

'Local films for local people': Travelling showmen and the commissioning of local films in Great Britain, 1900–1902

Vanessa Toulmin

Free Cinematograph Films of Local Subjects

All showmen are aware of the drawing power of Local Subjects cinematographed in the Town a few days before the same is visited: for instance, Panoramic views of the principal streets or Sights in the Town, factory hands leaving Work, Interior or Exterior views of various important Industrial Establishments. All such subjects are highly interesting to your local audience who flock to your exhibit in order to see themselves and their friends reproduced on the screen.¹

As this Warwick Trading Company catalogue advertisement of 1902 demonstrates, the concept of filming local events and scenes was a highly lucrative business tool for early film exhibitors. However, film historians have to some extent overlooked these particular films and their importance in the development of early filmmaking and exhibition. Non-fiction titles by Lumière, Biograph and Edison have of course been extensively investigated by academics and scholars, and John Barnes' pioneering work on the Victorian Cinema in Great Britain emphasises the importance of non-fiction during this period. With the notable exceptions of the Nederlands Film Museum publication *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Non Fiction Films*, and the third Domitor conference in 1994, very few attempts have been made to bring non-fiction back into the main-

stream of early film history. The reasons for the neglect of early non-fiction titles are explained by Tom Gunning, 'as a reasonable reluctance to wade into a great uncharted territory, a space left blank on all charts'.² The Brighton project in 1978 emphasised fiction as opposed to non-fiction, and films produced after 1900. This according to Gunning has contributed to a neglect of non-fiction films in the re-evaluation of early cinema. Events in the past decade have sought to rectify the path taken from Brighton and, as mentioned, studies have appeared on non-fiction. However, one of the most important and commercially lucrative types of non-fiction film produced in the early 1900s still continues to be overlooked, and that is the local film.

Local films, more than the majority of early non-fiction titles (particularly in the early 1900s), were tied directly to a date or event or specific occasion in the history of a region, town or business operation. This date could be the opening of an electric tramway, the local village fete or fair, or the visit of minor royalty. But often local films were not date specific, and were a simple marketing venture to film as many faces as possible, thus providing a ready made paying audience, desiring to see themselves reproduced on screen. This great filmic mass is often

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Fig. 1. Randall Williams' show front. A sign advertising 'Local Animated Pictures' is partly obscured in the centre. [National Fairground Archive, Tommy Green Collection.]

difficult to date, trace or identify, a factor Gunning readily accepts in his article 'Before Documentary'. However, I would propose another factor for the neglect of local films. Local subjects more than any other type of early film are directly associated with another forgotten or neglected figure in early film history, the travelling exhibitor who, like the films they showed, have until recently formed part of that undated mass.

Another reason for this neglect is that until the discovery of the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, a comprehensive body of relevant material did not appear to have survived and it was therefore difficult to link titles to particular filmmakers or exhibitions. This is partly because the films were perceived to have a limited shelf life, more ephemeral and not significant enough to remain on filmmaker's back catalogues. The aim of this study is to analyse the types of films in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection and re-evaluate the importance and prominence of local subjects in the corpus of films produced in the early 1900s, thereby demonstrating a network and mode of operation which for a short period of time was as complex and market driven as the production of fiction titles during the period.

Travelling exhibitors

As previously stated, the mode of exhibition most associated with these type of subjects were the travelling shows. In a ground breaking article, Deac

Rossell classifies travelling exhibitors into four main groups: fairground showmen who turned to moving pictures from already existing fairground shows; independent travelling showmen who presented short term movie shows in public venues and rented spaces; the theatrical exhibitor who used an agent to present a variety of music hall bookings in fixed theatrical venues; and finally the eager amateur or outsider with little experience of the entertainment industry. Rossell writes:

For the most part, travelling exhibition has been treated by historians as a romantic interlude in the story of exhibition, a kind of side-show on the way to real exhibition in the movie palaces built after the First World War.³

This view is often reflected in later reminiscences by the pioneers themselves. Hepworth recalls showmen buying his films with pennies collected from fairground rides, and the showmen themselves tend to paint themselves more as romantic figures than professional businessmen.⁴ However, recent research has demonstrated that by 1900 the travelling exhibitors were an important factor in the promotion of early films.⁵ Types and formats of exhibition have now been investigated, with the music hall,⁶ town hall and fairground showmen⁷ all being examined in various degrees by historians in the past decade.

Notwithstanding this, the role of itinerant ex-

hibitors in encouraging film production in the early 1900s has not been previously examined. The fairground showmen were associated with early filmmakers in three main ways: firstly as exhibitors, secondly as commissioners of new material, and thirdly (and perhaps most difficult to prove, with the exception of William Haggart), as actual producers of films.⁸ This study aims to focus on the local film, to produce a cohesive model in which to examine the complex relationship between fairground showmen and the commissioning of early films.

John Barnes's pioneering work on Victorian cinema has demonstrated that by 1900 the leading makers of non-fiction were the Warwick Trading Company and the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, which both specialised in topical or news events.⁹ The importance of news films in attracting audiences to early film exhibition, is stressed by Cecil Hepworth, who writes:

Now dawns a significant and important departure in the story of the films – the awareness of their news value – the value of news to the films; the importance of films to the news. News pictures became and remained for very many years the backbone of the 'pictures'.¹⁰

Events such as Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897), the Boer War (1899–1902) and other conflicts, the Funeral of Queen Victoria (1901) and the Coronation of Edward VII (1910) were all occasions which created a desire for topical news subjects. The listing of non-fiction titles in appendix 1 of Barnes' fifth volume reveals for the year 1900 a familiar pattern of the filming of national and foreign events, royalty, national sporting events, and many variations on Boer war themes.¹¹ Sources utilised by John Barnes for this extensive listing include film catalogues, periodicals, newspapers and surviving films. The study, however, concentrates on the national rather than the local level.

With the deposit in the British Film Institute (BFI) in 1999 of the Peter Worden Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, which consists of approximately 800 rolls of local non-fiction films produced between 1900 and 1913, a body of material is available for the first time which reveals another significant aspect of non-fiction production. This collection was transferred to the BFI in June 2000, where a four year project is currently being undertaken to restore, catalogue and date the material. A breakdown of the films will be covered in more detail at a later stage in this

article and an introduction to the company and its output can be found in *Film History* volume 10, number 1.¹² The material in this collection demonstrates the need for a re-evaluation of the local film, reflecting as it does a transition from news as large scale events to recording the everyday life of local towns from 1900 onwards.

Travelling exhibitors and local films

Local films both incorporated the attraction of news and the novelty factor of moving image, all placed in a regional and in many cases particular local setting. The concept of presenting regional views was a recognised aspect of projected entertainment in the years prior to the introduction of the cinematograph. A handbill in the John Johnson Collection held in the Bodleian Library reveals that a Mr Brooks was presenting lantern views of 'A Trip to North Wales' and a series of seventy magnificent photographs of 'The Castles and Abbeys of England' in 1889.¹³ Magic lantern showmen incorporated local landscapes and historic landmarks into their presentations.

In the early film era Lumière and Edison catalogues included titles of major cities and events, and Hepworth in his autobiography recalled filming titles such as *Procession of Prize Cattle*, *Tortoise Race* and *Thames Panorama*. Such catalogue films could be bought and shown anywhere, but genuine local films – those taken in a particular locality and then shown to the local people – were a growing attraction. Hepworth took local films for A.D. Thomas in Manchester in 1901,¹⁴ and by 1898 Arthur Cheetham from Wales was also making a name for himself in this field:

Mr. A. Cheetham, of Rhyl, North Wales, has been snap-shooting footballers at Blackburn and has about two hundred and fifty feet cut out of a three hundred feet film in good condition. He has got good sharpness and recognisable likenesses. He is making a speciality of doing local cinematographic work and exhibiting it in the neighbourhood in which the scene occurred, and he has been very successful.¹⁵

William Walker from Aberdeen quickly incorporated local films into his film shows in 1897, an attraction which drew great cheers from the assembled crowds as well known local personalities could be seen on the screen.¹⁶ Following this show in September, Walker continued to incorporate

'topicals' into his film shows and by 1898 was following the example of Arthur Cheetham by filming a local football match between Aberdeen and Glasgow.¹⁷ As Michael Thomson writes:

The real attraction was the chance of spotting a friend, someone well known, or even oneself in the 'topicals', a fact not lost on Walker who added at the foot of his advertisements that year, the line 'Have You Been Cinematographed?'¹⁸

The association between showmen and local films is further demonstrated in an article published in 1902, in which the author, writing under a pseudonym 'Upstart', recalls making films for a showman which showed local men leaving work:

The travelling show was a success in every way so the proprietor invested in a camera, in order to be able to secure his own local subjects. I was selected to make use of it, and as we had pitched in a large manufacturing town, it was thought that a picture of the men leaving work would prove to be a certain draw.¹⁹

A detailed survey of *The Showman* (a short-lived but very important journal dedicated to the travelling showman, founded in September 1900) between September 1900 and December 1902 reveals an extensive listing of reports of local films being exhibited at fairs and venues throughout the United Kingdom. A report from December 1900 informs us that Lawrence's world-famed electrograph was topping the bill at Belper Fair with a local film of Belper mill hands leaving work.²⁰ A similar pattern is observed at Norwich Christmas Fair where Crighton Electrograph's 'great draw' was a film of Coleman's workpeople leaving the factory.²¹ Town Hall exhibitors were also quick to see the popularity of the local draw and *The Showman* reports that the following week Mr Albert Coe of Norwich also presented local films, of Messrs Coleman's starch factory and the workpeople leaving the works at dinner hour.²² The Coleman's factory gate film was again shown in Norwich by the Animated Picture Company in March 1901 and still proved popular with the audiences.²³ The Easter Fair held in Manchester that year was attended by Cordewell's Royal Lifeograph with the 'usual films of the late Queen's funeral and locals' being exhibited.²⁴ The popularity of the cinematograph and travelling fairs is confirmed by a reporter for *The Showman* attending the Norwich Easter fair,

who wrote that after visiting Randall Williams' cinematograph:

Threaded our way to Crighton's. The firm shows Spanish cremation scenes in colour, and very good they are. They have local films and also Bennett's execution films which are fine.²⁵

Local films were also shown at Salford Fair, Oldham and Holmes Fair at Trafford Road.²⁶ A visit to Newcastle by Walter Gibbons provides us with a rare example of film titles being reported, along with information about the filmmaker. Amongst the new local pictures exhibited by Gibbons were the by now inevitable factory shots of Sinclair's Tobacco Factory and a new type of local film, *Children leaving School*, and *Newcastle Cathedral* and other churches after the service.²⁷

The fairground showmen also began to incorporate different types of local films into their exhibitions, and Randall Williams and W.H. Marshall attended Keighley Spring Fair with war films as well as local material. The films included Boer war scenes, comical trick pictures, and in the case of Marshall's cinematograph, films relating to the region with the *Return of the C.I.V.* and *Cycle Parade at Bradford*.²⁸ In the Spring of 1901 the Royal Animated Pictures Co opened at the St James Hall in Plymouth, and according to the reporter presented the most interesting event of the evening in the shape of films of the local dockyard, main thoroughfares and other local views.²⁹

Continuing our survey of fairground showmen presenting local films, the report for Rochdale fair in June 1901 reveals the showmen competing for the local audience, with Colonel Clarke presenting films taken of the Robinson factory and Relph and Pedley exhibiting another type of local film, the return of local soldiers from South Africa and the turnout of the Lancashire Fire Brigade in Rochdale.³⁰ In the case of these particular films I will show that they are possibly associated with Mitchell and Kenyon as both titles survive in the collection as negatives (thereby providing a clue to their origin). But only on rare occasions are the people who made the films mentioned in newspaper reports, and little evidence survives tying the exhibitor to the supplier of the material. Some clues as to which film companies produced such films can be found in advertisements. The first large-scale advertisement that we have found for local films belongs to Mitchell and

THE SHOWMAN, June 28, 1901.

Exhibition Promoting.

THE SHOWMAN

An Illustrated Journal for Showmen and all Entertainers.

Vol. II.—No. 30. "All Works"
"Reviewed." JUNE 28, 1901. "Registered at the G.P.O."
as a Newspaper. TWOPENCE.

NEW "HEPWIX" FILM

No. 247. THE DERBY OF 1901. This photograph, probably the finest Derby picture ever produced, was taken from the best position on the Course, the camera being placed a very short distance beyond the winning line, of which it commands a full and clear view. A suitable and picturesque background is afforded by a portion of the grand stand and the entire stretch of the straight run, up to the winning post. The competing horses are first seen as they are being paraded slowly along the line, looking their very best as the sun glitters on their shiny coats. Next comes the race, which is clearly seen from the time the horses round the bend up to their passing the winning post, amid the frantic cheers of the onlookers. Then the crowd bursts madly on to the Course and swarms all over it, while the view changes to show the grand stand and the winning horses being led past. A magnificent film, which will command applause long after the actual race has been forgotten. **Length 150 feet. Price £7 10s.**

TO SHOWMEN.

The most popular Cinematograph Film in a Travelling Show is **ALWAYS** a **LOCAL PICTURE** containing Portraits which can be recognised. A Film showing workers leaving a Factory will gain far greater popularity in the town where it was taken than the most exciting picture ever produced. The workers come in hundreds, with all their friends and relations, and the Film more than pays for itself the first night. In other words this is

THE GREATEST DRAW

YOU CAN HAVE, AND IT IS OUR BUSINESS

to provide it for you in Advance, for Each Town you visit.

Write, for particulars and prices, to

HEPWORTH & CO.,

Cinematographers, **Walton-on-Thames.**
Telephone: No. 16, Walton-on-Thames.
Telegrams: "Hepworth," Walton-on-Thames.
London Agents—L. GAUMONT & Co., 25 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, W.C.

HOLDEN AT STATIONERS' HALL.

Fig. 2. Hepworth's advertisement in *The Showman* in 1901 stresses the popularity of local films.

Kenyon who claim 'Nothing is so great a draw as A Local Subject'. The advertisement also contains a listing of sixty towns, ranging from Manchester to Sheffield, Bulwell to York, and Nottingham to Ilkeston.³¹

Other exhibitors were quick to spot a potential market, including Cecil Hepworth, who ran an extensive advertisement on the front page of *The Showman* for eight consecutive weeks from June 1901 onwards offering local subjects.³² Hepworth's association with local films is reaffirmed in 1902 where the reporter writes:

Hepworth and Co., as the majority of our readers well know, make a speciality of taking local films in any part of the country, for showmen and entertainers running a hall or booth in their town. They are not content with merely secur-

ing pictures of the streets and ordinary incidents, and their staff of photographers are in possession of several mighty secrets, by which they can generally stage-manage a sensational turn out of the local fire brigade or something similarly attractive.³³

The trend for local pictures continued unabated throughout 1901 and 1902, with *The Showman* informing their readers that local pictures were the keynote of all animated picture shows in Oldham that week.³⁴ Posters in the Bill Douglas Collection at the University of Exeter also reflect the trend for local films continuing into 1902, with the Argyle Theatre of Varieties advertising on 30 June 1902:

A Brilliant Series of Animated Photos, specially taken for the Royal Bioscope of the Cycle Carnival in Birkenhead in aid of our hospitals. Also Several Local Pictures including Snapshots of our Leading Thoroughfares, Arrival of a Woodside Ferry Boat and other interesting scenes.³⁵

The pattern throughout 1901 appears to be for films showing workers leaving a factory – factory gate films – and little else, and these are mentioned until the end of 1901. However, by August, different types of local films begin to be reported, in particular football films or sporting events. Wadbrook was advertising the football match between Ireland and Wales in his cinematograph at Gorscincin Fair near Swansea, and at the annual fair in Ripley, Arthur Twigdon's cinematograph was 'drawing the people in with a local film of a football match between Ripley and Pinxton'.³⁶ Other types of local films include an account of Feather's Animated Pictures exhibiting phantom rides of *Dundee to Lochee on an Electric Car* and *Over the Tay Bridge on an Express Train*.³⁷ The craze for football films continued into 1902 with Wadbrook's Electograph exhibiting football titles, other local films, and the latest from South Africa.³⁸ Other companies continued to advertise local films, including the Micrograph Company Ltd and Gaumont and Company, who placed an advertisement in *The Showman*.³⁹ Illustrated tram rides are a new feature of the reports that appear in the trade journals. The report for Professor Ball's show which exhibited in Reading, in May, reveals the attraction of this kind of topical:

Recognising the importance of having local pictures, Professor Ball was wise enough to

secure some excellent pictures of Reading – one a journey along the main street, taken from the front of a tram and the other a picture of Messrs. Huntley and Palmer's employees leaving the biscuit factory at lunch time ... The struggle between Sheffield United and Southampton for the cup was admirably depicted. This film is really the best one of a football match we have seen.⁴⁰

Showmen and filmmakers

The link between showmen and particular film companies can be found in the trade papers, in particular *The Showman*. Advertisements in this journal and in others such as *The Era* and later the *World's Fair* trade newspaper demonstrate that travelling exhibitors including the fairground showmen were particularly targeted by film companies in the 1900s. Another source of material is *The Showmen's Year Books* published annually by the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. The earliest surviving volume dates from 1900 and includes adverts for Philip Woolfe, Cecil Wray and Co., and Mitchell and Kenyon, the latter claiming that the films that they made were specially designed for showmen. The advertisement for Haydon and Urry Ltd reveals that they made specially strong and thick films for hard wear and showmen's use.⁴¹ From 1900 to 1908 adverts by several film companies may be found in the *Showmen's Year Books*: the 1901 issue included adverts from the Warwick Trading Company, Mitchell and Kenyon and John Wrench and Son.

