with *Mother* as far as I remember, and then we had *The End of St Petersburg*. We showed several others before we showed any Eisenstein. *Potemkin* had already been shown on 16mm; we showed it complete. We showed *October* and *The General Line* – we called it that, not the title it eventually had, *The Old and the New*.

What about Vertov?

Yes, we showed *Enthusiasm*. I think the 16mm people had *Kino-eye*. I can't remember whether we did, or whether he was only known through Bryher's¹⁸ book. Bryher's book brought Russian film very much to the knowledge of people even if they didn't see very much of them.

But that is what I was wondering, to what extent was it through the books and to what extent through actually seeing the films that people knew the Russian cinema?

Bryher's book made people interested. Bryher and *Close Up* made the films known before we showed them.

Could you say a bit more about the Progressive Film Institute?

We founded it to try and get the miners' halls, Co-op halls and so on, with films that were related to the anti-fascist struggle and the anti-Chamberlain struggle in England. Under the law a distributor had to register. You couldn't import a film and then show it, you had to have a distributor who registered it. No cinema could show a thing unless it was registered with a distributor under the Quota Act. We formed the Progressive Film Institute for that reason. A bunch of people in the Labour movement came in and were directors of the Institute, and my wife and I ran it. We hadn't any talent for that. There are people you see who love distributing pictures, like Charlie Cooper who was concerned with Kino and had made a great

success of that.¹⁴ I've seen it again and again in the Peace movement with which I am concerned, internationally. Every now and again they decide that it would be wonderful to have a film on peace and they get the greatest film directors in the world volunteering to do the films. They make the films, and nobody ever sees them, because once they've made the films they're no longer interested in them. And nobody knows how to distribute them or even how to let anybody know they exist. Nobody has a vocation except Charlie Cooper for wanting to distribute pictures, even if a few have for showing them if they could get hold of them. Stanley Forman is grand, but undertook it as a job that he was asked to do, Charlie Cooper is the only one who volunteered, as it were, got into it on purpose. We didn't like nor understood distributing. My wife worked terribly conscientiously, circularising everybody possible. Our only clients were the Cosmo, the thing that we had to start ourselves, and we carried on all through the war. Afterwards we shut up the Progressive Film Institute, we moved over to work a thing in the Soviet Embassy, the Soviet Film Agency. This distributed Soviet films during the war.

And what were you distributing in the Progressive Film Institute?

Well, Spanish War films.

Some of which you had made yourself.

Yes, and some of which we got from the Spanish people. Anti-fascist films, some of which we got from Germany or France. The pictures that I made personally for the Party like *Peace and Plenty*. We also made one or two newsreel type pictures of strikes, demonstrations by the unemployed, Party Congresses.

Can you see any connection between your political work and your commercial films? I mean working with Balcon and Hitchcock. Did you see any connection between these two activities?

No. I've always regarded myself as a single person. It seemed to me that one of the ways one could do work for the ideas in which one believed is by leading a creditable life, making some sort of a creditable impression in any particular profession. I had to take up the film profession because I couldn't live without earning money and that seemed to me, how wrong I was, but at the time, that seemed to be an industry with a future, that one would grow up with it. And I reckoned that if I was doing well as a film person and making pictures that were Royal Command performances or won Hollywood Academy of Motion Pictures prizes, that would spin off on the Communist Party. In the end I was blacklisted and couldn't get any employment. The Association of Cinematographic

96 Technicians you know, has a contract and employers can't fill any vacancies without consulting the office first, but when they consulted the office and my name was put forward, they laughed and I hope that it was for political and not technical reasons.

I also, of course, when the chance came, worked to build up the trade union, that was political work one could do, or social, it depends on how far you extend the word political. I never saw any contrast. I should probably never have been in films if I had had a guaranteed and assured income, but my father said he would give me an income only if he approved of what I was doing. Well, that you can't do, you see. I left zoology and went into films. I went to the *Daily Worker* and then left the *Daily* to go to Spain and then I went back to the *Daily*. I worked for the *Daily* all through the war except for the time that the *Daily* didn't come out. I couldn't get into the Forces, they wouldn't allow me in, probably because in the early days of the war when the Party was opposed to the phoney war I used to go round making speeches saying that everybody should go into the army and they should try to be the best bloody soldiers there because they couldn't expect to exercise any influence unless they were good soldiers and so probably they thought it best to keep me out.

You did have some notion of the political cinema at the same time?

Not under British conditions. You know, making all the films one could, but we didn't expect that . . . I don't know, you use the word cinema as if that were a sort of school. One made a particular picture for the Party because the Party asked for one for a particular campaign, that was all. The Party man who was running the Party's campaign against Chamberlain wanted *Peace and Plenty*.

But that wasn't the same situation as, say, Defence of Madrid?

Well, it was, yes. When the war started it suddenly occurred to us that the best way we could help the Spanish Republicans was to make known what was happening to them. So I rushed over there.

So it was conceived as reportage?

