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Regional Distinctions In The Consumption Of Films And Stars In Mid-1930s Britain

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Stars sell films. Who they are, what they might contribute to a project in terms of distinction, additional box-office revenue, and cost are clearly important questions facing film entrepreneurs. They also tell us something important about viewing preferences and thence social attitudes. Such evidence is important to the historian. Jeffrey Richards (1984) writing about British Cinema during the 1930s, advances the case that "(the) study of stars and their images and their popularity is central to an understanding of how cinema works in the context of society."^[1] He argues that:

Audiences are primarily attracted by stars rather than story lines. He supports this contention by reference to the importance of fan clubs, the plethora of fan magazines and the manner in which "stars were ... assiduously promoted by the studio publicity machines"^[2], during the classical period.

In representing an ideal, stars need to be "both ordinary for the purposes of identification and extraordinary for purposes of admiration."^[3]

Stars, like films, operate as ideological tools. In promoting a pattern of behaviour concordant with the perceived interests of the Establishment, stars "(c)an be used to gloss over ambiguities and instabilities in society by individualising social and economic problems and resolving them on a personal level by use of their star charisma."^[4]

For Richards, Gracie Fields and George Formby personified these star attributes - each idiosyncratically accentuating the quality of 'ordinariness' - in British Cinema during the 1930s and early 1940s, "(p)romot(ing) consensus, the values of decency and hard work, and the overcoming of problems by individual effort."^[5] In identifying stars of the period he makes much use of the Motion Picture Herald's annual (starting from the year 1936) chart of the most popular stars in the US and Britain and in doing so draws attention to the premier positions taken by Fields and Formby amongst British stars in both the British and International lists. Sedgwick (1997b) provides an alternative method of establishing film star popularity in Britain during the 1930s which whilst providing qualified support for the Motion Picture Herald (MPH) polls, found that Fields' MPH position was inflated and, more disconcertingly, that Formby, for the years 1936 and 1937 did not feature at all as a top British star.^[6] This disparity raises important methodological issues, including the extent to which there were distinct regional and social class cinema-going patterns in Britain during this period.

In assessing the relative popularity of stars, the box-office returns' approach is preferred on the grounds that the films customers actually paid to watch are likely to be a better reflection of popularity than that derived from a self selecting sample of customers attending a selected sample of cinemas. For instance the Motion Picture Herald organised surveys of audiences attending programmes in the leading (pre-release and first release) cinemas in the major US. Cities. These results were published annually in the yearbook - the Motion Picture Almanac - and have been widely influential amongst film historians. However, the evidence presented from this source is bounded and complete - it is not possible to manipulate it further. The polls conducted in Britain were not even based upon audience surveys but on selected exhibitor returns on relative box-office success. In contrast, given the absence of detailed box-office breakdowns of film performance, it can be argued that cinema programmes provide a more tractable source of information since when grouped they represent the choice available to customers at any one time, within a locality, at similarly priced cinemas.

By directly associating the popularity of a star with the vehicle she or he appears in it becomes possible to build up a picture of relative popularity over time simply by aggregating the box-office returns of all stars for the period in question. Simultaneous with the recent emergence of financial management information on US domestic and overseas box-office returns and production costs of all films emanating from the MGM, Warners and RKO studios during the classical Hollywood period ^[7], Sedgwick (1994, 1997) has developed an index of film popularity (POPSTAT) in Britain during the 1930s covering all films released onto the British market. The Index is based upon the cinema programmes of approximately 90 leading London West End and provincial city cinemas of Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield and in effect is a proxy measure of box-office success. In principal, this methodology enables the researcher to chart and compare the exhibition course of any single film as it is diffused outwards through a cascade-type distribution system, from pre-release, to 1st run, to zth run cinemas.

The record of each film is given as:

POPSTAT_{it} =

$$\frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n \sum_{i=1}^n a_{ij} b_{ij} l_{ij}$$

where:

POPSTAT = Popularity Statistic,
 t = exhibition year
 I = ith film
 j = jth cinema
 n = number of cinemas in the sample set
 a = the weighting of the cinema around a mean value of 1
 b = the weighting of the exhibition status where 0.5 represents a shared and 1.0 a single billing
 l = the length of exhibition at each cinema in weeks and half-weeks

Appendix 2 presents the 100 most popular stars in Britain for the three years 1934-36, as derived from the POPSTAT results of the films in which they appeared.^[8] The films themselves have been drawn from the Top 100 films for each of the three years counted and broadly represent those films which secured more than twice the mean POPSTAT from the cinemas in the sample set; that is generated twice the average box-office revenue of all films marketed in Britain during this period. These films are set out in Appendix 1. British artists amongst the Top 50 performers include those who, in these years, appeared in both

estic and Hollywood productions and those who appeared in British films only. The former group comprised George Arliss, Charles Laughton, Madeleine Oll, Robert Donat, and Merle Oberon, whilst Tom Walls, Jack Hulbert, Jack Buchanan, Anna Neagle, Jessie Matthews, Ralph Lynn and Will Hay appeared in British films only. It is interesting to note that Gracie Fields, top of the 1936 Motion Picture Herald poll for domestic female stars, is listed in 60th position, whilst, as mentioned earlier, George Formby doesn't feature at all. The German speaking stars, Elisabeth Bergner, Richard Tauber and Conrad Veidt, featured prominently in major British studio productions of the time and were labelled as 'Honor Stars' by the MPH, lying between 11th and 25th position in the MPH poll.[9]

Clearly, the choice of the sample cinema set is critical to the results which emerge. The cinemas of the sample cinema set from which POPSTAT was derived can be regarded as biased towards middle class audiences, since the average ticket price was twice that calculated by Rowson as the average price of admission (10.25d) in Britain in 1934.[10] The seating capacity of these cinemas, on average, was also approximately twice that of the national average.[11] In Sedgwick (1997b), it was argued, that as a result of tracing the exhibition records of 119 'hit' films over the period 1932-37 outwards from their extended pre-release London West End runs to the provincial city cinemas in the sample, and then further out into the cinemas of Bolton, Dover and the Chelsea/Kensington/Hammersmith area of West London, no discernable differences in film popularity emerged.[12] In other words, those films which performed well in pre-release and first run cinemas continued to do so amongst lower order cinemas in the distribution chain. However, this is not the same as saying that audience preferences were homogeneous. Whilst audiences in Bolton, for instance, were in general receptive to those 119 films referred to above, it may be the case on closer investigation that on the one hand significant differences existed between the popularity of individual 'hit' productions, whilst on the other Bolton audiences had distinct preferences for films which had not proved particularly popular in London's West End. Richards (1984) draws attention to social surveys of the period and suggests that distinct regional, social class and gender differences did in fact exist. Richards and Sheridan (1987) and Richards (1994) find further evidence for this in their exploration of the Mass Observation study of cinema-going in Bolton (Worktown) in 1939. Certainly, one piece of evidence, taken by the Moyne Committee (1936) from representatives of the exhibitors association (CEA), suggests that British films were extremely unpopular amongst working class audiences in areas of Scotland and East London.[13] In the case of Gracie Fields, it could be conjectured that whilst not perhaps universally appealing, her films might have been particularly popular with working class and Northern audiences.

