

Amateur Filmmaking During World War II

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Une nouvelle source de l'histoire (1898) is almost certainly the earliest recognition given to the potential of non-professional filmmakers to record the personal histories of their lives and societies. In this pamphlet, Boleslaw Matuszewski, a Polish camera operator, predicted that before long even amateurs could afford to capture moving pictures, and these amateurs "would like nothing better than to contribute to the making of history."¹ These small films have proved to be some of the most interesting records of the twentieth century. They are by no means perfect records, nor can the millions of feet of amateur film ever provide a complete social history of our times. In fact, more often than not, they document our leisure time rather than our daily chores, our celebrations instead of our crises.² At no other time in the history of amateur filmmaking is this more apparent than during World War II when the supply of small gauge film stock in Britain was restricted to military use and the amateur filmmaker's record of one of the most significant events of the twentieth century was denied. In 1998, one hundred years after Matuszewski's *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire*, Kodak announced that they would no longer be manufacturing Super 8 sound film stock. This prompted the filmmaker Saul Levine, to stand up at a screening and declare: "They are effectively cutting out our tongues."³ In a similar spirit, the amateur filmmaker in 1939 could well have declared they had lost all but their souls.

For a hobby which barely existed during WWII, we may be surprised to find that the 1940s were one of the most interesting periods in the history of amateur filmmaking. As well as first-hand accounts, filmmaking books published just prior to and after the war help contextualise the amateur's efforts during the 1940s. So too does a survey of *Amateur Cine World*, the only magazine of its kind available in Britain during the war documenting a turning point in the history of amateur filmmaking. Also significant is the effect WWII technical innovation had on post-war amateur filmmaking. While most amateurs became redundant during the war, afterwards they were rewarded with every advancement in technology they had dreamed of.

No books for amateur filmmakers were published during the war years in Britain but there were plenty of books available during the 1930s. *Making Home Movies* by D. Charles Ottley is typical of the many books available at the time. It details the type of equipment available and its use and instructs the reader on how to plan, film, edit and project the finished film. Ottley also devotes a chapter to 'The Amateur Cine Society.' The primary incentive to join or form such a society was to pool the resources of people sharing a common objective.

This is precisely the spirit that inspires devotees of the shadow world to join hand and heart in the quest for united effort and achievement. No matter how conscientious the individual worker may be, no matter what his financial resources, the time must come when he will desire to gather round him others of his kith and kin in order that progress, in the wider sense, may be possible. To meet others whose interests are mutual, and together to discuss ways and means, is, in itself, a fine stimulus.⁴

Ottley goes on to list the roles of club members: The Scenario Writer, the Director, the Art

¹Matuszewski's pamphlet is briefly discussed in Houston, 1994, 12.

²"... family film is rather a medium of personal protection against the outside world than its reflection.... Only rarely are everyday life, public life, work registered on film. This is perhaps the most fundamental difference with the professional film. The typical amateur film-maker wants to fix happiness." Hogenkamp & Lauwers, 1997, 113.

³Kilchesty, 1998, 49.

⁴Ottley, 1935, 114.

Director, the Musical Director, the Camera-man, the Continuity Secretary, the Property Master, the Carpenter and the Artistes. Most of these roles were occupied by male members with the exception of the Continuity Secretary and the Artistes. Imitating the commercial model of organisation was typical of pre-war amateur filmmaking. Aesthetically, too, the classical Hollywood style of filmmaking was promoted as the pinnacle of the amateur's ambitions. Cine club efforts to emulate this style of cinema suggests that the amateur should first understand and then accept the achievements of the Hollywood style in creating a harmonious pictorial composition and controlled narrative continuity.⁵

By contrasting the fledgling amateur film with the mature position of Hollywood cinema, books and magazines became vehicles for exporting an understanding and appreciation of commercial cinema. This would change immediately after the war, with audiences having been exposed to more varied styles of filmmaking such as official short films, documentary films, instructional films and other propaganda. During the 1950s, amateur filmmaking "collapsed into home movies. It was redefined as a social relation between families rather than an art form. New formats like 8mm that could not be publicly exhibited proliferated, creating a class hierarchy in amateurism based on how much technical control an operator could have over the imagery."⁶

By this time, collective filmmaking was no longer economically necessary nor aesthetically encouraged. The popularity of small, cheap, versatile 8mm equipment and the individualism that emerged after the war meant that visions like Ottley's, of cine societies imitating the organisation and aesthetic of commercial cinema, would rarely be mentioned again with such conviction and enthusiasm.