That's right. I went over with Norman McLaren. He was my cameraman. We took two 16mm cassette Kodak cameras. We rushed around, I can't photograph for toffee, but it was better to have two than one. And we took all we possibly could and then rushed back. And I cut it down at Harrow, I think that was the first time that Kodak had ever let anyone do it. But I said I'm going to put out a film and I'm going to show it round the country and this will redound to the possibilities of using 16mm and I consider that we hit on what the Americans later did. You see we did it all

in colour. The colour picture has disappeared now. But I remember that the burning of the palace of the Duke was very nice in colour. And the Americans later in the war took all their war documentaries on 16mm because they discovered that the grain is smaller on Kodachrome than it is on black and white, you can blow it up quite easily. Then I did the Spanish prisoners of war for evidence of non-intervention, took the film to Geneva and tried to get the League of Nations people to look at it. They wouldn't look at it officially of course but we showed them the cross-examination of prisoners. I hid a microphone when they were being cross-examined and told them that we were filming them to try to prove that they were alive since Hitler and Mussolini had said that all the prisoners were killed. Of course this didn't reassure the poor bastards because they expected that they would be killed as soon as the film was finished. And I remember an ethical question involved there. When I showed them at the ACT, Annie Asquith's sister, Bonham Carter, came along with a woman friend who was very indignant when I explained that they hadn't known that I was recording what they were saying. She said this was dishonest and all that kind of thing. Well quite candidly it never crossed my mind at all because what I was trying to do was to save very many lives by trying to make people realise the political game that was being played by the British and French who knew perfectly well that the Germans had forced their armies to go there. I mean the Italian soldier saying that he'd no idea where he was going when he was put on the ship and that sort of thing, and they called them volunteers! It was quite useful – a German saying that he was assigned there to an airforce unit. You can always say that you should never deceive anybody by hiding the microphone, but I don't know. When you use words like good and bad in a general sense it's very difficult, you have to analyse what you're trying to do.

Can we talk just a little about the Trade Union? You were involved from the beginning in the establishing of the Union. That was from when?

I can't remember exactly but the Union would tell you. I'm not the member number one. At that time of recruiting of course the idea was only just beginning and everybody was very snobbish and didn't want to degrade themselves by being associated with the idea of a trade union. They asked a Conservative MP to be President. It was that sort of atmosphere. The first breakthrough we got in recognition was at Shepherd's Bush. It was very interesting because we tried to build the Union there. There were only about half a dozen members, but we were trying to interest other people. Some tried to organise a company union and to sell the idea to Mick. Now Mick is a man of very decent instincts and very fine to work with but he doesn't always see things that are new to him

98 clearly right away. He played with the idea for a bit. There was a great meeting called on the biggest floor. There was to be a discussion of the proposal to form a company union. We arrived there – it was after hours – Mick was going to address us and he didn't turn up and nobody came. The place was packed. The whole staff was there and nobody came. Presently it was suggested that I should take the chair, so I took the chair and I could see waiting in the door one of the characters whom I shall not name who was actually a story writer on some of the pictures I was producing. I called out to him and said: 'Go down stairs and tell Mick that we will give him exactly ten minutes by my watch before this meeting is adjourned. It is disgraceful for us to be called here after hours and nobody with guts to come up and talk to us'. So he disappeared. Mick didn't come up, the meeting was adjourned, it was dispersed and the manager, Boxall, was authorised to recognise the Union. He was the breakthrough, after he recognised the Union all the other studios began to follow suit.

There was always a strong left influence in the Union. Why is that? It seems to have been much more left inclined than most other unions. Or was it?

Well, yes. I don't know. To my knowledge the number of Communists was always very few. Even during the war when of course the Communist Party membership was at its height, there were not to my knowledge more than twenty or thirty members in a union of several thousand members. On the executive which consists of twenty or thirty people, there were not to my knowledge more than two or three. But the point is I think that those there were, were assiduous in their attendance. They worked well and by worked I mean they didn't always hold up their hands when the others held up their hands. When Communists do that they become quite insufferable. And reasonably so because people realise that even two or three people who may start with some fundamental ideas don't always agree about everything. They behaved reasonably and like other people and they earned respect. Working hard in any trade union earns respect because when people go to vote, they vote for people they know and have seen. We always had on the executive to my recollection two or three Conservative members, Tory Party members who were respected for their activity. Perhaps two or three Communists, a host of non-party people and perhaps half a dozen enthusiastic Labour people. There was always a Liberal in Anthony (Asquith), and occasionally a Scottish Nationalist. I think we succeeded where Communists do succeed in things and that is when they are standing for a solution to the problems that face the trade unions and when they are reasonable. I don't know of any vote in the ACT that's ever been carried by a majority of left wing people, not in all the thirty or forty years

I've been associated with it. The vote was the logical result of the discussion.

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The kind of theme I was interested in from that question is that there seems to have been a persistent kind of left interest in the cinema in various kinds of ways. But there has never been a left cinema or a real left interest except as you say in a kind of opportunist way – I don't mean that critically, as a specific thing came up you thought a film would be useful, and a film might be made.

Of course. Well that has been because of the structure of financial distribution in this country. The monopolies have done that. Where you can't produce minority things and make minority pictures successful, minority political ones have even less opportunity. But you take Japan where there is a big and effective and commercially viable political film production, there they have organised a considerable left wing movement to have their own cinemas and look at their own films. Now in England this has failed again and again. It's been attempted with the Trade Unions which have just once or twice commissioned films of their own. It was attempted in the Round House for theatre and cinema and didn't come off.