Cinema-Going in Bolton

In testing this possibility, the exhibition records of all Bolton cinemas regularly showing films during the years of 1934 and 1935 have been examined. The cinema-going activities of the people of Bolton during the 1930s have been chronicled more than most. As pointed out above, the town was the then-anonymous subject of a study by Mass-Observation in 1939 of audience preferences, based upon a questionnaire, which has been described and analysed in detail by Richards and Sheridan (1987) and Richards (1994). It was also the subject of a personal history by Leslie Halliwell (1986) who recalls his childhood visits with his mother to the cinemas of the Borough from the mid-1930s. Halliwell has written:

For a film fanatic, Bolton was almost like Mecca. At one time there lay within my easy reach no fewer than forty-seven cinemas of varying size, quality and character. None was more than five miles from Bolton's town hall and twenty-eight were in the boundaries of the Borough.[14] (1986, p.28)

Bolton, with a population of 180,000, was a large industrial town, built around spinning and hence an integral part of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the culture associated with it. As far as cinema-going was concerned the town was effectively sealed: the supply of alternative programmes during any single week, not to mention the quantity and quality of first-run cinemas, meant that few would seek film entertainment outside of the town. As such, it represents a microcosm of cinema-going in the Industrial North: large enough to sustain a cascade-like distribution system down to at least fourth-run level.[15]

Halliwell's map of Bolton cinemas of the Thirties lists 22 cinemas in the town, almost all of which placed advertisements with the Bolton Evening News.[16] Table 1 adds some details to the vivid descriptions of these cinemas found in Halliwell's book. Of interest is the absence of the Gaumont British organisation from the town, whilst the ABC chain boasted two cinemas - the Capitol and the Regal. There is confirmation that most cinema admissions cost less than a shilling. The higher price range cinemas were those showing a once weekly change programme and served as Bolton's first-run houses. Cinemas at the bottom end of the price range are suggestive of Orwell's observation in his 1937 account of working class life in the Industrial North:

That - keeping warm - is almost the sole preoccupation of a single unemployed man in winter. In Wigan a favourite refuge was the pictures, which are fantastically cheap there. You can always get a seat for fourpence, and at the matinee you can even get a seat for twopence. Even people on the verge of starvation will readily pay twopence to get out of the ghastly cold of a winter afternoon.[17]

The principal first-run cinemas in Bolton during the Thirties were the Capitol, Hippodrome, Queens, Rialto, and Theatre Royal, with the addition of the Lido and Odeon in 1937. All 119 'hit' films, which received extended London West End runs between 1932-37, were exhibited in Bolton, and almost all had their local premiere in these five cinemas.[18] Thirty-four of these films (over a quarter of the selection) opened in two cinemas simultaneously with *Sanders of the River* (1935) having the distinction of opening in three - Queens, Rialto and Embassy during w/c.

23.12.35. Typically these films premiered as single bill entertainments and played for one week [19]. Following their premiere, the films from this selection generally returned, as the leading film in a double film programme, to one of the twice weekly change cinemas listed in Table 1 for a second-run approximately four weeks later - commonly with a gap of a three to four weeks between any subsequent runs. However, it should be added that 25 of these films played on a single bill weekly programme for their third run in the town and in the case of *Captains Courageous* (1937), *Lost Horizon* (1937), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1936), and *One Night of Love* (1934) this continued for their fourth run exhibitions.

In his recorded interview for Mass-Observation, Mr. Hull, the manager of the Embassy cinema, refers to occasions in which exceptional films went on to play again and again in the town [20]. He specifically mentions *Rosali* - seventh run, and *The Firefly* and *Maytime* - both achieving an eighth run. He also quotes *The Divorce of Lady X* and *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* as examples of big budget films which did poorly on their second and third runs. Certainly, this investigation confirms his testimony to differences in the popularity of films, as measured by the number of separate performances in Bolton cinemas. Table 2 lists the thirty films from the selection of 119 'hit' films which recorded six or more distinct appearances in Bolton's cinemas: they were amongst the most popular films shown in the town during the 1932-38 period.

An interesting development in film-going during the latter part of the period was the emergence of re-released films on cinema programmes. Whilst this had been an occasional event during the summer months, when cinema audiences were traditionally at their lowest, there appears to have been a dramatic increase during the late spring and summer of 1938. Twenty-seven of the 119 films from the Selection were re-released during the period, playing on 43 separate programmes. The extent of the revival in 'old' films can be gauged by the fact that over half of these performances (22) took place in 1938. A possible explanation for this may have been the consequence of the domestic crisis in production in 1937 which resulted in a greatly diminished supply of domestic films marketed in 1937 and 1938. Re-released films may well have relieved the supply pressures on renters and distributors alike.

Film Popularity in Bolton

To test the firmly-held hypothesis that significant regional variations in star and film preferences existed at this time, it is necessary to enlarge the film field of reference from the preselected sample of 119 London West End 'hits' to the complete range of stars and films available to Bolton audiences. With the same

Methodology as outlined earlier to measure film popularity, the exhibition record of each film seen in one of the cinemas listed in [Table 1](#) during the years 1934-1935 has been recorded, including its billing status - single or double bill - and length of exhibition. The weights used to establish the relative importance of each cinema - measured in terms of potential box office revenue - are also set out in [Table 1](#). To reiterate, the purpose is to examine the extent to which distinct patterns of preferences amongst Bolton audiences can be detected, when compared to the national sample results published in Sedgwick (1997b), parts of which have been adapted for the 1934-6 period and presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

The exhibition records show that 1,304 films received their Bolton premieres between 1 January 1934 and 31 December 1935. [Table 3](#) provides a contrast with the statistics of releases collected at national level. The discrepancy between the numbers of releases derives from the fact that whilst the number of films *released* nationally was taken from the Board of Trade register, the number of films *shown* refers to those films shown in: i) the 90 or so cinemas in the sample cinema set under the national heading; and ii) the Bolton cinemas listed in [Table 1](#).

It is apparent that many more films were shown in the 20 or so Bolton cinemas than in the larger national sample. The explanation for this is to be found in the biased nature of the national sample, which includes the most prestigious and expensive London West End and provincial city cinemas of the time. These cinemas, for the greater part, would expect to attract 'A' films on the grounds that distributors wished to maximise their earnings and accordingly needed their products to play in those cinemas with the greatest box-office revenue potential. Although the practice of double bill programmes increased as the 1930s wore on, with only super 'A' films playing as single features, it is clear that a sizeable proportion of releases (approximately 15%) was not shown at all at these cinemas, entering the cascade-type distribution system at a lower level.

The Bolton study differs from the national study for which POPSTAT was initially conceived in that it follows the whole population of films through the various cinema levels in a single locality up to the point where the local exhibition potential is exhausted. From this it is possible to identify those films, made primarily by 'poverty row' studios in Hollywood or second-rate quota quickie producers in Britain, which failed to register in the national sample but which played at lower level Bolton cinemas as second features.