An exception to the books on amateur film published in pre-war Britain is *Film-Making From Script to Screen* by Andrew Buchanan, a professional filmmaker. First published in 1937 and revised in 1951, his book was a passionate call to amateurs to use their cameras for more socially-orientated productions.⁷ In his opinion, it was "the duty of the amateur to employ his freedom to the best advantage instead of seeking to copy professional methods."⁸ He argued that "altogether apart from working conditions, there is no *fundamental* difference between the *individual* professional and amateur."⁹ Rather, the amateur filmmaker had the advantage. He may have lacked money and equipment but he was free to:

use his brains and obtain effects by the simplest and most ingenious means possible - which is the best way, of course. . . The amateur film-maker is a craftsman, and the spirit of craftsmanship in the professional film world, as elsewhere, is being crushed by a machine composed of human beings welded together in a mechanical mass.¹⁰

Amateur Cine World (ACW), first published in 1936, was the only such publication to continue

⁵Zimmermann, 1997, 76.

⁶Zimmermann, 1997, 77.

⁷I have been unable to compare the 1937 and 1951 edition of Buchanan's book to find out how much more emphasis he placed on individual filmmaking in the revised edition. While the 1951 edition goes into great detail on instructing the individual filmmaker on what to film - villages, farms, towns, foreign cities, a hospital, 'your own views' - I suspect that the pre-war edition also contained this emphasis as Buchanan's career was in documentaries. He was an occasional writer and judge for *Amateur Cine World* during the war years when he would again emphasise the fortune of the amateur filmmaker's freedom.

⁸Buchanan, 1951, 94.

⁹Buchanan, 1951, 93.

¹⁰Buchanan, 1951, 87.

throughout the war. Its major competitor, *Home Movies and Home Talkies*, only ran from 1934 to 1939. *ACW* is therefore an invaluable source of information on the activities of amateur filmmakers during the war and it allows us to trace the decline in film stocks, the fluctuation in prices and the availability of equipment. The magazine clearly went through difficult times during the war. The pre-war *Amateur Cine World* was a lavish monthly publication, indicative of a flourishing industry. But by 1941, the magazine was reduced from full-sized to pocket-sized because of paper restrictions and sold only quarterly after December 1941.

One of the most well-known features of *ACW* was its annual 'Ten Best' competition. Filmmakers were invited to compete for the ten best films of the year. Even today, amateur filmmakers might boast that they were a 'Ten Best'-nominated filmmaker, or that they once had the confidence to submit a film for consideration. The competition was dropped from 1940-1949, further evidence of the lack of resources and time available to the cine enthusiast. Gordon S. Malthouse, the editor, wrote about entries for the 1939 competition in January 1940:

... It is as yet rather too early to hazard an opinion on general standard. Despite the war, however, it shows no sign of deteriorating. Numerically, entries are stronger than ever. Indeed, more films have been submitted since the beginning of September than in the same period in each of the six years of our existence. This, surely, is a conclusive reply to the pessimists who foretell a cessation of amateur movie-making.

Indeed, the editorial content from the issues in late 1939 reveal little concern for the war. Typically, advertisements exploited the new war-time situation with advertisements like the following:

BE OF GOOD CHEER . . .

We can win through by "Keeping our chins up," and to do this we must find some occasional relaxation from war-worry. This is where home movies play a greater part than ever. Treat the family to a good projector this Christmas. We took care to order good stocks of home movie apparatus as far back as the summer, therefore we have an advantage over many dealers in being able to supply almost any make. First rate outfits range from £12 or as little as 10/9 a month. When you consider that for just over half-a-crown a week you and your family and as many friends as you'd care to invite can have the pictures at home, you will realise that economically it is a good proposition. Make your Christmas merry with a good home movie show.

OUR FRIENDLY TERMS AND GOOD EXCHANGE ALLOWANCES

Movies make your Christmas merrier still—our friendly terms make movie-buying easier still—we can supply any purchase costing 50/- or more on very easy terms, and for goods costing £10 or more we allow as much as two years to pay. Our exchange allowance on your used apparatus will save money for you. Send or bring it for our quotation—you'll be agreeably surprised at the big amount we offer.

Such advertisements indicated that equipment would soon become scarce and that stocks of imported popular brands such as Bell & Howell and Kodak would run out. Advertisements also made reference to 'The Cure for BLACK-OUT BOREDOM.' "The most pleasant way to shorten the long evenings is to entertain your family and friends with your own home movies."

This emphasis on film projection rather than production continued throughout the war. Amateur filmmakers were able to pursue their hobby because of this gradual move to projection over production. Very few amateur filmmakers were selected to enter the Services as official cameramen. Instead, we find them increasingly applying their knowledge of equipment and skills in projection. The December 1941 editorial encourages readers to use the newly established Central Film Library.

He can give his own show of films with a purpose. The substandard gauge is the standard of the road show, and a wide variety of films is available... The projector to-day is no less a weapon than the tommy gun, whether it be used to disseminate ideas, create a cultural background, provide instruction or afford relaxation.

