‘Limelights and shadows’: popular and visual culture in South West England, 1880-1914

Submitted by Rosalind Claire Leveridge to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in May 2011.

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I certify that all the material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.
Abstract

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were an important period for popular shows involving the moving and projected image, yet there have been few sustained studies that have mapped optical entertainments systematically outside London or that have analysed the influence of such shows on early film exhibition. This thesis has profiled the popular and visual culture of five contrasting South West locations during this period, tracing the development and distribution of magic lantern shows and dioramas as well as identifying the local and touring companies who hosted film on its arrival in the region. Using the local press, the trade press, contemporary publications and ephemera, this thesis has reconstructed an account of local shows and culture which not only deepens our understanding of popular visual entertainments in regional contexts, but which also serves to stand as a comparison to other established urban and metropolitan paradigms and thus to contribute to a wider and more complex national picture. It advances the argument for a broader classification of such shows in response to local findings and for a more nuanced and detailed appraisal and understanding of their provenance and profiles, and the role film played within them.

In addition, this thesis interrogates early film exhibition in these resorts following the move to fixed-venue cinemas in the late 1900s and investigates the arrival of cinema and its emergence as a fledgling industry in the region. It offers an overview of investment into the business locally and evidences the varied set of partnerships and individuals responsible for financing the first cinemas here. Responses to the new technologies and local modifications to business models for cinemas and film exhibition are analysed and their diversity examined. Managerial relationships with communities are evidenced as an important contributory factor to the success of many local cinemas, permitting adaptations to the needs of patrons which boosted audiences and increased revenue. The variety of local interpretations of cinema discovered here reflects the social and cultural diversity of these selected sites, and is a key finding of this thesis.
Acknowledgements

For the life-changing opportunity to work on this project, I am indebted to Jane Spencer, Steve Neale, John Plunkett, and Joe Kember at the University of Exeter, who appointed me to the task. Nor would my participation in this research have been possible without the funding from the AHRC, for which I am sincerely grateful. Thanks are especially due to Joe Kember for sharing so much knowledge with me and for gently guiding me through the whole process with immeasurable kindness, tolerance and patience. To John Plunkett, thanks are due too for all his cheerful guidance.

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*Agricultural Journal*

*Bioscope*

*Boys’ Own Paper*

*British Medical Journal*

*Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*

*Chums*

*Cornishman (CM)*

*County Gentleman*

*Daily News*

*Daily Telegraph*

*Dundee Courier and Argus*

*Exeter Evening Post*

*Exmouth Journal*

*Fun*

*Glasgow Herald*
Hearth and Home

Horse and Hound

Illustrated Chips

Illustrated Police News

Ladies’ Treasury

Lethaby’s Sidmouth Journal and Directory (Lethaby’s)

Liverpool Mercury

Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper

Morning Post

North Devon Herald (NDH)

North Devon Journal (NDJ)

Northern Echo

Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger (OMLJ)

Pall Mall Gazette

Penny Illustrated Paper

Punch

Reynold’s Newspaper

Royal Cornwall Gazette

Sidmouth Herald and Directory (SHD)
Sidmouth Observer (SO)

The Dart: The Birmingham Pictorial

The Era

The Showman

The Star

The Standard

The Times

Torquay Directory and South Devon Journal (TDSDJ)

Torquay Times (TT)

Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post

Woman’s Signal

Weston Gazette (WG)

Weston Mercury (WM)

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World’s Fair

Young Gentleman’s Magazine
Introduction

The years 1880 – 1914 constituted a time in which a series of technological revolutions occurred in visual and other related media which contrived to have a profound and enduring impact on contemporary everyday social and cultural life. During this period, radical and fundamental shifts occurred in the way in which images were disseminated, viewed and consumed. Spectators, who at its outset were accustomed to viewing only black and white static images fixed in albums to be consumed in the home or colourful yet fleeting views screened in a magic lantern show, had, by the climax of this period, encountered the medium of film, moving pictures, and the exciting new social space of cinemas. This thesis focuses on this dynamic period of change. Through the close examination of optical exhibition in five contrasting South West locations it seeks not only to modify the current understanding of the cultural functions of popular visual entertainments in regional contexts at this time, but also to provide a substantive study to set beside other research into visual media.

The five towns of Sidmouth, Torquay, Barnstaple, Penzance, and Weston-Super-Mare, small, provincial, coastal locations in the South West of England, were deliberately chosen to provide a contrast to much of the other previous research in the field of optical entertainment, which has focused primarily on urban or working class areas. This selection of resorts with differing social, cultural, economic and demographic characteristics is a strategy designed also to examine the variety of local responses offered to the developing visual technologies during this time: optical entertainments, which included magic lantern shows, panoramas, dioramas, and early film, were surveyed in all these locations over the whole period in question. From this sustained and in-depth study emerges a full and detailed picture of exhibition practices; analysis of these findings highlights predominant local trends and patterns and offers new and unique insights into the leisure lives of these particular local communities. A further significant advantage of this multi-site approach lies in the identification not only of the similarities but evidently also the differences which exist between the individual localities which result from the presence of a rich social and cultural diversity, even within a relatively limited geographical location. Comparisons can thus be made between patterns of exhibition in sites as diverse as the popular resort of Weston-Super-Mare or the remoter setting of Penzance, which deepen our
understanding of the subtleties and complexities of local exhibition at this time.
Furthermore, since spread across the three counties of Devon, Somerset and Cornwall,
these five coastal resorts provide information which enables broader trends to be
identified and which collectively contributes to the construction of a wider, regional
picture.

Research into these resorts was undertaken as part of an AHRC-funded
project at the University of Exeter entitled “The Moving and Projected Image in the
South West, 1840-1914”, which has sought to profile the visual and performance
culture of the region during these years, including the regions’ three major cities of
Plymouth, Exeter and Bristol. Whilst shows involving moving and projected images
played a significant role in popular entertainments throughout this period, little
systematic work has been undertaken on mapping these entertainments or on examining
the influence of optical shows such as the magic lantern and dioramas on early British
film exhibition outside London. An important strand of the project has sought to
establish regional paradigms for screening practices prior to and following the move to
fixed-venue cinemas in the late 1900s and to interrogate the arrival of cinema and its
emergence as a fledgling industry in the region. Working across both the study of
nineteenth century popular entertainment and early film has produced evidence which
helps to illuminate our understanding of the continuities of screen practice between
nineteenth-century optical recreations and early twentieth-century film exhibition.
Bringing together the findings from these and future projects forms an essential part of
the on-going process to build a national picture of developments in optical technologies
which is both balanced and nuanced, a picture which should derive its very richness and
complexity from the diversity and multiplicity of locations it encompasses.

Significant and extensive research in the field of early film exhibition has been
already completed, less so, perhaps, in the area of magic lantern exhibition. Whilst it is
beyond the scope of this study to undertake a complete survey of either magic lantern
or early film studies, the following work may be considered to have a particular
resonance and significance for this thesis. Research by Richard Crangle and Mervyn
Heard in particular has mapped in detail the social and cultural history of the magic
lantern of the nineteenth century, and the many contributors to the volume Realms of
Light that they also edited together with Ine van Dooren, and that include Stephen
Bottomore and Jens Ruchatz, still collectively provide one of the most comprehensive
appraisals of lantern history from its earliest times to more contemporary contexts. Research carried out by Joe Kember has shed new light on the heritage and practices of illustrated lantern lectures and the commercial imperatives of showmanship, and his close examination of performance strategies has demonstrated the many continuities between nineteenth century popular entertainments and early film shows. Karen Eifler has offered a detailed examination of the way in which British welfare organisations used the magic lantern for fund-raising and propaganda purposes at the turn of the century, whilst Torsten Gärtner has explored Victorian van missions and their use of the magic lantern for training, propaganda and public lectures.

Previous research mostly offers broad histories of the lantern and positions it in national or international contexts, providing a strong general framework to support subsequent studies. Fewer studies, however, have been undertaken which focus specifically on the lantern in local contexts. One exception is Stephen Herbert’s “Slice of Lantern Life”, which documents lantern exhibition in Hastings in 1881: Herbert demonstrates how the local press can be utilised to build a picture of the extent and functions of lantern exhibition of a given period. Niamh McCole’s study of the magic lantern in Ireland for the period 1896-1906 is another example of how the local press can be used not simply to map the distribution of provincial lantern shows, but also here, by surveying reviews of its reception, to argue the existence of a distinct local visual culture. However, little systematic work has been done to detail the lantern entertainments in one locality over a sustained period of time, and from this evidence to investigate in depth the links between metropolitan and provincial exhibition, or to consider the contribution of projected image entertainment to local and regional visual culture and its wider implications for the national development of visual media. One outcome of the Exeter project has been to attempt to re-evaluate the role of the magic lantern as part of an extended history of popular visual entertainments. This thesis seeks also to contribute to the above body of research a detailed survey of lantern exhibitions in the five coastal resorts over the years 1896-1914, and to use this evidence to build a picture of the diversity of cultural functions which it served regionally during the years coinciding with the advent of film.

In the field of early film history, Rachael Low’s survey of the Victorian and Edwardian periods and John Barnes’ five volumes on Victorian cinema have both become classic works of reference. Michael Chanan’s history of the development of
British cinema has traced the developing aesthetics and wealth of influences on the culture of its early years. A number of extensive studies of early film exhibition in America have been carried out, such as Gregory Waller’s detailed research into provincial exhibition in the small town of Lexington, Kentucky. However most research in the field of early film exhibition in Britain has taken the form of numerous micro-historical studies of key periods, institutions, or individuals, exemplified by Jon Burrows’ work on the showman T.J. West, Simon Popple’s research into films of the Boer War period, Luke McKernan’s work on Charles Urban, and Stephen Bottomore’s examination of film and the Delhi Durbars of 1903 and 1911. John Hudson Powell, for example, has offered insights into film exhibition within the context of the myrioramas of the illustrious Poole family, David Berry has profiled the film pioneer William Haggar, and Matthew Solomon, André Gaudreault, Ian Christie, Tom Gunning and Richard Abel have all contributed to a collection of studies which illuminate the work of George Méliès. In particular, travelling shows and their exhibition practices have been the focus of much previous research. Extensive coverage is provided in the proceedings of the 2008 international conference Travelling Cinema in Europe edited by Martin Loiperdinger. Kevin Scrivens and Stephen Smith have also made a study of shows involving the travelling cinematograph, and Deac Rossell has examined the role of travelling exhibitors in early cinema. In a series of studies, Vanessa Toulmin has also contributed extensively to our knowledge of fairground practices involving the cinematograph, and more recently has explored exhibition practices in town-hall and music-hall shows during the early Edwardian years.

Many studies have focused on metropolitan practices or urban contexts, frequently in northern England. Luke McKernan’s work resulting from the ‘London Project’ has surveyed the social and cultural impact of the medium of film on the capital, providing new insights into the nature of audiences, the spread of cinema buildings, and the changes to social and leisure habits which cinema instigated. Simon Brown’s examination of cinemas as businesses as part of the same project set out to map the places and people which would constitute the basis of the new industry, which having established itself in London, spread its influence to other parts of the country and the wider world. Jon Burrows has also considered exhibition spaces in London, with a particular focus on the transition years following 1906, and has also recently expanded our knowledge of the working practices of significant showmen such as T.J.
West in Bournemouth, research which challenges some accepted paradigms regarding the emergence of cinema and offers new explanations of the connections between practices in London and the provinces. Together with Richard Brown, Burrows has also scrutinised the cinema boom of the late Edwardian years, seeking to interrogate the accepted narrative of economic investment and expansion in the early film business and to provide a study of entrepreneurs and companies which offers a revised history of this period based on statistical evidence. In addition, Andrew Shail has explored cinematograph exhibition from a post 1908 national perspective in his consideration of the influences of earlier modes of audience participation upon later practices. The essays which form the collection *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, edited by Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple and Patrick Russell, offer an in-depth study of an early film production company in northern England, exploring the relationships between its films and producers, audiences and exhibitors within a multi-regional framework. Other micro-historical surveys of individual British regions or localities have also been produced such as Adrienne Scullion’s research into the early years of the cinematograph in Scotland, Richard Brown’s exploration of exhibition in Bradford, Frank Gray’s work on the Hove pioneers, and Denis Condon’s examination of Dublin audiences. Other local studies include David Williams’ detailed surveys of cinema in Leicester and Durham, Damer Waddington’s work on Jersey, and Helen Richards’ study of cinema in Bridgend, Wales. These all have as their strength an in-depth focus and can offer detailed insights into a town or a region, and the provincial distribution and local performance practices of early film.

As individual studies they are self-limiting, yet from the wealth of detail which they provide on a range of sites and events, a national history of early film exhibition begins to emerge which is rich and varied and which takes account of the contrasts between the urban and rural, the metropolitan and provincial. The significance of such studies lies in their number and diversity, and in the sharply focused approach which they adopt in their examination of key periods, personalities and locations. Their limitations, however, are self-evidently their length and scope, and even when considered collectively, the picture they provide is incomplete and uneven. To date the greatest focus has been on exhibition patterns in London: evidently, these do not necessarily represent practices which occurred in the regions. Little attention has been paid to small provincial towns or, with the possible exceptions of Brighton and
Bournemouth, to the genteel resorts of the South coast.\textsuperscript{21} Few studies have looked at pre-cinematic issues relating to early film or have mapped developments in moving and projected image entertainments over a prolonged period. Little detailed work has been undertaken on contexts for early film prior to fixed-venue cinemas or on investigating the impact of film on the programmes of the touring shows which first hosted it. Similarly there has been little analysis of the role of cinemas at local level or consideration given to the relationships which developed between managers and the communities they served. Little in-depth study has been made of the cinema industry in order to examine the range of different business models which were in existence in the pre-war years or to make comparisons between the diversity of establishments which called themselves “cinema”. Indeed few scholars have sought to investigate beyond the pattern of investment into cinema expansion outlined by Nicholas Hiley, in which he privileged the role of “disinterested” speculative investors from outside the industry, concluding that their main concern was profit rather than sustainability.\textsuperscript{22} In their recent work on Edwardian cinemas, Jon Burrows and Richard Brown have begun to redress this balance, furthering our understanding of the complexities of the film exhibition business and highlighting in particular the importance to the sector of small independent businesses, an analysis which opens the way to further research in this field.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite the existence of these numerous wide-ranging studies, therefore, it has been widely acknowledged amongst cinema scholars that more local and specialised research into early film exhibition practices is still required, and it is to this need which this thesis seeks to respond. With its focus on a range of contrasting coastal sites, it seeks to contribute to this process by its adoption of a multi-site, regional approach, which has produced a substantial and detailed map of practices and patterns of film exhibition in five very different towns in the South West. It thus provides material from a regional sample of a range of sites and venues which enables a comparative assessment of the different forms of film exhibition locally and regionally, but which also serves to highlight the complexity and variety of these film entertainments as part of a wider, national context. In his review of Gregory Waller’s detailed chronicle of local film entertainments in the southern city of Lexington in America, Tom Gunning has identified the value of this type of study and has suggested how, by mapping systematically the norms of local exhibition patterns, a broader, national picture can
By means of its broad focus yet with a detailed narrative, this thesis seeks not only to enrich our knowledge and understanding of regional film exhibition, but also to contribute significantly to a much wider national debate.

This thesis covers the years 1880 – 1914, a period selected to encompass both the years of ascendancy for the magic lantern as well as the arrival and early years of the new medium of film. The intentions of this thesis, as stated, are to seek to establish regional paradigms for lantern and film exhibition during this time through the identification and analysis of local exhibitors, practices, contexts and audiences in these five selected South West coastal resorts. To gain an overview of contemporary developments and a perspective from within the industry itself, trade journals such as the Bioscope, the Optical Magic Lantern Journal, the Showman, and the World’s Fair were consulted, as well as The Era, which with its extensive, regular coverage of theatre, music hall and the arts from both London and numerous regional venues is of special importance in providing a national overview for the period. Contemporary tourist guides, local maps, handbills, programmes, photos and other ephemera have also been surveyed wherever possible, and make a significant contribution to the creation of a wider picture of the entertainments and visual culture of the region. Company records of cinema companies have been consulted in the National Archives, which offer information regarding directors and shareholders. However, the evidence for this study has principally been found in the local newspapers published in each resort, in particular the entertainment advertisements, editorials, local news, correspondence and reviews columns. Of these, in Weston-Super-Mare and Torquay complete runs of two publications, the Weston Mercury and the Weston Gazette in each resort exist whilst holdings of the two papers for Sidmouth, the Sidmouth Herald and the Sidmouth Observer, whilst incomplete, were substantial. The North Devon Journal offered the most complete coverage of Barnstaple events and in Penzance The Cornishman was consulted, a complete run existing in both cases.

