

The North of England in British Wartime Film, 1941 to 1946.

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The North of England is a place-myth as much as a material reality. Conceptually it exists as the location where the economic, political, sociological, as well as climatological and geomorphological, phenomena particular to the region are reified into a set of socio-cultural qualities that serve to define it as different to conceptualisations of England and 'Englishness'. Whilst the abstract nature of such a construction means that the geographical boundaries of the North are implicitly ill-defined, for ease of reference, and to maintain objectivity in defining individual texts as *Northern* films, this paper will adhere to the notion of a 'seven county North' (i.e. the pre-1974 counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland, County Durham, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire) that is increasingly being used as the geographical template for the North of England within social and cultural history.¹

The British film industry in 1941

As 1940 drew to a close in Britain any memories of the phoney war of the spring of that year were likely to seem but distant recollections of a bygone age long dispersed by the brutal realities of the conflict. Outside of the immediate theatres of conflict the domestic industries that had catered for the demands of an increasingly affluent and consuming population were orientated towards the needs of a war economy as plant, machinery, and labour shifted into war production.

The majority of industrial activities could be refocused with relative ease. However, the British film industry, immune throughout the thirties to the vagaries of the market by exhibition quotas prescribed under the Cinematograph Films Acts of 1927 and 1938, was hit particularly hard by the wartime restructuring of the British economy. By 1941 outputs of British feature (long) films had fallen 75 per cent from their 1936 pre-war peak, and fell again in 1942 and 1944 (see Table 1).² Three notable factors were instrumental in this decline; studio space was requisitioned for the storage of war materials and munitions manufacture to the extent that less than half of the studios in operation in 1939, notably

¹ For a digest of a number of the different conceptual and spatial definitions used to position the North, together with a convincing argument for the use of a 'seven county' version of such, see Russell, Dave, *Looking North* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), 14-44, notably page 16.

² Data extrapolated from Dyja, Eddie, *The BFI Film and Television Handbook 2002* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 30. In using the term 'feature film', the definition being used is that of the 'long film' as outlined in Section 44 of Part 5 to the Cinematograph Films Act 1927 (i.e. a film of not less than three thousand feet; equating with a running time of not less than thirty-three and one third minutes).

the larger and better equipped studios at Shepperton, Elstree, Pinewood, and Denham,³ were still in use for that purpose;⁴ conscription reduced studio personnel, whose technical skills were much valued by the armed services, from four thousand at the outbreak of hostilities to fifteen hundred in 1941;⁵ and American capital investment in their British subsidiaries all but ceased.