Throughout the war, *ACW* is full of enthusiastic writing like the above, always rich in information about the changes taking place in the hobby, the optimism held for the future and the potential of turning a catastrophe for the industry into a situation that bred innovation and a sense of purpose.¹¹ In the December 1939 edition, Malthouse wrote a detailed article titled ‘What Shall I Film In War-Time?’ He did not dwell on the inevitable shortage of film stock but instead listed all those situations in which the amateur filmmaker could no longer operate:

... Let not your cine camera be seen anywhere near the following: Fortifications, battery, searchlight, listening post or other work of defence; aerodrome or seaplane station; assembly of forces; barracks or encampment; arsenal, factory magazine or store for munitions of war, arms, equipment, or supplies for the forces: wireless, telegraph, telephone, signal or cable station; dock, caisson, dockyard, harbour, ship-building works, or loading pier; vessel or war or any vessel or vehicle engaged in the transport of supplies or personnel; aircraft or the wreckage of any aircraft... Building structure, vessel, or other object damaged by enemy action or as a result of steps taken to repel enemy action; hospital or station at which casualties, whether civil or otherwise, are treated; any ambulance or convoy of injured persons, or any injured persons; electricity, gas or water works, or gasometer or reservoir, or any oil store; assembly or persons for transport or evacuation, or any temporary camp or other accommodation or transport vehicles used for evacuation; riotous or disorderly assembly, or premises or other objects damaged in the course of such an assembly; roads or railway exclusively connected with works of defence...

This did not deter Malthouse from asserting that in practice, the filmmaker’s viewfinder would remain occupied and that restrictions laid down by the central government could be reinterpreted locally. It is worth quoting his article at length as it is the most revealing example of the way amateur filmmakers understood their hobby in early war-time Britain. These extracts also demonstrate Malthouse’s understanding of his readers and their changing circumstances.

A cine camera is still not an accepted common-place. Whatever would you want to be doing filming a railway station in war-time? asks officialdom suspiciously... Much depends, of course, on the interpretation of orders by the local authorities. A.R.P. workers are people like us. We have given them cine shows. Many of us share their duties. Friendly overtures to a responsible official, therefore, would probably elicit permission to film local A.R.P. activities... But do you want to take such shots? You cannot cover the war with your cine camera. You cannot adequately cover local war-time activities. You cannot adequately show how war affects the other person. You can only show its effects on your own immediate circle of friends and relations. But a record of the war as it effects our home life will provide distraction and pleasure and pleasure in the making, besides being a most valuable record we shall be glad to possess when all this is over. It will be an economical way of filming, too, for we must

¹¹We might note here that *ACW*’s continued optimism must lie partly in the journal’s efforts to remain in production. While I am convinced that the optimism was reciprocal, the staff writers surely understood that *ACW*’s survival rested entirely on the enthusiasm of its readers and their belief that their time will come in the post-war years. Indeed it did and Editor, Gordon S. Malthouse, should be commended for his efforts. It is worth noting that he is still remembered fondly as the editor who took the journal through the war years.

reconcile ourselves to the fact that it will not be possible to make a complete film of any length or war-time home life. We cannot complete it until the war is over. We cannot plan ahead because nobody knows what is going to happen next. Our aim should be, therefore, to collect all the raw material we can now, without much thought as to its ultimate place in the film... Take shots of the front pages of newspapers on the rare occasions when there is any major news on them... Take shots of lamp shades being hooded, windows being measured for blackout materials... Secure close-ups of your book of petrol coupons, your identity card, respirator, food ration coupons, head lamp mask... The great majority of the subjects that we filmed before the war are still available to us. Indeed, if we take the long view, we see that not only have we just about as much to film as formerly; we also have an additional limited field brought into being by the new conditions.

Throughout 1939, there are indications in *ACW* that the war was gradually undermining the lives of club members. In the column 'What The Societies Are Doing,' contributors wrote that "progress has been delayed [but] members propose to carry on." Guest lecturers cancelled their visits and regular meeting places had to be changed because their regular halls were "commandeered by local authorities." With many of the male members away, "technical meetings" were "temporarily suspended" and "the general secretarial duties" were "transferred to Mrs. A.C. Smith..."

An article in the January 1940 issue discussed 'War-time Plots For Filming.' Aimed at "the amateur who has made up his mind that he will not allow the war to interfere too drastically with his hobby," the writer assured his readers that he "should not find himself short of subjects." Despite official restrictions on subject matter, travel, night-life and "a sadly reduced purse," the amateur still had two aims: "first, to record life as it will be lived by the majority of people between September 3rd, 1939 and some unknown future date, and secondly, to assist the authorities in the present plans, as far as can be arranged." While straightforward documentaries were impossible due to restrictions on filming any direct evidence of the damages of war, themes such as 'Evacuation,' 'How To Build A Garden Trench,' 'How To Grow Potatoes,' 'First Aid,' and 'Driving Instruction' were encouraged and the emphasis on a collaborative group effort endured.¹²

Such films would be easiest produced by a group of people who could pool their resources... Various films could doubtless be made in collaboration with the local A.R.P. authorities who might well welcome such suggestions... Personally, I draw my supply of ideas very often from the cartoons in *Punch*, *The Humorist* and similar papers scrutinised carefully on the occasions of my monthly visits to the hairdresser.