Another link between showmen and film companies may be seen in the 1902 report of the annual World's Fair held at the Royal Agricultural Hall in London:

Mr Taylor has pitched his beautiful cinematograph booth with its gorgeous carved front and wonderful gavioliphone ... Next to this show is Chittocks cinematograph, displayed a sign to the effect that all of their films are supplied by W. Paul of Holborn.⁴²

Similarly, the Messrs. Birchell and Son's cinematograph entertainment and fairground entertainments in St Austell exhibited films supplied by the Warwick Trading Company.⁴³ The *Music Hall and Theatre Review* in April 1905 confirms the link between showmen and filmmakers, the manager from Pathé Freres declaring to the reporter:

To give you a list of showmen who have

The Showman.

**Our New Series of
Boer War Films**

WILL BE READY
LAST WEEK IN SEPTEMBER.

**Startling, Realistic,
Pathetic.**

Also a
New Laughable Trick Film
Entitled
'Chasing De Wet.'

The Fight for the Gun.
Hands off the Flag.
Poisoning the Well.
Tommy's Last Shot.
Surprise of a Boer Camp.
Saved by a Woman.
A Sneaky Boer.
A Tight Corner, in 4 Tableaux—

1. A Dash for Help.
2. Through the Enemy's Lines.
3. The Message Delivered.
4. Just in Time.

We are still making the ever popular subjects:

**Despatch Rider,
Washing Boer Prisoner,
Winning the V.C., and
The Lost Scout on the Veldt.**

50ft. Local Pictures

25/-

300 Subjects Now Ready.

**Customers own Subjects
Developed and Printed.**

BEST FILM STOCK SUPPLIED.

MITCHELL & KENYON

Norden Film Works,
22 Clayton St., BLACKBURN.

Telegraphic Address :
"Films," Blackburn.

Fig. 3. Mitchell and Kenyon's advertisement in *The Showman* in 1901 highlights the large number of local films that they have in stock.

ordered and are using our machines would take more space than you could spare. Haggard and Sons, Messrs. E. Crecraft, Walter Payne, Dooner and Sons, G.H. Kemp, Poole, Relph and Pedley, J. Crighton, Proctor J. Studt, P. Collins, Capt. Payne, Anderton and Rowlands, Wadbrooke, Hancock, James Leo ... these are only a few.⁴⁴

An advertisement from Gaumont's catalogue in 1906 reveals an additional link, that between particular suppliers of equipment and fairground exhibitors:

As an instance and [sic] popularity of our apparatus among Professional Exhibitors we may remark that at the World Famed and Historical Nottingham Goose Fair, Held October 1905, Every Cinematograph Showman there was using the Professional Chrono. Among those present were the following gentlemen: Messrs. Collins, Kemp, Lawrence, Payne, Proctor and Twidgon, each one of whom is well known among the leading and most experienced Showmen in the United Kingdom. Fairground work is so keen in competition and of such an arduous nature, that only the highest efficiency – the best results on the screen and faultless construction – will stand the strain.⁴⁵

Showmen and the commissioning of local events

The discovery and preservation of the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection by Peter Worden presents a body of evidence with which to evaluate this pattern of commissioning and exhibition: the business relationships which existed between film companies and early travelling exhibitors. Many of the films which survive from Mitchell and Kenyon have the names of exhibitors scratched onto their leaders. The names of twenty four exhibitors have been found. These showmen were largely based in the North of England although the geographical spread of their activities in the case of George Green encompassed Scotland and Ireland. Outside the travelling fairground fraternity the five major commissioners of the films are A.D. Thomas, who presented films under the banner of Edison-Thomas Pictures, Ralph Pringle of the North American Animated Photo Company, Barrasford who was based in Leeds, and Sidney Carter with his New Century Pictures operation.⁴⁶

But a quarter of the named exhibitors were fairground showmen, these being: Captain Thomas Payne, Pat Collins, George Green, President George Kemp, Relph and Pedley, Sedgwick, and G.T. Tuby.⁴⁷ The association between George Green and Mitchell and Kenyon dates to 1898. Herbert Green later recalled that his father hired Mitchell and Kenyon to film local views and factory gates scenes in Blackburn in connection with the Easter Fair:

We also had topicals of Barrow because people came again and again to see themselves or their friends.⁴⁸

In 1899 an advertisement in the local paper for the Easter Fair mentions two local films: of Audley Hall Mills and Church Street and Station Road Blackburn.⁴⁹ From 1899 until 1906 George Green advertised in the Blackburn papers the arrival of the annual Easter Fair and the attractions he was presenting. The first films mentioned are these factory gates from 1899. Sadly no factory gate films prior to 1900 appear to have survived in the Peter Worden Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, but approximately 30 films in the collection have been traced to George Green. These relate to fairs that he was attending in England, in particular Blackburn Easter Fair and Preston where the Green family were originally based, and special events such as the Cork Exhibition in 1902. On 21 February 1902 George Green advertised in *The Showman* that he had secured the sole rights for the exhibiting of the cinematograph at the forthcoming Cork Exhibition.⁵⁰ An additional advertisement in the same issue reveals the following information:

I am prepared to treat with the Maker of the very best cinematograph Outfit it is possible to procure. I already have six machines of varied makes but desire for Cork an entirely New, Up-to-Date Best in the Market 1902 Outfit. Only makers of really first class machines need apply to this advertisement and each maker must be prepared to submit his machines on approval to be tested in competition with other machines sent on the same basis. I shall also Require a large quantity of Local Films taken, and also Films of the Official Ceremonies connected with the Exhibition, for which I have Sole Rights and I am prepared to Treat for the Taking of these Films.⁵¹

No details are revealed in *The Showman* of the

company or film makers who procured the commission, but within the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection are twenty titles relating to the Cork Exhibition, 1902, and labelled Green. As advertised, the Exhibition opened on 1 May 1902 with a Procession through the city of Cork to the Exhibition Grounds where in the Grand Concert Hall the Exhibition was declared open by the Earl of Bandon, assisted by the Lord Mayor of Cork.⁵² Of the films commissioned by George Green for the 1902 Exhibition, twenty two titles may be found in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection. Research by Robert Monks at the Liam O'Leary Archive in the National Library of Ireland demonstrates a similarity between these remaining films and the titles advertised in the *Cork Advertiser* for the period of the Exhibition. These include *Official Opening of the Exhibition* (Reel No 702), filmed on the 1 May 1902.⁵³ *Cork Exhibition Procession* (Reels 794–705) advertised in the *Cork Examiner* 1 and 8 May 1902, *Cork Fire Brigade*, (reels 718–720) exhibited from 19 May 1902 onwards,⁵⁴ and *Panorama of Exhibition and Grounds*, (Reel No 703) advertised in *Cork Examiner* 8 May 1902. Other titles with similar descriptions include (Reel No 722) *St Mary's Church*, which could be the film referred to as *Congregation Leaving St Mary's Church*,⁵⁵ and three boating films (reels 706–708) which could be any number of the boating and regatta films advertised in the *Cork Examiner* from the 1 May to the 23 July. These examples are just a few of the films already identified as being commissioned by fairground showmen and further examples will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Typology of local films

In the pioneering article by Worden and Whalley on the Mitchell and Kenyon collection the authors divide the films into types: factory gates, sporting events, and shipping and tram rides. They also list the names of particular showmen who are linked or directly associated with the corpus of material and the full geographical range.⁵⁶ I would like to take this classification further and suggest that in terms of the kind of events and locations filmed we may trace a chronology and demonstrate a distinct typology and development.