The different magnitude of POPSTAT statistic between the two populations of cinemas is not important. Later these are commonly indexed for the purpose of comparison. However, the variance of the means of the two samples, as standardised by the coefficient of variation, is marked and suggests that the national POPSTAT results are significantly affected by those films which played for extended London West End runs at box-office rich cinemas. [\[21\]](#)

Whilst [Table 2](#) lists those 30 films from the 119 'hits' which between 1932 and 1938 appeared in Bolton on six or more separate occasions, the frequency distribution in [Table 4](#) makes it clear that it was not just London West End 'hits' which were popular with Bolton audiences. What are these films which appeared so frequently in Bolton cinemas over the two years 1934 and 1935 and to what extent do they differ from those in the list of films derived from the national sample that might be expected to be popular? [Appendix 3](#) presents answers to these questions. By giving the mean POPSTAT result for both national and Bolton distributions the value of 100, it is possible to compare the respective box office performance of each film shown in either set of cinemas. Column 9 measures the proportionate relation between the two POPSTAT series where a value of 1 indicates an identical performance; a value > 1 suggests that the Bolton box-office performance was stronger than that achieved nationally; and a value < 1 that the national performance was stronger than the Bolton performance. Another form of comparison can be obtained from the ranked order of performance. The results in column 8 are obtained by deducting the Bolton ranking from the national ranking. Where the result is positive the film was more popular in the national sample cinemas, while a negative result indicates that the film was more popular in Bolton.

The most obvious observation stemming from the data collected in the Bolton Top 100 lists is the high popularity of the films starring Gracie Fields. As indicated earlier, although the Motion Picture Review Poll listed Fields as the number one British star, this was not borne out from the survey of London West End and leading provincial city cinemas. However, undeniably, as far as Bolton audiences were concerned, Fields was their favourite. *Sing As We Go* and *Love, Life and Laughter* were the two most popular films shown in Bolton in 1934, and *Look Up and Laugh* achieved a Top 20 position in 1935. In all three cases her poll position - up 36, 63 and 97 places respectively - and the indexed POPSTAT result - 2.12, 2.64 and 1.83 times greater than the respective national result - reflect strongly a marked regional bias in affection for the star. The Lancashire factor is undoubtedly important in this popularity, with Fields displaying a strong regional accent and mannerisms, compounded in *Sing As We Go* as she participates in the traditional Wakes' holiday at Blackpool. Indeed the local factor is even stronger with this film as the mill scenes were filmed on location in Bolton. [\[22\]](#) Gracie Fields' relatively poor performance in the middle class cinemas of the national survey suggests both class and regional distinctions amongst audiences.

[Table 5](#) lists the relative winners and losers as selected by Bolton audiences. In recognising that neither differences in ranking nor proportional levels of popularity are sufficient in themselves to serve as a reliable indicator, a composite measure of difference has been created by: i) in cases where values of proportional difference are > 1, multiplying the two values of differences for any single film found in columns 8 and 9 of [Appendix 3](#); and ii) where values of proportional difference are < 1, multiplying the reciprocal of the value of proportional difference by the difference in the ranking order. [\[23\]](#) What we are looking for here are extremes of value: that is either films in Bolton which were significantly more popular than suggested by the national POPSTAT result or vice versa. The absolute value of the composite statistic, then, is a measure of the degree of difference between national and Bolton survey results.

As we have seen, Gracie Fields' three films shown in Bolton during the years 1934 and 1935 generate a composite measure of difference which is strongly negative. But other films have even more extreme differences. The most extraordinary result is that of George Formby's *Off the Dole*, made by Mancunian Films in a room over a Manchester garage, which received little in the way of national distribution but in Bolton was the 27th ranking film in 1935, ahead of now famous productions such as *The Thin Man* (33rd), *The Gay Divorcee* (57th) amongst others. [\[24\]](#) Its Bolton ranking was 539 places higher than that recorded from the national survey, with a Bolton indexed POPSTAT statistic some 19 times higher. With seven distinct screenings, the film's success can be attributed to local factors. [\[25\]](#) Although this was only Formby's second sound film he was at the height of his musical hall fame and, indeed, had twice played on the stage of Bolton's regular variety theatre, The Grand, in 1934. [\[26\]](#)

Of the remaining relative winners, it is apparent that Bolton audiences appreciated fairly earthy domestic comedy, as against the more sophisticated/southern middle class type product associated with Jack Hulbert. Stanley Lupino's musical comedy vehicle *Happy*, and *You Made Me Love You*; Sidney Howard's *It's a Cop* as well as *Night of the Garter*, and *Trouble*; Will Hay's *Those Were the Days*, and *Dandy Dick*, as well as his appearance in *Radio Parade of 1935*, and Winifred Shotters' *D'Ye Ken John Peel* were all Bolton Top 100 productions.

Of the domestic dramas, *The Scotland Yard Murder Mystery* (32nd in 1934), *The Return of Bulldog Drummond* (12th in 1934), and *Java Head* (15th in 1935) all performed dramatically better in Bolton than nationally, whilst bigger budget super 'A' productions such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (30th in 1934), *Bitter Sweet* (59th in 1934), *Jew Suss* (89th in 1935), *Escape Me Never* (77th in 1935), *The Iron Duke* (90th in 1935), and *Nell Gwyn* (42nd in 1935) all under performed in Bolton.

If the analysis is extended to Hollywood based dramas, it would appear that Boltonians enjoyed historical costume dramas less than national audiences with *Cleopatra* (91st in 1934), *Little Women* (65th in 1934), *Clive of India* (85th in 1935) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (62nd in 1935), all doing less well than might have been expected. In contrast to the relative under-performance of many high budget Hollywood productions, it is noticeable that many of the most notable relative winners in Bolton emanating from Hollywood studios were middle budget 'A' film dramas which appeared in the national sample of cinemas, for the most part, on double feature programmes. [\[27\]](#) Films such as *Stage Mother*, *You Can't Buy Everything*, *Counsellor at Law*, *The Kennel Murder Case*, *A Wicked*

nan, *School For Girls*, *The Great Defender*, *The Trunk Mystery*, *Sequoia*, *Society Doctor*, and *Living on Velvet* did not receive extended London West End runs yet seem to have been to the particular liking of Bolton audiences.

A final genre based observation is the relatively weak showing three Gaumont British musicals - two Anglo-German operetta productions, *Unfinished Symphony* and *My Song For You* and *Evergreen* - a film starring Jessie Matthews, which was widely distributed in America[28] and down 41 places on its national position. Added to these is the more surprising poor performance of the Astaire and Rogers' *The Gay Divorce*, which drops 38 places to 57th place in the Bolton Top 100.

Finally, [Table 6](#) presents an aggregate picture of the differences between those films which made up the Bolton Top 100 found in [Appendix 3](#) for each of the years 1934 and 1935 and the film's position in the national survey. In the event of these films being identically placed in each survey the sum of the differences would add to zero. What [Table 6](#) shows is that, on average, the films which appeared in the Bolton Top 100 were placed approximately 50 places lower in the national cinema sample rankings and, hence, received a significantly higher (50%) POPSTAT indexed score.

These results suggest quite different average levels of popularity amongst the two sample sets of cinemas, the implication of which is that Boltonians recorded a distinctive pattern of cinema-going during the mid-1930s. However, the high level of variance reflected in the standard deviation and coefficient of variation statistics indicates, as has been outlined, wildly differing levels of popularity of particular films in the two samples; implying that for analytical purposes, as much attention should be given to the performance of individual films and their stars as these aggregated differences.