Collectively, these provide a unique and hugely valuable resource from which a substantial local, and regional, picture of optical entertainments at this time may be established. Advertisements and notices can provide factual detail concerning companies, shows, venues, and prices: surveying and mapping these over a period of time reveals additional information regarding the seasonal patterns of entertainment, the frequency of visits by companies and shows, the popularity of the venues, and the
status of the shows based on their ticket prices, data which can be used comparatively. Reviews of shows, exhibitions and performances, although mediated through the pen of the arts reporters or editors who personally experienced them, offer valuable insights into local exhibition practices and audience reception, and provide eye witness accounts for our further analysis. Niamh Mc Cole, using the local press for her micro-study of magic lantern exhibition in provincial Ireland, has contended that the reviewers whose accounts she utilises could not be considered as experts or critics since they were presenting their views as “everyman” and as “newcomers to a novel form of entertainment.”

This was certainly not the case in many of the South West resorts, where a reading of reviews of this type over an extended period of time reveals the continuities which existed within local publications, and where individual journalists, critics or reviewers, known to their readership via their pennames or initials, consistently covered local shows, events and exhibitions over many issues, months and years. These local reviewers were able to refer to previous performances or metropolitan shows, and covered a diversity of arts which they critiqued with an experienced eye. It would be wrong to assume, moreover, that all local critics were merely amateurs experiencing only the limited diet of the provincial repertoire: whilst smaller or more distant locations might have suffered a certain cultural insularity, others maintained firm connections with the wider arts world and clearly demonstrated their awareness of metropolitan entertainments and trends in their other columns.

A sustained study of local newspapers allows an identification of the various political affiliations and editorial stances adopted, vital to an informed understanding of the texts they contain: the influence of these editorial positions and political bias, whether subtle or substantial, is revealed in press coverage of local communities and culture. This is typified by the example of the Torquay Regatta where quite opposing attitudes to the annual presence of the fairground are displayed by the Torquay Times and the Torquay Directory, papers of different political persuasions and with different editorial policies. Niamh Mc Cole considers editorial bias a further limitation of relying on local material since, she argues, it can never be assumed that “newspapers fully and accurately spoke for, to and about all people in the community.” Whilst this is true, two strategies may be used to address this concern. Firstly, as previously stated, an understanding of editorial bias contributes towards a more informed analysis of local material. Secondly, a reading, wherever possible, of more than one newspaper for each
location allows a more nuanced and detailed picture of local culture to emerge: thus, for the purposes of this thesis, two papers were regularly sampled in each resort.29 These local press columns offer a window on the world of their communities and culture: their reports and reviews uniquely provide a rich and rewarding source of detailed information about local exhibition practices, one which has hitherto remained largely unexplored and which can contribute to a new understanding of the social and cultural importance of optical entertainment of this time.

Though sharing an identity as coastal resorts, the very different social, economic, demographic and cultural profiles of the locations involved provide opportunities for analysis and comparison to be made at a local as well as regional and national level. (Figs. 1, 2). Sidmouth and Torquay, whilst both resorts on the South Devon coast, were nevertheless very different in terms of their size, infrastructure, clientele, and facilities, and constitute respectively the smallest and largest towns in this study. Though benefiting early on from a railway link in 1874, Sidmouth’s perceived remoteness, few permanent amenities and lack of summer entertainments to attract day trippers meant that it remained small and relatively undeveloped during this period.30 By contrast, even from the decade before the coming of the railway in 1854, Torquay began to attract visiting gentry, aristocracy and even royalty to its fashionable hotels and parades.31 A mere five and a half hours from the capital at the end of the nineteenth century, it functioned predominantly as a health resort, visited by the elderly and invalid, and remained popular with the leisured and wealthy classes who rented villas in which to over-winter in the favourable climate. Up until the First World War, as Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard have shown, Torquay retained a “select” image, “patronised by an upper-middle and upper-class clientele attracted by the society life of the town: the promenading on the Strand and on Victoria Parade, the balls at the town’s baths and its many hotels, and the annual Regatta and review of the fleet.”32
Fig. 1. Map of Western England in 1893, showing the resorts of Sidmouth, Torquay, Penzance, Barnstaple and Weston-Super-Mare.\textsuperscript{33}

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<tr>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>33,245</td>
<td>38,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penzance</td>
<td>23,035</td>
<td>23,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weston-Super-Mare</td>
<td>18,275</td>
<td>19,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstaple</td>
<td>9,698</td>
<td>14,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidmouth</td>
<td>4,033</td>
<td>5,612</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2. Population figures for South West resorts for 1901 and 1911.\textsuperscript{34}
From the fin de siècle and onwards into the new century, these five resorts exhibited a marked diversity in terms of the type, sites, frequency and quality of entertainments on offer. When film first arrived in the South West region in 1896, it met with a fragmented and disparate set of entertainments and attractions which reflected the distinct social and cultural profile of each location. Whilst many parallels existed, there were marked contrasts too between each resort in terms of their localised attitudes to leisure and pleasure, and the issues which arose from the often conflicting interests of authorities, showmen, local residents and visitors. Compared to the larger and busier resorts, a relatively impoverished visual culture prevailed in the East Devon resort of Sidmouth at this time, and constraints on providing consistent, high-quality entertainment seemed numerous. The town still only possessed one venue of distinction, the Manor Hall, with other amusements taking place intermittently in church halls and the Drill Hall. Most entertainments continued to be amateur and of local provenance: the Choral and Orchestral Society performed several times each year, and there was an annual carnival and occasional Regatta. Whilst touring companies making their way along the coast from Dorset, or coming up from South Devon, occasionally stopped off for a night in Sidmouth, there was little regularly anticipated entertainment, and none which played for a whole week.

1898 was a livelier year, in which the Blackhawk Negro Minstrels, Ginnett’s Circus, and Lord John Sanger’s British Olympia and Hippodrome all paid the town a visit.35 George Grossmith, the humorist, George Villiers the Boer War lecturer, and Rene Bull the war artist also entertained in Sidmouth in the early years of the new century.36 Yet the editor of the Sidmouth Herald complained in the summer of 1901 that the week had been “decidedly dull” and again in 1903 that it had been “one of the dullest of the dull”.37 “A state of lethargy” prevailed in perhaps the most worthy of Sidmouth’s few societies, the Literary and Scientific Institution, and by the following year it had closed.38 The resort attracted too few visitors, and could not compete with livelier and larger Exmouth just along the coast, or the grandeur of Torquay, which they looked towards across the bay: “There are no special attractions for the Whitsun trippers” complained one reporter in 1905.39 None were apparently provided either for the residents in the town – instead the solution suggested by the press was to take a train to other seaside resorts nearby. Throughout the spring and summer of 1909, the tensions between Sidmouth Urban Council, entertainment providers, and residents were
running especially high. Correspondents in the press reacted angrily to moves to restrict and control what little entertainment existed in the town by some Councillors, who ventured the view that Sidmouth “which enjoyed popularity of a unique kind, did not cater for trippers.”

For the first time, Anderton and Rowland, well-respected local showmen and one of the few travelling shows regularly to visit were refused permission to rent space in the town. The following month, entertainments on the foreshore were banned. Sidmouth approached the new decade in a state of conflict over its own identity and future: whilst a regular pattern of entertainment consisting of lantern lectures and visiting theatrical companies was slowly becoming established, the town belatedly began to interrogate itself as other resorts had already been doing for a decade or more: “A larger question is inevitably opened up, that of the future of our town. … public opinion cannot be said to exist until we have made up our minds what it is we wish our town to become, until we have realised it as we intend it ultimately to be. But at what are we trying to aim? What is our ideal?”

On the North Devon coast, entertainment in the coastal market town of Barnstaple catered mostly for its residents; it also acted as a regional centre for the outlying villages in this predominantly rural area. Visitors and day-trippers seeking a destination in North Devon were more likely to favour Lynton and Ilfracombe, two quiet, genteel resorts nearby. Despite good rail connections, Barnstaple’s distance from London, and even from larger regional towns such as Exeter, contributed to a certain sense of insularity and self-dependency, manifest in both the local press and events and activities undertaken there. A yearly round of poultry shows, horse fairs, honey shows, flower exhibitions and summer fetes, linked firmly to the seasonal or agricultural calendar, formed a major part of the town’s activities. Other events stemmed from the many church and social groups, or had a political foundation, in a town with a keen interest in Liberal politics.

With less distractions to offer than some resorts, pride and interest were taken by local people in all aspects of its provision, and entertainment of all kinds was warmly welcomed in Barnstaple - it was only the lack of it which drew criticism. Theatrical entertainment, in particular, seemed sporadic and irregular, attracting complaints from correspondents to the press, one of whom demanded to know whether the theatre was “to prove a ‘white elephant’ during the coming season, or be used as a means of education and amusement for the public of Barnstaple? If Bideford and
Ilfracombe can induce theatrical companies to visit their towns...surely there should be no difficulty for the authorities of the Barnstaple Theatre to acquire the services of first-class companies, as it is generally acknowledged that the town is provided with one of the best-equipped theatres in the West.\textsuperscript{43} Five years later, in response to similar complaints, whilst the management of the theatre attributed the lack of shows to a depression in the theatrical world, which meant that it was impossible to book an engagement, it was more evidently the case that long distances and small audiences were not always attractive inducements to touring companies.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet despite the lengthy rail journey, a surprising number of touring theatrical and musical companies, dioramas, circuses and menageries regularly, if infrequently, reached North Devon. Barnstaple thus experienced a pattern of summer circuses or ‘Wild West shows’, and winter dioramas, lantern lectures, and theatrical companies, which were in general both well-attended and well-received. Less conflict between the authorities and these providers of amusement seemed apparent in Barnstaple than in other resorts: indeed, there were many instances of positive collaboration. Free use was given of the municipally owned Albert Hall which facilitated Friday afternoon concerts which attracted visitors, holiday crowds were positively welcomed and provided for wherever possible, and at the town’s most anticipated event, the Great Fair, the local committee worked with showmen, for example providing a water supply to the fairground in 1908 at the Council’s expense.\textsuperscript{45} Barnstaple fair was an event with which the whole town identified: welcomed by all, it was given legitimacy and respectability by its opening ‘Toast and Ale’ ceremony conducted and attended by civic dignitaries. In the absence of the attributes possessed by other resorts, such as sand and sea, Barnstaple came to realise the value of its fair as attraction for visitors, who in 1908 came in droves. “So great was the inrush from neighbouring towns and from distant places that the attendance established a record....the popularity of the event as a holiday fixture is undoubtedly increasing.”\textsuperscript{46}

Located on the western tip of the South West peninsula, Penzance shared a similar sense of insularity and remoteness from the capital and even from other centres in the South West. Despite the undoubted beauty of its natural setting and the construction of Brunel’s Tamar Bridge in 1859 which linked it by rail to London in 1866, the town consistently failed to attract the visitor numbers it sought in the final decades of the nineteenth century and in its own eyes came a poor second to resorts
such as neighbouring Falmouth, which seemed to have more attractions on offer. An editorial in *The Cornishman* noted the careful preparations for tourists to Penzance in July 1896 – “water is economised, drains flushed, cars made ready, and steamers are overhauled and painted” – which were made in vain.47 “The glorious weather of the past three months has been a tempting invite to tourists and summer visitors,” the article continued, “but they don’t come.”48 Eight years later the press were still lamenting the lack of visitors, when at Easter “Penzance bore a quiet holiday appearance largely in consequence of the large numbers who went to Truro.”49 A month prior to the building of the new Pavilion, the author of a new guide book to Cornwall, whilst praising “the great natural advantages of the resort”, lamented “the absence of any intelligent effort to make use of them.”50

Central to any successful seaside resort at this time was the focal point of the Promenade - Penzance’s dismal sea front seemed symbolic of the lack of funds and imagination invested in the buildings and amenities of the town as a whole: “For the first hundred yards or so there is a dilapidated sea wall, surmounted by a ruinous rail. Then the whole thing has collapsed, and forms a confused mass of earth and granite blocks, unexpectedly surmounted by a number of inverted tree-stumps whose broken roots point forlornly skywards.”51 Traditionally, the local press often focused more on daily working life or the colonies and the Cornish compatriots who had settled there than on visitors and attractions closer to home, in a town which concentrated on exploiting its natural assets of sea trade, farming and mining, rather than on the needs of tourism. Penzance’s geographical remoteness evidently also had an important influence on the provision of entertainments in the town. Some major touring spectacles managed to incorporate Penzance and other Cornish towns into their circuit: Joshua Dyson, for example, paid his first visit in March 1898, with Joseph Poole’s Myriorama arriving the following month and Albany Ward with his Velograph in October.52 Whilst Bostock and Wombwell’s Menagerie also brought their show to Penzance in the same season, it was their first appearance for ten years in the town. Like Sidmouth and other smaller resorts, therefore, there was also a heavy dependency on regionally and locally-sourced amateur entertainments, which frequently took the form of musical concerts, such as by Penzance Choral Society or Penzance Military Band, church-inspired lantern or cinematograph shows and lectures, or the annual Corpus Christi Fair.53 Whilst St. John’s Hall, opened in 1867, provided a dignified venue capable of
hosting a range of entertainments from variety shows, theatrical companies and trades exhibitions to Kitty Loftus or the Festival of Empire, the neighbouring Central Hall was less successful (Fig.3).\textsuperscript{54} In 1897, for example, it was said to have had “a dull season”, following total receipts of £89 and a profit of just £13.\textsuperscript{55} In 1904, a local artist wrote to the press voicing the need for a theatre in Cornwall, a project which the editor considered as “Utopian” in an environment “where crowded houses do not fall to the lot of many touring companies.”\textsuperscript{56} The arrival of the first of Penzance’s three cinemas in 1910, and the construction of a luxurious new pavilion in August 1912, gave much-needed impetus to the cultural activities of a resort which, as one press editorial suggested, had hitherto dozed “in a lethargic sleep.”\textsuperscript{57} Penzance Pavilion not only proved a venue for audiences “delighted to have somewhere to go to spend a pleasant evening, it also had repercussions for the wider entertainment industry locally, and cinematographic entertainments in particular, a theme which will be explored more fully in Chapter Five.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Fig. 3.} St. John’s Hall. Courtesy of the Morrab Library, Penzance.
In the North Somerset coastal town of Weston-Super-Mare, a vibrant culture existed in which a wide range of entertainments to please all was offered in its many and varied venues. Along the sands lay the lawns and promenades, and behind these existed select streets such as the Boulevard: here, prestigious venues such as the Victoria Hall and the Assembly Rooms regularly attracted artistes of a high standard with a London or national reputation.Visiting theatre companies, dioramas, operas, celebrity lecturers, and a significant number of high-class musical performances from orchestras and individuals contributed to busy summer and winter seasons. Weston’s select residents favoured rational amusements and such pleasures as daytime art classes and scientific lecture courses at their own School of Science and Art in the heart of the town, frequent lantern lectures, and membership of the Weston Philharmonic Society or

![Grand Pier, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association](image)

**Fig. 4.** Grand Pier, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association
the Literary Guild. Social, religious, temperance and benevolent groups were in abundance, carrying out programmes of charitable and church good works, and providing paternalistic guidance and worthwhile occupation for those “who otherwise would find recreation and amusement by frequenting the streets” through agencies such as St. John’s Ambulance, the Band of Mercy, or the Boys’ Brigade.

But Weston was predominantly a seaside resort which could attract tens of thousands of day-trippers at the Whitsun or August Bank holidays, and thus had to meet the challenge of entertaining them. The concentration of working-class holidays into Bank Holiday weeks posed problems. “At the seaside, “John Walton notes, “the usual considerations of public order and morality were entangled with the thorny problem of identifying the best-paying visitor market.” Weston habitually displayed an ambivalent attitude towards the hordes which descended from train and steamer: on one hand it enjoyed the increased revenue, whilst simultaneously deploring the rowdy behaviour which inevitably resulted in appearances before the courts the following morning. Weston could boast two piers, open to anyone with 2d to spare, and its vast lawns, promenades and sands were a huge and colourful playground: together they formed a socially and culturally inclusive space, in which all shades of respectability were to be found (Fig.4). Weston seaside presented itself as a “theatre of wonders” where “entertainers were everywhere, on the sands, in the parks and pavilions, even on the streets.”

Throughout this period, Torquay continued its attempts to maintain the sophisticated and select image which it had carefully cultivated over many years. Leisure practices in the town remained largely segregated along class lines, and its entertainment, broadly dictated by the cultural ideology of its dominant elite, continued to be provided in a variety of select venues such as the Bath Saloons or the Theatre Royal and Opera House. The tension between those who wished to develop a summer season and open up the town to a wider social mix of visitors, and those who wished, like one lady villa resident, to “see Torquay remain in the future as in the past”, intensified and remained a hotly contested topic throughout during the first decade of the new century. John Walton notes that: “[i]nvestment in amenities at Torquay was
held back at the turn of the century by ‘the acute and permanent division of opinion...between the mass of residents on the one hand and the traders and boarding house keepers on the other.’ A powerful lobby, residents feared the town would become “a mere resort of trippers in summer and of next-to-nobody in winter” and petitioned the Council repeatedly to build the Kursaals, pavilions and pleasure gardens, that they believed would enable Torquay to guard its elite status: “The problem awaiting solution”, ventured one editorial column writer, “is not only how to get the leisured classes, but how to keep them.”