Retailers, too, advertised with confidence in the future of amateur filmmaking:

¹²These topics are in line with official films being produced throughout the war. See Thorpe & Pronay, 1980.

R. G. Lewis Ltd. (Cine)

202, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.1. Chancery 6956

THERE WILL BE MANY NEW RECRUITS for this very fascinating hobby and we predict quite a boom in cinematography. Have you ever thought of the many happy times you have had and which you would give anything to live over again. Let the cine camera give you this joy. Remember the children will be growing up, and what better subject could you wish for. Then husbands, sons and sweethearts will be coming home on leave. Surely you would like a permanent record of these events, to say nothing of many others which will present themselves during the coming months ? !!

The lack of film stock appears to have hit the amateur market hard around 1940. Occasional advertisements for film stock do appear up to September 1940 issue, but disappear until 1947 when Gevaert advertises its reversal stock that was "still in short supply." In late 1941, as advertisements for stock cease altogether, articles start to appear on exposing out-of-date stock, home processing and using up odd-shots and off-cuts from already completed films. There were also a couple of articles on animation. All this suggests that amateurs made use of every last frame of film available. In the September 1942 issue, Malthouse asked, "Is it [amateur cinematography] dead or merely moribund?" By this time, clubs were disbanding, and owners of 16mm equipment were being targeted with WANTED advertisements encouraging them to trade in their equipment for the war effort.

Even in such a somber mood, Malthouse argued that "the outlook for the cine movement" was "full of promise," and rightly predicted that "the experience gained in war production by important manufacturers will prove to be of considerable advantage to the amateur after the war." Meanwhile, to meet continued demand, an "inter-dealer register of apparatus" was established so that equipment could be located quickly by retailers who were out of stock in a particular item.

Malthouse's characteristic optimism and forward thinking must have been a source of comfort to readers who had been under the impression that movie-making as a hobby had "retired for the duration."¹³ In the September 1942 editorial titled 'Your Camera Can be Busy Again,' he cleverly argued that sub-standard film had come of age. He showed how 16mm was being seen by more people than ever before; how it had gained prestige by being exploited for government use; how the advances in optical and mechanical aspects of 16mm were substantial and would benefit the amateur filmmaker to no end once the war was over. Again, the recurring theme of collective versus individual filmmaking was addressed.

In the meantime, how best can the lone worker carry on with film-making, as distinct from projection (for which there are, of course, unlimited opportunities)? One simple answer is: by no longer remaining a lone worker - by pooling resources with his friends, by securing such of the benefits as still remain of the collective organisation.

Yet one year later, we find very few articles that addressed current amateur film production, whether collective or individual. Starting in late 1943, Malthouse was encouraging readers to write to the war office and offer their expertise "in the provision of entertainment and instruction for the Services." Gone were the days when amateurs were seen as playing games with their little toys, he wrote, and by the end of 1943, as 48-hour leave was being denied in many cases due to

¹³ *ACW*, September 1942 Vol. 1 # 8.

further restrictions on travel, the amateur could do no better service to the war effort than to offer accommodation, relaxation and entertainment to the off-duty soldier.

ACW also provides evidence for the emergence of women in the amateur film world during war-time. In March 1943, Malthouse's editorial titled 'The Lady Is Willing,' discussed the role of women in the amateur cine movement. He argued that while men were predominant in the arts and professional cinema, the war had had far reaching effects on the role of women in the amateur movement, who, in other realms had already demonstrated that they were capable in adverse war-time situations. He noted that women were gradually taking over 16mm projection (although men still dominated 35mm). They had "exploded the myth that postulates that women are helpless when confronted with machinery and that the only branch of mechanics it is safe for them to enter is the somewhat limited one of switching on the electric light." Malthouse declared these ideas in his increasingly evangelical style:

That is why we look forward confidently to an influx of women members to cine clubs after the war. They must be encouraged to join not only as make-up specialists, costume designers, leading players, continuity clerks and purveyors of suppers. They must be encouraged to take their place at the camera, at the lights, at the projector; for film production is a hybrid of art and science: with feminine participation relegated to strictly defined non-active limits it can become mullish... Why not institute family subscriptions on favourable terms. And might one suggest that women representatives in the various amateur cine organisations would do much to influence the successful growth of the movement?

The growing presence of women was indicative of the post-war move from club participation to domestic, family-orientated filmmaking. This trend can also be seen in 1950s advertisements of cine equipment which was frequently aimed at females.