Star Performances

[Appendix 2](#) ranks stars in order of popularity for the period 1934-36. It is derived from the national cinema sample estimates of the 100 most popular films shown in Britain for each of the years by ascribing to the each star the POPSTAT result associated with the films in which they appeared. Each score was then weighted, according to whether the star was first or second billed, with the respective values of 0.67 and 0.33. The list is then composed by aggregating these scores and ranking accordingly. The Index score for each star shown in column 5 of the [Appendix](#) is derived by setting the accumulated weighted POPSTAT score of the 20th ranked star[29] (Joan Crawford) equal to 100 and computing accordingly. An important implication of the numbering system is that stars at the top of the list are many times more popular with audiences than those at the bottom, which comes, of course, from playing in films which are many times more popular and constitutes, in turn, the single most important rationale behind the phenomenon of stardom.

The longer period 1934-36, rather than the 1934-35 used earlier and below in the text, enables a greater number of films to be taken into account in forming a general picture of stardom in mid 1930s Britain. The effect is to show how stars with high film profiles with 1936 audiences, such as William Powell, Shirley Temple, Miriam Hopkins, Ronald Coleman, Irene Dunne, Charles Laughton, Madeleine Carroll, and Robert Donat rise relative to their 1934-35 position, whilst James Cagney, Tom Walls, Franchot Tone, Greta Garbo, Dick Powell, and Wallace Beery decline.

As discussed elsewhere, the national cinema sample rankings are dominated by Hollywood stars, prominent amongst whom are the Britons George Arliss and Charles Laughton, with Madeleine Carroll and Robert Donat plying their trade on both sides of the Atlantic as well as appearing together in Hitchcock's *39 Steps*. The first listed star who made films exclusively in Britain was the German star Elisabeth Bergner, who had left Germany in 1933 to escape racial persecution and appeared in a series of lavish big budget productions, notable amongst which were *Catherine the Great* and *Escape Me Never*. The comic actors Tom Walls and Jack Hulbert are the first indigenous actors to wholly appear in British films, with the comic songster Jack Buchanan edging into the Top 30 stars for the period. As pointed out above Gracie Fields appears in 60th position, below the positions taken by Ralph Lynn and Will Hay.

Given the differences observed earlier concerning the popularity of individual films between the national and Bolton sample surveys of cinemas, it should come as no surprise if a similar pattern emerges with respect to the popularity of stars. Again using the exhibition records of Bolton cinemas for 1934 and 1935, a comparison is made between the stars rankings from the two sample sets. However, in doing so attention needs to be paid to the lag-time in the distribution of films to Bolton, in relation to their pre-release dates in the London West End; since films are included in each sample according to the date at which they are first seen in the respective sample sets of cinemas. Accordingly, those 'hits' pre-released from August/September to the end of 1933 in the London West End would not be shown in Bolton until 1934. As a result such films would be counted in the 1933 statistics derived from the national sample but in the 1934 statistics from Bolton. Similarly, films pre-released towards the end of 1935, and hence included in the national survey assessment of popularity, were not shown in Bolton until the New Year of 1936 and hence would not appear in the time-span of the Bolton listings. For this reason, some stars are under-represented in these listings.

For example the fact that both Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers perform significantly less well in the Bolton rankings, can be explained by the different release dates of *Top Hat*. Originally pre-released at the Carlton in London's West End in October 1935 for a 14 week run, before being subsequently distributed nationally, the film is captured in the national sample statistics for the 1934-35 period but not in the Bolton set, as its Bolton release did not occur until the New Year of 1936.

To get around this problem, the following comparative analysis is based upon only those films which feature in the Bolton Top 100 lists for 1934 and 1935. Accordingly, any film, and therefore its stars, which does not get into these lists is excluded from analysis, irrespective of its national showing. An extreme example of this is the Korda production of *Catherine the Great*. The film does not seem to have been of great interest to Bolton audiences, ranking only 140th in 1934, yet it was positioned 4th in the national survey. Accordingly, the film does not feature in the relative assessment of 'star' popularity, meaning that the appreciation of Elisabeth Bergner's relative standing is based only upon the reception of *Escape Me Never*, which did indeed appear in the Bolton Top 100 for 1935 in 77th position, whilst being 10th in the national survey.

The left hand panels of [Table 7](#) register the most popular stars drawn from the Bolton Top 100 lists for 1934 and 1935; the number of films in which they feature; and the number of these in which they hold first billing status. The right hand panels chart the respective reception of exactly the same films from the national sample of cinemas. [Table 8](#) complements the information presented in [Table 7](#) by arranging the stars in order of the ratio of their Bolton to national POPSTAT Index scores. What follows is a discussion of these results, set in the context of the list ([Appendix 2](#)) of the 100 most popular stars in Britain, 1934-6 as derived from the national sample.

Hollywood 'Stars'

a) Equally popular with both sets of audiences

Of the regular Hollywood 'hit' artists, Wallace Beery, James Cagney, Eddie Cantor[30], Gary Cooper, Joan Crawford, Marie Dressler, Clark Gable, Janet Gaynor, Jeanette MacDonald, Grace Moore[31] and William Powell prove to be more-or-less equally popular amongst the two sets of audiences, although [Appendix 2](#) indicates a decline in the relative national positions of Beery, Dressler, Gaynor and Cagney in 1936: Cagney's as a consequence of his legal dispute with Warners which lowered his appearances in 'star' vehicles. Although primarily a second billing star in 'hit' productions, Franchot Tone also falls into this popularity category: his elevated Bolton profile the consequence of his two 'hit' successes in the town, *The Trunk Mystery*[32] and *Stage Mother* which were respectively placed 49th and 38th in Bolton, but only 239th and 252nd nationally.

Miriam Hopkins' elevated position in the national survey of 1934-36, recorded in [Appendix 2](#), is largely explained by the successes of her late 1935 and 1936 'hit'

ases *Barbary Coast*, *Becky Sharp*, *Men Are Not Gods*, *Splendour* and *These Three*, none of which was released in Bolton before 1 January 1936. The only films shown in Bolton during the period of the investigation was *The Richest Girl In the World* which squeezed into the national ratings in 99th place in 1935, but was placed 269th in Bolton during that year. Loretta Young's two starring hits reflected in the [Appendix 2](#) list, *Crusades* and *Shanghai*, were also released in Bolton in 1936. Her only starring role prior to this placed in the Bolton Top 100 was in *White Parade* which secured the 82nd spot in 1935, but was placed outside the national sample Top 100, at 118th.

b) Relatively More Popular in Bolton

Of the first billing Hollywood stars, the biggest Bolton gains, set out in [Table 8](#), are recorded with the films of Laurel and Hardy, Ann Harding, Spencer Tracy, Robert Montgomery, Kay Francis, Warner Baxter and Shirley Temple. In Montgomery's case each of his starring films in 1934 and 1935 achieved a higher ranking in Bolton: *Another Language* (51st against 99th); *When Ladies Meet* (67th/184th); *The Mystery of Mr X* (29th/125th); *Hide-Out* (40th/105th); *Fugitive Lovers* (81st/200th); and *Vanessa* (36th/95th). Part of the explanation for this might be that these films were devised by MGM as programming 'A' features and as such were not the type of film that would be expected to receive, and did not receive, extended London West End runs. The consequence of this is a poorer showing in the national sample of cinemas. The same might be said of three of Shirley Temple's 1934 and 1935 vehicles. Only *Now and Forever* reached the Bolton Top 10 listings (in 7th place) - it was 104th nationally - whilst *Baby Take a Bow* (60th/135th); and *Girl in Pawn*^[33] (46th/269th) indicate substantially stronger local responses to the child star than is evident from the London West End and provincial city cinemas. However, *Bright Eyes* reverses this sequence (63rd/36th), whilst the later *Little Colonel* (31st/30th) seems to have been equally popular with both audience sets. Unfortunately, *Curly Top* (25th nationally) was released too late to feature in the 1935 Bolton releases. Warner Baxter's improved position in the Bolton listings is principally attributable to

the success of *Crooks in Clover*^[34] which at 53rd position in 1934 was some 130 positions higher than its national ranking; assisted by one of the two films he second-starred in with Janet Gaynor - *One More Spring* (the other being *Paddy the Next Best Thing*), which was ranked at 83rd place compared to 159th in the national rankings.