I would ascribe it to the fact that the general level of culture makes it very difficult to get anything off the ground that is specialised, like that. Let me give you an example. If you read Trotsky you find Trotsky describing how in the early days of the revolutionary movement in Russia the argument was for the intellectuals to 'go to the people', the narodniks did it, the socialists did it, the communists did it, all kinds of people did it. Well they would go to villages where people couldn't read or write and were remote from radio or television. A person who came in and offered to teach people to read and write got respect. He didn't have to read politics all the time for people to be interested in his ideas. You had a blank sheet for communication with the masses. The moment the masses have got their occupations and their time occupied, listening or paying attention to politics or going to a political film means *not* going to the dog races, not sitting with the television, not going to something else. You have a great deal more difficulty in spreading any political ideas by any political method. You haven't got a blank sheet in modern society. And in the Western countries this is a real problem in developing any political argument at all.

But was there ever any thought of bringing politics into entertainment? As into the feature cinema? I mean it seems odd, but nobody...

Where? How could you?

They wouldn't even let us bring Hitch's non-politics in because it was out of the ordinary.

Ah, now that's really the question I'd like to ask you. Is that really the case that Hitchcock is non-political? Because on the face of it there's at least the sources, I mean John Buchan, Conrad, and so on, very right wing. What I was really trying to argue was that you might in fact find political implications in these films and you might find them to be decidedly right wing implications.

No, well I say there are implications in any film. You know the point of the marxist critics, marxists say a film with no politics in it is still a political film, it is distracting people from the idea that change is needed in the world. And that is a thing of course on which I have written abundantly. But I never expected to be able to make a film that had 'change' in it. I knew that as soon as people noticed it they would stop it, just as in America when they noticed what *American Tragedy* was about they stopped it. When they asked us to make it, they didn't know what it was about. But it was inescapable by the time we finished our script.¹⁵ Somewhere along the line they would have stopped you. Now I believe you get away with it a bit more because of the fact of this not being regular fare and because of there being such a shortage of films but in those days you had no chance at all so that's the answer why I never expected or thought of being able to make political films commercially.

When you were working with Eisenstein what kind of things was Eisenstein thinking at that period? There's not much written.

In that book I wrote of it, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*.

Well, you've written about projects you were engaged in.

Yes. What Eisenstein had was that he was all-absorbent. The unfamiliar culture – everything he wanted to do, everything he wanted to see, ceaseless energy to meet people, to see crowds, to do things, to see everything American people did. He was a man absorbing and adding to the vast store of knowledge and experience of cultures that he had. That was his chief interest. He thought he knew how to make pictures rather better than any of the other people. I don't think he picked up any ideas from other people or expected to in that sense.

What ideas were you picking up from him? Were you?

No, I don't think so. You see this approach to cinema was two or threefold. One was didactic and scientific, in the relationships of

various kinds of movements, patterns, compositions and things like that, producing psychological states in people and so forth. You could get that from seeing his pictures and reading his stuff, without needing conversation. His teaching, his direct teaching in lectures and what I learnt from people who were there, and translating and also the short course we had in Russia, there I would say were wonderful examples of the ideas that were already expounded in his writings and pictures. But what was unique, and he couldn't teach you that, was his artist's eye. The expression of his drawing, rendering his theories in composition. Now I've been always aware that that side of me is very deficient. Also, I know nothing about music. I can react to it as a dog can react to it and I've produced musical films, but I can't compose and I can't understand the technique at all. Art I can understand a great deal more, but I know that I am weak in my own composition and visual sense.

But the kind of theoretical ideas about the cinema which Eisenstein had?

Those I could get from the books and films.

No, I was wondering if you felt it made any difference to your own career?

No. I wouldn't say so because I feel that it is the approach that any scientist makes and that he either reaches similar conclusions himself or he recognises conclusions as one did with Eisenstein that one didn't think of first. But of course, that's how it would work. I think he approached cinema as a scientist. He analysed his own work as a scientist.

It is very curious just, again returning to Close Up, the kind of response they had to the Russian film. They liked Russian movies a lot. But they seemed to think: that was a great dramatic story, it was very well done, etc. They tended to write about the films in a very impressionistic way.

Don't miss the kind of people whom *Close Up* included and I wouldn't except myself . . . They approached the revolution as Liberals. So long as it's a struggle against oppression and a struggle for freedom, it's intensely appealing to people in other countries who have been struck by the need for a greater measure of freedom and justice than they find in their own society. The films that were made by the early Soviet cinema, films of the struggle against oppression, of the defeat of oppression, these are the things with which every Liberal could deeply sympathise. And that was what came first, afterwards they would translate that into a certain analysis – why do I like it and how did he get these effects and how

102 does he influence me? But the sympathy came first. Now those are people who often would consider themselves revolutionaries, sympathisers with the Soviet Union and they belonged to what I think Andrew Rothstein rather unkindly called 'the friends of the Soviet Union till' club. Something comes which upsets their liberal consciences. I don't mean that what the Soviet Union does is necessarily always right, it very often isn't. They are human beings trying to decide what is a right or wrong course in given complicated situations. They're not simple, and with the best will in the world even if they were saints they would constantly be doing things that were wrong. But the point is they got disappointed when it doesn't fit an ideal pattern and then begin to find the new films dull. I remember going to the Soviet Union on one of my first visits and seeing a film fourteen reels long about village life the climax of which was when somebody switched on the electric light and it worked. Well now, you couldn't expect that film to appeal to anybody else in any other country where they were accustomed to switch on electric lights. But that was a thrilling subject to millions of people in the Soviet Union.