Certain groups of films were made over a period of time when a showman was exhibiting at the local hall or theatre. For example, twenty titles relating to Manchester have the name A.D Thomas

scratched on the negatives, and a similar quantity of material relating to Birmingham and Leeds is ascribed to Pringle, Thomas and Barrasford.⁵⁷ However, if the material is examined as a *whole* the collection can be broken down into types. In terms of classifying the films, the following types have been ascribed (along with the estimated number of examples surviving in the collection; the numbering is based to a large extent on the titles inscribed found on the negatives): factory gates, sporting events, children's processions as distinct from coronation celebrations, national events through a local perspective, phantom rides (which includes to some extent street scenes), static street or crowd scenes, calendar customs.

Approximately 99 factory gate films were made between 1900 and 1902. Filming of national events from a local perspective, for example the coronation celebrations of Edward VII in 1902, and material associated with the Boer War, are more difficult to approximate because a large percentage of the films are listed by location and not subject. However, 40 titles are linked to General Buller and the return of Volunteers to various towns, with perhaps a further 30 children's processional titles relating to coronation celebrations. There are approximately 60 views of local festivities or calendar customs such as the Knutsford May Queen, Preston Whitsuntide Fair and the Warrington Walking Day processions (either described on the negatives, or the films have been restored and viewed). Local sporting events include football (41) rugby (25) and cricket matches. Tram rides, including the specific filming of the arrival of electrification in cities, number 52. Ships, steamers and boats account for approximately 43, with a percentage associated with the launch of a vessel or the filming a boat trip. These are also categorised as 'phantom ride' which number approximately 15 rolls.

Taken as a group and then categorised in this way, the films demonstrate the role of showmen as commissioners of local events, and reveal a certain framework in which to examine the particular types. The estimated figures for each type of film in the collection will obviously change when the full collection has been copied and restored. As such, the estimates should only be taken as a general guide to the collection and not a specific definitive listing. In the following sections an example of the following types of films will be described: factory gates; sporting events; calendar customs; and tram rides.

Fig. 4. Mitchell and Kenyon's advertisement in *The Showman's Yearbook* in 1901 lists some of the towns they have on film.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

Big Attraction.

1/- per foot Local Films,

Good Discount for Cash.

Following Towns now ready.

SEND FOR PARTICULARS.

Altrincham Ashton Acerington Blackburn Bolton Bulwell Burnley Boston Belper Bury Burton Chesterfield Chorley Carlisle Dewsbury Doncaster Earlstown Farnworth Glasgow Gorton Goole Huddersfield	Horwih Holbeck Halifax Hull Hyde Ilkeston Keighley Levenshulme Lancaster Loughboro' Lincoln Manchester Mansfield Middleton Melbourne Nelson Nottingham Newark Newcastle-on-Tyne Newcastle-u-Lyne Oldham Preston	Padiham Pudsey Rochdale Ratcliffe Rotherham Ripley Stockport Stalybridge Stanningley Scunthorpe St. Helens Saltaire Sheffield Shipley Tydesley Uttoxeter Wigan Worksop Wakefield Warrington York
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OTHERS MADE TO ORDERS.

MITCHELL & KENYON,

"NORDEN" FILM WORKS,

21, KING STREET, AND 40, NORTHGATE,

BLACKBURN.

Factory gate films

The first and earliest type of film directly associated with the travelling fairground exhibitor in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection are 'factory gate' films. Many former pioneers of the cinema recall exhibiting factory gate films, including Hepworth in *Came the Dawn*. Calder's Famous Cinematograph and Popular Concert also advertised a grand local picture of Pullar's Dye Work's Employees to be shown at the City Hall, Perth on the 11 December 1899.⁵⁸ Edwin Lawrence, a former fairground exhibitor writing in 1939 recalls William Clark finding a cameraman to film employees leaving the factory:

Cameramen were not plentiful in those far off days, so to find a man with a cinematograph camera must have been a piece of inspiration on the part of Billy Clark. He found and engaged this man to take a short film of about fifty to sixty feet showing the employees leaving their work at the dinner hour at a local hat factory at Stockport, which he then exhibited at Stockport fair.⁵⁹

This type of *ad hoc* and informal commissioning of factory gate material is also reflected in a letter from Herbert Green written in 1948 in which he claims his father George Green commissioned Mitchell and Kenyon to film local scenes which were then exhibited in their travelling show. However, although these accounts reveal a direct link between a particular showman and film company, the mode of commissioning appears informal and without structure, with no recognisable pattern of advertising and distribution. The factory gate films, of which approximately 99 reels can be found in the Mitchell and Kenyon collection, reveal a different story. The geographical spread of the filming encompasses Scotland, the Midlands, Yorkshire, Lancashire and the North East and dates between 1900 to 1902.

A typical example of this type of film is Reel 48, *Hornby's Brookhouse Mill Workers*, Blackburn 1900/1901. The film starts with a group shot of men and small boys leaving the factory, and then a young girl wearing a shawl. The camera is situated in front of the entrance in a central position in order to capture as many of the workers as possible. The second group shot consists of men and women filmed leaving the doorway in a group, they then separate and walk either side of the camera. Half way through the film the workers proceed to leave in almost single file and walk to the right of the cameraman. The first group appears unaware of the camera, but as more people leave the factory, they show a greater awareness of the camera. In particular the women employees lower their heads or hide their faces in their shawls. The children in particular walk directly across the line of the camera as opposed to the men and women who continue to pass to the right. (The film lasts approximately 50 seconds.)

Unlike some of the later Mitchell and Kenyon films there is no indication on the majority of the factory gate films of the identity of the showman/commissioner. And examination of the negatives by Peter Worden reveals no examples of any kind of product placement on the film, advertising where the film is to be shown (the only information traceable for the majority of the films is the name of a factory and a location, or the occasional advertising poster displayed by a showman). Several other film companies at the time were offering a service to film in the locality where the showmen were appearing:

To Showman. The most popular Cinema-

tograph Film in a Travelling show is Always a Local Picture containing Portraits which can be recognised. A Film showing workers leaving a factory will gain far greater popularity in the town where it was taken than the most exciting picture ever produced. The workers come in their hundreds, with all their friends and relations, and the Film more than pays for itself the first night. In other words this is The Greatest Draw You Can Have, and it is Our Business to provide it for you in Advance, for Each Town you visit.⁶⁰

Of ninety nine Mitchell and Kenyon factory gate films, forty have a date inscribed on the film leaders. The first is dated 29 January 1900, and the last October 1908, made for G.T. Tuby. (With the exception of this Tuby film, made at Gainsborough in 1908, none of the early factory gate films are identified on the film leaders as being commissioned by individual showmen.) However this Tuby film is the only title that falls outside the date range of 1900 to 1902 and perhaps demonstrates the case of a showman falling back on a type of film with a tried and tested success rate. Twenty five out of the forty titles are dated to the exact time in the month they were filmed, with fifteen titles just referring to the month they were filmed. The geographical spread of these films relate mostly to mill towns in Lancashire and Manchester and reflects the pattern of a particular film maker supplying films in advance for the showmen for each town they are visiting.

Upon closer examination a large percentage of factory gate films from 1900 to 1902 correlate to festivities known as the Wakes Weeks, with towns such as Nottingham, Hull, Ilkeston and Loughborough falling into what is known as the 'backend run' of fairs. These backend fairs are held from the middle of September and end with Loughborough Fair in the middle of November. The term 'Wakes' relates to the particular time of year when the factory workers were allowed their holidays. In order for the flow of factory production to continue, each specific area had a particular time of year allocated for their seasonal holidays. Starting from the end of May and finishing in mid-September, they were often associated with a fair or in some cases a migration to the seaside holiday resorts.⁶¹ As Walton and Poole state in 1982:

The Lancashire Wakes, especially in the area around Manchester where rushbearing flourished, were more than just well established

fairs. They remained for most, if not all, of the nineteenth century, affirmations of community identity, both past and present, in which people expressed themselves through uninhibited pleasure-seeking.⁶²

The Wakes fairs continued into the twentieth century with an established pattern of time and location. The *Showmen's Year Books* published from 1901 onwards publish separate lists of fairs associated with the Manchester holidays and the Yorkshire feasts. The dates on the negatives on the first twenty five reels directly correspond to the dates of these events, in particular the Lancashire Wakes Fair and following the dates from the *Showmen's Year Book* the films can be placed in the order in which they were originally filmed and exhibited. For example, the Longsight factory gate is undated but the annual Wake took place on 27 July. The factory gate of Gorton is simply described as being filmed in August and the Wake was held in the first week of September. If definite dates can be traced, then local newspaper reports reveal further information about the films. An example of this is Stalybridge Wakes (Roll No 8), and described by Mitchell and Kenyon as Cheetham's Bankwood Mills, Stalybridge, with a filming date of 17 July 1900. Reports in the local newspaper provide us with a colourful description of the reception the film received:

We make our way to what appears to be the centre of attraction, a cinematograph exhibition announcing a picture of local interest. This we are utterly unable to resist and having paid the necessary threepence, for which we are promised a comfortable seat, we wend our way to the front ... After a very good show of pictures, mainly depicting the war in South Africa, the great attraction is announced in stentorian voice by the guide. The mill hands (we are told) at one of the local mills – Mr Cheetham's it was announced – had been photographed specially for this show and we are enabled to see the employees as they appeared for dinner. Much amusement is [caused] by the exclamation of the audience as one after another appears on the scene and is recognised. It certainly was a very smart idea on the part of the showman to adopt this method of popularising his show, and we have no doubt he has reaped the benefit of his enterprise.⁶³

Fig. 5. A typical 'factory gate' film: workers leaving Hornby's Brookhouse mill in Blackburn, c.1901. [British Film Institute.]