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By late 1943, the journal started concerning itself with post-war events, recognising that the "stimulus of the war" in camera and projection innovation would certainly affect the amateur cine movement. Indeed that was where 16mm began. In the first editorial of 1944, 'Your Ideal Cine Camera?', Malthouse tackled the question head on:

Denied the opportunity of making films, either because of the shortage of film stock (the position now, by the way, becoming a little easier), or because in the sterner tasks we had to do there was no provision for cine cameras, many of the more ardent among us, who simply had to think and talk cine, even though we could no longer practice it, retreated into the dream world of the past... What do you look for in the ideal camera, projector, film stock or accessory? You, the prospective user, are the final arbiter, for the time is approaching when the customer will again always be right. Tell us then, of your requirements... If the demand is shown to exist, and it can be supplied, it *will* be supplied.

The editorial stated how the future of amateur filmmaking was brighter and how new developments in equipment designs were quicker to come through. It was then followed by a three-page article (considerable given the size of this ravished magazine) titled 'Post War Amateur Cinematography.' Automation, refinement, sound recording, faster film stock, brighter, quality projectors and professional features such as reflex lenses were all under discussion. The increasing distinctions between 8mm and 9.5mm, "the truly personal sizes of film," and the now semi-professional 16mm gauge still demanded by the more serious amateur, were also important considerations. In the following issue, another three-page article titled 'What They Want' was based on readers' replies:

Camera workers as a whole are very interested in 8mm., but 9.5mm has some staunch supporters, with 16mm definitely the choice for serious work. There is a widespread demand for the lightest and most compact instrument for hand use. There is no marked preference for magazines and cassettes as against spools, but sprocket transit is often mentioned... the desire for register pins in the gate mechanism, and feel that if a back rewind is provided, it should be capable of rewinding a whole film, not merely a few frames... the very real demand for a frame counter, the desire for a viewfinder which makes accurate allowance for parallax error... a waist level as well as eye-level finder... a diaphragm which closes right down... automatic change of aperture... speed ranges from 8 to 48, or if possible 64, frames per second... turrets for three or four lenses... handier carrying cases... a quieter motor... delayed action attachment... *Projectors*. The outstanding requirements seem to be less noise, more film, more light... exact control of the speed... motor rewinding...

The amateur filmmaker wanted more freedom with versatile equipment that allowed for accurate control while allowing for automation. Their demands were met within just a few years when manufacturers invested largely in 8mm equipment rather than 9.5mm which was in serious decline by the mid-1950s. In September 1944, Malthouse was writing about "filming just to please oneself." The latest designs required minimal expertise and allowed the filmmaker to be self-sufficient and independent. The war years had gradually and effectively changed the outlook of the amateur

filmmaker, his inspirations and aspirations, and by June 1945, the writers of *ACW* were keen to pull them from their rut and offer visions of a promising future.¹⁴

Malthouse wrote about amateur filmmaking as both a serious art form and a source of relaxation and recreation. Filming just to please oneself had been difficult due to the scarcity of stock, multiplicity of restrictions and "the no less moral persuasion that it wasn't the thing to do." Now with the end of the war in people's minds, "one can look forward to the time when one takes ones camera on holiday again, when another reel can be added to the family film history, when one can go out into the highways and bye-ways with a loaded camera and the hope, which ample experience to the contrary never extinguishes, of something turning up." Yet conscious that their lives would not always be spent idly, Malthouse also observed that many amateurs would "no longer [be] content to produce the pleasant little pedestrian pieces they made before the war. The long years when the only contact they had with their hobby was to think about it and dream about it have bred in them sterner resolve. They want to make a worthwhile film."¹⁵

Dick Brandon wanted to make worthwhile films during the war, too. In our interview, he described how he would come home on seven-days leave every three months and his next door neighbour, the bank manager, would appear with a roll of 9.5mm film stock for him. Where it came from, Dick was never sure, but he felt that he ought to do *something* with it. "You'd think what on earth am I going to do with this? And the obvious answer was animation, because he would be impressed, you'd really done something with it, and it was interesting really."¹⁶ The neighbour didn't always have a roll of film for him but when he did, it was often still within its use-by date; Dick wouldn't want to waste his time making animated films with stock he couldn't rely on. He did use out-dated stock and other left-over ends to make *War And The Joneses*, "a string of odd bits of film which I took during the war with very little explanation really, just things which I took with the film which I didn't entirely trust, or when I had done a bit of animation and had got 20 seconds left, or something and I was going back off leave, I would fire off the 20 seconds in order to send it off for processing, just as I would have done or just as we really do now." When his neighbour didn't have any film for him, Dick spent some of his leave time making props, titles and puppets for his films.