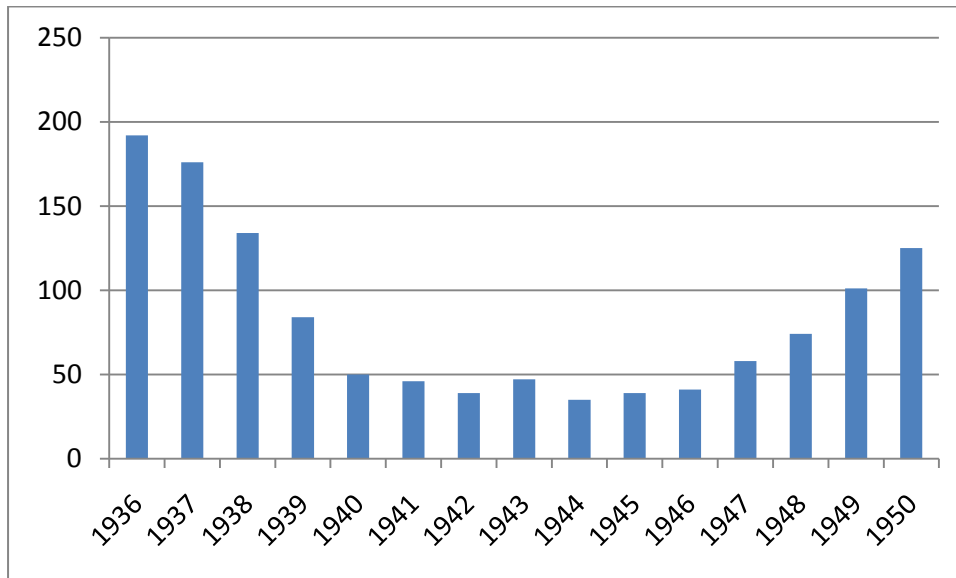


Table 1. UK Feature films produced 1936 to 1950

The response of the British film industry to these wartime privations was, as both a commercial entity and a state actor via the Crown Film Unit, to place itself at the centre of the conflict and in its outputs embrace the notion of the ‘People’s War.’ Framed by grittier and more realistic portrayals of the conflict emerging in 1941 (which had been largely absent from the screen in the early months of the war), and by the easing of restrictions on production by 1946,⁶ (at which point outputs began to revert to pre-war patterns), the dominance of particular motifs can be identified in British film. Arguably most radical amongst these, and capturing the refocussing of the documentary movement’s drive for

³ Chibnall, Steve and Alan Burton, *Historical Dictionary of British Cinema* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), xxiv.

⁴ Coultass, Clive, ‘British Feature Films and the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19/1 (1984), 10. Also, see House of Commons [Film Studios] Debate 21st November 1945, Volume 416, columns 437 – 438.

⁵ *Kine Yearbook* 1942, (London: Kinematograph Publications Ltd., 1942), 275.

⁶ Thomas Schatz identifies a similar lag effect in American World War Two film outputs whereby, from 1943 onwards (a little over a year following the start of American combat participation in the war), newsreel footage and documentary film-making influenced the style of cinema outputs involving a shift from pre-war espionage thrillers and domestic dramas to more authentic representations of conflict. Schatz, Thomas, “World War II and the Hollywood ‘war film’”, in Nick Brown, ed., *Reconfiguring American film genres* (London: University of California Press, 1988).

social reform upon the goal of national unity, was the portrayal in film of consensus and harmony across social classes. Diverse class, regional and sub-national identities were all shown as contributing towards a more inclusive conceptualisation of British-ness, most pointedly through incorporating working class identities into constructions and representations of national identity.⁷ Such positive images of working class life, involving viable and complex working class characters, were unusual to find within the canon of British fiction film in the years prior to 1941 – with the exception of films set in the North of England.⁸

The North in film, 1927 to 1940.

Whilst the North's existence within an English context as a distinct and subordinate socio-political entity can be identified as early as the eleventh century,⁹ the imagery of the North found in pre-war British film dates from the nineteenth century where, in addition to being bleak, barren and rural, the North was defined as 'an industrial area populated by the rough working classes.'¹⁰ Moreover, positioning the North as both different to and distinct from broader definitions of national identity, the semantics and semiology employed in defining England and 'Englishness' were those typified by imagery ascribed to a 'rural idyll' synonymous with conceptualisations of the South of England.¹¹

Throughout the thirties the North of England had a marginal presence in British film outputs, in spite of being the location of over one third of British cinemas and cinema seats.¹² Only some 3 per cent, or forty from over fifteen hundred, of the fiction feature (long) films produced in the years 1927 to 1940 were set in the North.¹³ Moreover, congruous with the wider conceptual location ascribed to the North, a specific working class

⁷ See Aldgate, Anthony, and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War*, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007); Chapman, James, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-1945* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1998); and Murphy, Robert, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2001).

⁸ A small number of directors, notably John Baxter and Norman Walker, did present positive images of working class life in film. However it was in the documentary film movement where representations of working class life were most positive, Lovell, Alan, and Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972).

⁹ Jewell identifies that, in addition to geomorphological, climatological, and agricultural differences, in a political context the North of England had been 'conquered' by the South. Jewell, Helen, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Shields, Rob, *Places On The Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 229.

¹¹ Wiener notes the 'victory of the Southern metaphor' in the definition of what constituted 'Englishness'. Wiener, Martin J., *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 42.

¹² 1,537 out of 4,305 cinemas (36 per cent), and 1,421,000 out of 3,872,000 cinema seats (37 per cent) were located in the 'Yorkshire and district', 'Lancashire and district', and 'North of England' areas. Data extrapolated by author from Rowson, S. "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934", *Journal Of The Royal Statistical Society* 99/1 (1936), 67-129, notably page 76.