It is clear that Laurel and Hardy commanded a great deal of popularity amongst Bolton audiences during these years with three Top 100 successes but in particular Top 20 positions for *Fraternally Yours* (19th/ 126th in 1934)^[35] and *Babes in Toyland* (5th/ 115th in 1935). The weak performance of these films in the national sample of cinemas is marked in comparison, a pattern that is reinforced by the different receptions awarded *Hollywood Party* - a film which squeezed into the Bolton Rankings in 95th position, but was placed 150th nationally.

Although not a top ranking star, Ann Harding's vehicles *Biography of a Bachelor Girl* and *The Flame Within*, were films sufficiently enjoyed by Bolton audiences to warrant 70th and 67th ranking compared with 140th and 231st nationally. Two of her films achieved low national Top 100 rankings during the 1934-36 period - *Gallant Lady* 89th in 1934 and *Peter Ibbetson* 91st in 1935 - not sufficient to secure her a berth in the Top 100 stars set out in [Appendix 2](#). The first of these was placed outside of the Bolton Top 100 in 104th place, whilst the second was not released in the town until 1936. A similar pattern emerges with respect of Spencer Tracy. Not one of the four films which are found in the Bolton top 100 lists - *Looking for Trouble* (56th), *When New York Sleeps*^[36] (79th), *Man's Castle* (94th), in which he was the first-billed star - and *Bottoms Up* (63rd), in which he was second billed, found its way into the nationally derived lists, all being ranked between 111th and 190th.

For Kay Francis, the starring features *House on 56th Street* and *Living on Velvet* were markedly more popular with Bolton audiences, both obtaining lowish Top 100 positions, but not making the Top 200 films nationally: their respective ranks were 80th/206th and 54th/213th. Her starring role in *British Agent* (with Leslie Howard second-billed) seems to have been more appreciated within the national sample of cinemas where it was 86th, ten places above its Bolton rank, whilst *Wonder Bar* in which she second-starred to Al Jolson, obtained Top 20 positions in each of the two surveys (13th/17th).

Finally, both John and Lionel Barrymore had first-billing successes in Bolton which were not repeated nationally. In the case of John, his *Counsellor at Law* (44th position in 1934) was ranked 141 places higher than the nationally derived rank, whilst Lionel had two such films: *This Side of Heaven* (68th/166th) and *Service*^[37] (33rd/205th).

c) Relatively Less Popular in Bolton

In contrast, Fredric March who starred in nine national Top 100 films in 1934 and 1935 (rising to 11 over the three year period 1934-36) appears to have been less popular in Bolton, with only three such successes, *The Affairs of Cellini*, *Death Takes A Holiday*, and *We Live Again*, positioned 58th Bolton/73rd national, 98th/86th, and 92nd /94th respectively in the two surveys. Similarly for Claudette Colbert national Top 100 successes such as *Private Worlds*, *Gilded Lily* and *Four Frightened People* are placed 159th, 190th, and 305th respectively in Bolton. The lavish *Cleopatra*, ranked 12th in the national sample, achieved only 91st position in Bolton. *It Happened One Night* was hugely popular with both sets of audiences, being ranked in the Top 10 in both cases, but in this Colbert was the second ranking star behind Gable. George Arliss's evident national popularity is less marked with Bolton audiences. In particular, they seemed not to greatly enjoy *The Affairs of Voltaire* - 24th in the 1934 national sample but ranked outside the Bolton Top 100 in 111th position and the British made *The Iron Duke* which was ranked 86 places lower in Bolton as the 90th ranking film in 1935.

A similar story can be told about Greta Garbo and Mae West. Garbo's two Bolton 'hits' for the period, *Painted Veil* and *Queen Christina*, ranked 21st and 7th respectively in the national listings, are placed lower at 79th and 20th in Bolton. Mae West's three films in the survey - *Belle of the Nineties*, *Goin' to Town* and *I'm No Angel* all perform less well in Bolton, although not markedly so; the respective national/Bolton rankings being 59th/86th, 39th/52nd and 7th/26th. Ronald Colman's position in [Table 8](#) is explained by the disparity between the national and Bolton reception of *Clive of India*: like Arliss's vehicle *The Iron Duke*, the film only scraped into the Bolton Top 100 at 85th whilst riding high nationally in 9th place in 1935. His other Bolton 'hits' *Masquerader* and *Bulldog Drummond* were more or less equally popular amongst both sets of audiences, being placed 15th/18th, and 35th/23rd respectively.

The lower section in [Table 8](#) lists those stars with only a single 'hit' credit to their name in Bolton. Elisabeth Bergner's weak showing has been discussed earlier. Perhaps the most surprising entry here is Katherine Hepburn. In [Appendix 2](#) Hepburn is credited with 6 starring Top 100 films drawn from the national sample of cinemas for the years 1934-36; sufficient to place her in 14th position. Yet, of her films released in Bolton in 1934 and 1935 only *Little Women* secured a Top 100 spot, ranking 35th in 1934 compared to its national standing of 8th. As with *Little Women* the remainder of her output seen over these two years show her national reception to be stronger, with *Christopher Strong* ranked 123rd compared to 420th, *Morning Glory* 44th/106th, *Little Minister* 22nd/156th and *Spitefire* 57th/423rd. A similar story holds for Marlene Dietrich. Her single Bolton Top 100 success was *Song of Songs* which is ranked 60 positions lower in Bolton than its national position of 22nd. Her national Top 100 successes with *Scarlet Empress* (38th in 1934) and *The Devil is a Woman* (67th in 1935) were not repeated in Bolton, where the films took 113th and 358th positions respectively.

Neither Barbara Stanwyck nor Bette Davis was a front ranking star in Britain at the time. Stanwyck had a single Top 100 success in 1934-35 with *Gambling Lady*, ranked 79th nationally and 73rd in Bolton. Otherwise her films were marginally more popular with Bolton audiences with the exception of *Baby Face* which ranked 468th in Bolton as against 331st nationally. *Concealment*^[38], *Courageous*^[39] and *The Woman in Red* are positioned 218th, 372nd and 370th respectively in Bolton but somewhat higher at 122nd, 135th and 106th in the national survey. For Davis her three starring roles, in *Bureau of Missing Persons*, *Ex Lady* and *Fog Over Frisco*, were in similarly middle ranking films, although *Ex Lady* scores very poorly in the national cinema set, being ranked at 564th.