I was really getting at something much more general. British film criticism whether in the late twenties or now, seems a very un-theorised, not necessarily uncritical, but a kind of unintellectual way in which the cinema is actually appreciated.

Can I add that reading now things written in the twenties by Eisenstein, and Vertov, Pudovkin and the others you can realise that actually, they had quite severe disputes among themselves.

Oh yes, and I was very interested in that Russian number that *Screen* had with the criticisms of *October* which came out and so on.

Were people aware of that in England or did they just take all Russian films as being more or less the same and the important thing was that they were Russian?

Some people must have been aware. But I don't know that anybody in the *Close Up* group could or had any idea of that. But although you describe those things and those violent quarrels I don't know that they really affected the scene so much as you might infer without knowing the background. You see artistic quarrels have always gone on in Russia. Imagine the way now that arguments are always quoted over here and if they were done with that violence people would think that the world was coming to an end here, but it's I think quite an old tradition and it's a literary tradition too, and some of those people are people who would be just rationalising jealousy and that happens in every circle and others are people who are being constructive and friends and they

use exactly the same sort of language. But you are quite right, you raise that point and I think people were not aware of it at all outside. Many people outside did not know that Eisenstein made no successful pictures in the Soviet Union between *Potemkin* and *Alexander Nevsky*. His pictures came here and were acclaimed abroad as a terrific something or other but that was because the only people who could see them were the people who could be interested in, moved by, or excited by the formal aspects. But where they had to appear to a large public for whom many of the experiments and technical things that he was trying to do were quite novel and hadn't reached a familiar language. These didn't go down with the public at all. He would come and lecture about them and I would find these lectures absolutely fascinating and I would realise that the films had enormous value. But I also realised that if you were in circumstances in which you had to work with a public and not only that but with colleagues who might never give you another chance to work you wouldn't be able to have that liberty of experimentation. The twenties in the Soviet Union was the period of the greatest liberty in the arts that had ever been known in the society. That of course is the great mistake and although it is only a historical mistake, not otherwise a mistake perhaps, of *Zhivago*. The point was brought to my attention as a matter of fact by Ehrenburg. In *Zhivago* you must remember, everything is monotonous and everybody is jumping on every kind of experiment in art. And Pasternak, who was a man who lived very much by himself and wasn't familiar with what was going on, was introducing into his novel the situation in the arts that arose about twenty years later; but the time of which he wrote, was the time of all these grandiose experiments, the time that they got Corbusier to come over and design, build buildings and so on and when they had plans to paint Ribero frescoes all over the Chinese wall at the Kremlin and so on, things that were absolutely fantastic and idiotic but a lot of them came to be done and a lot of them were nearly done. That was the time of *Dr Zhivago* and that was the time when these young film people were growing up and getting the chance to make the pictures which we now so much admire. But of course, not only *we* admire. When these pictures are put on television now, I notice that people come to tell you: 'We've seen *Ivan*', 'We've seen *October*', 'We've seen those films that have been put on in these series of retrospectives that have been put on by television', when millions and millions more have seen them than ever saw them in their hey day and they say how interested they were and how they've never forgotten them and so on. But that is because they are now more used to it. In those days, even in Russia, people didn't like the films, except *Potemkin* and the *Nevsky*. And when one looks on Eisenstein's career as some people do as a repression of the arts, this is only possible because we put ourselves in the position of an artist in England who is fascinated by this stuff and

104 always was fascinated by it and can't imagine anybody who jumps on it being anything but somebody who is jumping on art. But if we put ourselves into the situation and realise that the very fact that these people were making these pictures at all is an extraordinary freedom considering that they were never popular with the public, it's a very different complexion then to see his career in those terms. I once wrote a comparison, as a matter of fact, between Eisenstein's career in the cinema and Stroheim's in the capitalist world. Eisenstein had troubles enough with every picture he made in the Soviet Union and so any artist like him would have in any system in the world, Utopian or otherwise because of the enormous resources you need to make pictures on the scale he wanted to make them, and therefore the difficulty of getting enough people to be interested in what you're doing to justify the allocation of those enormous resources. But, when he came out abroad, capitalism didn't give him any better deal in making pictures he wanted to make. And one has to see that in perspective. No, the fights went on in the Soviet Union and they fed on that fact that the artists although very free at that time were also free to quarrel and did . . . Well, I remember Mayakovsky's suicide, how much that was due to personal relations and how much it was due to the quarrels he was having with RAPP, you can't analyse this unless you know the exact circumstances and so forth, but he was having these quarrels with RAPP.¹⁷ The Government and the Party was not on the side of RAPP, but it's humiliating and it's wearing and it's exhausting and upsetting to an artist who may be upset with personal matters as well and those sort of things cause him to do things that normally one wouldn't do. But that illustrates the atmosphere of quarrel I am trying to illustrate. And some people came through it and some didn't. Does that answer the points you were getting at?