Outside observers, whose opinions were frequently published in its own press, characterised Torquay as “starchy”, “sad”, and “deadly dull”. These tensions and conflicts impacted enormously on the provision of transport, accommodation, entertainment and amusement in the town: “villadom” fought greater democratisation and preferred to keep leisure select. Others began to challenge this cultural domination by the elite, and campaigned for wider provision for day and weekly visitors, trams, and the greater availability of cheap seats for the town’s working classes. The periodical Today proffered the view in 1905 that whilst Torquay was “the most beautifully built town in England”, culturally speaking it was dull: “In
Torquay, the residents do not hanker after entertainment. They rarely go to the theatre: only a prima donna will draw them in sparse numbers to a concert at the Bath Saloons; and when they go on the pier they are a subject of curiosity to the casual visitor.”68 As another correspondent remarked, “innovations are taboo in Torquay.”69

Though subject to the pressures of modernity and progress, its identity consistently under scrutiny from within and without, this still-fashionable resort attempted to keep much of its class and culture unchanged as it went into the twentieth century. In the summer of 1909, this identity continued to be contested between on one hand the Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, tradesmen and boarding houses seeking to promote the resort for pleasure and profit, and on the other, those who feared its consequent degradation and vulgarisation. Another editorial in 1909 strongly attacked those who held what it considered to be backward-looking views: “They fought against the introduction of the trams, they would close the Princess Gardens to the public, muzzle every dog in the Borough to prevent it barking, prevent children going on to the Torre Sands without their parents or nurse; and in fact devise every possible annoying restriction which would result in the gratification of their own selfish desires.”70 It was a conflict which remained unresolved as Torquay moved into the next decade.

These tensions, between those seeking the provision of popular amusements and those wishing to uphold the social tone, form the subject of the opening chapter of this thesis. Whilst the five chapters are sequenced chronologically, there is also a conceptual framework underpinning their organisation. Whilst the last three chapters map out the advent of cinema in the region and track its development from early film exhibition in touring shows until the establishment of the first cinemas, the first two chapters serve to introduce the communities and culture which hosted its arrival and to explore these resorts as contexts for popular and visual entertainment. Covering the whole period therefore, Chapter One takes the two resorts of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare as case studies and explores in depth the complex relationships between the authorities – the councillors, police and press – and the pleasure crowds who thronged the popular amusements of this period. With reference to the work of Rob Shields on marginal areas and John Walton’s extensive research on British seaside resorts, it attempts to highlight issues arising from the exercise and marginalisation of popular entertainments in the liminal areas and local contexts of these two seaside resorts.71
The two resorts of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare were selected as contrasting sites which occupied very different positions in the resort hierarchy: whilst, as we have seen, the former was Devon’s premier resort, attuned to the needs of its elite and wealthy long-stay visitors and residents, Weston had a reputation for being a popular playground for working-classes trippers. Yet at the time of Torquay’s annual Regatta fair, and on the weekends and Bank Holidays when crowds filled Weston’s seafront, both resorts shared an anxiety when faced with the challenge to order and disciplined behaviour which they perceived the holiday crowds to pose. Chapter Two focuses on the interface between these forces and explores the responses of the authorities in each to this recurrent situation. It examines the range of factors – social, cultural, legal, and economic – which led to conflict in the relationships between the authorities, pleasure seekers and public space, and considers the strategies used to limit and control engagement with popular amusements in each town. Evidence from these two case studies is used to suggest that participating in the popular pleasure activities of the fair or the pier rarely led to the disorder feared by many residents and authorities, and to demonstrate that in all but a handful of instances, crowds self-regulated their behaviour and were relatively orderly. This chapter also seeks to recover a sense of the nature of these early popular mass entertainments and to provide an insight into attitudes by the prevailing authorities towards those who sought to indulge in them, illustrating the clear social and cultural hierarchies which continued to predominate in these resorts at this time and the extent to which authorities sought to exercise control over the leisure lives of seaside visitors and residents alike. In two of the foremost resorts of the South West region, it establishes a picture of the entertainment culture in existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which will serve to contextualise and underpin the study of early cinema in these resorts which forms the basis of the final three chapters.

Chapter Two focuses on the period 1896 – 1914, and takes as its starting point the years 1896 and 1897, years in which film was beginning to appear and to establish itself in the region, surveying first the contribution of the lantern to local visual entertainments in the South West at this time. At the beginning of this period, the magic lantern was unquestionably firmly embedded into everyday life at every level. Its success as a medium for spectacular entertainment had been dominated by the ghost shows which had originated at the London Polytechnic with the famous stage illusion
‘Pepper’s Ghost’, and which had drawn audiences to fairgrounds and theatres all over the country. Yet it was not simply its presence in such large, institutionalised contexts which had made the magic lantern such a part of everyday life and within almost everyone’s experience: Joe Kember, narrating the shifting balance of entertainments at this time, attributes the continued popularity of the magic lantern to “the wide range of cultural functions it was able to serve.” This range of functions would evolve further over the subsequent decades, a process given impetus by emerging technologies. “Technical progress in the lantern trade,” notes Richard Crangle, “was inseparable from its institutional and commercial progress as an entertainment and instructional medium.” The increasing availability of photographic images which could be identically reproduced and widely disseminated was of especial significance to the popular genre of the formal lecture, which began to dominate usage of the magic lantern from the early 1880s. “Because of the general acceptance of the photographs’ ability to represent faithfully and accurately,” argues Robert Nelson, “the tenor of slide shows shifted from illusion to realism, from phantasmagoria to science.”

At one end of the scale were sophisticated and complex performances such as those featuring the spectral effects of Strange and Wilson’s Aetherscope and their dramatic interpretation of ‘Faust’ or ‘Storm of Thoughts’ at the Bath Saloons, Torquay, or the polished professionalism of Sir Robert Ball and his spectacularly illustrated “Universe in Motion”. At the other lay a myriad of ways in which the magic lanterns were positioned within the grasp – figuratively, literally, economically, and technically – of ordinary members of the community. Their affordability meant that magic lanterns, in their simplest and most compact forms, were readily available to families, churches and benevolent groups. Moreover they were, at a fundamental level at least, technically accessible, and did not require sophisticated equipment, a complicated set-up, vast spaces, or a skilled operator to achieve a reasonable public performance. As diary entries for one Robert Hart, Vicar of Takeley in Essex reveal, the purchase of a magic lantern in London on 20 November 1882 could be followed merely a few days later by its use in a show to members of the Dunmow Friendly Society. Amateurs such as Hart were in abundance - the number of similar magic lantern exhibitions being given across the country was astonishing, as an 1897 interview with a slide producer in Titbits revealed: “You may take it roughly, multiplying the parishes by the number of lantern exhibitions given and by the pictures presented at each, that this process of conveying
instruction and amusement presents to the eye of the British public millions of pictures in a single season.”78 Lanterns were even versatile enough to be used with ease as home entertainment: an article in The Ladies’ Treasury for May 1888 posits it as “the latest amusement which finds favour at ‘at homes’...on a new plan”. Steve Humphries identifies the last two decades of the nineteenth century as the heyday of the lantern at home, when “magic lanterns were almost as common in middle-class homes as television sets are today.”79

In a unique way, magic lanterns could bring ordinary people into close contact with technology and allow them to experiment with both new and old science: “The room is suddenly darkened,” a journalist for The Ladies Treasury observed, “and a curtain withdrawn discloses, reflected on a sheet, photographs of some of the assembled circle. These having been printed on glass from the negative, by a few moments exposure to a gas jet, form fine transparencies.”80 The success of this form of “amusement”, embodying both science and entertainment, was predicated on the simplicity of the lantern and the photographic technique: participants were therefore not alienated by the technology, but on the contrary derived a sense of satisfaction their ability to use it: “It is surprising,” the article continued,” what life-like and amusing effects can be thus produced by the most inexperienced amateur in photography.”81 The advent of photographic slides combined with the development of hand-colouring techniques permitted amateurs to achieve stunning effects and lantern shows were commonplace for photographic societies across the South West. One Reverend Henning, addressing the Torquay Camera Society, showed slides both “numerous and beautiful” all of which he had produced himself.82 A succession of commentaries in the British Medical Journal on the Christmas festivities narrated how lantern slides were used to bring “sunshine in sickness” when brought into London hospitals, where it was hoped, they would produce effects to “rival the therapeutical powers of the materia medica,” one of many uses which reflected how, since not always requiring a theatrical or semi-theatrical setting or professional operator, lanterns could provide an entertainment which was both adaptable and flexible, and well-suited to a wide diversity of locations and institutions.83

In the light of the known importance of the form and function of lantern shows nationally, this thesis will focus on local patterns of exhibition in the five selected regional resorts and examine the diversity of purposes for which illustration by
magic lantern was employed. The cultural functions which lantern illustration served in each location in the remaining pre-war years will then be considered in detail in this chapter, which further seeks to examine the implications for the lantern of the arrival of film, and to evidence examples of collaboration and continuities between the two media. It will suggest that use of the lantern was firmly embedded locally, as nationally, and that throughout the early years of film in these locations lantern shows remained numerous and diverse, only experiencing a decline in popularity towards the later years of the period in question. Evidence from local material also positions the lantern as a medium which could serve the whole community and which was able to cut across social and cultural boundaries, meeting the needs of all sectors of society, and functioning as a tool for both education and amusement. This chapter seeks to evidence and analyse the function of shows involving the magic lantern and establishes the range of performative practices and patterns for exhibition which manifest themselves here. By establishing the traditions of optical entertainments locally, the continuities between earlier optical entertainments and those involving the new medium of film may be investigated and compared. Chapter Two therefore seeks to map out the position of the magic lantern as part of an inclusive account which not only contributes to the interpretation and understanding of optical recreation locally, regionally and nationally, but which further serves the important function of contextualising the arrival of early cinema in these resorts, the focus of the three subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three considers the first years following the arrival of film in the region, and attempts to survey the commercial and aesthetic aspects of the medium and to interrogate its convergence with other entertainment forms. It begins to map the organisation and distribution of film exhibition in the five South West resorts and to analyse the various strategies, contexts and practices adopted by early exhibitors to exploit the medium within the region following its prompt arrival from London in the autumn of 1896. The early months of its fledgling appearances in a variety of locations across the capital following the presentation of the Lumière Cinematographe by Felicien Trewey, and the first demonstration by Robert Paul of his Theatrograph on the same day in 1896, have been well documented by film historians such as John Barnes, Rachael Low, and Deac Rossell. Significant to the appropriation of early film in a regional context is the fact that in the few short months before its arrival there, perceptions of the new medium had already undergone a major transformation. To
recall that film was first viewed in locations associated especially with scientific
discovery and invention, is to recognise that for a short while this new apparatus
designed to project moving pictures was celebrated principally as a technological
marvel, its potential as an entertainment medium yet to be realised. Solutions to the
problem of how best to exploit film had been found even before it went out from
London: as early as 19 March, Paul’s Theatrograph had begun to form part of magician
David Devant’s shows at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, commencing what would be a
two-year tenure at the Alhambra Theatre, Leicester Square shortly afterwards. 85 In
merely a month, therefore, Robert Paul’s invention had metamorphosed from scientific
wonder, to sideshow. To some, these developments were a betrayal of cinema’s
dignified scientific origins: “The Kinematograph having literally at its birth been
dragged into the service of the music hall as a novel and interesting form of
entertainment,” warned V.E. Johnson in the journal *Photography*, “its scientific value is
likely to be obscured, if not temporarily lost...”86

Also significant to the regional study of the appropriation of film, is the
knowledge that some less dignified settings nurtured film in its infancy. At a new
enterprise founded in Whitechapel called ‘Wonderland’, Paul’s Theatrograph was just
one amongst a miniature World’s Fair of visual attractions, ranging from serpent-
swallowing to tattooing, defined as an “optical illusion”, and situated in a hall designed
as “practically one vast promenade, round which the audience can freely circulate and
inspect the various side attractions of living ‘freaks’ and natural curiosities with which
the place will be literally lined, interspersed by numerous stalls at which curious and
interesting manufactures and industries are being carried on.”87 The symbiotic
relationship between music hall and film, which Bryony Dixon suggests was to endure
for over three decades, also began in London very soon after its very first exhibition.
The cinematograph had quickly been incorporated into the programmes of music halls
such as the Paragon and the Empire, Leicester Square, and it was principally these and
other metropolitan music halls, with their vast audiences numbering thousands, which
were the first to exploit film commercially, where it became, as Bryony Dixon has
observed, “a novelty among the many novelties.”88 By October, after twenty-eight
weeks as star turn at the Alhambra, it was already billed as “The greatest Money
Magnet of the Age.” 89
These initial paradigms of metropolitan exhibition all have considerable significance for the regional patterns of exhibition which immediately followed. For having gained a foothold so quickly in a rich diversity of locations – as a novelty in magic shows, music halls, and halls of wonders – film first went out from London already furnished with many models to explore and to inspire others who chose to journey with it out to the regions. It is a detailed account of these local patterns of exhibition which Chapter Three undertakes to give, focusing first on the immediate contexts selected by early film exhibitors before moving on to construct a history of early film in these resorts for the first decade of its existence. Positioning film as the domain of the touring companies and travelling shows, it considers the particular difficulties inherent in working within the constraints of the geography and infrastructure of the South West region. This chapter surveys these touring companies who first exploited film commercially locally, and offers an analysis of performance practices and commercial strategies adopted. Finally, it explores the final months of this period and maps the transition to fixed-venue film exhibition, tracing the emergence of significant individuals who instigated and facilitated this process.

This chapter seeks to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the complexity of early film exhibition, and in particular to interrogate established modes of classification which have grouped together touring film shows predominantly according to the type of venues in which they appeared. A survey of touring exhibitors is undertaken using a framework devised in response to local research findings, which classifies companies and individuals into five discrete groups based on the evidence of a combination of factors which include their provenance, their longevity in the entertainment business, their size, and the type of show they offered. The five categories identified comprise the well-established shows with a national reputation; smaller, nationally touring shows with an established local reputation; local professional performers; companies or shows which emerged from London or other nationally touring spectacles; and the new companies set up for the purpose of exploiting film commercially. These shows are analysed in terms of the contribution they make to the development of local trends in these resorts, a process which provides comparative data to contribute to a wider national picture of entertainments which first hosted film. The chapter thus seeks to establish the continuities within the early history of film exhibition to enable further analysis and comparison to be made both with the
traditions of nineteenth century optical entertainment, but also with the changing practices which were to follow with the arrival of fixed-venue exhibition.

Following the decade or more covered in Chapter Three, a time during which film was exploited in a variety of shows and venues, some exhibitors began to seek a new home for film in dedicated semi-permanent or permanent sites for its exhibition. Chapters Four and Five both cover the same chronological period, but each focuses on a different aspect of film exhibition in the years 1909-1914. In Chapter Four, the commercial exploitation of films during this time will be explored and local models of business and patterns of investment investigated. At a time when investment in the industry was speculative and widespread, this thesis seeks to establish the existence of local adaptations and variations to the accepted paradigms concerning the development of cinemas and to highlight the importance of relationships between the cinema industry and communities and culture locally. The process by which these resorts acquired cinemas is mapped out in this chapter and a survey of business patterns undertaken which evidences the wide variation of successful practices and models in existence in the first five years of fixed-venue exhibition. This study widens our understanding of these by revealing that investment in local cinemas came from a variety of sources, thus challenging the accepted paradigm of the dominance of the outside investor in funding of the nascent film industry. It evidences an assortment of individual entrepreneurs, partnerships, cinema companies, nationally known or local showmen, local companies and shareholders, who together with capital from London companies and wealthy investors, collectively formed the fledgling business which owned and managed the first cinemas in these resorts. Mapping the acquisition of cinemas in each individual resort throughout this period, this chapter also seeks to make a comparison with other metropolitan and urban patterns of provision, and to demonstrate the way in which local cinema buildings conformed to accepted norms of design and interior fittings whilst adapting to the needs of the communities they served in terms of scale and provision. It shows the wide variation in definitions of the term ‘cinema’ within a narrow geographical area, encompassing both a modest converted building simply screening film, or a lavish picture house with many additional luxuries, aimed at the leisureed and wealthy.

The second half of this chapter explores the role of the new cinemas in the community and their impact on the entertainment culture locally. It examines in depth
some of the relationships between managers and their customers, and evidences the importance of the interaction between them which enabled shrewd managers to modify their practices and thus optimise profits. The influence of cinema on young people, a topic widely debated nationally, is considered from a local perspective, and an analysis of procedures and practices and the role of the cinema manager and local authorities with regard to censorship and morality is made. This chapter seeks to investigate the particular importance of cinema to communities and their press, and to account for the central role it quickly came to play in the lives of local people. It also provides evidence of local practices which collectively contribute to developing our perceptions of a national picture of early cinema.