British Stars

Relatively More Popular in Bolton

The presence of Stanley Lupino, Cicely Courtneidge, Gracie Fields, Will Hay, Winifred Shotton, Sidney Howard, and Ralph Lynn in the upper reaches of [Table 8](#) suggests that Bolton's cinemagoers enjoyed the earthy indigenous comedy associated with these actors, rather more than the cinemagoers who attended the national sample of cinemas. Undoubtedly, George Formby would have been amongst this company had his first ATP film *No Limit* been released in Bolton in 1935 rather than the following year.^[40] In keeping with the poll appearing in the Motion Picture Almanac, [Table 7](#) shows Gracie Fields to be the most popular of British stars. Although her successes have been described earlier within the general discussion of [Table 5](#) it is worth repeating that of her three releases shown in Bolton during the 1934-35 period, *Sing As We Go*, and *Love Life and Laughter* were placed first and second in 1934 and *Look Up and Laugh* was 14th the following year; these contrast with the respective national placings at 37th, 65th and 111th.

Some ten places below Fields in the Bolton lists were Ralph Lynn and Will Hay. The national success of the string of comedies produced and directed by Tom Walls for the Gaumont British organisation, in which Ralph Lynn played the second-billed lead to Walls, was sufficient to enable Lynn to be the 45th ranked star in the national 1934-36 lists, whilst Wall took 21st position. *Fighting Stock* is an example of their pairing, being ranked higher in the national list at 55th position in 1935 (compared to its 80th place in Bolton). In the case of *Dirty Work*, in which Walls directed only, the positions are reversed, with Bolton audiences ranking it 32nd to the national 56th. However, Lynn's eminence in [Table 8](#) stems from the relative Bolton success of two of his British and Dominion films produced by Herbert Wilcox: *Up To The Neck* and *Summer Lightning*, placed 75th and 60th respectively in contrast to their national ratings of 149th and 204th.

Cicely Courtneidge's relative Bolton popularity is partly explained by the success of the re-released *Aunt Sally* which was placed 74th in the Bolton Top 100 for 1934 but, like the 1935 re-release of Grace Moore's *Jenny Lind*, was not re-exhibited in the national sample set of cinemas. This success was improved upon in 1935 by *Things are Looking Up* which took 13th position in the Bolton Top 100, although its national sample showing was lower at 60th. *Me and Marlborough*, released in the same year, did less well falling outside the Top 100 in both cases - 123rd /127th. Unfortunately, only the tail-end of the distribution of *Soldiers of the King* occurred in Bolton in 1934, hence preventing any assessment of the reception of the film by Bolton audiences.

The national POPSTAT Top 100 films lists for the years 1934-36 found in [Appendix 1](#) show that Will Hay comes into national prominence as a film star only after his move from British International Pictures to the Gaumont British organisation in 1935, which resulted in the successful *Boys Will Be Boys* - ranked 32nd for that year. Again, unfortunately, this was released too late in Bolton to be recorded in the survey. However, it is clear that Will Hay was already popular with Bolton audiences, with *Those Were The Days* and *Dandy Dick* ranked 7th and 23rd respectively in 1934 and 1935, in contrast to the national sample rankings of 171st and 283rd. In the variety film *Radio Parade of 1935* he was one of a number of featured celebrities. However, in this case the national ranking was greater than that derived from the Bolton cinemas at 63rd compared to 91st.

In order of appearance Sidney Howard's three films *Trouble*, *Night of the Garter*, and *It's A Cop* were respectively ranked in Bolton 72nd, and 61st in 1934 and 40th in 1935, sufficient to place him ahead of Eddie Cantor, Mae West and Claudette Colbert in the Bolton panel of [Table 7](#). Although clearly not a front ranking star, Howard's humour appealed to Bolton audiences; certainly more so than with those attending the cinemas in the national sample, from which the rankings 121st, 101st and 281st for the three films are derived. Likewise, Stanley Lupino's *Happy* and *You Made Me Love You* are 248 and 153 positions higher in the national rankings than the 11th and 70th spots recorded in the Bolton lists. Finally in this category, Winifred Shotton appeared in four Bolton Top 100 films, although only once as the first-billed star in *D'ye Ken John Peel*; a films which just squeezed into the listings at 98th position, although this was a marked improvement on the national 451st position.

b) Relatively Less Popular in Bolton

At the other end of the scale recorded by [Table 8](#) are the established British stars, Conrad Veidt, George Arliss, Charles Laughton, Leslie Howard, Anna Neagle and Jack Hulbert.

Of these Arliss was a major Hollywood star, whilst Laughton and Howard combined work in both British and Hollywood studios.

George Arliss is ranked 5th in the nationally derived [Appendix 1](#) list of 'stars' for the period 1934-36. He returned to Britain in 1935 from a very successful Hollywood career. During the period under investigation he had major 'hits' with *The House of Rothschild*, which heads the nationally derived ranks for 1934 and was placed 4th in Bolton. The *Last Gentleman* was also highly placed at 24th and 39th positions respectively, although *The Affairs of Voltaire* was considerably less popular in Bolton being placed 111th in 1934, compared to its national rating of 24th. As has been discussed earlier, his first British made film on his return - *The Iron Duke* - did not receive from Bolton audiences the degree of esteem afforded it in the national cinemas included in the survey; this "lacklustre effort" being placed 90th in contrast to its national position of 4th.^[41]

Anna Neagle was Herbert Wilcox's top female star at British and Dominion during these years. In *Nell Gwyn* and *Bitter Sweet* she achieved national Top 20 successes respectively at 10th and 16th positions. Her Bolton standing was less assured, with the two films being placed 32nd and 43rd. The reception of *The Queen's Affair* was weaker for both sets of audience, being placed 112th nationally, but 257th in the Bolton list for 1934.

It would appear that Bolton audiences were far less enthusiastic about the two films starring Conrad Veidt. Both *The Wandering Jew* and *Jew Suss* were topical, given the recent rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany and the declared intention to reduce Jewish influence. However, the success of these two films in the national sample, being placed 26th and 5th respectively, was not repeated in Bolton with both being placed in the 80s. *Bella Donna* failed to make the Top 100 in either sample, although the earlier German (UFA)-made FP1 (English Language version)^[42] starring Veidt was very successful in the national sample set achieving 23rd position in the 1933 Top 100. Unfortunately, the 1933 Bolton release date means that a full record of the film's exhibition run in the town has not been captured.

Charles Laughton and Leslie Howard were both international stars appearing in British and Hollywood films. It would appear that Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was less popular with Bolton audiences, being ranked some 28 places lower than the 2nd position achieved in the nationally derived Top 100 for 1933. Laughton's position near to the bottom of [Table 8](#) is undoubtedly due to the relatively higher index scores achieved the top ranking national 'hits', since his other two second-billed appearances in *Ruggles of Red Gap* and *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* are popular Top 30 and Top 20 productions respectively, in both cinema samples. Similarly, for Leslie Howard the Top 10 success of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in both samples ensures a low Bolton to national ratio, particularly as his only other Top 100 film for the years 1934 and 1935 was as second-billed star to Kay Francis in *British Agent*.