Actually I think it relates to something which we were asking about political cinema because, I mean I suppose nowadays people actually have a concept of a political cinema which is not a thing on occasion. But lots of film makers would think of themselves as political film makers first and foremost. Now that's a situation which as you described it in the thirties, didn't exist. The way you saw yourself for instance, you were in the capitalist industry, or on occasion, a special occasion, you would make a film, for the Party, a particular situation but you didn't see yourself as a political film maker as many film makers do now.

Can't you make the analogy between a film teacher, a man who is working and being a good schoolmaster and is also a good trade unionist so that he eventually ends up as president of the NUT twenty years later? And probably very respected and that's why he hasn't got thrown out. He's a good schoolteacher and head-

master of his school and there's no thought in his mind of throwing up his job to do a summer school lecture occasionally for the Party. 105

No, look, the situation is now that there are people who do see themselves as political film makers in a sense, there are people now who see themselves as political schoolteachers as well, for good or ill. And obviously in that situation one has to pose those debates of the twenties because what strikes me in the differences between Vertov and Eisenstein, is that they saw themselves as political film makers.

No.

You don't think they did?

No, they saw themselves as Soviet film makers and this is what the Soviet people and they themselves were interested in.

Well, what is a Soviet film maker?

No, look at it this way. Nearly all those early film directors were middle class, bourgeois intellectuals. Now when the films that were made were films about the revolution and people wanted it, the public wanted that, because it had just happened, they wanted to see it happen and to see themselves and to identify with these events. And it was a question of making *Potemkin*, *October*. Men like Eisenstein could be fascinated by these events and there could be a fairly good marriage of content and form. But when it came to the business of construction, making the electric light work, and making collectivisation, mechanisation of agriculture work so that the age-old labouring of farms was less onerous, how could a man who had never worked on a farm in his life have any sympathy with it? Immediately they all became formalist, because they were only interested in the form and not in the content, they couldn't make themselves into revolutionaries. They couldn't make themselves interested in content they weren't interested in. How far it was conscious and how far it was unconscious is another matter. But that was the kind of thing that began to happen. Then things cleared up and when they began to be established and the Revolution was a past thing they began to want to do things on personal relations. And Pudovkin had to make a picture – I don't think he was *told* to make a picture, but his innards told him to make a picture – like that story of *A Simple Case* instead of the revolutionary pictures, and his methods were not adapted to them. It wasn't somebody making him do a thing but it was what he happened to be keen on. And he wasn't thinking in the other things of *wanting* to make politics, he didn't think of himself as a political

106 film maker, I'm quite certain. It is that the atmosphere was propitious for that kind of picture. Nowadays of course all the second rate people are continually making and have been making, and which has been the curse of Eastern Europe, not only the Soviet Union, pictures of the war. And they are making them because it's the easiest thing. They're not so good at making pictures if they haven't got the ready-made thriller and plot that the moment you've got it you can make something easily that will hold the audience by almost any means. I think the distinction of the political thing is entirely false and belongs simply to that period.

But I don't see how it could be that Eisenstein's attitude to his work in the Soviet cinema obviously couldn't be comparable to your attitude to your work in British cinema, surely?

He was trying to make the best pictures he knew how along the ways of the creative experiments that he was interested in and choosing subjects that interested and excited him. But they were *always* those subjects that interested and excited him. He went back to these battles and things. He didn't do the others because they didn't interest him. Not because he didn't think he was good at them, he thought he was good at anything, but because they didn't interest him. He wanted to make things like the struggle of the . . . not in Cuba, the other place, in Haiti, and so on, these battle things. He wanted to do the whole history of Mexico because he always found the visuals in Mexico so exciting.

Notes

1. Mr and Mrs Sidney Drew were a husband and wife comedy team; they appeared in a number of films just before and after the first world war. Their films included *Their Mutual Motor* and *The Unmarried Look*, and they were mainly shorts.

'Pimple' was Fred Evans, a top British slapstick star of silent film; when sound came in he lost favour and mostly worked as a film extra. He starred in a number of shorts featuring the character 'Pimple', including *Sexton Pimple*, *Pimple's Battle of Waterloo*, and *Pimple's Ivanhoe*.

2. Montagu first came into contact with Emil Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner when he went to Germany for *The Times* early in 1925. There he saw *Nju* by Paul Czinner starring Jannings and Bergner and Conrad Veidt. He later met most of the actors and the director during his stay, and this was the beginning of his friendship with Elizabeth Bergner. He returned later the same year to negotiate with Paul Czinner and Elizabeth Bergner (these two later married) to show *Nju* at the Film Society.
3. The Stage Society was founded in 1899 for the production of plays of artistic merit but which stood little chance of being performed in a commercial theatre. Such plays were given a West End cast and put on at a West End theatre for one or two performances. Con-

sequently they were necessarily performed on a Sunday when the commercial theatres were closed. The first performance of Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* (this was the first public production of the play) was interrupted by a police raid; Sunday entertainments were at that time still illegal. The Society set a precedent and led the way for other Sunday-playing theatre groups.