Another report of the show appeared in the *Stalybridge Herald*, and includes more details relating to the exhibitor:

Two large cinematograph exhibitions claimed the first notice of all by their dimensions ... I patronised both and am duly impressed with the real excellence of the fare provided. The living pictures were largely of a military character and many an interesting incident at the front was reproduced on the screen. The programme at each establishment was equally good, but the second had a distinct point over its rival, by the inclusion of a capital local film. This depicted the 'hands' employed at Cheetham Mill's leaving work and an excellent example of the cinematograph art it was. The operator had evidently taken a good stand and was favoured with good light, for the figures were really excellent portraits and many were the shouts of recognition which went up as members of the audience saw themselves or their friends as the cinematograph saw them. The only other big show on the ground was the indispensable menagerie.⁶⁴

Other newspaper reports of the Wakes festivities reveal the same pattern with a showman attending the fairs showing local films of employers leaving the factory at dinner time. Mossley Wake follows Stalybridge and the report in *The Herald* includes an account of a cinematograph show depicting scenes of the local employees from Mayall's Mill:

On the left here is a cinematograph show, the proprietors of which have hit upon the new idea of throwing up views of the employees at local mills leaving work at dinner time. Messrs. Mayall's Mills were chosen for Mossley and a roaring patronage was the result.⁶⁵

The reporter continues with a description of the spectators being highly entertained at the sight of familiar faces on the screen. The following month the report for Ashton Wakes held on 25 August reveals that yet again two showmen were presenting cinematograph shows at the local Wakes:

In the show line the living pictures, bioscopes, cinematographe – all identical terms – took a very long lead. The pictures were almost exclusively illustrations of incidents of the Boer War, most of them familiar. Two estab-

ishments standing side by side were almost invariably crowded. That of Captain Payne took a definite lead in the living pictures front by the introduction of a film showing the loosing of Garside's Wellington Mills on the previous Friday. The scene was certainly realistic and individuals hurrying across the screen were occasionally recognised by members of the public and greeted with familiar exclamations. Mr Sedgewick of Menagerie fame is also in the living pictures business and combined the two in one show, the beast of prey being very much in the background.⁶⁶

The listing of Wake titles in the Mitchell and Kenyon collection continues into September with Oldham and Middleton, and the route of the showman can be traced as in the previous examples through details in the local papers. The locations also include Ripley, Nottingham, Hull and Loughborough and, as previously explained, these link again to a particular fairground route, in this instance the backend run of fairs associated with the ending of the showmen's season. In October the showmen travelled to Nottingham for the annual Charter fair held in Nottingham Market Square. The advertisements in the *Nottingham Evening News* reveals that Colonel Wall was advertising a factory gate title *Workpeople and Girls leaving T. Adams and Co, Stoney-street at Dinner Time*.⁶⁷ This corresponds to roll 31 described by Mitchell and Kenyon as *Thos Adams Lace Factory*, which had been specially filmed for the Goose Fair. The following week's festivities were associated with Hull Fair and again factory gate films are mentioned in the local papers with the reporter for *The Hull Times* informing the readers that:

Local pictures are all the rage this year. The cinematograph meets you at every turn – up-to-date and localised – you may even see the girls leaving Reckitt's starch factory.⁶⁸

The filming of factory gate scenes and industrial works continued throughout the early 1900s, and G.T. Tuby commissioned or filmed a factory gate title in Gainsborough in 1908, many years after its apparent heyday. However, it does appear that the factory gate film became superseded by other types of local films, and Edwin Lawrence, writing in 1939, believes it was due to the fact that the public wanted more of a novelty than just seeing a familiar face on the screen:



Fig. 6. Blackburn Rovers versus Sheffield United, 29 March 1907. The film was made by Mitchell and Kenyon for Green's Cinematograph, including some blatant 'product placement'. [British Film Institute.]

Audiences no longer wished to see themselves as others saw them. As one man put it: 'I see enough of myself when I'm shaving.'⁶⁹

Sporting events

Sporting events were amongst the first subjects to be filmed, with the 1895 Paul-Acres Derby title being the obvious example, and the Oxford and Cambridge University Boat Race.⁷⁰ Arthur Cheetham filmed football matches in 1898 including Blackburn Rovers v West Bromwich Albion at Ewood Park in October. The reporter in *Photography* states:

We thought that before long the cinematograph would come into the football field. At the beginning of the season and at the end of it, of course, the light is good enough but the play may not be of the best.

Some of the earliest football films were made by Jasper Redfern of Sheffield, who travelled with Sheffield United in 1899 and is known to have filmed four matches.⁷¹ Redfern was based in Sheffield and this could be a reason why Sheffield United were chosen for such prominent coverage. However, they were a very successful football club at the time and went on to win the FA Cup in May and would therefore have attracted national interest. Mitchell and Kenyon also filmed football matches, and an example of a sporting event purely of interest to the locality in which it was exhibited is demonstrated in a film of Salford v Batley. This was exhibited in December 1901 when a journalist from the *Salford City* newspaper reports a showman showing sporting titles amongst the local films:

The Thomas Edison Company are paying a return visit and their comprehensive series of animated pictures prove a source of both entertainment and wonderment. No event of local interest seems to escape the cinematographic operators attention. One of the series of animated pictures shows a turnout of the Salford Fire Brigade and some of the exciting matches between Salford and Batley.⁷²

An example of a sporting event filmed in association with the visit of a travelling cinematograph is the Blackburn v Sheffield United match (roll 95) which took place on Good Friday 29 March 1907 and was shown in Green's Cinematograph during Blackburn Easter Fair. Filming starts with the Sheffield United players leaving the dressing room. To the

right of the frame a man appears holding a gag card advertising Green's. However, it is upside down. The Blackburn Rovers then leave the dressing room and are filmed running on to the football pitch. The man to the right of the frame is now holding the advertising card up the right way. After the players run out on the pitch the person holding the advertisement for Green walks to the centre of the frame holding the card prominently to the camera – then the film jumps to scenes of the football match.

The dates that survive on these Mitchell and Kenyon sport films reveal a time span between 1901 to 1907. But a large percentage of the material is undated, with only the title of the sporting event inscribed on fourteen out of approximately sixty five titles. However, the small percentage of international fixtures as opposed to local matches demonstrates that the majority of the titles were filmed to coincide with the arrival of a showman/exhibitor in the area, with Ralph Pringle, Captain Payne and George Green being associated with some of the titles. An example of this occurs in *The Showman* in December 1901 where it is reported that Mr Harry Howe's exhibition of animated pictures in Halifax included a specially taken picture of last Saturday's football match – Halifax v Hull.⁷³

Calendar customs

Calendar customs comprise the filming of festivities which are tied to a particular date in the calendar month, either through local custom or economic and seasonal working patterns. The various calendar customs illustrated in the Mitchell and Kenyon collection include *Egg Racing at Preston*, *Hull Fair*, *Whit Walks*, *Warrington Walking Day Processions*, *Knutsford May Day* and *Buxton Well Dressing*. Hull Fair takes place on the Friday nearest to the 11 October and remains one of the largest and oldest Charter fairs in Europe. Dating back to 1293, by the start of the Edwardian period it was one of the most prominent and important fairs in existence. A report in *The Showman* in 1900 reveals that there were at least nine cinematograph booths in attendance at Hull and the film could have been shot for any one of the showmen exhibiting at the fair.⁷⁴ Some of the most astonishing films in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection are the titles associated with Hull Fair. See Appendix.

Tram rides and product placement

Tram ride films provide two distinct areas of interest.