¹³ Data extrapolated by author from Gifford, Denis, *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1970: A Reference Guide* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973).

profile for the North, absent in films set elsewhere, was evident. The North's visibility in pre-war British film was undoubtedly most prominent through the presence of a small number of high profile performers whose personae, trading heavily on comedic and dramatic tropes established in nineteenth century popular literature and music hall, were unmistakably working class in nature (notably George Formby and Gracie Fields, and less so Sandy Powell and Albert Modley).¹⁴ Cementing this positioning of the North as a working class environment, thirty-five of the forty films set in the North had working-class characters as their central protagonists.¹⁵

More significantly, through portrayals of character and plot emphasising hegemonic values, the North was positioned as the *appropriate* location for the English working class. In contrast to films set elsewhere in England portraying working class life, where such was positioned as a socio-cultural 'other' to the wider milieu, films set in the North portrayed its inhabitants as members of the 'noble' working classes with archetypal and socially acceptable issues at the heart of their dramatic narratives. This ranged from plots concerned with industrial workplace safety; *Men Of Steel* (George King, 1932), *Black Diamonds* (Charles Hanmer, 1932), and *The Stars Look Down* (Carol Reed, 1939), to a desire for employment; *Sing As We Go* (Basil Dean, 1934), and *Look Up and Laugh* (Basil Dean, 1935). Outside of the workplace the class identity of the inhabitants is positioned through their interest in traditional working class leisure pursuits: association football in *Up for the Cup* (Jack Raymond, 1931); rugby league in *Where's George?* (Jack Raymond, 1935); the football pools in *The Last Coupon* (Frank Launder, 1932), *On Top of the World* (Redd Davis, 1936), *The Penny Pool* (George Black, 1937), and *Lancashire Luck* (Henry Cass, 1937); brass bands *Play Up The Band* (Harry Hughes, 1935); whilst greyhound racing is a feature of both *Sing As We Go*, and *On Top of the World*.

Mirroring this, when working class characters exist outside, or attempt to rise above, the working class environment they are presented as being, variously, comedic, deviant, anachronistic or, ultimately, suffering as a consequence of these aspirations. This is executed comically in *Up For The Cup* (with a wealthy loom-inventor out of his depth amongst the sophisticates on a trip to London for the Cup Final, whilst a retired mill-owner becomes the victim of a gold-digging widow in *The Right Age To Marry* (Maclean Rogers, (1935)), and also dramatically (*Men of Steel* portraying an egalitarian working class steel plant foreman promoted to Board level after inventing a new production process before, ultimately, taking over the company). This social and financial mobility does not result in the adoption of the progressive work practices for which he had been campaigning prior to his elevation, but instead he becomes as ruthless and indifferent to the well-being of workers as those he replaced. These issues are ultimately resolved at the end of the film

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the majority of both George Formby and Gracie Fields' films were set outside of the North.

¹⁵ The remaining five films had upper class lead character(s) in three, and middle class lead character(s) in two.

when a fatal factory accident causes him to revise his callousness and he returns to the fold by both marrying his working class former 'sweetheart', whom he had abandoned when newly wealthy, and implements safety measures at the plant. A similar message of the unfulfilling nature of wealth can be identified in *Hindle Wakes* (Maurice Elvey, 1927), where the commercial success of the weaver who had gone into business for himself serves not only to affect him, but also leads to his rakish son bringing shame upon the family and causing conflict with his oldest friend, whose daughter the son deflowered.

At the other end of the class spectrum, there are only three films set in the North - *The Ghoul* (Thomas Hayes Hunter, 1933), *South Riding* (Victor Saville, 1938), and *Over The Moon* (Thornton Freeland, 1939) - which place upper class characters in the lead role, all of which position the upper classes, like working class aspirants, as anachronistic to the wider working class environment. *The Ghoul*, an unsophisticated horror set in a country house on the edge of the Yorkshire moors, has the upper class landowner's reanimated corpse seeking murderous revenge. In *South Riding*, the central protagonist, a downwardly mobile Squire, is shown to be financially and ideologically out of place and time in the North. His farming estate is unviable, his funds are exhausted by asylum bills for his mentally unstable wife, and his opinions have little traction in the council chamber (the forum that provides the unifying thread for the characters of the film). His redemption is secured through an inversion of the *Pygmalion* motif when he steps down a social class to be with the local schoolmistress (the death of his wife providing a convenient *deus ex machina* for such an union) and, in donating his house and estate to the council for a school and housing scheme, relinquishes his aristocratic status.¹⁶ Subverting not only class, but also gender norms, the orphaned country house aristocrat girl in *Over The Moon* both attends to her elderly servants and proposes marriage to a local general practitioner of modest means. Upon her inheritance of a fortune the Doctor breaks off the engagement, which is only restored when she proves to him that she can live frugally and that wealth is of no interest to her, a Yorkshire country girl.