Given the relative popularity of British comic stars in the Bolton charts, it is interesting to note that Jack Hulbert, who along with Tom Walls heads the British comedian contingent in the nationally derived Top 100 stars found in [Appendix 2](#), fares less well in Bolton. Hulbert's star vehicles *Bulldog Jack* and *The Camels are Coming* are placed 21st and 20th respectively in the national survey, but lie some places lower in Bolton at 41st and 35th. This difference is reflected in his popularity ranking in the two surveys: 23rd in the national listings for the period 1934-36, but 47th in Bolton; admittedly over the shorter period 1934-35.

In contrast the popularity of Jack Buchanan's musical comedies set in the "luxurious never-never land of West End theatres, Mayfair nightclubs, Home Counties mansions, four-star hotels, Cunard liners and a Riviera where champagne flowed without pause"^[43] is more evenly spread. His two 'hits' of 1934 and 1935 *That's a Good Girl* and *Brewster's Millions* achieved Top 30 successes in the national sample charts at 28th and 17th respectively; results which were slightly improved upon in Bolton, where the films took 25th and 9th positions.

top 100 ranking stars in Britain, listed in [Appendix 2](#) have both Elisabeth Bergner and Robert Donat in the Top 20. The popularity of Bergner has been noted earlier, particularly the relatively poor ranking of *Catherine the Great* in Bolton. The discussion of Robert Donat is limited by the fact that the only starring role in which he appeared to Bolton audiences in the survey period 1934-35 was in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a Top 100 film in both lists, although its national position was 37 places higher at 27. Unfortunately, *The 39 Steps* did not open in Bolton until January 1936 and so its reception has not been captured in the study. Likewise, Jessie Matthews appeared only once during the period in the Bolton Top 100 lists, in *Evergreen*; a film which Richards (1984) maintains "was the first film to be specifically tailored for her".^[44] The film does less well in Bolton, recording 55th position in contrast to its national berth at 14th position, continuing a sequence from the earlier *Friday the 13th* and Hitchcock's improbable *Waltzes from Vienna*; films respectively placed 34th and 116th nationally, but 199th and 212th in Bolton in the 1934 list.

Conclusion

Cinemagoing in Britain during the 1930s was the dominant form of entertainment, absorbing approximately two-thirds of all entertainment expenditure.^[45] Simon Rowson has shown that cinemagoing was universally popular throughout Britain, particularly amongst the urban city population.^[46] The fact that Lancashire, along with a Scotland dominated by the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, had more cinemas per head of population than any other region of Britain serves to support the previously made claims concerning Bolton as a good representative of urban cinemagoing outside of London and the provincial cities of Britain.

By contrasting the results from two surveys carried out on film popularity in Britain; one based upon the exhibition programmes of a sample of approximately 90 London West End and provincial city cinemas and the other upon twenty Bolton cinemas, this research seeks to identify similarities and differences in cinemagoing preferences. The national survey might be taken to represent *middle class* British cinemagoing in that the admission prices of these cinemas lie significantly above the 10.25d mean price estimated by Rowson, for all admissions (963 million)^[47] into British cinemas in 1934. This was particularly true of London West End cinemas, where prices were as high as 11/6d for a top price admission.^[48] In contrast the Bolton survey includes all cinemas in the town, enabling us to monitor the exhibition progress of all films as they trickle down from higher to lower level cinemas as part of the wider *cascade* system of distribution and exhibition. [Table 1](#) lists these cinemas and their status. It is clear that the highest price of admission (1/6d) is only 8d above Rowson's estimated national mean. Although this survey may be described as *regional*, in that it reflects a complete micro-system of distribution and exhibition within a locality with a strong sense of local and regional identity^[49], the fact that it monitors films exhibited at each level in this distribution chain will also provide evidence of working class preferences when compared with the results from the national survey.

Both surveys reflect the dominance of the Hollywood product in British cinemas and the esteem in which so many of its stars were held by the British people. The nationally derived Top 100 stars listed in [Appendix 2](#) include Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, Fredric March, William Powell, Fred Astaire, Shirley Temple, Miriam Hopkins, Ronald Colman, Irene Dunne, Claudette Colbert, Grace Moore, Katherine Hepburn, Eddie Cantor, Ginger Rogers and Joan Crawford in its first 20 places. The Top 20 Bolton stars, as set out in [Table 7](#), further adds the names of Robert Montgomery, Wallace Beery, James Cagney, Franchot Tone, Lionel Barrymore, Dick Powell, Laurel and Hardy, Marie Dressler, Bing Crosby, Kay Francis and Spencer Tracy.

Complementary to this list of Hollywood stars are the films in which they appear. Common to the Top 20 ranking productions of both surveys are the films: *Roman Scandals*, *The House of Rothschild*, *Footlight Parade*, *It Happened One Night*, *Wonder Bar*, *Masquerader*/, and *Queen Christina*, in 1934; and *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *One Night of Love*, *David Copperfield*, *The Merry Widow*, *Roberta*, *Kid Millions*, and *The Barretts of Wimopple Street* in 1935, with *The Bowery* in 1934 and *Treasure Island* in 1935 being placed just outside the Top 20 in one or other of the two survey charts.

The presence of British films in the Top 20 lists of both surveys is much thinner; consisting only of *Blossom Time* in 1934 and *Sanders of the River*, *Brewster's Millions*, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in 1935. Of the British Stars, wide disparities emerge. George Arliss is the only British star to appear in both Top 20 lists, but of course two of his three starring roles in 1934 and 1935 were major Hollywood productions. [Table 8](#) serves to identify the relative popularity of major stars across the two surveys, with Boltonians being less attracted to grand costume melodrama featuring exotic /continental-type stars and having a stronger liking for earthy indigenous humour, and fast moving, but not necessarily big budget, action dramas.

These outcomes confirm Richards' view upon the Worktown Mass Observation Study that distinct regional and social class film preferences existed in Britain during the period, themselves reflecting differences in lifestyle expectation and aspiration. He writes:

The evidence from Bolton suggests that Lancashire and national taste in the 1930s were in close alignment, that cinema was in fact nationalizing taste and outlook and attitude. It remains true nevertheless that gender and regional identities could be maintained within an overall national identity and the most popular stars achieved their popularity by appealing to all of these multiple identities.^[50]

Although as a general rule, those films which had extensive runs in the London West End theatres continued to be popular as they were distributed outwards in time and space from higher to lower order cinemas, this was not the whole story of cinemagoing in Britain. The Bolton survey demonstrates that local audiences also enjoyed films featuring second ranking Hollywood stars such as Ann Harding and Robert Montgomery, whilst having less affection for those of Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Elisabeth Bergner. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence to properly assess the popularity of Jessie Matthews, but the relatively weak reception of *Evergreen* suggests that her 'posh' Kensington accent and mannerisms were not the kind of characteristics that appealed to Boltonians: surely they would not have agreed with the Motion Picture Herald poll which placed her second to Gracie Fields in the British stars category, and ahead of Crawford, Cagney, Colbert, Beery, MacDonald, Garbo, Cooper and Shearer in the international rankings, although audiences of the national cinema survey might. On the other hand Boltonians would probably have agreed with Gracie Fields' preeminent position, a verdict unlikely to have been shared by their middle class national survey counterparts.

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References And Bibliography

Appendices:

[Appendix 1](#), [Appendix 2](#), [Appendix 3](#).