The social and cultural impact of cinema on local life and leisure are further explored in Chapter Five, which considers the film programme and the variety of factors which influenced its composition. It surveys the wide range of models of exhibition which constituted cinema locally and examines the role film played within each. Research into these many and varied forms of cinema evidences the persistence of certain forms in these South West resorts: models such as the variety show incorporating film, or the combination of skating with film, endured in this region after their discontinuation elsewhere. Film-only venues arrived relatively late here, and remained few in number in comparison with other urban and metropolitan sites. This chapter also identifies the importance of the development of managerial relationships with people and press in certain communities, and its significance for the film programme, which could be adapted by managers with local knowledge to please audiences and maximise profits. As one of a range of factors which influenced film programming at this time, this study also examines the repercussions of changing film technologies which brought developments such as longer films. Exploiting these successfully provided a challenge for cinema managers locally as nationally: this study explores the variety of strategies adopted to accommodate these technologies and the changes to the programme which ensued. It investigates why some managers chose initially to avoid screening longer films in their cinemas, and the way in which others successfully continued to exploit the immediacy and intimacy of local films to draw in audiences from the community. This chapter also focuses on the particular importance of the topical film to audiences at some distance from the capital, and the special resonance of national and public events for regional spectators. The concluding part of
Chapter Five assesses the range and number of contexts for film exhibition which existed in these resorts in the final years before the First World War and considers the continuities and transformations compared to the previous years of film exhibition here. Together, Chapters Four and Five trace the emergence of permanent cinema during the transition period between touring shows and fixed-venue exhibition, and offers evidence which demonstrates the broad differences in funding, facilities, programming and practices which constituted early cinema in these five sites by 1914. They form a picture of a local industry which was rapidly evolving, yet comprised still of disparate groups, each individually responding in their own way to the needs of the business and of the community.

Collectively these five chapters constitute a study which attempts to offer a broad, yet in-depth survey of optical entertainments, with a particular focus on early film exhibition, throughout the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They systematically map optical shows in five contrasting South West locations and aim to demonstrate the extensive distribution of moving and projected image entertainments in this period. They seek to construct a history of the popular and visual culture of these regional centres which is both broad and detailed, and which allows the identification and analysis of patterns of exhibition practices and continuities between traditional nineteenth century optical entertainments and the cinema. Together they constitute a comprehensive study of coastal sites of the South West of contrasting character which will complement research already undertaken into urban and metropolitan areas, and which will, it is hoped, contribute to our understanding of the national development of visual media of the period 1880-1914.


25 With the exception of all the copies of the Torquay Times for the year 1896 which are missing.


27 This is explored in detail in Chapter One.


29 The exception being Penzance, since only The Cornishman offered an in-depth coverage of local events.


35 SO, 16 March 1898; SO, 27 April, 1898; SO, 13 July 1898.

36 SHD, 6 October, 1900.

37 SHD, 13 July 1901; SHD, 16 May 1903.

38 SHD, 18 October 1902.

39 SHD, 10 June 1905.

40 SHD, 31 July 1909.

41 After much petitioning, and local protests, and permission was finally granted one week before the show arrived. Probably due to the negligence of the Council – the field was not fenced off despite recommendations – the following week Professor Anderton fell into the river Sid and drowned.

42 SHD, 4 September 1909.

43 NDJ, 11 August 1898.

44 NDJ, 14 May 1903.
NDJ, 23 April 1908; NDJ, 24 September 1908; NDJ, 26 March 1908.

NDJ, 24 September 1908.

CM, 9 July 1896.

Ibid.

CM, 7 April 1904.

CM, 27 July 1912.

Ibid.

CM, 24 March 1898; CM, 14 April 1898; CM, 6 October 1898.

CM, 5 January 1898; CM, 4 June 1904; CM, 9 February 1899; CM, 4 June 1904.


CM, 4 February 1897.

CM, 7 January 1904.

CM, 7 May 1910.

CM, 12 August 1912.

WM, 20 September, 1902; WM, 26 March 1898.

WG, 5 March 1904.


Sharon Poole, Weston-Super-Mare: A Pictorial History (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), n.p.

TDSDJ, 11 February 1903.


TDSDJ, 25 March 1903.

TDSDJ, 1 September 1897; TDSDJ, 2 March 1904; TDSDJ, 10 February 1909.

TT, 27 August 1909; TDSDJ, 4 February 1896.

TDSDJ, 11 January, 1905.

TDSDJ, 11 January 1905.

TT, 27 August 1909.


Kember, Marketing Modernity, 61.


TDSDJ, 10 March 1880; WM, 3 March 1900.


TDSDJ, 8 February 1911.

British Medical Journal, 21 January 1871, 71; 11 January 1873, 40.


The Illustrated Police News, 28 March 1896.

The Era, 16 May 1896; Pall Mall Gazette, 21 March 1896; Bryony Dixon, “Film and Music Hall,” Film, Genres, and Themes, British Film Institute, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1097171/

The Era, 10 October 1896.
The years 1880-1914 defined a period of gradual social and cultural change at the seaside. Whilst these were years in which the genteel rituals of the late nineteenth century wealthy elite persisted into the new century, yet they were challenged by a re-ordering of leisure practices that empowered working and middle-class day-trippers. In the pre-war years affordable amusements at popular resorts were thus opened up to these groups. Once the arenas of the rich and leisured, many of the seaside towns which had entertained their exclusive clientele with Assembly Rooms, circulating libraries and promenades came under pressure from the very different demands of a wider class of visitor delivered to their doorsteps by means of the railway or steamer. This was not a universal trend: Sidmouth, as previously mentioned, put in place strategies designed to prevent an influx of day visitors and trippers; Ilfracombe managed with some success to continue to accommodate their traditional wealthy, longer-stay guests alongside the newer visitors who arrived by steamer from across the Bristol Channel; and whilst as John Walton explains, “cheap, informal, entertainment” came to dominate some resorts, “old-fashioned practices survived longer in some areas such as South Devon.”

Geographical remoteness and the associated increased costs of travelling played a major role in the degree of control which resorts were able to exercise over their visitors. Even in late Victorian times, as John Travis has noted, distance still acted as a filter and many peripheral South West resorts continued to attract “those who were seeking havens of social decorum” where “the close presence of the lower ranks of society” could be avoided.

At first sight, the two South-West towns of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare appear at this time to have occupied very different positions in the resort hierarchy: Torquay sedate, select and fashionable, its villa residents fierce defenders of the social tone; Weston-Super-Mare, its piers and promenades busy with pierrots, phrenologists and photographers, its teeming crowds consuming entertainment on the beach and in the
street. Yet in both there existed tensions between cultures and classes, between the
demands of small, discreet groups of over-wintering guests and residents and the
pleasure crowds, between popular amusements and rational recreation. In Weston-
Super-Mare, these tensions surfaced regularly at weekends and on Bank Holidays, with
the arrival of thousands of day-trippers; in Torquay, the annual Regatta fair stirred up
the social order and brought a new definition of pleasure to the town. Together they
provide an insight into attitudes towards local popular amusements and their perceived
status within the entertainment culture in these seaside resorts.

Patronising the shows: Torquay Regatta Fairs 1880-1914

Were it possible for the New Zealander, of whom Macaulay has written, to drop
into Torquay, somewhere in the vicinity of the harbour at the height of the regatta
festival, he would be inclined to the opinion that in verity mankind had gone stark,
staring mad. [A] scene more like ... Bedlam it would scarcely be possible to
conceive than that which annually afflicts Torquay at the end of the month of
August. It causes visitors who have heard of Torquay only as a most sedate,
aristocratic, and quiet health and holiday resort to open their eyes in astonishment,
and to wonder whether they have not by chance committed a mistake in booking,
and hied to some place which has probably existed only in dreams or been
revealed to them only in nightmares.6

The event here likened by the writer to the apocalyptic scenario of Macaulay’s London
or the frightening insanity of Bedlam, was one which, as a rare oasis of popular pleasure
in an otherwise limited calendar, enthralled and excited its thousands of participants.
The annual Regatta, which had existed originally for the benefit of the yachting elite of
Torquay, had gradually been superseded in importance by the fair which accompanied
it, a situation which unfailingly provoked a storm of protest every year from outraged
residents and a succession of discomfited Town Councillors as well as drawing the
attention of surprised visitors and amused London correspondents. To many outside
observers, Torquay was noted for being ‘starchy’. Despite the early arrival of the
railway to Torquay, this resort, as in the case of the majority of Devon seaside places,
had avoided becoming the destination of tens of thousands of working-class trippers.
Questions of cost and distance precluded many from visiting, and as Nigel Morgan and
Annette Pritchard have indicated, even Exmouth had only a tenth the number of day-
trippers compared to Weston-Super-Mare: “Resorts which drew most of their clientele
from the day-tripper market (like Weston-Super-Mare...) were perceived to exhibit an undesirable and low social tone in the eyes of the social elites of resorts like Torquay.”7 Torquay, which consistently attracted its visitors from the gentry and aristocracy, and which enjoyed a London patronage and a select winter season, had powerful residential and municipal groups who forcefully controlled leisure amenities in the town.8 The Daily Telegraph concluded that the town needed “to be tinged with more geniality and a less assertive air of superior respectability,”9 and even the Torquay Directory, a paper to whom the same epithets might equally have been applied, carried an editorial which criticised the “icy stiffness, reserve, and exclusiveness” of the place.10 Of many other reports to take up this theme, one in the Torquay Times, observing that “Torquay is not given to frivolling”, attempted to justify the apparent conflict of identities:

It takes life far too seriously to attempt much in the way of making people boisterously happy. Its mission is higher. It is above all things to make the sick well; to provide winter sunshine for north-country people anxious to escape the cold and damp of their northern shires. But for two days ...it will unbend in a way that would be no discredit to Blackpool, and that would prove to the foreigner that English folk can enjoy themselves at home sometimes.11

Lasting for just two days each year, the Regatta itself attracted over one hundred yachts which competed in races and which, owned by the gentry and aristocracy, constituted an annual show of ostentation which complied with a cultural ideology in the town dictated by its genteel residents. Torquay’s identity as a yachting station and fashionable resort was annually maintained by the event, which also included swimming and rowing matches and the elite Regatta Ball, the festival atmosphere being further enhanced by the illumination of the pleasure gardens and evening fireworks. Sponsored and attended by the leisured and wealthy, this select, exclusive event, however spectacular, had been gradually eclipsed in excitement and appeal by its own sideshow, the Regatta fair, which ran concurrently with it. One local journalist observed wryly that whilst “the Regatta is all very well for amateur admirals and nautical Johnnies who strut about in blue serge and sailor caps”, he himself, admitting his own “degraded tastes”, was going to the Fair.12
Unlike other large-scale, open-air events such as the visiting menageries and circuses, which were obliged to occupy open space on recreation grounds or the ‘downs’, the Regatta fairs were held in the very heart of the town, laying claim temporarily to public space that was confined geographically and defined by customary usage as shopping parades, harbour quays or residential streets (Fig. 1.1). The transformation of the town, though fleeting, was nevertheless significant. The limit of just two days duration imposed by the authorities, the location of the shows in the elite heart of the town, and the absence of this kind of entertainment from the rest of the year’s calendar combined to lend the fairs an intensity and exuberance uniquely
experienced in Torquay, a “two days’ oasis in each year’s prosy round”, “two days unfeigned frivolity” when the town was seen to be “rocking itself with glee.” The fair’s physical intrusion into the very space of the centre symbolised its disruption of normative practices and a potential threat to the established social order and introduced a temporary liminality into previously controlled and civilised space, briefly transforming it into a site for pleasure and for carnival. “Liminality”, as Rob Shields elucidates, “represents a liberation from the regimes...and performance codes of mundane life because of its interstitial nature”. The Regatta fair slipped briefly into the temporal and spatial “gap between ordered worlds” and annually allowed its participants the brief freedom from constraints which Shields neatly terms “liminal ‘time-out’”.

Tasteless, vulgar and degrading though the fair was to some, to most it was this very release from propriety, rationality, and social constraint which constituted its attraction. Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque illuminates the way in which carnivals could create a space in which the sense of self could be lost and a new identity assumed:

The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd...It is the outside of contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organisation, which is suspended for the time of the festivity....Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of the bodies, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people’s mass body.

The Regatta fairs merged people into a new transient collective identity in which habitually-entrenched social and geographical divides were temporarily suspended. Social groups, usually kept apart in the highly segregated society of Torquay, blended together to form crowds unified by their new identities as pleasure-seekers and fairgoers. One press report from 1902 noted how the “visitors from the yachts in the bay, the townspeople, the holiday-makers, everybody in short in Torquay, is given over to nonsense, and should the fun on the pier lag, there is always the fair. There, indeed, the revelry is furious.” The crowd itself became a force for pleasure in which the individual was merged into a collective able to transcend the usual constraints of class, age, propriety, and convention: “Good humour was everywhere, middle-aged men and women were young again for the day, and those who had passed the meridian of life
looked on with amusement at the foibles and peccadilloes of the Regatta fair with a revival of reminiscences that awakened memories of pleasant episodes...”

Thousands bonded together in the mutual enjoyment of unaccustomed pleasure: “Mad and merry is the scene – so mad and merry that it is almost intoxicating, and even the soberest-minded felt themselves drawn into the vortex of the fun-making and the noise-creating crowd. Reports, particularly in the Torquay Times, regularly affirmed that the fair constituted both popular and inclusive entertainment, and carried an understanding and acceptance that the simple pursuit of pleasure was a legitimate goal for its participants: the 1890 crowd looked as if “earth held nothing but enjoyment for them” whilst in 1898, a “whirlpool of humanity” was observed which “with measureless activity and measureless appetite for laughter, jigs merrily all day long, and a large portion of the night, in the confines of the Fair.” It was “a huge lucky bag” in which there was something for all”, a “magnet-like attraction to thousands of people”, a place for crowds to “feel the combined influence of fair, fires, and fireworks, and let themselves go with zest.” One 1898 report stated quite simply: “Everybody appeared to be so engaged.”

A new cultural and social space was briefly created which was “opposed to the everyday” - for fairgoers, as Douglas Reid explains, “the showmen’s world had a collective magic which lifted them out of themselves.” The Torquay fairs, in a unique way, seemed to satisfy a yearning for nostalgia and a desire to return to childhood:

We may grow and wear tail-coats, and put our hair up; we may become Town Councillors and New Women, and even New Humorists, but we are all children at heart, and grow younger as our years increase. We cannot remain obdurate to the fascinations of wooden horses who go up and down and round; we cannot drag ourselves away from three shlies a penny. No, we are children and may we always remain so...

A variety of affordable options uniquely empowered an unusually wide group of Torquay society, including those normally excluded from leisure activities by reasons of cost, class and availability, and provided them with a space for pleasure in which they could take decisions and make individual choices. Other exhibitions which habitually visited Torquay usually offered a varied but set programme for a fixed entrance price: in 1887 Wombwell’s Menagerie was priced at sixpence for ‘labouring classes’ and at one shilling for servants and children; Sanger’s cost sixpence in 1898; for Bostock and
Wombwell’s Double Menagerie in 1898, the minimum daily price was one shilling, with evening performances costing sixpence; whilst Barnum and Bailey’s tickets in 1899 began at one shilling, with the most expensive being seven shillings and sixpence. The pier and the pleasure gardens were deliberately priced to maintain exclusivity, and depended on high pricing to restrict access and prevent “the gratification of those who are neither useful nor ornamental.”25 As the editorial in the Torquay Directory further enlightened its readers, opening public spaces up to all might lead to “risky extremes” such as giving access to “every Tom, Dick or Harry, Mary, Jane, or Eliza, to the lagging, staring nursemaid and to the loafer with his evil-smelling tobacco and his loathsome expectorations...”26

The fairground, which offered penny and twopenny attractions, embraced these ‘risky extremes’ and empowered them. Whilst three pence would purchase entrance to a ‘superior attraction’ such as the aquatic display entitled “Amphibious Wonders”, some showmen merely asked fairgoers to give ‘what they liked’. But it was the economics of the “marvellous power of the penny” which permitted fair-goers to experience many of the vast array of attractions which presented themselves. Bob and Jack, two of the fairgoers in George Gissing’s novel The Nether World, have as much as a sovereign and ‘two-pound-ten’ respectively to spend on such amusements27: for just one penny at the Torquay Regatta fair, participants could choose from a range of affordable attractions, from having “the pleasure of knocking the few remaining teeth out of the late departed Kruger” to “a grand supper of winkles which it seems doubtful any self-respecting pig would eat!” 28 Without the fair, the Regatta would be a “poor affair indeed...a holiday for the few” noted one Torquay commentator, adding: “There are hundreds of lasses who would absolutely grieve were they unable to get a dozen or so rides on the roundabouts, on the switch-back or float down the helter-skelter ... and an equal number of lads who would think life was no more worth living if they could not spend a goodly number of coppers, firing shots at cocoa nuts, or bobbing eggs.”29 As Vanessa Toulmin has acknowledged, “the open nature of the travelling fairground arena” with its affordable prices was a democratising agent which “enabled the presence of all visitors, whether they be rowdy or well-behaved...”30, and thus an important, if not unique opportunity for popular leisure in a town more familiar with an elite cultural provision.