The Stage Society produced more than 200 plays, including the first production in England of a number of Shaw plays; the works of foreign dramatists – Hauptmann, Gorky, Gogol, Wedekind, Kaiser, Pirandello, J J Bernard, Afinogenov, Cocteau and Odets, were presented for the first time in Britain by the Society.

The Society continued into the 1930's when a move was made to close it as new theatres had arisen (eg the Gate Theatre) which were putting on full productions of new plays. The Society did continue however until the war when it fell into abeyance.

4. Sidney Bernstein was born in Ilford, the son of a successful quarry owner and builder who had an incidental interest in cinemas. Bernstein began his career in the family business and soon rose to the top. His father died in 1921 leaving five theatres to Bernstein. This became his main business interest and he went on to develop the enormous Granada chain (in 1927 he had ten theatres, in 1936, thirty-six, 1954, fifty-seven). He was not indiscriminate in his exhibition of films, and C A Lejeune described him as being 'selective and responsible'. He was one of the founders of the Film Society and a member of the intellectual and social group centred on the Society. At this time he was involved in his own 'self-education', learning from McKnight-Kauffer, Frank Dobson, Eisenstein, about architecture, the arts and cinema. In 1927 he introduced the first Saturday morning film showings for children.

Bernstein joined the Labour party in 1919 and has been a life-long socialist, always on the left of the party; one of the 'socialist millionaires', he was given a life peerage in 1969.

He developed a very successful cinema-circuit and later became involved in production with Hitchcock on the making of *Rope* and *Under Capricorn*. From 1940-45 Bernstein was Films Adviser to the Ministry of Information; after the war he went on to further develop the Granada chain and in 1955 he entered commercial television with Granada Television Ltd. He is Chairman of Granada Group Ltd, Granada Theatres Ltd, Granada Publications Ltd, Granada TV Rental Ltd and director of Granada Television Ltd (he was Chairman from 1955-70).

5. *Close Up* was the first major magazine of serious film criticism to appear in English; the first number was published in July 1927. *Close Up*, together with the Film Society etc, was an important element in the growing critical movement in the 1920's which saw film as an art medium as well as a commercial product. It ceased to appear in December 1933.
6. George Pearson, a founder member of the Film Society, was the only well-established director at the time who gave any significant support to the Society.

Born in 1875, he had worked from 1895 to 1912 as a school master. In 1912 he started in films, making his first three-reeler. From then until 1947 he worked variously as a director, of features

and documentaries, producer, author, script writer, and studio manager. His silent films were probably his best; in particular, the *Ultus* series of films made in the Feuillade manner around 1916, and the enchanting *Squibs* series, starring Betty Balfour, made in the 1920's. Other films of the twenties include *Reveille* (1924), *Satan's Sister* (1925), *The Little People* (1925), *Blinkeyes* (1926). His first sound films were collaborations made in Hollywood and include *Journey's End* (1930). He worked successfully in the thirties as a freelance director and his films include *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1935), *Checkmate* (1936), *The Third String* (1930) and *River Wolves* (1934). From 1940 to 1946 Pearson was the Film Director in Chief at the Colonial Film Unit. The Unit made 170 films during the war; among those directed by Pearson are *British Family in Peace and War*, *Take Cover*, *An African in England*. His autobiography *Flashback* was published in 1957.

7. Adrian Brunel had developed from childhood a passion for films and he began his career working for a firm of film exhibitors; he then started his own firm, Mirror Films, with Harry Fowler Mear as a director. He was eventually called up to serve in the army but was medically unfit for active service and found himself in the newly established army film department. After the war he joined the British Actor's Film Company—the first cooperative film production concern in Britain—as scenario director, at the same time forming a film actors agency called Bramlins with Benedict James and John Payne (and which was continued by John Payne until 1941). He then formed British Comedy Films with Leslie Howard, Aubrey Smith, A A Milne and Nigel Playfair, which was later Minerva Films. Here Brunel did his first commercial film directing. The company eventually folded; although its films were successful, it lacked the capital to make a sufficiently large film 'package' to sell to the distributors. He then worked on a number of unsuccessful travel films and was out of work for two years. He met Michael Balcon in 1924 together with C M Woolf and was signed on with Gainsborough Pictures to direct films for distribution by Woolf, and he made a number of burlesques. He founded the Film Society in 1925 with Ivor Montagu and others, and also an editing company which later became Brunel and Montagu Ltd.

His first sound picture was the very successful *Elstree Calling* (1930); Brunel was taken off the film after the shooting had been completed because of a dispute with a producer about the humour of a scene. The film was finished without Brunel's 'fancy editing' and Hitchcock re-shot the scene in question.

Brunel had become mistrusted by the production companies and distributors who saw him as 'dangerously revolutionary' in his film ideas and his career was seriously affected. In the thirties he found it difficult to get work; he did make a number of short comedies with Fox British and various 'B' pictures, and later worked with Korda at the Denham studios. He joined Balcon again at Ealing, working with Cavalcanti on *Yellow Caesar*. He then became production consultant with Leslie Howard at Denham studios. He died in 1958.