Tables:

[Table 1](#), [Table 2](#), [Table 3](#), [Table 4](#), [Table 5](#), [Table 6](#), [Table 7](#), [Table 8](#)

Endnotes

1. Richards, *Age*, p.155.
2. Richards, *Age*, p.156.
3. Richards, *Age*, p.156.

- Richards, *Age*, p.158.
5. Richards, *Age*, p.159.
 6. See *The 1937-38 Motion Picture Almanac*, p.1094 for the 1936 Poll and *The 1938-39 Motion Picture Almanac*, p.998 for the 1937 Poll.
 7. Glancy (1992, 1995), Jewell (1994).
 8. These were films which were premiered from 1 January 1934 to 31 December 1936.
 9. The 1937-38 Motion Picture Almanac, p. 1094.
 10. Rowson (1936), p.70.
 11. See Sedgwick, J., (1995) *The British Film Industry and the Market for Films in Britain, 1932-37*, unpublished Ph.D, London Guildhall University, ch 4 for a detailed account of the comparative characteristics of the sample set of cinemas with those of the nation as a whole.
 12. These films are listed in Sedgwick (1995), ch.5.
 13. *Minutes in Evidence* (1936), para.10, p.80.
 14. Halliwell, L., *Seat in All Parts*, London, 1986, p.26. The Bolton Evening News (8 December 1934) counted 20 cinemas with the opening of the Crompton Way Cinema two days earlier. Halliwell positions the cinemas on a map on p.29.
 15. See Sedgwick (1995) chs.4-6, for an extensive discussion of the practice and economics of the film distribution system.
 16. See Halliwell (1986, p.29) for the map. The Hippodrome Moses Gate, and Empire Farnsworth have not been included in the count as their programmes were not regularly advertised in the Bolton Evening News. The latter boasted of a daily circulation in excess of 50,000.
 17. Orwell, G., *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harmondsworth, 1962, p.72.
 18. The exceptions were *42nd Street* - opening at the Regal and Palladium w/c 2.10.33, *Damaged Lives* - Palladium from w/c 11.12.33, and *Green Pastures* - Embassy from 10.5.37.
 19. The exceptions were *Captain Blood* which played for 1.5 weeks at the Theatre Royal, from w/c 3.8.36, *Damaged Lives* - 2 weeks at the Palladium from w/c 11.12.33 and *Sign of the Cross* - 2 weeks at the Rialto from w/c 9.10.33. A few films opened as the leading part of a double bill programme. These were *Affairs of Voltaire* with *Smithy* - Hippodrome w/c 2.4.34, *Dreaming Lips* with *The Gap* - Lido w/c 25.10.37, *Painted Veil* with *Bon Voyage* - Capitol w/c 15.7.35, *Road to Glory* with *Grand Jury* - Capitol w/c 26.4.37 and *Souls at Sea* with *She's No Lady* - Capitol w/c 14.3.38.
 20. 6. Worktown Box 29E, Mass Observation, published in Richards and Sheridan (1987, pp.27-30).
 21. Whilst 'hit' films played for extended runs at London West End cinemas, elsewhere it was rare for films to play at the same cinema for more than two consecutive weeks. See Sedgwick (1995) pp. 150- 69 for the detailed distribution records of eight London West End 'hits' as they cascaded outwards and downwards from their pre-release run.
 22. The opening and closing sequences were shot at Denvale Spinning Mill, Union Road, whilst the interiors were shot at Sir George Holden's mill at Astley Bridge. See Bolton Evening News, 8 June 1934, p.6, col.6-7. Gracie Fields was prominent in the life of the town during the week of shooting in and around Bolton. For details see Bolton Evening News, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 21 June 1934, including photographs.
 23. The distinction between the distributions of the two sets of POPSTAT results has previously been discussed in the text. Essentially the longer tail of the nationally derived results is the consequence of extended runs in box office rich London West End cinemas for hit productions. For instance the national POPSTAT index value for *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* is twice that of its Bolton value, yet the film was top of the 1935 listings in both surveys. By multiplying the two differences together a composite result of zero is obtained, implying that the film was equally popular amongst the two sets of audience (ie the Difference in Rank = 0). Where the value of the proportional difference of Bolton to national POPSTAT for any single film is less than one, its reciprocal has been taken, in order to establish a symmetry of weighting around the value 1 of the Proportional Difference.
 24. See Richards (1984), pp. 196-198, Low (1985) p. 162.
 25. The film opened as a single billing at the Capitol for a week on 7 October 1935 and played at a further six venues on half weekly programmes, only one of which was shared with another feature film.
 26. See note a to [Table 1](#).
 27. These were the type of films which provided the studios with reliable 'bread and butter' rates of return. See Sedgwick (1994, 1995b), and Sedgwick and Pokorny.
 28. See Sedgwick (1996).
 29. The choice of setting the 20th rank equal to 100 has no special significance. It is the relative difference between the index numbers that is important.
 30. The low Bolton to national POPSTAT ratio for Eddie Cantor recorded in [Table 8](#) reflects the longer tail of the national POPSTAT frequency distribution, explained by the longer runs associated with London West End 'hits'. In standardising the two POPSTAT indices by allowing the mean film in each series to take the value 100, films at the top end of the national rankings score more heavily than high ranking 'hits' in Bolton. Accordingly, the respective Bolton to national sample ranking of Cantor's two films *Roman Scandals* and *Kid Millions* are extremely close at 14th 16th in 1934 and 3rd in both samples in 1935. As with Gary Cooper's *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, the higher national score generates a lower ratio value than the value 1 suggested by a comparison of the ranking performances of these films.
 31. The position of the operatic singer and actress Grace Moore is elevated in the Bolton lists owing to the successful re-release in the town of *Jenny Lind* (US release title *A Lady's Morals*) The film was 74th in the Bolton Top 100 in 1934 but not re-exhibited in the cinemas of the national survey in 1934 or 1935. As is known from [Table 2](#), Grace Moore's 'hit' *One Night of Love* had eleven separate billings in Bolton achieving number two position in both Bolton and national charts during 1935, whilst her subsequent films *On Wings of Song* (US release title *Love Me Forever*), and *The King Steps Out* were sufficient to rank her 13th in the 1934-36 national survey, just ahead of fellow American stars Katherine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers.
 32. Released in the US as *One New York Night*.

Released in the US as *Little Miss Marker*.

34. Released in the US as *Penthouse*.

35. Released in the US as *Sons of the Desert*.

36. Released in the US as *Now I'll Tell*.

37. Released in the US as *Looking Forward*.

38. Released in the US as *The Secret Bride*.

39. Released in the US as *A Lost Lady*.

40. After having failed to sustain a London West End run, *No Limit* was placed in 175th position in the national sample rankings.

41. Richards (1984), p. 274.

42. See Low (1985), p.94.

43. Richards (1984), p. 223.

44. Richards (1984) p.215.

45. Stone and Rowe (1966), tables 36 & 39. For a fuller depiction of cinemagoing statistics see Sedgwick (1997a), table V.

46. Rowson (1936), table x.

47. Re-estimated by Browning and Sorrell (1954) as 903 million admissions.

48. See Kine Weekly Year Books for a detailed breakdown the seating capacity, price structure and ownership of British cinemas. Also, Eyles and Skone (1991).

49. Richards (1994), pp. 148-50.

50. Richards (1994), p.164.

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