This reordering of a space which for most of the year was select, elite and respectable, lay at the root of much of the anguish so vociferously expressed annually in
the press and at Council meetings: the Strand resident who depicted the Fairs as an “outrageous nuisance” and “one of the most cruel forms of torture that could ever be devised” was typical of those who, when confronted with the sights and sounds of the fair, complained annually to the press and the local Board. The jarring discord of the fair – “the perpetual whirr of the roundabouts, the shouts of the leather-lunged show-proprietors and of the sellers of all manner of articles, and the laughter and screams of the merry-makers”, plus the ever-present steam organs - contrasted painfully with the normally pleasant harmony which Fred Gray describes as the “music of the seaside”: residents and select visitors to resorts such as Torquay were surrounded by sites – bandstands, concert halls, pavilions and piers, where only music of quality and harmony could be heard. Noise, observes Ruth Forbes, was feared by the middle classes who equated “uncontrolled sound with rabble rousing [and] lawlessness”: the strident noises of the Regatta fairs seemed to permeate this “usually sober town” making it “pulsate with pleasure at every point” and thus brought the fear of such disorder to the inhabitants at its very heart. One journalist concluded: “It will be conceded therefore that outside Bedlam, there can be few, if any, more nerve-wracking scenes than that furnished by Torquay Regatta fair.”

The creation of a space for pleasure, open to all, was anathema to many of those on whose very select doorsteps it lay. These exclusive streets, temporarily transformed into a new, intimate space which belonged briefly to the crowd, were once a year filled with the anomalous and flimsy architecture of the fairground. One journalist documented this process with fascination: “Close by were thousands of square feet of canvas and many long metal tubes, piles of gilded figures and brightly ornamented mirrors, whilst strewn on the ground were many tons of timber...mere skeletons of woodwork at first, but ultimately growing into the gaudily decorated, gilded and be-mirrored merry-go-round with its strident but expensive steam organ. The work of transformation had been accomplished with incredible speed...” At night, when electric lights and oil lamps muted the scene, the “crude and gaudy colours are toned down, the rents in the canvas are hidden, and the hard lines in the show people’s faces disappear”, the presence of the fair was at its most powerful: “Then, when the gardens and sea front are converted into a fairyland with their mazes of gem-like coloured lamps, and the tops of the cliffs are turning red and blue and green with their coloured fire...the fun waxes furious.” Strings of lighting and bunting bound together
streets and seafront, town and fairground, creating the impression that the fair, for a brief period, blended with the town: “As the bay was approached...the sparkling colours of the variegated lamps and the softer hues of the lanterns stretched away a long distance, until they merged in the revolving electric lights of Hancock’s “merry-go-rounds” and the whole area was radiated with coloured light of varying tints and depths of tone.”39 Finally, there was even some sense of accommodation and acceptance of the Regatta revelries, and of two very disparate worlds briefly harmonising together: “Meanwhile the great firework display that has been advertised for weeks is proceeding: the rockets, breaking high up over the harbour, bathe the town in a purple or crimson light, and the windows of the houses on the hills give back an answering twinkle, as though enjoying the fun.”40

The Regatta fairs, though not marginalised geographically in the way most fairgrounds typically were, lay nevertheless at the cultural and social margins of Torquay. It appeared to those who were minded to act as cultural gatekeepers that for a time Torquay had assumed a new identity from which they themselves felt excluded. The fair cut through social barriers and mixed together the classes in a way rarely experienced in Victorian and Edwardian Torquay, where social structures were particularly inflexible and distinctions between class groups rigorously upheld by a dominant elite of wealthy residents. The Regatta fair thus provided new and unfamiliar spectacles: one well-known Torquay Times journalist, Walter E. Grogan, drew attention to the astonishing diversity of the 1898 crowd, with its “host of peripatetic hawkers rubbing elbows with the yachtsmen...and the young lady who for a few hours forgets how much three yards of ribbon at one-three is.”41 Peter Bailey, exploring the tensions arising from the “endemic status anxiety of the middle classes”, notes that “leisure represented a new and relatively unstructured area in the life-space where social distinctions were particularly vulnerable.”42 The way in which the fair had a widespread appeal which broke through the well-established social boundaries was shocking and incomprehensible to the many villa residents and those in authority. The balance of power appeared to slip away from the grasp of this hegemony who habitually held it, outweighed for a time by the sheer numbers of those who wished to identify themselves as fairgoers: “For one man, armed with binocular and patience, watching the racing with interest and intelligence, you shall find a score in the streets anxious merely for the gaiety to be picked up in odd corners among the booths and in the very vortex of the
A later press report similarly agreed, concluding that “...however keenly interested a limited few may be in watching the fortunes of the competing yachts, with the great bulk of the people - 90, if not 99, out of every hundred – ‘the fair’s the thing.”

Thus the Regatta fairs constituted a contested area which, as Bailey explains, in the eyes of the elite “needed constant vigilance in defence of the social frontiers of class.” Mike Huggins, however, argues that not everyone wished “to keep themselves morally distinct from the lower orders.” The Regatta report in the Torquay Directory for 1897 grudgingly admitted that “there is no disguising the fact that to the great majority of the thousands who go forth from their homes to see each recurring year, the prime, nay almost the sole, attraction of the regattas is the fair... when not even Town Councillors and curates hesitated to indulge in rides upon the wooden steeds...” As Mike Huggins further notes, there were those who undertook a “significant degree of instrumental manipulation” of their role as a respectable member of the middle classes, who “engaged in different modes of behaviour within a single life style, at different times in different contexts....” Reports abounded of residents described by the press as habitually “staid, sober, and demure” exhibiting anti-social behaviour at the fair: whilst the Times more tolerantly reported the exuberance of these fairgoers, the Directory found them “guilty” of indulging in “freaks and pranks which they would no more think of committing at any other period of the year than they would of breaking the Decalogue.”

This seduction of the elite residents and visitors, or even more astonishingly, members of the clergy and local authorities, by the glitter and glare of the fair, challenged prevailing values, practices and social order, and deeply offended the sensibilities of both the residents and the ruling elite, with whom one of the two local newspapers of the period, the Torquay Directory and South Devon Advertiser, allied itself. The Torquay Directory, edited for many years by Mr. Edward Vivian, a Liberal who “was connected with nearly every public institution in the town, having for their object the moral, social well-being or material prosperity of Torquay” and owned by Mr. Cockrem, whose published guide books to Torquay advised the visiting gentry, consistently adopted both a rhetoric of middle-class respectability and a position of moral paternalism. A sustained anti-fair discourse prevailed, supported by an annual offering of selected letters from offended residents, verbatim reports of heated
exchanges at Board meetings, and lurid reports by Councillors, designed to scaremonger, of unsavoury public exhibitions at the fairground, such as of men eating live rats. Editorials in the *Torquay Directory* expressed their disgust at the sight of the respectable and the genteel participating in activities they considered degrading and debasing. One journalist likened the fair to a disease which spread “its infection to every class”, outraged by the participation of “whole yachting parties and the elite of the place, and the strangers who have no reputation to damage and carry not the honour of the town”, behaviour which challenged the established image of Torquay itself. The whole carefully constructed identity of the town as a high-class health resort which sought the leisureed and wealthy, the gentry, aristocracy and even royalty, carefully manipulated and promoted through regular national advertising, local newspaper editorials, and visitor publications, seemed to be under threat.

The correspondence from residents which routinely filled the pages of the press was typically selected for the antagonism expressed to the presence of the fairs in Torquay: written often from a narrow, personal, or prejudiced perspective, they ranged in tone from the mildly irritated to the incandescent. Some were representative of a “small, although highly vociferous minority” whom Mike Huggins suggests were often motivated by evangelicalism, and were typically “active middle-class moralists and reformers.” One “Strand resident”, for example, annoyed at having been “kept at home by duty and unfortunately having no villa to retire to during the Regatta” suggested: “By all means have shows or any other pleasures usual at such times, but let it be in a field, or... Ellacombe Green, where people who find it necessary to shoot off guns at bottles could do so to their heart’s content...” demanding to know by whose authority the fairs had been sanctioned to stand within fifty yards of his sitting room, preventing him from working. Another, purporting to altruism but hysterical in tone, accused the town of being “callous to ordinary decency”, and expressed fears for the morality and respectability of local young people ‘contaminated’ by the “allurements and temptations” of the fairs. By printing a great many letters from readers expressing antagonism to the fair, and by sanctioning Regatta fair reports whose tone ranged from gently mocking to downright hostile, the *Torquay Directory* fuelled the anxieties of its readership about the dangers arising from the ‘less respectable leisure pursuits’ of the fairs and appealed to those whose refined sensibilities were disturbed by their widespread popularity. F.M.L. Thompson, noting the increase of commercial enterprise
which had contributed to regulation and improvement in fairground behaviour, considers these fears of the fair were by this time unjustified: “Some puritans continued to object, and if they were quintessential social controllers, who thought that coconut shies, fat ladies, and roundabouts were as immoral, depraved and mindless as the brawls and rowdiness of earlier fairs, then they had conspicuously failed.”

The fairs appeared to push at the careful boundaries set by these self-appointed cultural and social gatekeepers to the town and to challenge their hegemony in an unprecedented way. It consistently proved itself to be an unstoppable force, and despite repeated efforts, an event which they seemed powerless to control fully. The minutes of the Torquay Board of Health meeting for August 1883 typified the annual tensions between the Regatta Committee, the Board and the showmen. Some Councillors strove to conceal their personal prejudice and distaste for the shows behind objections based tenuously on legality, arguing, for example, that shows illegally obstructed the highway; the Regatta Committee, anxious to secure precious income from the stalls, needed permission for the shows to stand in the lower (and most prestigious) part of the town, the Strand. Increasingly, the Regatta Committee, witnessing a decline in interest from the yachting elite and consequently revenue from subscriptions, were in the somewhat ignominious position of depending on the one hundred pounds or more supplied by William Hancock, the well-known Westcountry showman who leased the ground from the Town Council. Yet a scrutiny of the votes cast following such discussions reveals in fact that most councillors voted in favour of the shows; in 1883, for example, only two out of the eight councillors present objected to them. Councillors had the power to dictate the location of the shows and to enforce strict constraints on the time they should be allowed to stand in the town. They also sought to find strategies to codify behaviour within the fairground, which included restricting activities deemed to be offensive, such as the “ladies teasers”, “dirty water-squirts” or “paper whips”. These attempts at public discipline were, however, only partially effective, for with the masses complicit in the dodging of old regulations through the annual invention of new tricks and toys, the fairs remained at least one step ahead of the regulatory forces. Five Regattas later it was noted that the “Corporation has sought to repress the “doodle dashers” as the paper whisks have been termed...just as it repressed the dirty-water teaser nuisance of a few years ago, but without avail: this year the brushes have been whisked quite as freely as usual.” However, within the confines of the fair, the Council
had some difficulty exercising control: they were reluctantly obliged to enter an uneasy alliance with Hancock. With his position of respect and influence, Hancock had a degree of control over the fairground space, and the pleasure crowds which inhabited it, and the irritation of the “teasers” which the authorities had sought to banish, seemed only to have been finally eliminated with his co-operation:

He is the King of the Fair, an autocrat of autocrats, who overawes the towns almost as completely as he does the subject showmen. If the Town Councils want to impose unpleasant restrictions, King Hancock knows how to bring them to book. ...One year Dartmouth thought it could ignore Hancock. It called in another class of showmen. But it never risked a second year without the King of the Fair.\(^{60}\)

Yet, despite the fears and anxieties of the ruling authorities, it was ultimately they themselves who controlled the Regatta fairs. Neil Ravenscroft and Paul Gilchrist, in their consideration of Bakhtinian concepts of carnival, explain its contradictory nature as a social institution, being “both a popular expression of folk culture, which signals an alternate conception for the ordering of human society, and a bulwark of authority, built into the fabric of communal governance, which is permitted, even fostered, by these authorities.”\(^{61}\) This inversion of norms, they note, could be “tolerated for temporary periods, in spaces officially sanctioned by the hierarchy.”\(^{62}\) The Torquay authorities entered into a contract with Hancock which tightly controlled and defined the location and duration of the shows. In this respect, some important aspects of the hegemonic relationship, partially suspended, were fully restored at the close of the fair; other aspects were in fact in continuation throughout the duration of the fair. Within the fairground itself, authority control was light touch: although there was a designated police presence, their main focus was on the hawkers and not the pleasure crowds. However, by dictating ‘the where and the when of carnival’ in Torquay, the authorities retained the key aspects of hegemonic control over both the shows and the pleasure crowds, and thus, for a finite time, licensed their existence.

The Church was one representative of hegemonic authority that did attempt to operate within the defined space of the fairs. In a town bristling with missions, charities, church groups, and benevolent associations, all striving to act as agents for social and moral discipline, whilst some viewed the fairs as an intolerable intrusion, others construed them as an opportunity to influence both fairgoers and showpeople.
Missionary work was carried out zealously every year by the Rector of Torwood and his team at the fairground, providing education for the children of show families, flowers for the women, and breakfast for the men. The Torquay Directory implicitly approved this attempt by the well-intentioned to introduce the themes of sobriety, education, and Christianity into the fairground environment and portrayed it in a positive light. By contrast, its rival paper the Torquay Times, recognised the incongruity of a handful of evangelical do-gooders operating an “Open Air Mission” in the vast arena of the fairground, and approached the situation with great humour:

We hope this mission was doing good. Who can tell? But we could not help thinking that in such surroundings it stood rather a poor chance against the fascinations of “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” There was also conveyed a strong sense of feeding the soul but also feeding the body, as we observed that it was flanked on one side by a gaudily painted barrow of “Valley’s Ice Cream”, and on the other by a hot steamer of chipped potatoes sending forth their savoury aroma accompanied by the hoarse pleadings of the vendor.

Their futile attempts to draw a crowd by singing hymns which were drowned out by the din of the fair, were in marked contrast to the accounts which followed of the skill of the showmen who themselves excelled in the art of attracting and maintaining an audience. This isolated and incongruous position between vans of chips and ice-cream, seemed to symbolise the Mission’s struggle to make a moral impact when pitted against the more powerful world of pleasure.

With the notable exception of William Hancock, the ‘othering’ of showpeople is universal in the Torquay Directory reports. Whilst the paper carried accounts which regularly mocked him for being one legged, for his “open mouth and grinning face” and “comical cackle” or for having a “face the colour of a boiled lobster” others evinced a somewhat grudging admiration for his undoubted business acumen and showmanship. Other showpeople were repeatedly demonised as being indecent, dirty, and poorly dressed and labelled as travellers or gypsies: journalists spectating their arrival each year, whilst decrying their fascination for the waiting crowds, nevertheless themselves displayed a certain curiosity, as well as the revulsion they professed to feel, for “such people of the road and the green”:

The sight of scores of frowsy, unkempt and bedraggled women, and coatless, vestless, hatless, and begrimed men, and unwashed,
neglected, children, is one which is calculated to inspire sorrow and to impel the query, “How do such people live?”

Ian Starsmore notes the existence of “an irrational mistrust of the nomadic way of life” and points to the inspection reports which followed the Movable Dwellings Bill brought in by M.P. George Smith in 1889. Contrary to preconceptions, these frequently recorded that showpeople were in fact healthy people living in attractive wagons.

Discourses in the Torquay press, in which women were objectified and represented as uncivilised, unfeminine or even promiscuous, were especially prevalent: “The womanhood in the females – the women and the girls – must rapidly disappear in the lack of privacy, the absence of ordinary domestic amenities, the coarseness and the roughness of the life of showpeople.” Whereas “pallor, fragility, and whiteness” epitomised the feminine ideal for wealthy women, as Fred Gray explains, dark skin was associated with “degrading physical activity”, and “the social and economic elite privileged white skins for the indication of both status and health.” References made to the “swarthiness” of the showpeople and the fact they were “dark as gypsies” positioned them in an underclass set apart from polite Torquay society: one local journalist pointed to the “striking, poignant, contrasts” between the show people and those who patronised them, terming it “one of those knotty problems which are the outcome of our twentieth century civilisation.” Reports in the Torquay Directory of contact between showpeople and fairgoers depicted these as cross-class encounters in which the social inferiority of the former was visibly reinforced: one journalist professed himself amazed by the “amount of unnecessary grime tolerated”: “Without a prick of the conscience, ladies in the most immaculate of dresses and gloves receive, in change, coppers from the hands of roundabout men so black that they might just have emerged from chimney or stoke-hole. Soap and water are cheap enough, but regatta men – and women – are strangers to them.” Accounts by Torquay Directory journalists claiming to offer insights into the “inner life” of showpeople, consisted of little more than culturally-constructed judgements based on visual ‘evidence’ and prejudice, and evidenced little interaction or real understanding. Show people were consistently stereotyped as a group, the “regatta tribe”, “a great motley assembly”, “human attachments” who “had a far more intimate acquaintance with coarseness than with decency”, whose arrival in Torquay one Sunday seemed to be “forming a scene ...utterly foreign to that customarily associated with a Sabbath evening.” This, and
other accounts which sought to establish the social, cultural and even racial alterity of
show people, mirrored popular contemporary colonial discourses in novels and films
and their tropes which were centred on white supremacy and native populations who
were depicted as devious, dark-skinned, and threatening. The 1911 *Torquay Directory*
reporter, in an echo of judgements made by Weston-Super-Mare press about the day-
tripper crowds, was particularly explicit: “The show people appear as though they were
of an alien race.”