The North in wartime film, 1941-1946.

Given the thematic shift that occurred within British film between 1941 and 1946, involving the reworking of national identity to include working class representatives in prominent and developed roles, the existence of the North as an environment populated by such characters might lead to the assumption that the North would have an increased presence

¹⁶ The 'Pygmalion motif' of transcending class boundaries was a common plot mechanism in British film of the thirties. See Shafer, Stephen C., *British Popular Films 1929-1939: The cinema of reassurance* (London: Routledge, 1997), notably chapter 4 'Mistaken Identities: the Pygmalion motif' pages 56 to 86. Also Chibnall, Steve *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (London: BFI Publications, 2007), notably 'Money, Sex and Social Change' pp. 111-121 in Chapter 4 'Quota Entertainments' 92-137.

in film. However, with only ten from two hundred and forty-seven features set there (4 per cent), two of which were George Formby vehicles,¹⁷ the North remained near invisible in film.¹⁸ As well as scant representation in these absolute numerical terms, the North was also positioned outside wartime discourses through its relative representations during the period. In British film outputs between 1941 and 1946, the war dominated thematically with 154 from 247 films (62 per cent) being framed by the conflict. This ranged from unequivocal war films where plot and narrative were located in the theatre of war (fifty-three films, or 22 per cent of the total), to comedies (thirty-seven films), musicals (eighteen films), crime films (fifteen films), and dramas (fourteen films) which all had wartime 'issues' at the heart of their narratives.¹⁹ In contrast, even in Northern located films given a contemporary setting any links to the conflict are tenuous at best, with plotlines instead focussed on the routine dramas of everyday life typical of pre-war outputs.

With a narrative beginning in the thirties, *Hard Steel* (Norman Walker, 1942) shows an ambitiously ruthless steel worker, Walter Haddon (Wilfred Lawson), undergoing successive promotions until he is running three foundries. As a result of his negligence leading to the death of a worker, and after turning to a former colleague who took a different path in becoming a lay preacher, he sees the error of his ways and steps down. It is only upon the outbreak of the war that he returns to work a reformed man, making a rousing speech at the close of the film to indicate that his drive for personal success has been replaced by zeal to co-operate for the collective good of wartime production. Whilst *Hard Steel* does explicitly address the importance of the Home Front, in *Turned Out Nice Again* (Marcel Varnel, 1941), a George Formby comedy set in a Lancashire cotton mill, a similar reference is only alluded to with Formby's on-screen wife, Lydia (Peggy Bryan), designing and modelling a successful new range of skimpy lingerie – implicitly suggesting the virtue and appeal of conserving textile resources at a time of clothing rationing.²⁰

Wartime Liverpool is the location of the romantic drama *It Happened One Sunday* (Carl Lamac, 1944). In this film an Irish housemaid, Moya Malone (Barbara White), falls in love with a merchant sailor, Tom Stevens (Robert Beatty). The film's wartime setting is only betrayed through the presence of black marketeers taking advantage of Tom and the seriousness with which the loss of his Merchant Seaman's papers is presented. However, a kindly magistrate overlooks the transgression, thereby allowing Tom and Moya to marry before Tom's ship sails at the end of the film.

¹⁷ *Turned out Nice Again* (Marcel Varnel, 1941), and *He Snoops to Conquer* (Marcel Varnel, 1944).

¹⁸ Data extrapolated by the author from Gifford (1973).

¹⁹ Other genres within which the war was accommodated were romances (seven films), histories (four films), revues (four films), and one fantasy film. Data extrapolated by the author from Gifford (1973).

²⁰ Also, the export of woven cotton fabric provided a much needed source of foreign capital during the war – to the extent that the expensive Technicolor documentary *Queen Cotton* (Cecil Musk, 1941) was made as part of a 1941/42 trade export exhibition to the Americas and South Africa organised by the UK Cotton Board.