His major films include *The Man Without Desire* (1923), with Ivor Novello; *Lovers in Araby* (1923); *Blighty* (1927); *The Intruder* (1934); his scenarios include *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1937) which he also co-directed with Alexander Korda, and *The Lion has Wings* (1939).

His books include *Filmcraft* 1935; *Film Production* (introduction by Alexander Korda) 1936; *Film Script: the technique of writing for the Screen*, 1948; *Nice Work: the story of thirty years in British film production*, 1949.

8. The Original Council of the Film Society was composed of: Iris Barry (film critic), Sidney Bernstein (film exhibitor), Frank Dobson (sculptor), Hugh Miller (actor), Ivor Montagu, Walter Mycroft (film critic), Adrian Brunel (film director).

The Founder Members were: Lord Ashfield, Anthony Asquith, George A Atkinson, Clare Atwood, Anthony Butts, Lord David Cecil, Aubrey Clark, George Cooper, Edith Craig, H Fraenkel, Roger Fry, J B S Haldane, Julian Huxley, Professor Jack Isaacs, Augustus John, E McKnight Kauffer, J Maynard Keynes, Angus MacPhail, Olga Miller, H F Rubenstein, Christopher St John, George Bernard Shaw, J St Loe Strachey, Lord Swaythling, Dame Ellen Terry, Ben Webster, H. G. Wells.

Others who joined later were: Sidney Cole, Thorold Dickinson, John Grierson, Robert Herring, Ellen Wilkinson and Basil Wright. Adrian Brunel was forced to resign from the Council very early on due to pressure from his employers (he was under contract to Gainsborough Pictures whose distributor, C M Woolf, was very opposed to the Film Society and forced Brunel's resignation), but the Society continued to use the offices of Brunel & Montagu, and he was very involved in the Society, if not officially.

Walter Mycroft was film critic with the *Evening Standard* at the time – his interest in films developed when a story of his was made into a film. He began as a sub-editor on the *Standard* and became critic after an article by him on 'Films as a new Art Form' was published. With his developing support for the Film Society and 'Art' films he no longer conformed with the *Standard's* ideas about film and with the introduction of the Quota Act Mycroft moved into films in 1927 when he joined British International Pictures as literary adviser. In 1933 he became Director of Productions at BIP (later Associated British Production). He died in 1959.

Iris Barry, born in Birmingham 1895, said that her taste for movies was fixed after seeing an early French production of *Les Misérables* in about 1913. She was a keen film-goer and began writing about film for *The Spectator* around 1923-24. One of the founders of the Film Society in 1925, she later wrote an article on the 'sad state of film production in Britain' which led to a job as film critic for the *Daily Mail* in the same year.

She went to New York in 1930. In 1935, with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, she began the Film Library of the newly established Museum of Modern Art. This was about the same time that comparable organisations were created in France and Britain for the preservation of films and their appreciation. With the passing of the silent film and the realisation that these would never be seen again there had developed a movement for the setting up of film archives.

She retired as Director of the Department of Films in 1951 but continued active in the International Federation of Film Archives which she had founded in 1935. She died in 1969.

Her books include: *Lets Go to the Pictures* (1925), *Splashing into Society* (1923), *Portrait of Mary Wortley Montagu* (1930), *D W Griffith: An American Film Maker* (1940) and she translated from the French and edited Bardeche and Brasillach's *History of the Motion Picture*.

9. Le Vieux Colombier, le Studio des Ursulines and le Studio 28 were specialist cinemas which emerged to meet the need for places to exhibit art films particularly the films of the avant-garde not generally distributed. They grew out of the film society movement in France in the 1920's which developed from an original but unsuccessful idea by Delluc for a vast cine-club on the scale of the Touring-Club of France. Nevertheless Delluc then went on to organise, with Canudo and Moussinac, special showings of films which brought in audiences with a serious interest in the cinema. This idea led to a proliferation of cine-clubs in Paris and various large towns in France. At the same time specialist cinemas were established, like Vieux Colombier, to show avant-garde films; these cinemas developed regular audiences of followers of serious art films, and were an important distribution system for such films, which had been Delluc's original goal.
10. *Secrets of Nature* was a series of nature films produced by British Instructional in the early 1920's. They were unique studies of wild-life and plantlife, photographed by leading British cinematographers and edited by people who were recognised authorities on the subjects dealt with. *Biograph* (20.9.23) describes the series: 'Special Features: the wonderful close-up of minute creatures; the clever linking together of the scenes into a story of connected interest; the variety of the subject matter; the pictures of incidents never previously photographed'. These films had been widely acclaimed and gained a large reputation. None of the filming was faked and many of the series constituted significant scientific achievements. They were also presented 'to make the broadest popular appeal' and were obviously presented as 'entertainment' as well as instruction.
Films in the series include: *The Mayfly*, *Battles with Salmon*, *The Stickleback*, *The Story of Westminster Hall* (1923) and *Seed Time and The Golden Eagle* (1925).
11. Graham Cutts had originally trained as an engineer. He started in films in 1909 as an exhibitor and moved into production in 1920. He was the 'Blue-eyed' boy at Gainsborough Pictures and he was very successful with distributors particularly C M Woolf. He was the top British box-office director in the 1920's and made the famous *Rat* films with Ivor Novello. With the coming of sound Cutts was rather eclipsed but made a return with a number of comedies including *Three Men in a Boat* (1933), *Aren't Men Beasts?* and *Over She Goes* (both 1937). He joined World Wide in 1940 and worked with them until 1947 making a number of documentaries and shorts. He died in 1958. Hitchcock's early film work was on Cutts' Films, as scriptwriter, assistant director, editor and designer.