The unusual proximity of the showpeople to Torquay visitors and residents
threw into relief the class and cultural differences between them. “Leisure
relationships”, observe Morgan and Pritchard, “are underpinned by the power
relationships inherent in society...leisure both reflects and realises social divisions...”

“Is there not a touch of irony”, queried the *Torquay Directory*, “in the fact that it is to
the labours of such people... that the thousands of people who frequent the Regatta fair
year by year are bound to look for provision for amusement?” Showpeople, too, were
routinely characterised as being cunning and crafty, a construction which conveniently
removed agency and responsibility from the fair-going crowds and pictured them in the
unfamiliar and threatening world of the fairground as innocent, inexperienced, and in
danger. The evangelistic tone and language of these constructed these crowds as
“unsuspecting folk”, “religiously” visiting all the new shows, succumbing to the
“temptations” of the cunning showmen.

Thus are pence, and shillings, and pounds wheedled from the pockets
of a confiding, unsuspecting multitude. It is as though everyone who
passed along the line of shows, etc., exhibited a printed notice reading,
“Here I am, with my pockets full of money: empty them!” And the
showpeople do, and that without the slightest compunction. Joe Kember, writing of the practices of showmanship in the fairground and penny gaff,
has explained the “openly knowing relationship with audiences” which existed between
many showmen and their patrons, and which was mutually rewarding: “The public
clearly understood and cherished the showman’s skills of exaggeration, duplicity and
‘bunkum’, and this reflexive knowledge was a key part of their appreciation of the
shows.” Local commentators largely failed to acknowledge the reciprocity in this
relationship: to do so would have both exposed uncomfortable truths about the balance
of power between showmen and their Torquay public, and entailed an admission of the
genuine attraction of such entertainments to audiences socially diverse enough to
include their own Councillors and clergy. Thus it was not the crowds here who were
demonised by the press as later in this chapter will be seen to be the case in Weston-
Super-Mare: instead, the Torquay press sympathised with fair-goers, portraying them as
“victims” in their encounters with showmen who were depicted as “rogues”. These
accounts aimed to minimise individual responsibility for participation in and conduct at
the fair, and set out to picture the showmen as the ‘outsiders’ exploiting them: the
Torquay Directory warned its readers that “you become a victim almost without
knowing it.” Patrons of the fair were repeatedly described as “moths” unable to “resist
the fatal fascination of a glaring light.” Notwithstanding the march of education,“
noted one observer in the Torquay Directory, “we are just as ready today as were our
forefathers a century ago to fall victims to the wiles of the proprietor of the ‘penny gaff’
– which nowadays is generally a twopenny ‘gaff’ – to be deluded by the mysteries
which do not mystify, and to have our pockets denuded of coppers in our search for
‘pleasure’ and ‘recreation’”. 

Regularly accompanying this high-minded rhetoric of the victimisation of the
fairgoers by duplicitous showmen, were commentaries and accounts which detailed the
particular ways in which the sideshows were thought to be exploiting and deceiving
their patrons. Successions of reporters unfailingly raised questions about the validity of
the fairground experience, citing entertainments which they claimed delivered less than
they promised: they were dismissive, for example, of such attractions as the
‘Amphibious Wonders’ who were merely up to their necks in a tank of water, the
dwarves bigger than the reporter himself, or the “lady living from the waist upwards”
who was later seen walking around the show having “found” her “nether parts”. Some
of the shows at the Torquay Regatta fairs successfully and skilfully created attractions
which were judged to fulfil the promises of the parades and proprietors outside: the
model coal mine, the “Iron Woman”, the “Cake Walk” and the “Flip Flap”, a ride which
simulated a rolling ship, all drew praise from the various reporters who sampled them.
Many more, however, were criticised for failing either to create any sense of magic or
mystique, for offering illusory promises, or for being deliberately duplicitous: reporters
cited boxing booth displays where men punched each other only feebly; the ‘Russian
giantesses’ who were nothing but the spectators own reflections in distortion mirrors;
the hopelessly entangled escapologist whose ropes were discarded with ease the instant
the crowd paid up; the menagerie whose lion tamer was challenged by a lion with
merely “a pussy-cat look” and who “suffered many indignities passively”; and the illusionist offering only dirty cards and “mysteries that are mysteries because they are called mysteries.”

Commentators professed themselves amazed that such amusements, which they saw as fraudulent or sham, should prove so pleasurable to the crowds: “Indeed, if the ‘fair’ furnishes matter for wonder, they are to be found in the extent of the crowd which patronises and apparently enjoys it, and the obviously vast amount of money spent upon frivolities, if not inanities pure and absolute.” Puzzled, despairing or even angry responses, such as the following, appeared regularly in the press:

They have eyes which see not beyond the fringe of the harbour where the attractions of the fair are arrayed in all their glare and glitter and garishness: they have no thought but of the amusement which they can extract from the conglomeration of shows, stalls and merry-go-rounds. The Goddess of Pleasure reigns supreme and few there are who do not pay any tribute to her. Whence the tribute comes in hundreds of cases is a mystery which is past solution.

In the majority of cases, though, the Torquay press regarded the crowds as merely foolish or misguided and exonerated them to a large extent for their dissipation, profligacy and aberrant behaviour, preferring to blame the show people for cheating their public, either, as previously noted, through duplicitous practices, or simply because their shows were of a low standard or their performances lacklustre. Often performers were described as “listless” “solemn” or “harassed”, or as exhibiting other attributes or emotions which, since seemingly running counter to their roles as purveyors of fun and pleasure, appeared to be another way in which audiences were not being given value for money: “Miss Parker is a slight, pretty girl, and, like all the rest of the show people looks anxious and serious.” Others were criticised for being automatons who operated as if part of a huge, relentless, pleasure-producing machine: one visitor to a show of “aquatic eccentricities” in 1893 noted that “the showman at length appeared, and after assuring us of the pleasure it gave him to introduce the performers...proceeded in a mechanical manner with closed eyes to narrate the performance...”

Set against the genteel backdrop of some of the most select streets and shopping parades of Torquay, the arrival of the “penny gaffs”, as the local press referred to them, in the heart of the town must have outraged those who only months earlier, had
campaigned strenuously against the placing of similar entertainments even on the more marginalised site of the pier. In 1895, one correspondent, appalled that the pier was “to be vulgarized by quack medicine and soap advertisements and penny-in-the-slot boxes, to the indignation and dismay of all right-minded people”, had appealed to the Town Council to uphold morality, “propriety and fitness”, supported by another who feared such amusements would “catch the eye and saturate the mind.” Commentators complained at the immorality of the “peep-show” and the cinematograph, where some of the pictures exhibited were said to be “of a questionable character...” and objected to the presence everywhere of “the base and the suggestive...especially in the form of mutoscope pictures”, calling for these to be promptly suppressed.

Whilst, as Gary Cross and John Walton illustrate, freak shows traditionally “crossed class and taste lines” and were considered as family entertainment, some of the more risqué ones were singled out for criticism by one journalist who saw “nothing elevating or edifying in the exhibition, for instance, of a nude grown-up female, however much of a freak of nature she may be.” The demand for images of otherness in institutional contexts which Joe Kember has identified was, as he explains, in reaction to “a need for comfort or reinforcement of deeply engrained social values of gender, nation, class or race, for example, that appeared under threat at the fin-de-siècle": recounting and recoiling from their presence at the Torquay Regatta served a similar function for newspaper readers. Waxworks appeared, such as Manders’ collection of figures which in 1892 included the “latest sensational murderer, Deeming”, or as in 1896, Mrs. Dyer, the Reading baby murderess:

... some of her victims could be seen for a penny. Outside there stood a working model of the unhappy woman’s execution. You placed your penny in a slot, and the machine did the rest! Of such is the taste of the public in these fin de siècle times!

From freaks to “the human ‘quack’ with his cure-all nostrums, to the gutta-percha cockerel emitting a spasm-like cackle as it collapses and dies after being distended by air, from stalls containing sweetmeats of the most indigestible hue and matter...”: year after year these and similar accounts of the shows presented a construction of the cultural alterity of the fairs, and collectively formed discourses which functioned as an affirmation of normative practices and a means of reassurance for the select Directory readership. This newspaper continued throughout this period
to act as a relentless critic of the fairs, and to invite its readers to share its abhorrence of an event which they found neither “refined” nor “elevating”, and which they believed should be “viewed with disfavour and disgust by many who would have the people rise above the gew-gaws, the fripperies, the frivolities and the inanities which are the characteristics of the collection of shows...”

Unlike in Weston-Super-Mare, where the ruling hegemony maintained a careful distance from the holiday crowds, there are repeated instances in Torquay in which members of the Church, press and authorities set out to explore more closely the phenomenon of the Regatta fairs and to interact with some of the individuals who peopled them. Taken collectively, these encounters form a broader spectrum of experience and opinion against which the consistently anti-fair stance of the Torquay Directory may be set. The attempts by local agencies to make some connection with the fair which annually stood on their doorsteps fell broadly into three categories: the work of the local Church groups amongst the visiting show families; personal narratives by journalists from the perspective of a participant; and less frequently, dialogue or interaction between show people and reporters. The motives which lay behind these various encounters, and the responses they provoked, varied widely according to context. Those which underpinned the work of the Church missions with showpeople might be assumed to be typically those of social control and paternalism. Yet even this contact provided some insight and knowledge of the lives of fairground families which could cut through some of the stereotypes perpetrated by other commentators who had based their judgements on observation at a distance only: thus the 1903 mission, for example, revealed that the fairground children being educated by them in the canvas schools were “quite equal educationally with children who had greater scholastic advantages,” and in 1905 that” the attendance and conduct of the children have shown a marked improvement.”

Moreover, also in contrast to the Torquay Directory whose depiction of the fairground routinely emphasised its alterity, the Times regularly printed accounts which empathised with show people and evidenced a range of personalities and characteristics which deviated from the stereotype. Walter E. Grogan, arts critic and son of the editor of the Torquay Times, offered an alternative narrative of the fair, in which show people were not merely othered as an alien group, but encountered as individuals with personalities and emotions. His 1897 report recorded with apparently genuine sympathy
one “tired-looking woman” performing a rifle-shooting and knife-throwing act “before an awfully small audience in a lifeless and uninterested manner.” In this rain-soaked Regatta, the pathos of the woman’s situation seemed recognised, and a rare attempt made not to objectify and stereotype her as a showwoman, but to understand her as a woman who worked the shows: “Poor woman, working with nerves and skill for a sorry living, with the possibility of an accident one day and a blank thereafter; with the surety of creeping old age, with the discomforts of this show travelling, with a multitude of drawbacks!” In another moment of quiet observation and unusual sensitivity, Grogan narrated how a “perplexed” and “anxious-eyed” woman in costume, collecting money from spectators with a baby on one arm, took the time, more than once, to kiss her baby’s hands: “There is a good deal of womanly love in the woman in abbreviated skirts, living in a caravan and knowing comfort possibly by repute, but not otherwise.” Together, they knowingly engaged in a game which, with a philanthropic gesture, he allowed her to win: “I had a sixpenny piece, she had only twopence; she would pay me the other twopence later on. She owed me twopence, and continued to owe it to me. I did not expect its return, and was not disappointed.”

The same reporter next reflected on an Italian girl he recognised from previous years, “pretty, even more than pretty, but quiet and almost out of the run of custom.” Here again, his interaction with her was not quite the habitual one of the knowing showwomen and the gullible customer, as his sympathy for her nature and situation moved him once more to generosity: “I give her something; she smiles. It is not so mechanical in effect as the smiles of other show people...But I fear she does a small trade, for her manners are softer than is usual in those who succeed in commercial pursuits. The race is to the strong and the loud-mouthed in all things.” One article alone drew attention consecutively to a “woman dancing tirelessly with a solemn face”, to a “severe, determined” showwoman at the shooting stall, and finally to a “solemn-faced lady” who “walks upon the tight-rope” who is “weary, working all day and a large portion of the night for an existence that might certainly be better, and could not well be worse.” These first-person narratives offered perceptive glimpses of the position of women within the fairground and show a knowledge and insight in marked contrast to the often stereotypical and dehumanising portraits of them elsewhere. These occasions, when the personalities and lives of the showpeople were revealed with any degree of sympathy and understanding, were rare, and when their show practices were considered
to be motivated by poverty rather than greed, their performances examples of their craft, rather than craftiness.

Motivated, perhaps, by the desire to produce novel material for its readership, the *Torquay Times* accounts were nevertheless distinct from those of their rival, the *Torquay Directory*. A readiness to envisage or engage with the fair from the perspective of one of its patrons led a succession of *Times* reporters to visit and actively experience them, by being in the audiences, behind the curtains, or even on the galloping horses: “I also had a ride”, wrote one fairgoing journalist, “just to feel how it would feel”. 107 Instead of collectively condemning all the shows and attractions as noisy, cheap, or vulgar, these reporters offered an evaluation based on close observation or experience which, often taking the form of personal narratives, presented as less one-dimensional and more open-minded accounts. In 1906, for example, the reporter noted the presence of shows which were “most attractive and fascinating”, praised a Kaffir snake charmer who provided a “really good performance”, and got his “money’s worth” from “a lad who whistled in imitation of various wild birds with wonderful skill, quite apart from a clever contortionist and some excellent animated pictures.”108 In 1910, another journalist gained “considerable pleasure” from the quick movements of the boxers, admired the “clever swimmers” in the aquatic display and praised Hancock and his entertainment for always giving “the public value for its money.”109 These accounts carried an acceptance and a greater understanding of the meaning of the fair to the masses who patronised it, the “merry, laughing, happy, light-hearted crowd,” who were “getting as much fun as possible in a very short time.”110 Importantly, they carried a recognition that as an interlude of pleasure, the Torquay Regatta fairs could appeal to and satisfy the needs of all:

There are many lessons in the mass of hurrying feet, if you will only detach individuals from the indigestible whole, which is as broadly beaming and benign as ever. So whatever you be, there is always something for you in the charmed circle of the Fair, something to your mind.111
Pleasure and displeasure: Weston-Super-Mare, 1900-1914

“Dreadful enough to look at, the mammoth mass became terrible when you fused yourself in its bulk. It seemed the same by night and day; it must have slept sometime, perhaps not in bulk, but in detail, each atom that sank away to slumber replaced by another atom fresh for the vigil; or if it slept in bulk it was in some somnambulant sort, with the sense of bad dream, a writhing, twisting nightmare.”

The topography of Weston-Super-Mare, which borders on the Bristol Channel on the North coast of Somerset, with its vast expanses of flat sands and hinterland, dictated naturally the spatial zoning of its town and seafront. With the sea at times as much as a mile distant at low tide, Weston was primarily characterised by wide, open, spaces. Its physical attributes lent themselves to features which were both long and linear: thus promenades ran along two miles of broad sands, backed by parallel succession of long lawns (Fig. 1.2). At right angles to the Promenade ran the grandly named twin parades of Oxford Street, and also Regent Street, which emerged on the seafront directly opposite the Grand Pier: at this intersection was later constructed the luxurious Regent Street cinema. The wide avenue of the ‘Boulevard’, which was bordered with imposing buildings such as the new library and the Victoria Hall, curved into South Parade, making a corner which was filled by the oval of the Grove Park gardens, with its ponds, fountains and bandstand. By 1904, two piers also formed long linear structures which straddled land and water, running away at right angles from the promenade. One Daily Telegraph reporter, whilst highlighting the benefits of these and the Marine Parade which “sweeps round, belting the expanses of sand and beach, gaining more solidity and dignity”, nevertheless pinpointed the problems inherent with such a large scale site, characterising Weston as a “straggling town”, divided into two sections between the town and the Birnbeck Pier to the north, and the beaches and promenades of the south. By the turn of the century, Weston had witnessed the emergence of a parallel, more popular culture, which had evolved with the growing accessibility of the resort to the large working class populations of Bristol and Wales.
It was not alone in facing the challenges posed by this increasing trend: “The culture of the seaside,” notes John Walton, “was broadening its range in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the larger resorts proved capable of providing intellectual and aesthetic stimulation for those who sought it, as well as (more obviously) allowing more boisterous opportunities for the pursuit of earthier and less inhibited pleasures.”

These patterns and structures clearly influenced the way people utilised and moved around these seaside spaces, with relationships developing between spatial and social zoning which could be fixed or fluid, and which depended on seasonal and temporal influences and other determinant factors such as class, cost, and entertainment provision. Of these, Fred Gray considers the most important to be class, noting that the architecture of the seaside was “consistently structured around and worked to existing social divisions.” In Weston, in common with some of the other major seaside resorts such as Brighton and Bournemouth, specific areas took on distinctive characteristics and roles at this time which defined them within the social and cultural hierarchy of the resort as a whole. As Rob Shields has outlined, invoking Barthes, not only objects but also places can derive cultural meaning through function, context,
and their habitual users: thus the same place, Shields explains, “can be made to symbolise a whole variety of social statuses, personal conditions, and social attitudes.”\(^\text{118}\) Fred Gray’s teleological perspective on seaside architecture posits it as the product of a “complex and layered design process”; he interprets this as “the manner in which a series of meanings attached to resorts, and their buildings and the seaside more generally, are produced and reproduced...and have a formative and determining influence both on how people use the seaside and what they understand and envisage by it.”\(^\text{119}\) Certain sites within Weston were interpreted differently and often conflictingly by the diverse groups associated with them: the piers, the Promenades and the Sands in particular had different meanings according to the perspective from which they were viewed, exemplified by attitudes, explored further in this chapter, to one of the most contested of these sites, Birnbeck Pier.