In the gothic melodrama *The Night Has Eyes* (Leslie Arliss, 1942), experiences in the Spanish Civil War are cited as being instrumental in traumatising the talented composer, Stephen Deremid (James Mason), and compelling him to seek out the isolation and solitude afforded by a remote property on the Yorkshire moors. However, whilst there are indications of some degree of self-sufficiency in that his housekeeper butchers breeding rabbits for food, the ample basket of eggs and a large ham together with extensive private car usage on screen are somewhat incongruous with the food and petrol rationing of the time. Equally removed from the conflict are *Men of the Mines* (David MacKane, 1945), which tells the story of a newspaper reporter going to Yorkshire and falling in love with a miner's daughter, and *Loyal Heart* (Oswald Mitchell, 1946), a drama of Cumberland sheep worrying.

Arguably the Northern set film that was closest to the wider canon of British film outputs of the time in making connection to the war was the historical drama *Atlantic Ferry* (Walter Forde, 1941). Similar to a number of non-Northern set films that were chronologically positioned outside of the timeframe of the conflict, but through their plot content were positioned as analogous with the war,²¹ *Atlantic Ferry* is concerned with two brothers in nineteenth century Liverpool competing both in the transatlantic shipping business and for the affections of the same woman. Made during the Battle of the Atlantic, and at a time when Britain was keen for the United States of America to enter the war, the film unremittingly asserts the bond between Britain and America and ends with a voiceover stating:

[the Atlantic Ocean is]... a well-trodden highway and over it the peoples of America and Britain mixing into one fellowship. Their disputes settled as among friends and their united determination opposing any challenge to human liberty or freedom whenever and wherever it is made.

This is the sole example of the positioning of the North within the metaphorical parameters of wartime British identity. The only other Northern film of the 1941 to 1946 epoch that was given anything other than a contemporary setting or located in the recent past was *When We Are Married* (Lance Comfort, 1943). This adaptation of J.B. Priestley's play set in 1890s Yorkshire sees three middle class couples, who come together to celebrate their silver wedding anniversaries, discover that none of them are legally married. After comic and poignant reflections all ends happily. Accordingly, in an era of film production when precepts of national identity are framed explicitly and metaphorically within the parameters of the conflict, the absence of the North on film generally together with its portrayal (when shown) as an environment 'untouched' by the conflict, serve to distance it from constructions of national identity. However, even more pointed in positioning the North as

²¹ For example, *That Hamilton Woman* (Alexander Korda, 1941) located Britain's struggle against Napoleon in terms of resistance to a dictator who wished to dominate the continent – the parallels with the war against Hitler's Germany being obvious, whilst *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944), released at the same time as the Normandy landings, showed an English King victorious in France.

peripheral to nationhood and wartime identity were films that positioned the North as a broken and unwanted environment.

Alluding to a post-war society, the George Formby comedy *He Snoops To Conquer* (Marcel Varnel, 1944) shows a corrupt council regime in the fictitious Lancashire mining, brewing and cheese-making town of 'Tangletown' overthrown by a newspaper reporter. The outcome of the film sees much needed, improved housing and sanitation becoming available for the town's populace. In contrast the post-war message of *George in Civvy Street* (Marcel Varnel, 1946), where a demobbed George Harber (George Formby) and his army chums renovate and run a country pub in the heart of the bucolic rural idyll synonymous with the South of England, is one of a return to, and not a flight from, the pre-war environment. The promise of a 'brighter tomorrow' for the North is presented more soberly in *Love on the Dole* (John Baxter, 1941) where the opening titles state that the pre-war deprivations of Hanky Park, Salford, in the early 1930s portrayed in the film are 'one of the darker periods in our history,... a region of darkness and poverty where men and women for ever strive to live decently in face of overwhelming odds never doubting that the clouds of depression will one day be lifted.'²² In the two Northern-set films, in contrast to the eulogising of a timeless, rural, hierarchical England synonymous with conceptualisations of the South (the defence of which is endemic within films of this period), the traditional North appearing on film is one typified by deprivation which victory in war will, ultimately, sweep away. Even in the rare examples where the South is presented as having social problems, these are portrayed as unifying and benevolent forces. In *The Common Touch* (John Baxter, 1941), a wealthy young businessman goes undercover to investigate the camaraderie evident in a hostel for homeless men in central London, the triumphant conclusion of the film being the preservation of the hostel from demolition. The dominant discourse of films in this wartime era is that the war is being fought to preserve and defend the South and coincidentally (when it is detailed), remedy the North. The North was neither being fought over, nor being fought for.