War And The Joneses starts with the intertitle "Bill and Tom find the Army isn't *all* work. . .," showing him and his friends playing football, swimming and going to the fairground. Another intertitle "The others all make and grow for victory" introduces his family in the garden. The film also includes a Pathe Gazette news reel, *Our Rapid Advance In Libya* (presumably shot from inside the cinema) prefaced with the intertitle "News comes from the cinema." Another intertitle describes his leave as "seven lovely and lazy days" although today, Dick remembers them differently.

So you would go home and there would be various things to do, I mean, bits of stuff had fallen to bits, but there wasn't a great deal you could do because there were various

¹⁴"The amateur film movement is stirring and rubbing the sleep out of its eyes. . . Six years hibernation has a debilitating effect on the system; and no doubt the brain is not so good now. . . Amateur had to retire for a long time. . ."

¹⁵*ACW* Editorial, September 1944, Vol. 2 # 4.

¹⁶I conducted this interview with Dick Brandon at his home in Diss, Norfolk, on November 7th 2001. A copy of the full two-hour interview on CD with transcript can be found in the East Anglian Film Archive.

forms to fill in if you wanted a bit of wood. When you had done that, you looked around and there was nobody about because everyone was working and if they weren't doing their ordinary job, they were fire watching or that sort of thing, so although the idea of going home was marvellous, when you got there, it wasn't as good.

The final intertitle exclaiming "Peace! It's grand to be home... or is it?" is followed by several shots showing Dick having to deal with civilian life: food rations and paying for your own cigarettes. Returning after two years in Nigeria, he had to face the British weather; his feelings summed up in a single shot of rain falling against a window.

Dick Brandon was born in 1919. In 1935, a friend gave him his first camera, an old hand-wound 9.5mm Pathe. Dick, who was 16 and still in school at the time, was fortunate because he could not afford a camera on his own. In sixth form, he put on a film show for other pupils. He recalls reading copies of the school's *Amateur Cine World*, a magazine he remembers for its editor and because it was good on film techniques. The show was made up of film that Dick had shot of sports day activities, some local footage a friend had shot and a commercial film from Gibbs Dentifrieze, "a marvellous film which was full of little black demons who would prance around some large teeth... [It] went down very well as a comedy." This was not unlike the kind of shows he would later become involved in at the Whitehall Cine Society.

Cinemas were very popular, they were often full, you often had to queue to get in, so it was quite attractive to say, alright, we'll run some films, and the fact that they were silent, didn't worry people too much because they didn't expect anything else. And sometimes, someone would put a record on or tinkle away on the piano or something so you could talk to one another without it resounding around the room. There would have been quite a bit of that. People who had got several films would probably show at least partly their own, possibly a film of the 1937 Coronation or the celebrations or something local, and pad it out with some professional films which they'd got from these libraries.

Whitehall Cine Society was founded in 1932 "on the basis that this was a group of people that wanted to make their own films but wanted to come together to exchange ideas. That was, as I understand it, about the first of that type of society ... certainly there would still have been a lot of groups who were making films as groups and they would have been 16mm because someone would have a camera, almost certainly it would have been someone's camera, but film that the group could afford to buy." It appears that even by the time Ottley's *Making Home Movies* was published, societies were forming to nurture individual rather than group filmmaking.

In contrast to the Whitehall Society which used to show films in the Holborn Library Hall to packed audiences of 200 people, Harpenden Photographic Society, to which Dick also belonged, was a smaller local group of 25 members interested in still photography and three interested in filmmaking. The few cine enthusiasts were encouraged by the response from the shows they put on for the public: "People would come and look and providing things were moving, they were more or less happy, the idea that someone was making amateur films." For the last screening in 1938 (the Society broke up at the beginning of the war), they showed a 16mm film the members made called *Prize Prints*, "a story about a photographic society deciding that they would run a one-day competition and send people out to the countryside and they all get the same picture."

Recently Dick counted over 80 of his finished films, mostly animation he had been making since WWII. He made six war-time films including *War and the Joneses*. Two are animated: *Knights Are Still Brave*, about a knight who diffuses a bomb and *Meet Algy*, a brief film of animation and live action. *Meet Algy* depicts Algy, a man made from pipe cleaner who finds his true love. Another 9.5mm film is a single roll of of Dufay Colour film which shows flowers and the sun setting (typical of early colour amateur films). *Tour of Nigeria* is a rather grand title for two rolls of film shot on the 8mm stock he bought with a camera in Lagos when stationed there from 1943-5. Dick was still in Nigeria for VE day but having returned home prior to VJ day, he was able to find some 8mm film for the occasion to make *VJ*.

These war-time efforts amount to about 40 minutes of film. The puppet animation was carefully done and required little editing. The live action films were sparsely edited but otherwise titles were made and the reels joined together. The Nigeria footage is badly under-exposed, suggesting that the film stock was already out-of-date when Dick acquired it, a common occurrence during this period. Film stock tended to appear irregularly; sometimes it was found in the back of a shop or in someone's cupboard. Dick was aware of this and used to try and compensate for it, remembering that "if you had film that was six months out of date you gave it another half a stop or so."