They are usually linked to the opening of the electric tramways in regional towns in the North such as Accrington, Wigan and Liverpool and are bound by a distinct time. In addition they also provide the main function of the local film, allowing recognition of local areas, in this case the urban setting, with views of streets and local people.

Tram films appear in the Mitchell and Kenyon collection from 1901 onwards. At this stage the dates are estimated but identification of titles and the evidence on the negatives themselves provide us with a date range from 1901 to 1907. Product placement – identifying the film with the showmen – is apparent in subjects relating to fairground showmen after 1905, but is predated by films in the collection associated with Ralph Pringle and A.D Thomas who both appear on titles filmed in 1901 and 1902. The Mitchell and Kenyon film of Preston Whitsuntide Fair begins with a small boy holding an advertising card for Preston Whitsuntide Fair and includes a panning shot of Green's Cinematograph show.

A report in *The Showman* demonstrates the popularity of *An Illustrated Tram Ride through Nottingham* (1902), which corresponds to the title now in the BFI,⁷⁵ and consists of a journey through Nottingham on a tram. Part way through the film, the tram stops before crossing a bridge and pauses for five seconds at an advertising hoarding covered in posters for the North American Animated Photographic Company. This form of product placement features heavily in the films preserved in the collection, and further examples are found in titles commissioned by George Green, A.D Thomas and Relph and Pedley. *The Opening of Accrington Tram Way* filmed on 2 August 1907 is more characteristic of the filming of a particular local function, in this case the official opening of Accrington electric trams. The camera is placed in a prominent position to film the arrival of the trams and the crowds of people assembled for the official ceremony. The surviving negatives demonstrate an additional feature, with advertisements for the showman, in this case Relph and Pedley, prominently visible throughout the films (see Appendix).

Another film of Sedgwick's cinematograph offers publicity for both producer and showman, with James Kenyon seen in front of Sedgwick's show (see Appendix). This proves conclusively that Mitchell and Kenyon were filming commissioned subjects for the showmen. However, the link between the showmen and early film companies is not always so

straightforward and advertisements in the trade press between 1901 and 1902 for developing and printing of customers own subjects demonstrate another facet of the complex business relationship that existed at the time.

Showmen as filmmakers

Dave Berry's work on William Hagggar, showman and pioneering film maker has demonstrated that at least this one fairground showman was directly involved in producing his own material.⁷⁶ *The Showman* in 1901 reports that Hagggar's bioscope was a big draw, with local views taken with his own apparatus.⁷⁷ Later reminiscences by Edwin Lawrence in *The World's Fair* newspaper reveal that the Lawrence family reputedly made early adaptations of the novels of Charles Dickens. However, with the exception of Hagggar, other claims have been difficult to prove as no contemporary evidence has come to light and the films have not survived. But there is evidence in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection of showmen filming local scenes and then sending the material to companies such as Mitchell and Kenyon for developing and printing. By September 1901, Mitchell and Kenyon were offering such a service, and interestingly the advertisements for the Prestwich camera also reveal that not only developing and printing of showmen's own subjects was offered by other companies, but also a particular type of apparatus:

To the Cinematograph Showmen of To-day

To be successful it is necessary to you to have films that your competitors cannot obtain. What you buy, your fellow showmen can buy: the only way for you to get original and explosive films is for you to take them yourself. It is astonishing what a great attraction a local film is; crowds flock to see it, and there is generally some comical features that causes much merriment. Considerable delight is expressed when popular characters come on the screen, and great laughter as some grinning face appears. These pictures can be taken by anyone of great intelligence and with a slight knowledge of photography, with the aid of a Prestwich Patent Camera ... The development and printing we can do for you with the greatest despatch ... [This] is a much cheaper method than employing a professional cinematograph operator, as you thereby save his travelling

Fig. 7. The Prestwich Manufacturing Company's cameras were used by showmen for filming local scenes. [Hopwood, *Living Pictures*, 1899.]

xvi

**The "PRESTWICH" Specialities for
ANIMATED PHOTOGRAPHY**

Nine different Models of Cameras and Projectors in three sizes for 1in., 1½in. and 2½in. width of film.

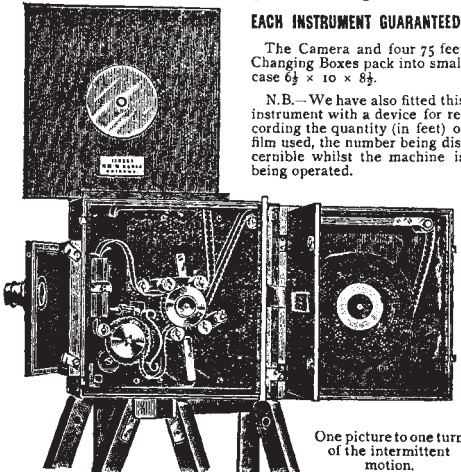
We make and supply everything appertaining to Cinematographs.
CAMERAS, PROJECTORS, PERFORATORS, &C.

Constructed on an entirely new principle. Perfect Register.
This Camera will carry from 400 to 500 ft. of film without changing, and the magazines being light-tight the operation of filling-in is done in daylight.
Focussing can be done directly on to the film.
As a Printer this instrument is *perfect*, giving absolutely correct registration and masking. Will print 500 ft. in one length.

EACH INSTRUMENT GUARANTEED.

The Camera and four 75 feet Changing Boxes pack into small case 6½ x 10 x 8½.

N.B.—We have also fitted this instrument with a device for recording the quantity (in feet) of film used, the number being discernible whilst the machine is being operated.



One picture to one turn of the intermittent motion.

The "Prestwich" Combined Magazine Camera & Printer (Patent). Model 4.
For further particulars send for our New Illustrated Catalogue.

THE PRESTWICH MANUFACTURING CO.,
744, High Road, Tottenham, London, N.

expenses and fee ... You Turn The Handle, We Do The Rest.⁷⁸

According to Edwin Lawrence, the Prestwich camera was taken up by showmen eager to steal a march on their competitors and produce a film that nobody else would have. He recalls that:

This frantic race to obtain the services of a cameraman continued for probably twelve months, and then there came onto the market a very excellent camera known as the 'Prestwich Camera'. This was a wonderful little tool and at the cost, I think of about £50, was within the reach of anyone who owned a cinematograph show. The result of this was that every little country village at one time or another had its local picture.⁷⁹

Lawrence goes on to describe the mixed results of some of these early attempts by the showmen at filmmaking, but with skill and ingenuity they soon talked their way out of any problematic situation:

It is only natural to suppose that at first these cameras were operated with varying degrees of success and it was not unusual to hear the describer on announcing the local film say 'Ladies and gentleman, we now introduce to your notice, a local picture showing the employees leaving so and so's engineering works on a foggy day or our next picture will show you the local cricket match in a snow storm'. Many were the excuses made for these under developed, overexposed, badly focused 'soot and whitewash films'. They however served their purpose and in a little while many were quite expert at producing photography of quite good quality.⁸⁰

Few if any films linked directly to showmen filmmakers have been identified, it is difficult to prove the validity of Lawrence's stories. However, the wide range of advertisements in the entertainment press aimed directly at the showmen would appear to show that this practice, such as this extract from *The Showman* in 1901:

Local cinematograph views have of late come increasingly to the fore and certainly are an added interest to animated picture entertainments. Certain well-known makers cater for the production of this class of film, and send out operators to take special subjects to those who will patronise the entertainments; but on occasions time does not allow arrangements to be made beforehand, in which case showmen would find it of great value to possess one of the cameras as made by the Prestwich Manufacturing Co., which would enable them to get over the difficulty, and take their own films as it suggests itself to their discretion, under any circumstances that arise.⁸¹

Both Hepworth and Mitchell and Kenyon advertised a developing and printing service for showmen's own subjects from 1901 onwards, and as we have seen a percentage of the films in The Mitchell and Kenyon collection have the names of showmen inscribed on the negatives.⁸² It is possible that some of these titles were indeed made by the showmen themselves and that Mitchell and Kenyon were acting as a developing and printing service. However, until the whole collection has been fully assessed and analysed by film historians, the link will remain tantalisingly unproven.



Fig. 2. A bioscope show front: Captain Payne's show at Smithfield Market, Sheffield in 1908. [National Fairground Archive.]