The North was divorced from constructions of national identity not only by the small number of films set there, and the narratives of these films positioning the North outside the conflict, but also through the body of 'ensemble' films portraying the coming together of individuals from different social classes and regions of the Commonwealth in the defence of Britain.²³ All of the Armed Services were represented amongst these films; *In Which We Serve* (Noel Coward and David Lean, 1942), *The Way Ahead* (Carol Reed, 1944), and *The Way*

²² Levine, Caroline (2006) "Propaganda For democracy: The Curious Case of *Love On The Dole*" *Journal of British Studies*, 45/4 (2006), 846-974, details that the film was made purposefully unremittingly bleak to indicate that, in contrast to Axis countries, Britain could hold a mirror up to its flaws – the North implicitly being a place where such was to be found.

²³ A number of the key films taking this approach are detailed in Rattigan, Neil, *This is England: British Film and the People's War, 1939-1945* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001) notably within Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

to *the Stars* (Anthony Asquith, 1945) profiling the Royal Navy, the Army, and the Royal Air Force respectively. Also addressed was the Merchant Navy in *San Demetrio London* (Charles Frend, 1943), and the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS, the women's equivalent of the British Army) in *The Gentle Sex* (Leslie Howard, 1943), while *Millions Like Us* (Edward Black, 1943) showed the experiences of women who had been called up for war service, and were posted to work in an aircraft factory in the Midlands. The geographical location ascribed to these and other films lauding the collective efforts of previously disparate individuals was, with the exception of *Millions Like Us*, the South of England.²⁴ As well as this implicitly positioning the North as an environment that was not under threat, these films portrayed individuals of different classes and from different geographical locations as coming together to defend the vision/version of England that was, essentially, Southern in nature. The message throughout was one of national unity and the unifying purpose of coming together to fight a common foe.²⁵ However, with a handful of notable exceptions, remarkably few of the characters in these ensemble pieces were from the North of England.

Tellingly, in *Millions Like Us* where the action takes place outside of the Services and the importance of industry and factory production to the war effort are emphasised, the male lead is played by Yorkshire born Eric Portman as gruff factory overseer Charlie Forbes. Unlike other men of fighting age he is not in uniform and, congruous with the conceptualisation of the North as an environment populated by industrial folk, comfortable on the factory floor instead of the battlefield. Also, unlike other romantic relationships within war films of this era which are routinely only rent apart by the death of one or both parties, his dalliance with one of the women who is sent to work in the factory, affected upper middle class Jennifer Knowles (Anne Crawford), is presented as an union of incompatibles, existing pragmatically for the duration of the conflict only. As such, any violation of social hierarchies that involves the North is merely for the duration of the war and is not a fundamental revision of the status of the North within the national locus.

There are also a number of ensemble films where a significant body of the narrative takes place outside of Britain, albeit in war zones. In two of these films a Northern character has a key role:²⁶ *We Dive at Dawn* (Anthony Asquith, 1943) portrays crippled British submarine HMS *Sea Tiger* sinking the German battleship *Brandenberg* before successfully making its way home, and *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1942) shows the aircrew of a downed Lancaster bomber make their way back to Britain from occupied Netherlands. In *We Dive at Dawn* Leading Seaman Jim Hobson (Eric

²⁴ Although, on their way to basic training, the recruits in *The Way Ahead* gathered at Crewe railway station for their connection to camp. Thereby suggesting the, safe, location for training was in the North of England and, as such, that the North was, unlike the South threatened by invasion and bombing, not a place of danger.

²⁵ Aldgate, Anthony, and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007), *passim*.

²⁶ There is also the character of, former Durham miner, Private Joe Harvey (Jack Horsman) in the less well-known *Nine Men* (Harry Watt, 1943), but he has only one passage of dialogue and no character development.