In many respects piers are unique structures, yet they arguably might be compared to a similar structure, the bridge, which as conceptualised by de Certeau crosses some kind of frontier and links “(legitimate) space” to its (alien) exteriority\(^\text{120}\): bridges may also represent a place for “departure, or the flight of an exile.”\(^\text{121}\) Piers are evidently geographically marginal places, on the edge of both land and sea, which both link and cross these two zones; piers also serve to move people from the space of the geographical centre to the periphery, from the known certainty of the street or the promenade, to an unfamiliar space above the water. Like de Certeau’s bridges, one function of piers was also as a place of departure, and consequently of arrival too: aside from promenading, their other early primary function was as a landing place for boats and passengers, acting as a link between two ports of call. For Weston’s genteel and long-stay visitors, by the turn of the century, Birnbeck Pier was of declining relevance: marginalised geographically by its position at the extreme end of the promenade, as one Daily Telegraph reporter noted in 1902: “The pier, commonly regarded as the most Northerly point of the Borough, is a considerable distance from the Sanatorium, but the tramway...may in time do much to make Weston pier, what it never yet has been, popular. It is situated at the far end of the town, away from the beaches frequented by the children and the casual visitor, and is practically little used...”\(^\text{122}\) Conversely, for at least half of the day excursionists and pleasure trippers to Weston, Birnbeck Pier was their essential gateway to leisure: for them, the pier was identified with pleasure, fun, a relaxation of the social mores and freedom from the work by which they were
constrained in their everyday life (Fig. 1.3). Weston’s geographical proximity to large, urban working populations enabled them easily to access its attractions: at the pier, steamers from Cardiff and Penarth arrived at regular intervals, bringing with them the tens of thousands of Welsh day-trippers that visited the resort each summer.  

Fig. 1.3. Birnbeck Pier, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association

Over this period, estimates of numbers of visitors arriving in the resort by boat increased from 12,000 in 1900, to 20,000 in August 1913, making up nearly half of the Bank Holiday crowd in each instance. Within Weston’s own cultural hierarchy, therefore, with its steamer connections to Wales, popular entertainments, and marginal position at the extreme end of the promenades, Birnbeck Pier was considered the domain of the working classes: known somewhat derogatively as ‘the Old Pier’ after the
construction of its superior rival the Grand Pier in 1904, as the *Weston Gazette* observed, it was “the recognised place of entertainment for the democracy.”

Accentuating the social and cultural alterity of the Old Pier became the regular focus of much local journalism during this period, forming discourses in the press which, in their objectification of its patrons, sought to unify readers in a common disdain for, rejection of, and superiority to all those who sought pleasure at Birnbeck. Attempts to reaffirm self-identity by marginalising as ‘Other’ despised social groups and cultures, are typically located, as Rob Shields has observed, in “the official discourse of dominant culture and central power”; the *Weston Mercury* in particular, sought to objectify the Old Pier patrons by engaging persistently in a mocking critique of their modes of dress, speech and behaviour. One of the known rituals associated with the pleasures of the working class excursion was ‘dressing-up’ for the day: it was a chance to discard the everyday clothes of the world of work, and an attempt to assume for a few brief hours the outward appearance of the leisured. Typically personified as ‘Arry, ‘Arrieta, Lizer, or Mrs. Grundy, the day-tripper crowds here were satirised for their attempts at refinement, their poor taste or lack of self-awareness: “Lizer arrived in the best of spirits and in all the glory of her “litest” Bank Holiday hat – a marvellous compound of white “fevvers” and ribands – and accompanied by the equally exuberant ‘Arry – majestic in his sky-blue “bell-bottoms...””

Mike Huggins explains how the liminality of the seaside permitted such “roles” to be assumed, being a location where “even the lower middle-class male might put on airs, masquerading a new identity.” It was precisely this “new seaside identity”, taken on by the working class girl or youth at leisure, empowered and exuberant which middle-class commentators in Weston despised, and feared, so much.

Criticisms of the dress codes of Weston’s holiday crowds frequently formed part of broader gendered discourses which, as those in Torquay had done, focused on women in particular: one *Mercury* journalist in 1911 derided the wearing by so many collectively of their bright “Sunday best”, implying that the underlying homogeneity of their class might be construed from the very heterogeneity of their dress: “Their attempts to be ‘in the mode’ were such as might have made the late lamented author of *Sartor Resartus* turn in his grave. The dresses were of every make, mode, shape, size, design and description – and they embraced every known colour, and several unknown, all blended together with circus-poster effect...” Derided also, by the same journalist,
as “a headdress composed of a sugar-loaf hat possessing as its sole ornament an upstanding feather-plume” were their hats: “Being ‘the latest from Paris’ it was, of course, good enough for the soulfully refined young ladies of Bedminster, Cardiff and the Rhondda...who spent their pocket money lavishly thereon and ...damned the consequences.” This juxtaposition of Paris, the centre of fashion, with the working class districts of Wales and Bristol, served to ridicule the aspirations, means, and etiquette of these working class visitors. Ironically, the very act of attempting to “dress up” to the class above was visible evidence of them bringing their own, inferior culture on holiday with them and merely reinforced notions of their working class status in the eyes of some middle class observers.

Commentators in the press regularly took delight in relating the discomfort, the failures, or unrealised expectations of the day-tripper, inevitably seeking to infer causality for these disappointments linked to the class or culture of the hapless visitor. Thus the journalist writing of the wet Easter in 1900 made fun of the plight of Weston’s poorer visitors, mocking their determination to enjoy their one day of holiday, despite the atrocious weather which imparted “the greatest degree of discomfort amongst all who elected to seek pleasure in the open air. It took more than the prospects of an unpropitious day, however, to prevent ‘Arry and Lizer from spending their long anticipated day at Weston and accordingly they duly carried out their trip...” Narratives in the press in which excursionists saw their day of leisure wrecked by a day of rain and gales were plentiful, in which no empathy was shown by observers: rather, there was the implication that the necessity for those “lower classes” to pursue their leisure activities in the open air, with all the attendant consequences, was foolish behaviour which plainly accentuated their status. These accounts served further to reinforce class distinctions and could be both cutting, and triumphant, in tone: “An hour or so on the Sea Front suffered to put Lizer out of all count however. The wind and rain played havoc with her ‘at’, ... with her tousled fringe hanging as dark and limp as rat tails...” With all attempts at finery and respectability washed away by the rain and thus stripped of their “new seaside identity”, trippers could be simply reduced once more to the stereotype of the working class drunk: “small wonder”, continued this commentator, “that she subsided into a semi-listless condition which all the quarts of beer in the world could not entirely dispel.”
Victorian ideas of middle-class respectability which, as Mike Huggins has demonstrated, remained powerful at the turn of the century, continued on into the twentieth century, their rhetoric still “acting through preaching, the pages of the press, political platforms, and magistrates’ pronouncements.” A form of cultural hegemony prevailed in Weston in which dominant groups sought determinedly to impose their own ideologies and practices of leisure, behaviour and constraint on working-class visitors and others whom they considered as potential transgressors and a threat to their established ‘norms’. The voice of this dominant group sounded loudly and disapprovingly in the local press: observations of visitor behaviour in the newspapers focused on transgressions and misconduct which then formed the basis of their ‘tripper’ narratives, which consistently constructed day-trippers and working class excursionists as tending towards drunken, indecent, immoral, or violent behaviour.

Bad weather also often forced working-class visitors unwillingly into behaviours which the press then found degrading or decadent: the inability of the return steamers to Wales, for example, to dock at the pier, could result in thousands being stranded outdoors in Weston overnight. In 1900, a ‘hurricane’ forced hundreds to spend the night on the pier – the press sensationalised rather than sympathised with their situation, finding vicarious amusement in the discomfiture of ‘courting couples’ obliged to spend the night together, and speculating with undisguised pleasure on the embarrassment of facing their parents on the return home. These implications of indecency were not, in fact, borne out by the behaviour of the stranded day-trippers, for “where finances allowed, ‘Arry generally succeeded in securing a night’s shelter for his beloved, whilst he roughed it elsewhere.” Whilst the intention of the observer was to portray an unfavourable image of the ‘lower classes sleeping rough’ these comments conversely evidenced a respectability and code of behaviour in widespread operation amongst the trippers which contradicted this. Such scenes of visitors “sorely buffeted by the wind and blinded by the driving sand and grit”, faced with no option other than to spend a stormy night on Birnbeck Pier or the sands, drew not compassion, but merely calumny, from a press only too eager to accentuate to its readers the undesirability and alterity of the tripper crowd.

The entertainments provided for these crowds along the pier at Birnbeck, moreover, did little to endear them to Weston’s ruling elite: having gradually developed from the original bare boards which had merely provided opportunities only for
promenading, and as John Walton suggests, for “display, discussion and flirtation”, Birnbeck’s amusements had evolved into a replica fairground, comprising as many attractions as the limited space allowed. Prices too, were on a par with the fairground: tuppence allowed admission to over fourteen different amusements of a type most familiar to the Victorian fairgoer, from the shooting gallery to the coconut shies. These stalls and shows, long established at travelling fairs inland, transferred easily to the context of the Weston seaside and a ready-made, semi-permanent home on the pier. Typical, too, of the fairground, the Old Pier’s showmen embraced the latest technologies and made them into entertainment: in 1900 here, the novelty of electricity gave rise to the new attractions of “embroidery by electricity” and “electric engraving”. This pier promoted the latest crazes, such as the helter-skelter or ‘houp-la’, and thus proved itself an ideal home, too, for ‘rinking’ when in fashion.

Entertainments on the Birnbeck pier, like the fair, therefore, offered a comfortable blend of the old and familiar, combined with an endless quest for novelty and new inventions. By 1910, the houp-la and the hurry-scurry were now accompanied by the maze, and one of the latest attractions, the cake-walk, a moving mechanical walkway powered by electricity, which jolted its customers around amusingly: later, airships, which fed into the burgeoning interest in aviation, took crowds to a new and dizzying height above the pier.

Discourses in the press on the Old Pier amusements routinely condemned this popular mix of low, fairground, and working-class entertainments, where detailed accounts of activities and amusements spoke plainly of a certain class of visitor and reinforced cultural distinctions more trenchantly. As Rob Shields elucidates, any site with a marginal status has the potential to become a space for “illicit or disdained social activities”; as a marginalised social space, self-contained and set apart from the shore, Birnbeck’s attractions drew contempt from the press. Journalists marvelled that pleasure could be derived from such cheap and unsophisticated amusements, and maintained a firm focus in their reports on the undignified, the unsavoury, or the vulgar, the cheap prizes, the dropped ‘aitches’, or the duplicitous showmen. Sideshows, such as the ‘Artful Dodger’, where a “grotesquely painted face” was thrust “through a circular orifice in a canvas screen” to be pelted by the public hoping to win a cigar, smacked of the fairground and provided a rich source of humour for one Mercury journalist who observed: “The pennies literally poured in, and so did the cloth-balls, but unfortunately
the attempts to ‘it ‘im on the ‘ead’ were rarely successful, and thus few of the choice ‘cigaws’ [‘specially imported from our own plantation’] changed hands.”

The Weston day-trippers habitually displayed their love of dancing, readily engaging in “valses, polkas and square dances” on the open space of the pier. Darren Webb, commenting on the northern working class love of dancing, feels that it is in this activity, more than any other, that the Bakhtinian spirit of carnival may be found: “It was here that class distinctions came closest to being suspended, that communication came closest to being free and frank, and that the crowd came closest to fusing into the immortal mass body of the people, united in free celebration of the most beloved of all social practices.” The mixing and bodily contact between the sexes was openly disdained and yet at the same time often described with voyeuristic pleasure; implications of immorality and intemperance lay just below the surface of so many of these accounts. To middle-class observers, dancing in the open air on the pier was the cultural antithesis of its elite and more refined ballroom cousin, and the visible delight and eagerness of visitors to indulge in it, again reinforced prejudices regarding the day-trippers. On the Old Pier in 1911, even the existence of a makeshift “ballroom”, for which an extra charge of 4d or 6d was levied, did not quite add the desired refinement, for whilst “a moderate few... disported themselves”, the press report revelled in the presence near its entrance of an “exhibition of a lion-faced lady, while near at hand another rival factor – a coffee-coloured gentleman rejoicing in the name of Togo and the profession of snake charmer – by way of advertising his performance periodically brandished a rattle snake in the very faces of the public.”

Exposing the presence of these marginalised activities and their proximity to the pier visitor both reinforced once again the social and cultural alterity of all those who patronised Birnbeck, whilst at the same time seeking to affirm a common sense of identity and make an appeal to the normative values and experiences of the newspaper readers. The racial stereotyping was not solely confined to the Welshness of the visitors or the colour of the snake charmer’s skin: it extended, also, to the German band who accompanied the dancers on the Old Pier. This construction of racial alterity, in which the musicians were labelled as “representatives from the Vaterland”, their German accents mimicked, and their music mocked, was perhaps a foretaste of the demonisation of the German race which would shortly become commonplace in the years approaching the First World War. Yet again, it invited readers to make favourable comparisons with
their own, ‘higher’, culture and securely placed them in relative cultural and racial
superiority to the audiences and musicians on the pier:

...for the modest sum of twopence per head dancing to the deliriously
fascinating strains of Jacob’s – we beg pardon, Herr Jacob’s band,
could be indulged in...From the once ornamental bandstand, his
talented body let forth such a tornado...as fully made amends to the
trippers for the atmospheric discomfort to which they had been
subjected, with the result that Jacob’s smiling appeals to “Pleese
patronise de band” met with a most generous response.149

From the ethnocentric perspective of Weston’s dominant hegemonic group,
these working class holiday crowds, having briefly at their disposal both time and
money, represented a despised and feared mix of low culture and temporary
empowerment. The tripper trade was viewed from an essentially English, middle-class,
masculine, and local perspective, which turned these pleasure crowds into spectacles of
otherness: watched by local observers, mocked, reviled, feared, and under constant
observation, they were frequently misrepresented and usually misunderstood. The
patriarchal gaze of the press fell often upon the female day-trippers, and invited readers
to share their view, in both senses of the term: “Long or short, square or stodgy, weedy
or willowy, fully aged or flappers, they all wore [hats], and all appeared to be eminently
satisfied with the result – but it was a sight for gods and men!”150 One 1911 article,
ambiguously subtitled “The Humours of the Day”, ventured the opinion that that whilst
most trippers were “evidently people of good class position”, many of the ladies
“formed fit subjects for contemplation by students of human nature.”151 Beneath this
lighthearted phrase, calculated to amuse the readers, lay disturbing implications
concerning female respectability and male superiority, which objectified these women
as “specimens” who freely invited the male gaze.

These crowds were spectated, observed, and understood only as a mass, as a
single entity. Gustave Le Bon’s study of crowds a few years earlier had argued strongly
for the loss of individuality within the crowd, contending that “the sentiments and ideas
of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious
personality vanishes.”152 The American critic and author, William Dean Howells,
narrating his experiences of flânerie amongst the leisure crowds of Blackpool, Brighton,
and London, vividly recorded his impressions of the crowds in a detached yet not
dispassionate way from his perspective as an outsider. Spectating the crowd through a
process he termed his “mental Kodak”, Howells recognised that his written snapshots
were in themselves inadequate, since “most pictures [only] represent the surfaces of
things”; he understood that his knowledge of the crowds he witnessed could only be
partial. Despite his deliberate and repeated immersion, however, constraints and barriers
of class and conventions prevented him from fully participating in the crowds he had set
out to see, or even from merely interacting with them:

You meet innumerable people who would eagerly tell you their lives
or analyze their characters to you, if you would offer them the chance
by the slightest question, and yet you pass them dumbly by while
inwardly you are hungering and thirsting to know about them. How
rich I might have made this page, if when we venturously formed part
of the organism on the quay, I could have asked some elbow
neighbour what he was when he was at home, and how long he was
going to stay, and how he liked it.

“We wished we knew them”, wrote Howells in another discourse, “but social
improprieties forbade” this lack of communication led to Howells knowing nothing
of the individuals who constituted the crowd surrounding him, and comprehending it in
a limited way simply as “mere human mass ... and miles of it.” The rhetoric in the
Weston press similarly stereotyped the holiday crowd as an unknown and homogeneous
mass, an alien breed, “the tripper species” the “imports”, a “horde of strangers”, which
moved, thought, ate, drank and danced as one. Like Howells, observers from
Weston’s authorities and press remained, in their own words, “distant spectators”.

‘Arry, with his hat placed at a knowing angle at the rear of his head,
with both arms clasped round Lizer’s shoulders – his honest hands
there reposing strongly suggesting to the distant spectator a pair of
miniature legs of mutton – dreamily waltzed until such time as the
adjournment of himself and his lady-love for a little beer became
advisable in order that the fatigue attendant upon Terpsichorean
exercises might be dispelled.