Ivor Novello; singer, composer, film and stage actor and playwright. He was trained as a singer but also wrote, having a great success with 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' which became a marching song in the war and netted him £16,000. After the war he went on the stage and acted in his own play *The Rat* which was later made into a film, the first of three. His first film, *The Man*

Without Desire (1923) was the beginning of a very successful film career as the Romantic Hero, in the 1920's. With the change to sound films Novello returned to the stage and appeared and produced a number of musicals, many of which he wrote himself. He also was very successful as a song composer and he established the Ivor Novello Music Publishers. He continued to act in and produce plays and musicals up to his death in 1951.

12. *The Gold Rush*, made in 1925, was written and directed and starred in by Charlie Chaplin and made by the Charles Chaplin Production Co.

Shadows was probably *The Shadows*, made in 1918 by Reginald Barker for Goldwyn (USA).

13. Brunel & Montagu Ltd. This began as a small jobbing firm of Brunel's later becoming a partnership with Montagu. He joined when the Film Society was started, because many of the films shown needed to be re-titled and sometimes edited. New employees of the firm were self-recruited; after a period doing odd jobs in the office and being generally useful one was put on the payroll.

The firm was the first of its kind in Wardour Street and it worked entirely on finished films which were wrong in some way, cutting and editing them, and also re-titling foreign films. When the talkies came the firm was killed; production companies didn't think it necessary to edit them and editing became a mechanical 'joining' job and the equipment needed for talkies had become too expensive. Sub-titling foreign films was not economic either - where before companies paid £250 for the re-titling of a foreign silent film, they paid £40 for the sub-titling of a talkie.

Begun by Brunel with Jock Orton and Tod Rich (on the latter two's de-mob pay), it was later joined by Ian Dalrymple (ex-editor of *Granta*, later chief editor at Gaumont British; director, producer and writer), Frank Wells (son of H G Wells; later script-writer and then art director at the Denham Studios), Angus MacPhail (left to become scenario editor of Gainsborough Pictures, later scenario chief at Gaumont British and then at Ealing Studios), Sergei Nolbandov (script-writer, director and producer), Michael Hankinson (supervising editor of British and Dominion Films Corporation, later a director), and Reginald Beck (later editor for Fox Films and other companies; then supervising editor at Denham, and finally co-editor with Laurence Olivier).

14. Charlie Cooper began in films through association with Kino-Films in the 1930's where he was working with other young film makers on documentaries on the hunger marches in Wales and the tenant strikes in East London. He went to the USA in 1940 and spent seven years running the film department of a major labour organisation before setting up a film hire company called Contemporary Films in 1947. This was not a very favourable period in the USA for the kind of venture Cooper wanted, he was harassed in particular over the distribution of a number of Soviet films, including *Alexander Nevsky*, and he eventually sold the company and returned to Britain where he began a new Contemporary Films, specialising in 16 mm film hire, which he still directs.
15. Montagu collaborated on two scripts with Eisenstein while they were in America together:

Sutter's Gold: scenario by Eisenstein, G V Alexandrov and Ivor

Montagu, taken from the novel *L'Or* by Blaise Cendrars.
An American Tragedy: scenario by Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Montagu, based on the novel by Theodore Dreiser of the same title.

16. *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* by Winifred Bryher, 1929.
17. RAPP or VAPP was the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, founded in 1920 by descendents of Proletkult, and produced the journal *On Guard*, dominated by Lelevich, Vardin and Rodon; more moderate leadership appeared after 1925 including Averbakh, Libedinsky, Kisho and Ermilov, and the journal became *On Literary Guard*. Reorganised as RAPP (Russian APP) in 1928, controversy with left groups developed (Litfront, Lef) and it was dissolved to form Union of Soviet Writers in 1932.

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Ivor Montagu – Filmography*Director, Feature Films*

- 1928 Bluebottles
 1929 Daydreams
 1930 The Tonic

Director, Documentaries

- 1934 Wings Over Everest, directed by Geoffrey Barkas and Ivor Montagu. Record of the Houston-Mount Everest Flight
 1938 Defence of Madrid
 Spanish ABC
 Behind the Spanish Lines
 Testimony of Non-intervention
 Britain Expects
 1939 Peace and Plenty

Associate Producer

- 1934 The Man Who Knew Too Much, director: Hitchcock
 1935 The Thirty-nine Steps, director: Hitchcock
 1936 The Secret Agent, director: Hitchcock
 Sabotage, director: Hitchcock
 1949 Another Shore, director: Charles Crichton (Ealing Studios)

Screenplay and Co-Director

- 1948 Man, One Family

Scriptwriter and Screenplay

- 1948 Scott of the Antarctic, director: Charles Frend (Ealing Studios)

Script and Screenplay in Collaboration

- 1956 The Last Man to Hang, director: Terence Fisher