Portman) is an outsider to the cohesive group that is the ship's officers and crew. This is all the more notable given that, in keeping with the reputation of submariners, the officers are shown to be much less formal than their above the waves counterparts.²⁷ On board the submarine, and in the scenes on shore where he drunkenly brawls with his brother in law, he is abrasive, cynical and not part of the cohesive machinery of submarine life with its bonhomie and banter warranted for harmony in the cramped conditions. The clinical brutality with which he bludgeons and then stabs an incapacitated German officer and, similarly, kills a German sentry without warning after approaching from behind deviates drastically from the chivalrous 'temperate masculinity' with which British Servicemen are routinely shown as engaging in conflict.²⁸ In spite of these character flaws he is instrumental to the success of the mission; were it not for his awareness of German and overhearing captured airmen betray the location of a German battleship, the submarine's mission would have failed. Equally, it is his familiarity with an occupied Danish island from time served in the Merchant Navy that allows the submarine to secure the fuel supplies necessary to facilitate an escape back to Britain. Northern Jim Hobson exists as a totem of the North: an 'other' within the microcosm of national identity that is the submarine but, just as the success in the war and protection of England depended upon industrial production from the North, Hobson is instrumental in the success of the submarine's mission. The, personal triumph of Jim Hobson at the end of the film, where his previously estranged wife and child greet him at the dock, parallels that promised to the North of a better tomorrow after the tribulations of the conflict.

A slightly more engaging character is found in brusque Tom Earnshaw (again played by Eric Portman) in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. For the rest of the airmen, three middle/upper class Southerners (including titled Rear Gunner, Sir George Corbett played by Geoffrey Tearle), a Welshman, and West-Countryman, variations in class and region elide. From an early scene set back in Britain where he receives calendars from home advertising sheep, ('the best cheviots in Yorkshire'), to when he stoically laments having to dress in traditional Dutch clothing to facilitate escape ('the old Yorkshire saying 'clogs to clogs in three generations'), Tom's plain-speaking Yorkshire persona positions him as the outsider and something of a figure of gentle ridicule, existing as the butt of the aircrew's humour:

Tom Earnshaw: We want to get back, raid or no raid. Now look here, Mrs de Vries, I don't...

Jo de Vries [Dutch resistance]: Are you in command of this party?

²⁷ Amply illustrated by the lothario status of submarine commander Captain Freddie Taylor (John Mills) dating a variety of different girls when on shore leave. This being in sharp contrast to contrast to the respectable bourgeois domesticity of the family life for Captain Kinross (Noel Coward) of *In Which We Serve*.

²⁸ Rose, Sonya O., 'Temperate Heroes, Masculinity in Second World War Britain', in Stefan Dudick et al (eds.) *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 177-195.

George Corbett, [Rear Gunner]: No, no, no, he's just a Yorkshireman.

The North was located as marginal to constructions of national identity through both omission and, where it was portrayed, the employment of particular representations different to those utilised in conceptualising national identity. However, the phenomena that most markedly served to cement the North as external to precepts of national identity were the representations of the Southern working class. To these ends, the ennoblement of the working class in film during the 1941 to 1946 period did not lift the Northern working class into an exalted position, but the axis of the English working class moved distinctly southwards to, instead, portray the Southern, metropolitan and rural, working class as benevolent (a position previously ascribed to the Northern working class). The rehabilitation of the (notably metropolitan) Southern working class into a central aspect of national identity was noteworthy. It served to further distance the North from constructions and conceptualisations of national identity.