Once in 1939, Dick was given a roll of film six years out-of-date. Although there were still existing supplies of stock still available in 1939, filmmaking was still an expensive hobby for Dick who was working at the Post Office dealing with workers' pensions. A reasonable camera would have cost about five pounds and he was earning 100 pounds a year, so even out-of-date film was appreciated. Before he started working in 1937, Dick had shot only one roll in two years.

He learned how to make titles at the Farnham Arts School while he was in the army. When Dick was first called up in November 1939, he was stationed at the Railway Training Centre in Hampshire. There, he got to know the people in charge of education and found that although they didn't publicise it, the army was quite happy to pay for their men to attend arts school. During extended tea breaks, Dick caught a bus to college and spent a few hours studying lettering. He was supposed to learn how to title book covers but eventually convinced his teacher to practice film titling. Dick continued to attend the art college throughout the 'phony war' until 1940 when the Railway Training Centre took in many injured servicemen from Dunkirk.

After Dunkirk "there was a period of grinding and from then on you wouldn't have been able to get film unless someone happened to have discovered [some] in the back corner somewhere." When I told him that the East Anglian Film Archive had a number of amateur films from the war, Dick rightly pointed out that it would have been on 16mm. Stock that was available for limited commercial or military use may have slipped into the hands of amateurs. But for most amateurs who were filming in the cheaper and thus more popular 9.5mm gauge, there was nothing available to buy. For those using 16mm, "a bit could have drifted amateur-wise because a commercial film needed it, but as far as I'm concerned, it was very little."¹⁷

While there was virtually no film available to buy at the time, laboratories were still busy catering to the commercial market, so the amateur who had film was still able to have it processed. Typically, Dick would film while home on leave and then send it off for processing so it would be

¹⁷Pathe introduced 9.5mm in November 1922, just months before Kodak announced the 16mm standard in June 1923. Today, 9.5mm is kept alive by a group of dedicated enthusiasts who meet as the '9.5 Group', splitting, perforating and selling their own film stock and publishing a quarterly magazine, *9.5*.

waiting for him when he came back three months later. Home processing was more common than today, and to compensate for poorly exposed film, he added a reducing agent. Those amateurs that developed and printed their film at home did so under difficult circumstances. "There were times when if an air raid turned up you couldn't be sure a light would stay on, or would stay on at the normal wattage."

I asked Dick if theatrical films and the Ministry of Information films in cinemas influenced his own filmmaking. The articles in *ACW* seem to suggest this but on the contrary, Dick said that emulating professional films was almost impossible, not only because of the lack of film stock but also because getting a group together at one time was simply not practical. For Dick, the cinema was a source of much needed entertainment and escapism.

The end of the war did not bring about a sudden increase in the number of amateur films being made:

There weren't as many people interested in film as there had been... It changed. It was still fairly difficult to get film in 1948... I got married in '46, and we were getting a house organised ... I'd got other interests... At the end of the war, people were pretty tired really, and tended to heave a sigh and sit back in the evenings more than they had done. Before the war, I used to rush home, grab a sandwich and go off and play tennis in the evening, and no-one had much energy for that. It was really the 1951 thing, the '51 exhibition was very much a sort of 'G up', very much apart from what was actually shown, it needed something to shake people up and get them going again.

When amateurs did start making films again, things had changed. As suggested in *ACW*, the idea of individually produced documentaries was more appealing than theatrical club films. The war had made people like Dick more independent, more "bolshy." Having been told what to do by the army for years, Dick even became adverse to wearing black shoes and buttoning up his shirt.

People had decided rather, that the idea of a group making a 16mm film was not all that good. Largely because you assembled a group of 15 people and three of them had all the say about what the productions were going to be and how they were going to be made and who was going to have what job. There was a slightly more bolshy outlook on life... a tendency of people to think in terms of making their own films. And what you can do, or what most people can do in the way of fiction, without a group of people is pretty limited... What happened was that Whitehall was doing these public shows, and most of the films were fairly serious, they were travel films or there were documentaries of sorts, pretty factual films. I'm not sure of the word documentary, because different people understand different things by it, factual films. So I always tried to produce something different.