Conclusion

Local films started to boom around 1900 and one of the reasons for this could be waning interest in Boer War films. An article in *The Showman* published in September 1900 reveals that 'interest in the Boer war has largely died out' and offers ideas for new topics for the showmen-exhibitors. Although the writer does not mention local films and instead offers the Boxer war as a topic for the public's imagination, the article concludes with the advice:

That there is a wide field to choose from for the man who studies passing events and finds his show on that occurrence which is most in the public mind.⁸³

By December 1900, the trend appeared to be for local films, and as Lawrence claims in his reminiscences, 'the introduction of the local ... proved to be a bonanza for the fairground.'⁸⁴ The films themselves evolved and became more complex throughout the 1900s and reflected the changes in technology that were occurring in the fledgling industry as a whole. Innovations such as phantom rides, early 'documentary' type features such as *The Trip to North Wales on the St Elvies* and *Panorama of the Menai Straits*, the latter with early animated inter-titles, reflect a degree of sophistication not usually associated with the 'local' picture.⁸⁵

This review of the rise of the local film in the early 1900s and the type of material that is available in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, introduces many new and fascinating aspects of the early film business. Preliminary research on the material in the collection after 1902, and reports in trade journals and local newspapers, reveal that the practice of filming local subjects continued until the First World War and after. The final films in the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection date to 1913 but as Whalley and Worden have demonstrated, the company ceased large scale production and filming by 1909 with very few titles occurring after 1910.⁸⁶ The complexity of the relationship between filmmakers and travelling exhibitors was not purely that of supplier and exhibitor. The Mitchell and Kenyon Collection and contemporary accounts in local newspapers demonstrate a model of commission, exhibition and production that has been completely overlooked. Furthermore, the collection reveals a pattern in film types, and reflects a chronology of subject filmed, not usually associated with the local film genre. Until the negatives are conserved, contextualised and dated, it is not possible to give accurate figures for the percentage of titles within the collection that fall into any of the above categories. However, this preliminary survey has provided evidence that challenges our preconceptions about itinerant exhibitors and the impact they had in the early 1900s. ♦

Acknowledgement: This article forms part of a four-year joint project between the British Film Institute (BFI) and the University of Sheffield to preserve, restore, catalogue, research and contextualise the material in the Peter Worden Collection of Mitchell and Kenyon films. The majority of the collection itself is inaccessible until the BFI's preservation work is complete. This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the British Academy and the University of Sheffield Library. I should like to thank Peter Worden for his help and support in supplying material, and Patrick Russell, Keeper of Non-Fiction at the BFI. I was greatly aided in my research by John Barnes, Richard Brown, Barry Anthony, Robin Whalley, Robert Monk, Ronald Grant and Martin Humphries, the John Johnson Collection at the Bodleian Library, Deac Rossell, David Williams, Stephen Bottomore, Simon Popple, Dave Berry, and Janet McBain of the Scottish Film Archive.

Appendix

Descriptions of some Mitchell and Kenyon films

Hull Fair and Buxton

The following description reveals the content of this early title which is undated and described purely as 'Hull Fair'.⁸⁷

Hull Fair reel 651. Film starts with a shot of Randall Williams' Cinematograph Show advertising local films. Then pans to Harry Gess's boxing show decorated with a banner illustrating scenes from the Corbett v Mitchell match with shots of the boxers lined up on the front. Camera then pans to row of shows including a small show with illustrations of tall ships on the banners. Show to the side of this is Bert Hughes boxing show with five boxers parading on the front of the show, inviting the onlookers to take them on. Camera pauses at a chestnut stall and films a woman serving customers. Then focuses on a fairground striker with set of swing boats behind the striker.

Reel 652: Starts with a close up of Turner's photographic booth and then pans to the left of the booth to show people walking down one of the avenues of the fair – continues panning to the left and films the front of the ambulance station with group of nurses stood outside who pose for the camera, then pans back to the right and then jumps to the left again to film the ambulance station. Cuts to a shot of a 'guess your weight machine'. To the left of the weight machine is Randall Williams' bioscope show advertising local films – people look at the camera and then camera continues to pan to the right of the show row. Bostock and Wombwell's menagerie can be seen in detail and then the camera continues to pan to the right and films Bailey's circus with clowns parading on the front where the film ends.

The reels are undated but a further two rolls associated with these are in the process of being printed. Other films related in the collection include Reel No 650, *Hull Monument Bridge*, filmed in October 1900, to be shown in connection or association with Hull Fair. Another example of the filming of calendar customs are the titles described as *Buxton Well Dressing*, 1904 and are associated with President George Kemp who features in all of the films. Well dressing is the art of decorating springs and wells with pictures made from local plant life, and is unique to Derbyshire.⁸⁸ The well dressing season spans from May through to late September each year, with Buxton being one of the most famous, and traditionally takes place in the second week of July. Although a familiar and traditional calendar custom, certain scenes, in particular the local girls dancing around a Maypole, on the front of President Kemp's show, were obviously staged for the benefit of the exhibitor.

Reel 540 starts with a May dance on the front of President Kemp's Bioscope show. President Kemp dressed in a white suit and white hat, is clearly visible at the bottom left hand steps of the bioscope show. Forty seconds into the film he motions to one of his workers and then holds up his baby daughter in the air and imitates the dancing of the girls on the front of the stage. A crowd of people can be seen either side of the bioscope show with a brass band providing the music for the girls to dance around the pole. Dancing stops and then the camera pans to take in the crowds. Filming takes place directly in front of the show and crowd with an avenue for the cameraman to film the crowds on either side of the camera. Dancing girls finish and then pose for the camera and walk in a group down the steps. President Kemp directs his men to take down the maypole and walks onto the front of the show. Large crowds then follow the girls and walk in front of the camera waving their hats in the air. (Length 85 feet.)

Reel 541: Maypole assembled on a village green in front of a tent. The brass band and dancing girls from reel 540 are filmed assembled on a village green in front a tent. Camera pauses on the dancing girls who line up and face the camera – operator then pans to include group of onlookers on the left of the maypole and a marquee built up on a village green. Girls turn round to face maypole and proceed to dance. Camera then pans to the right of the maypole as the girls are dancing. President Kemp enters the frame from the right holding baby daughter from Film 540 and places in the arms of one of the dances – dancing girls face the camera with the baby and then one of the operators lifts the child in his arms walks in the direction of the camera. (Length 118 feet.)

Film 541: Two well dressings. First well dressing St Ann's with ornate decorations over the well with sign saying established 1844. President Kemp in front of the well holding baby daughter, turns round and faces the camera. Film stops and then starts again with a pan of the

railway bridge and then moves to second well dressing, smaller less ornate with Kemp on the right of the frame; two small children take a cup of water from the well, Kemp then walks across the frame and takes a cup of water from the well. (Length 59 feet.)

These titles and others reflect the filming of a subject peculiar to the custom and tradition of that locality. It could be argued that the subjects could be of interest outside the locality in which they were filmed as they reflect customs of 'Merry England'. However, the Buxton titles in particular appear to have been filmed or commissioned by George Kemp and not as general stock to be sold to a larger market.

Tram films and product placement

Reels: 181, 182, 543 – 545. *Opening of Accrington Tramway Electrification*

Four trams appear in the film with various dignitaries from Accrington in the front of the cabs. Second tram operated by the Lady Mayoress of Accrington has a gag card which says 'Relph and Pedley the Best', placed underneath the cab on the front of tram. The third tram also has the same gag card for Relph and Pedley. When the fourth tram comes into the frame with the words Special car on front, the operator places another card for 'Relph and Pedley the Best' underneath the cab and then walks in front of the camera. The camera pauses on the advertisement for Relph and Pedley, which can be clearly seen. Shots of crowd looking at the camera and the operator pans to crowds at the right of the tram. Another shot of tram coming up main road and stops where the crowds are assembled. The operator for Relph

and Pedley then places the card on this final tram and removes it when a policeman walks across. The showman then stands by the side of tram to the right of the camera with sign slightly behind his body and then holds the card up in front of the camera. Mayor and Mayoress of Accrington are then filmed leaving the tram car and pose for a group shot in front of the tram for the camera. The Mayor address the crowd and the police move the crowds out of the line of the cameraman who films the official opening of the tramway.

(Reel 772): *Sedgwick's Exhibition*.

The film starts with a close up of the performance taking place on the front of the bioscope show. The stage show consists of a Barber shop enactment with a man being shaved but held down by a group of barbers. He then staggers to the right of the stage and pretends to fall off the chair. This scene lasts for several seconds. The next shot consists of a large crowd scene standing on front of the show at the top of the steps. After being held back by one of the men on the stage the crowd is released and they fall and run down the steps with some of the children making faces and waving to the camera. Several children re-enter the film and are shown coming down the steps on two or three different occasions, to make it appear as if more people are on the front of the show. James Kenyon then walks behind the crowds from right to left at the top of the stairs and stands behind a man holding the sign for Sedgwick's Exhibition. Once he's assured that the sign is in place, he then leaves the stage on the left side of the camera. Film ends with two men holding up a sign for 'Sedgwick's Exhibitions Animated Pictures – Passion Play and Lantern Views' – at the top of the steps.