The repositioning of the Southern working class was evident in both the 'ensemble' films detailed where Southern working class characters were presented in a positive light, and also within films where the urban and rural come into contact with each other. Cockney evacuees, in rural locations outside of their ordinary milieu, integrate into their new rural environments for the benefit of all; the evacuee brings news of the German invasion to the neighbouring village in *Went the Day Well?* (Michael Balcon, 1942), whilst Ronald Mittsby (George Cole) helps foil a German spy in *Cottage to Let* (Anthony Asquith, 1941). Similarly, in *Those Kids From Town* (Lance Comfort, 1942) and congruous with notions of paternalistic country-house aristocracy, the singing talent of evacuee Liz Burns (Shirley Lenner) is discovered and nurtured under the guidance and sponsorship of the local Earl of Stainwater (Percy Marmont) with whom she is billeted. The closest to a suggestion of class 'conflict' in the South can be found in *Great Day* (Lance Comfort, 1945). The underachieving World War One veteran, Captain John Ellis (Eric Portman), who has an alcohol problem and an inability to accept the mediocrity of his lot, is shown living on his past glories of the Great War and being discontented with his present station in life. Gossip and positioning for status appears to be the 'meat and drink' of the ostensibly middle class Women's Institute whose members are the characters at the core of the film, although the working class characters therein are benevolent and are, along with Lady Mott (Isabel Jeans), the ties which bind the village together. Similarly, within the London set films, the lives, loves and mores of working class Southerners were, in contrast to their previous filmic incarnations, presented as being honest, stoical, courageous and displaying aspect of the traditions and heritage of Britain that were being defended.²⁹

²⁹ Prominently displayed in, for example, *This Happy Breed* (David Lean, 1944) and *Salute John Citizen* (Maurice Elvey, 1942). Also *Millions Like Us*.

Throughout films of this phase, the North was positioned outside of the parameters of the conflict. It was not shown to be explicitly under threat from the conflict, as was the case for environments within the South. Examples of the South under threat are legion. They related to the dangers faced by the rural idyll. In *Went The Day Well?* German paratroopers, masquerading as Tommies and aided by a perfidious squire, take over an English village. *Tawny Pipit* (Bernard Miles and Charles Saunders, 1944) has the saving and hatching of nesting birds acting as a metaphor for the recovery of both an injured Spitfire pilot and, with a nod to post-war society, the nation itself, while *This England* (David MacDonald, 1941) portrays a village's repelling of continental invaders over a thousand year period. Also present are threats to more metropolitan Southern settings: *Fires Were Started* (Humphrey Jennings, 1943) and *The Bells Go Down* (Michael Balcon, 1943), both showing the London blitz; and, *In Which We Serve*, with the bombing of Plymouth as a plot thread.

Accordingly, the most potent manner by which the North was distanced from precepts of national identity was not through its relative invisibility and neglect during this period, but through the manner in which its mantle as the location of the authentic English working class (first established in the nineteenth century and evident in film of the 1927 to 1940 period), was lost. To these ends, as might be expected during a period when commonality of purpose across the classes was being portrayed on film, the working classes became more prominent on film. Yet it was the southern working classes that were rehabilitated and shown as benevolent, either *in situ* in the South or in theatres of conflict. Even when deviance is evident in the South, it is shown to be isolated and ranges from well-intentioned (in *Waterloo Road* (Edward Black, 1945) Jim Colter (John Mills) goes AWOL to save his marriage from a draft-dodging spiv), to temporary (initially reluctant conscripts in *The Way Ahead* meld into a fighting group, whilst the young Stoker (Richard Attenborough) in *In Which We Serve* abandons his post early in the film but redeems himself and dies stoically by the end). In this phase of film, the mantle of the authentic English working class was passed from the North to the South and, whilst the inclusion of the North into constructions of England and Englishness could, or arguably should, have been facilitated by the opening-up of English identity to include the working classes, what happened instead was the rehabilitation of the Southern working classes from their pre-war filmic representations.

Conclusion

In a period of crisis when national identity on film was reworked to be as inclusive as possible, perhaps most prominently by integrating working class identities (which had previously been the preserve of the North) into the heart of conceptualisations of national identity, the North of England nonetheless remained peripheral to such constructions. British film outputs emphasised particular traits, qualities and manifestations of nationhood, in both historical and contemporary settings, that were as antonymous with long

established views of the North as they were synonymous with those of the South of England.

To these ends, while working class identities were ascribed increased form and function within British film between 1941 and 1946, wider constructions of nationhood that positioned the 'Southern metaphor' as dominant confirmed the North, in its conceptual location as an industrial environment, as marginal to such manifestations. The North was not being fought over, or fought for, during the conflict and this was reflected in both the absence of the North in film generally and the recalibration of authentic working class identity to the South. On film the North therefore was ultimately doubly distanced from constructions of national identity; the war was neither being fought to defend the North, nor was the North properly involved in the defence of the nation in its hour of need.

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