In 1945, Andrew Buchanan wrote *Film And The Future*, a small book that addressed the effects of the war on the future of amateur filmmaking. He felt that the hardships of war had reaped significant changes for the future of sub-standard filmmaking, and was delighted that in 1943, a weekly British audience of over 1,000,000 people were watching 16mm films and over 5000 16mm

shows were offered every week. The world, he said, was "encircled by 16mm, as with a magic belt," and the amateur was able to take back a technology that prior to the war was his domain alone. With national recognition, the amateur's opportunities were "exceeding his wildest dreams" and the facilities for production and exhibition had never been so rich.¹⁸

Despite Buchanan's fervent encouragement (he was not alone), and perhaps because of the interest and investment the professional world now had in 16mm, the amateur did not go on to exploit the gauge as Buchanan had hoped. Buchanan's vision of films made by amateurs for public distribution and his belief that "there is no *fundamental* difference between the *individual* professional and amateur", confused the very idea of what it meant to work as an 'amateur' distinct from being a 'professional.' The label 'amateur,' originally comes from the Latin '*amare*' meaning 'to love.' But as Zimmermann notes, its meaning changed with the growth of 19th century capitalism when amateurism was associated with activities ranging "from bicycling to painting to drama."¹⁹ It was specifically the antithesis of 'professionalism' - a rational, publicly acknowledged, commercial system of exchange relations - hardly the passionate, autonomous, private and creative activities of the amateur. To embark on something as an 'amateur,' was and still is, to volunteer an interest during one's leisure time, at one's leisure, and most commonly within the areas of sports or arts. With so much commercial interest invested in 16mm, the equipment outgrew the needs of the potential amateur consumer. Increasingly used in documentaries, television and advertising, the industry of equipment manufacturers, laboratories and exhibitors exploited this mature technology well beyond the financial means of most amateurs. In effect, "the war merely amplified the technological dimensions of 16mm by dissolving its status as a consumer commodity."²⁰

Introduced in 1932, film stock was becoming faster and finer and Kodak realised that the 16mm gauge could be reduced even further. The same equipment that produced 16mm film could be used to make 8mm film with virtually no need for further investment in manufacturing. That it was exactly half the size of 16mm was no coincidence since it could be cut from the same sheets of film with no waste. Manufacturers like Bell & Howell and Kodak led the amateur away from the now professional 16mm gauge to the mutually convenient 8mm. Thus, above all else, it was convenience and economy that gave the amateur 8mm.²¹

The 8mm system had also benefited from war-time innovations in 16mm design and satisfied the majority of amateurs up through to the introduction of video. Only 'serious' amateurs stuck with 16mm which until the 1990s was the standard gauge for documentaries, news and television. By this time, it had been taken well beyond the reach of most non-professionals after the silver crisis in the late 1970s rapidly increased the cost of film stock.²² The 9.5mm gauge declined in Europe (it never really took off in the USA), due to a mixture of slack marketing, faster innovation in 8mm equipment and the growing popularity of 8mm outside of Europe.

¹⁸Buchanan, 1945, 62.

¹⁹Zimmermann, 1997, 75.

²⁰Zimmermann, 1995, 98.

²¹see Kattelle, 2000, for a history of the amateur gauge industry.

²²The price of silver rose from \$5 to \$50 an ounce between 1979 to 1980 after the Hunt brothers of Texas bought huge quantities of silver in a hedge against inflation. Even the television industry, which was the greatest consumer of 16mm film, considered this a further reason to begin using video in production.

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For all its potential, amateur filmmaking has drifted to wherever the manufacturers decided to take it. In turn, cine enthusiasts were able to remain economically independent from both the 1930s style of film club production and the later commercial industry which grew out of 16mm. Buchanan's vision of a distribution network of films made with the freedom of amateurism never really materialised and when amateur film does reach a mass audience now, it is usually used retrospectively as archival footage or is exploited for its comic effect. As stated earlier, amateur film indeed "collapsed into home movies" after the war. From today's perspective, Buchanan and Malthouse's predictions that the film industry, distribution market and audiences' tastes would cater to such a revolutionary shift in our understanding of the distinction between 'amateur' and 'professional,' seems naive.

This paper has discussed the development of amateur filmmaking from just prior to WWII until a decade later. It was a period of immense upheaval, not only in British society but also for personal cinema. By looking at typical books aimed at the amateur during this period, the only surviving magazine for the cine enthusiast and the comments by Dick Brandon, we see that this hobby which even its greatest supporters admitted had "retired for some time," was well equipped to adapt to changing circumstances. What began as a predominantly social hobby, one which was deeply influenced by the ideology of commercial cinema, gradually turned into an individualist pursuit infused with the growing ideology of the post-war nuclear family. There are, of course, exceptions and much I have not been able to dwell upon within the length of this paper.

It would be worthwhile to look at the minority of filmmakers who stuck with 16mm for it is that minority that produced some of the most historically significant amateur footage during the war. There were also a number of rich amateurs who never took up filmmaking as a social pursuit since they could afford to continue their hobby alone. It would also be instructive to specifically examine amateur film shot by Americans during the war, since unlike their British counterparts,

they had greater access to film stock, most of which was 16mm colour.

Here we have concentrated on the more popular side of the hobby - 9.5mm and the predicament of the cine club member. It was this majority of amateurs that the how-to books of the 1930s targeted and these were the people who sustained *ACW* throughout the war and then took up 8mm filmmaking post-war, developing home movie-making into what it is today.

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