Notes

1. Advertisement from Warwick Catalogue, 1902, Early British Film Catalogues, 1896–1916, reel 2, (London: British Film Institute, 1982).
2. Tom Gunning, 'Before Documentary', in *Uncharted Territory: Essays on early nonfiction films* (Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), 9–24 (10).
3. Deac Rossell, 'A slippery job: travelling exhibitors in early cinema', *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century*, Edited by Simon Pople and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), 50–60 (51).
4. Hepworth, *Came the Dawn: Memories of a Film Pioneer* (London: Phoenix House, 1951), 44.
5. See in particular Adrienne Scullion, Mervyn Heard and Dave Berry's articles in *Moving Performance, British Stage and Screen, 1890s–1920s* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000).
6. Adrienne Scullion, 'Greggies, Empires, Cinemas: The Scottish Experience of Early Film', in *Picture House*, No. 21, Summer 1996:pp 13–19.
7. Vanessa Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale: The story of the fairground bioscope shows and the showmen who operated them', *Film History* 6:2 (1994): 219–237.
8. See Dave Berry, 'William Haggart, Film Pioneer, Actor and Showman', in *Moving Performance* 112–122
9. John Barnes, *The Beginning of the Cinema in England* Vol 5 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), Foreword.
10. Hepworth, 48
11. See Barnes pp 143–257 for a listing of films released in 1900.
12. Robin Whalley and Peter Worden, 'Forgotten Films: A short chronological account of Mitchell and Kenyon cinematographers', *Film History*, Vol 10, No 1, (1998), 35–51.

13. Handbill dated Plymouth, 20 January 1889, John Johnson Collection, Cinema Box 1: Magic Lanterns. Bodleian Library, Oxford. For more information on this collection see the *John Johnson Collection: Catalogue of an Exhibition* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1971).
14. Hepworth, 42, 58
15. *Photography*, (6 October 1898): 656. Vol 10, no 517.
16. Michael Thomson, *Silver Screen in the Silver City* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 17.
17. *Ibid*, p. 20.
18. *Ibid*, p. 21
19. 'The Upstart, Experiences in Animated Photography', *The Showman* (3 January 1902): 272.
20. *The Showman* (December 1900): 57.
21. *The Showman* (11 January 1901): 33
22. *The Showman* (25 January 1901): 68.
23. Although not necessarily the same film, it does demonstrate three different showings over three months of a similar type film by fairground and town hall exhibitors. See *The Showman* (29 March 1901): 212.
24. *The Showman* (4 April 1901): 228.
25. *The Showman* (12 April 1901): 245.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *The Showman* (26 April 1901): 276.
28. *The Showman* (10 May 1901): 307.
29. *The Showman* (17 May 1901): 326.
30. *The Showman* (14 June 14): 388.
31. *The Showman* (December 1900): 3.
32. *The Showman* (21 June 1901), front page until the end of August.
33. *The Showman* (7 March 1902): 45.
34. *The Showman* (26 July 1901): 480.
35. Poster for the Argyle Theatre of Varieties, 30 June 1902, Bill Douglas Centre, University of Exeter, reference 56598.
36. For Wadbrook's show see *The Showman* (30 August 1901): 560. For details of Arthur Twigdon, see *The Showman* (1 November 1901): 122.
37. *The Showman* (27 September 1901): 41
38. *The Showman* (28 February 1901): 26.
39. For Gaumont see *The Showman* (7 March 1902):36 and for Micrograph see *The Showman* (21 March 1902): 72.
40. *The Music Hall and Theatre Review* (29 May 1902): 301.
41. *The Showmen's Year Book* (ed. by Rev. Thomas Horne), (Manchester: The United Kingdom and Van Dwellers' Protection Association, 1900).
42. *The Showman* (3 January 1902): 265. This refers to R.W Paul.
43. *The Showman* (16 August 1901): 524.
44. 'Films for the Fairs, More Wonders of the Pathescope', *The Music Hall and Theatre Review* (28 April 1905).
45. Gaumont Catalogue, (October 1906): 65
46. For further information on these travelling films exhibitors see Geoff Mellor, *Movie Makers and Picture Palaces* (Bradford: Bradford Libraries, 1996). The various groups of travelling exhibitors are indicative of the types described by Deac Rossell and include a further twenty named individuals.
47. For further information on fairground cinematograph showmen see Vanessa Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale: The Story of the Fairground Bioscope Show and the Showmen Who Operated Them', *Film History*, Volume 6, No 2. (Summer 1994): 219–237.
48. Letter from Herbert Green to Henry Simpson, 8 January 1945, Scottish Film Archive, reference 5/8/42.
49. *Northern Daily Telegraph* (1 April 1899): 1.
50. *The Showman* (21 February 1902): 7.
51. *The Showman* (21 February 1902): 30.

52. All information relating to filming in Cork and material from local newspapers supplied by Robert Monks, Liam O' Leary Archives, National Library of Ireland.
53. *Cork Examiner* (1 May 1902), information supplied by Robert Monks, National Library of Ireland.
54. *Cork Examiner* (22 May 1902) supplied by Robert Monks, National Library of Ireland.
55. *Cork Examiner* (23 May 1902).
56. Robin Whalley and Peter Worden, *Film History*, (1998) Vol 10, No 1, p. 45
57. For further information on A.D Thomas see Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan (eds) *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996). For further information on Ralph Pringle, Sidney Carter and Thomas Barrasford, see Geoff Mellor, *Movie Makers and Picture Palaces*.
58. Advertisement for Calder's Cinematograph, reprinted in 'Fifty Years of Scottish Cinema', *The Educational Film Bulletin*, Special Jubilee Issue, No 33, September 1946.
59. Edwin Lawrence, The Infant Cinema, Part 2, *The World's Fair* (10 June 1939): 35.
60. *The Showman* (21 June 1901) front page onwards.
61. For further information on the Lancashire Wakes festivities and their history see John K. Walton and Robert Poole, 'The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century', in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth Century England*, ed. by Robert D. Storch (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 100–124. For a contemporary description of a Wakes Fair see *The Worlds Fair* (24 August 1907): 6.
62. Walton and Poole, p. 119.
63. *The Reporter* (28 July 1900). See also *The Herald*, (28 July 1900): 11, for an additional description of the rival cinematograph booth.
64. *The Herald* (28 July 1900): 11.
65. *The Herald* (4 August 1900): 3.
66. *Mossley and Saddleworth Herald* (25 August 1900): 7.
67. *The Nottingham Evening News* (4 October 1900): 1, and see page 4 for description of the film.
68. *The Hull Times* (13 October 1900): 11.
69. *The World's Fair* (10 June 1939): 35.
70. John Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England, 1894–1901, Volume 1, 1894–96*, revised and enlarged edition (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1998), 229–230.
71. Jasper Redfern filmed Sheffield United v Derby, Sheffield United v Liverpool and two cup ties at Nottingham and Bolton. For further information see Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England, 1894–1901, Volume 1, 1894–96*: 224.
72. Tony Flynn, *The History of Salford Cinemas* (Neil Richardson: Swinton, 1987), 28–29 for visit of A.D Thomas aka Thomas-Edison in December 1901 and November 1901
73. *The Showman* (20 December 1901): 233.
74. See Vanessa Toulmin, *Hull Fair – fun for all: An illustrated history of Hull Fair in the 20th Century* (Oldham: World's Fair, 1999) p. 2.
75. *The Showman* (3 October 1902).
76. Dave Berry, *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1996).
77. *The Showman* (9 August 1901): 512.
78. *The Showman* (9 August 1901): 3.
79. Edwin Lawrence, 'The Infant Cinema', Part 2, *The World's Fair* (10 June 1939): 35.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *The Showman* (9 August 1901): 509
82. Advertisement for Mitchell and Kenyon which states 'Customers own subjects, Developed and Printed', *The Showman* (6 September 1901): xi.
83. Val Boyce, 'To Attract the Public' in *The Showman* (December 1900): 18.
84. *The World's Fair* (20 June 1939): 35.
85. Whalley and Worden, 40.
86. *Ibid.*, 46.
87. Peter Worden Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, Numbers 651–652, British Film Institute.
88. For further information on the tradition of well dressings see <http://www.welldressing.com>

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