The visuality and sensuality contained in this cameo typified the voyeuristic
gaze of the press, with the journalist/spectator, both detached and yet involved, attracted
and yet repelled by the scene, standing culturally, socially and morally apart from the
objects of his scrutiny. A similar dialectic between curiosity and revulsion emerged
clearly in Howells’ written observations of the masses. Though he wished repeatedly to
encounter and know the seaside crowds, yet they are recalled in the opening citation to this chapter as a vast and voracious single living organism, with a gargantuan appetite and little need of sleep. It was with disgust that Howells witnessed the crowds “forever writhing, forever worming, squirming up and down.” His representation of the crowds has a remarkable parallel in one Weston Mercury report, which likened them to “a fearsome tripper-octopus.” Weston’s construction of the crowd/creature was more frightening even than Howells’: having “seized upon the town” in the early morning, it “gripped it fast in its relentless tentacles until midnight, and then, having gorged itself to completion upon its victim’s blood, withdrew until the natural process of time should afford it another opportunity of repeating its ravages.”

This vision of the Weston crowds as monstrous and powerful was a recurrent theme throughout this period, and demonstrated that on one side of the relationship, at least, there existed fear: authorities, residents and press consistently displayed anxieties about their ability to control the phenomenon of the mass crowd, whilst remaining convinced of the need to do so. As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard have outlined, “[r]uling elites have always regarded unlicensed recreation with alarm. Whenever and wherever the so-called lower orders gathered in numbers … the authorities have always seen a threat to social order.” Thus great potential for conflict in Weston lay at the interface between those seeking to maintain social tone, and those they feared posed a threat to it. Whilst opinion continued throughout this period to be divided - Bank Holidays for the traders, stallholders, and providers of entertainment were golden opportunities to make money - many residents of the town disliked the wholesale invasion of the streets and promenades by the trippers, and the authorities firmly believed such crowds posed a threat to law and order. These tensions emerged clearly from a Weston Mercury article from 1900, which depicted a wet Easter at Weston: whilst from the trippers’ and businesses’ point of view this was a “failure”, the Weston Mercury noted with habitual bias the relief it imagined to be felt by many Westonians who would “unfeignedly rejoice if the disappointment which Monday’s trippers experienced were of such a complete nature as to induce a determination on the aforesaid trippers’ part never to again patronize the town.” The paper was of the opinion that “had the weather proved of anything like an agreeable nature, our streets would undoubtedly have once again presented the scenes of pandemonic revelry with which we have on previous occasions become familiar …” One contemporary
American critic of the crowd, James Huneker, expressed the fear, that when behaving collectively, “humanity sheds its civilisation and becomes half child, half savage”, a view echoed later by the critic Jane Jacobs, who in her observations on the tensions and anxieties of American street life at this time, regards streets as an arena for a highly polarised struggle between “civilization” and “barbarism”. Andrew Prescott, remarking upon the “energy and vibrancy” and “rough physicality” of Edwardian streets, notes further that whilst the working classes considered them “a venue for gathering, celebration, and recreation”, the urban middle classes, concerned about their “social fluidity”, were anxious to impose civic virtues of order, rationality and mannered behaviour...

In Weston, this ‘struggle’ was equally polarised, between an alliance of authorities focused on social control, confronted with an influx of holiday crowds bent on pleasure, bringing with them their own culture and codes of behaviour.

From the first moments after their arrival, to being marshalled to their point of departure sometime towards midnight, the excursionist crowds from Wales, and the thousands who joined them by road and rail from Bristol, were closely watched. The Foucauldian paradigm of panoptic surveillance laid an emphasis on the “permanent visibility” of the prison inmate, and the self-regulating practices which the mechanism promoted: this system, Foucault contended, was a means of imposing a particular form of behaviour on a prisoner, “a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation.” A similar all-seeing eye existed in Weston, which monitored and regulated the every movement of pleasure trippers arriving in Weston for the high days and holidays, from the first moments to the last seconds of their stay. “The panoptic mechanism” Foucault noted, “arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognise immediately.” In Weston, the authorities aimed to keep day-tripper crowds “permanently visible”: arrangements were made for the close observation and monitoring of visiting groups throughout the day. Detailed data on the provenance, destinations, and numbers of visitors was carefully and repeatedly accumulated: here, it was not an understanding of the individual which counted, but knowledge of the masses, and whether they arrived by steamer, road and light railway, of the thousands heading to the pier, the promenades or the sands. Tracking the crowds in this way maintained their visibility, and gave the authorities a knowledge of them which contributed to their exercise of power over them. Councillors, magistrates, police, pier management, station-master and railway staff together formed an authoritative alliance.
which sought to ensure the maintenance of order and the hegemonic imposition of codes of behaviour through a concerted system of surveillance and the punishment or incarceration of transgressors. Observers were stationed in key locations: at each Weston site, a small but powerful presence was there to observe and to control. At Birnbeck, the Manager and Secretary of the Pier Company; the station master and staff at the railway; the local police force, along the streets and promenades, their numbers increased perhaps by fifty extras from the county; all collaborated in the watching of the tens of thousands of arrivals. In this way, visitors were passed around from the hand of one authority to the next, until returned to their point of departure, and home; a few unfortunates, however, in a continuation of the disciplinary process, went directly to the cells, to be referred to the authority of the magistrates the following morning.

![Fig.1.4. Weston Sands. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Museum.]

This tight control appeared to work well in closely defined spaces, such as the Old Pier, where a combination of turnstiles, the payment of a toll, and smaller crowds, meant order could be more easily maintained by a combination of the Manager and
Secretary of the Pier Company, and duty constables. The press allied itself with these controlling authorities and approvingly reported each Bank Holiday when “perfect order” had been maintained here. Potentially more volatile, however, were the huge open spaces of the Sands and promenades: more concerning still, was the existence of “localities over which the police had no authority”, to which certain day-trippers regularly retreated.¹⁷⁰ In contrast to the pier, the vast, free, and largely unregulated expanse of the Sands, lawns, and Promenades was socially fluid space: there were no tolls such as those which existed in Torquay’s seafront Pleasure Gardens, priced deliberately to exclude those who, as previously noted, in the eyes of the Council, fell into the category of “loafers”. The sheer volume of people concentrated in one space posed a problem in itself (Fig. 1.4). One day in 1912, a “pronounced degree of congestion” occurred, when the brilliant sunshine had “driven the multitude shoreward”: “the Sands”, noted one journalist, “appeared to be practically black with people, while the Promenade and Beach lawns suggested the same human ant-hill appearance.”¹⁷¹ Inhabited by a diversity of occupants which shifted and altered from night to day, and from weekday to Sunday, it was space which could be accessed by all, from the socially excluded to the eminently respectable. It played host to an endless cycle of changing activities, legitimate and illicit, innocent and sinister, as a Daily Telegraph correspondent so graphically described in 1902:

> The history of Weston sands is told in three days. On Saturday night, the darkness of the Channel is intensified by the glare of the lamps where the niggers congregate, and the adult population are not loth to linger. At the stalls, buying and selling is accelerated by the coming of a sharp, summer shower, for such stock must be cleared. Every entertainment is well patronised, from the hastily organised auction to the phrenologist’s tent, and all grown-up Weston, and a considerable contingent of the juvenile community, would appear to be out on the sands. During church time on the morrow... the sands are in the possession of open-air missionaries. On Monday, however, the children come into their own again, and hold the wide beach during the rest of the week.¹⁷²

This description evidences a social and temporal zoning and the discrete occupation and ownership of the Sands by a heterogeneity of groups who seemed mutually incompatible: absent from this account is evidence of any periods of the sociable mixing and mingling of different classes and users. It makes a marked contrast with the comments of the Liberal paper, The Blackpool Times, writing of the Promenade crowds there in 1904, which constructed a very different impression of the crowd: “A common
meeting ground this for all, for the merchant and the mechanic, the lady of fashion and the factory lass, for the plutocrat and the plebeian, the mightiest and the meanest. We all commingle on these spacious parades by the sea, for the time being having no castes, no precise distinctions of ‘proper’ and ‘select’ persons.”

Gary Cross and John Walton note that “these cheerful images of Blackpool epitomized what were coming to be seen as traditional English virtues of good humour, class harmony, and shared pleasures.”

For the Weston authorities, the vast swathes of the sands and the promenades often appeared to be sites not of harmony but of conflict: as one Reverend Thomas explained, Weston was “by no means a heaven on earth. He had been told that sometimes on a summer’s evening on the sands it was much more like pandemonium…” Together they comprised a liminal zone of shifting occupancy and legitimacy, which included furthermore, that most troublesome of sites, the foreshore.

Unrefined and undesirable though the Old Pier patrons might be, there was always an underlying confidence that within this socially and geographically marginalised space at least, visitors could be contained and controlled. John Walton explains how the spatial organization of resorts could legislate against the authorities’ ability to order them, and adds: “At the seaside rich and poor, respectable and ungodly, staid and rowdy, quiet and noisy not only rubbed shoulders...they had to compete for access to, and the use of, recreational space...the result was untrammeled competition for the use of the most convenient areas of the foreshore.” In addition to the problems relating to the visitor numbers in Weston, the sheer scale of the site and the conflicting demands its users made upon it, there remained the vexed question of its ownership, and the regulation of its stalls. The opening months of the new century witnessed a Local Government Board enquiry at Weston-Super-Mare town hall, during which fresh requests by the Urban District Council to be allowed to introduce stricter bye-laws to obtain fuller control of “parades, foreshores, sands and wastes” were considered. The enquiry itself displayed in microcosm, the balance of power and influence which mirrored that within the town itself: alongside scant and anonymous representation from “a number of other individuals who gain a livelihood upon the Sands”, were listed the names of the barristers representing the Council, the ratepayers, and the Salvation Army, five members of the clergy, thirteen councillors, two Justices of the Peace, the Deputy Lieutenant of the County, and other parties with vested middle-class interests, including the owner of a lodging house and the principal of a local private school.
“The Nuisances Upon the Sands”, as the local Weston press headed its report on the enquiry, in the eyes of their detractors, comprised a familiar and traditional assortment of salesmen and showmen, with temporary stalls which came and went with the tides and the crowds. John Walton observes as a consequence of the increase in lower-class visitors, the arrival at resorts of “hawkers, stallholders and showmen” whom he considers to have caused “congestion and discomfort, and bringing middle-class families into contact with undesirable sights and sounds.”179 These “undesirable sights and sounds” were apparently in abundance in Weston and objected to vocally by, amongst others, a magistrate who feared to walk along the Promenade with friends, a reverend who wished to hold services on the Sands, and a teacher, who feared for his pupils walking along the sea front, all of whom gave evidence personally at the enquiry. The coalition of figures of authority presenting evidence to the Board unsurprisingly conspired to portray the businesses on the Sands as belonging to an underclass who preyed both morally and financially on unsuspecting passers-by in an attempt to “catch a wandering copper.”180 Their verbal evidence combined to form a rhetoric which, for the sake of the agreed need to “conduce to the good order of the town”,181 condemned the behaviour, morality and activities of all of those who worked the Sands (Fig. 1.5). This vilification of the performers and sellers on the beach was framed by constructions of cultural, social and racial alterity which sought to depict their activities as inferior, immoral, or simply bizarre. Those who gave evidence spoke of the foreshore as inhabited by a dangerous and threatening mix of types, unregulated and unwelcome, and of pickpockets, phrenologists, and indecent performances: the Clerk to the Magistrates, for example, stressed “the motley nature of the crowd”, where “at one spot half a dozen “blue girls” might be seen singing and dancing, whilst close at hand was a troupe of “New Boys” – onlookers being importuned for donations in each instance. Probably next in rotation would be the Salvation Army, a performing donkey, Mr Punch, a party of acrobats, nougat sellers, etc.”182 To these middle-class observers, this ‘motley crowd’ encompassed elements of the bizarre, the unknown and the alien, and which therefore excited their fear and xenophobia. The same Clerk complained of witnessing a fight between the nougat sellers, who, “he was happy to say, were not Westonians, but were either German or Russian Jews” and who had... “in order to attract attention... the services of either Kaffir or Matabele attendants, whilst, when
Fig. 1.5. “Professor Bauer and his performing donkey”, c.1903. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Museum.

the amusement palled, huge masks were worn – in fact, something new appeared to be introduced every day.”183 This, too, was a discourse with more than an occasional gender bias, one resident, for example, considering that “the entertainments given in front of the Promenade wall were vulgar, and many vile suggestions were uttered in connection with them – particularly by the female performers.”184 The enquiry had clearly demonstrated how the clash between figures of authority, and entertainments and sellers on the beach, had become polarised into a conflict of values and ideas of conduct, between the binaries of order and disorder, decency and immorality, refinement and vulgarity. The Council, feeling its actions legitimised by the enquiry, moved to regulate all those who sang, made speeches, hired out bathing machines, boats or chairs, collected money or undressed on the beach, by strictly delineating zones where such activities were permitted, and by prohibiting all such amusements within twenty yards of the Promenades.185 These attempts by the local authorities in Weston to ‘ring-fence’ the activities of the foreshore were partially successful: a reporter for the Mercury a few months later noted that “the incessant pestering of Promenaders by
various members of the troupes with collecting boxes was avoided.” Some of the much feared interaction between the foreshore entertainers and the families on the promenade had thus been curtailed. Though now at a distance, they remained as an audible presence on the beach, as one reporter noted with sarcasm: “It does not require much talent to satisfy a Bank Holiday crowd. Vocalists with racy titles, breezily suggestive of ‘the halls’, were roundly applauded, sang they never so hoarsely, whilst “patter” and jokes...were hailed as transcendental examples of wit.”

The informal alliance of authorities which had prevailed in the 1900 enquiry continued to conspire to intervene powerfully in a succession of similar disputes, claiming in each instance to be acting either in the interests of the law, the ratepayers, or the best interests of the town. Maintaining the ‘social tone’ in Weston was a priority which was thought to require strict municipal regulation and strong control: 1909 in particular, was a year of stringent regulation and harsh new penalties. Cases involving showmen, stallholders, or hawkers, appeared to have the odds stacked against them: thus, for example, in the case of the Old Pier showman, contesting his right to retain his site for his ‘Cake Walk’ for the coming 1911 season, the judge found quickly, in his absence, in favour of the Pier Company. The same year, in its report entitled “Amusing Prosecution”, the Weston Gazette derived much humour from narrating the conviction of a showman for “fraudulently pretending or professing to tell fortunes”: the ‘customer’ who had made the complaint against him was none other than the wife of a local police sergeant, set up by the police to trap him, a ruse the court seemed pleased to ignore. Hawkers, whether on the sands or in the streets, were relentlessly pursued: one, in June 1911, was offered the choice of being fined 40s or spending 14 days in prison, for allowing his cart full of rock sweets to stand for twelve minutes whilst unloading, the harsh sentence intended to act as a warning to people who “defied the desire for law and order in the town” and “to put a stop to the nuisance”. The following year, more hawkers were chased on or prosecuted by a police presence “determined to show these people that they cannot defy the wish of the public with impunity.”

More than a decade after the Board enquiry, the Sands remained a contested site. The regulation of the stalls on the foreshore was once again on the agenda of the Urban District Council meeting in May 1912: yet in the intervening years, a remarkable shift in the balance of power had occurred. Faced with a Council resolution, passed
without any consultation with the stallholders, to alter their positions and conditions with immediate effect, fifty-four of them refused to sign the new agreement. This new dispute highlighted the ambivalent attitudes of councillors who openly despised the stalls and entertainments, yet enjoyed the revenue from the rentals. It showed the unexpected power stallholders could wield when acting as a concerted party: whereas in 1900 they had scarcely had a voice, in 1912 they were bold enough to send a deputation and a petition to the meeting. It publicly exposed those councillors with vested interests, who whilst claiming to act in the interests of the ratepayers, had sought simply to move the stalls away from their own businesses in the town, and those who held shares in the Grand Pier which crossed the Sands. Most importantly, by their own admission, it caused the Council to “look ridiculous”, obliged as they were to rescind the resolution and revert to the old terms and conditions. Critically, both Councillors and stallholders now realised both the economic, strategic and symbolic importance of the space which the stalls occupied within Weston. Nestling up to the Grand Pier, opposite the best shopping parades, and in the centre of the Promenades, they occupied the heart of the resort: this attempt by the Council to marginalise them geographically, behind which lay the desire to distance them socially and economically from the centre of the resort, ended in a surprising humiliation for members of the Council, and unexpected triumph for the stallholders.

Edwardian commentators, note Morgan and Pritchard, believed that interaction between all the various social groups who shared the seaside during their holidays, would lead to a new and improved class cohesion. In reality, they argue, resorts during this period were more frequently sites of conflict, where “status-conscious visitors and residents competed with working-class tourists for access to leisure time and space.” One of the most pressing problems for those resorts attracting large numbers of holiday makers was that of reconciling the many conflicting needs, in particular, the demands made by what John Walton terms the “mutually incompatible modes of recreation and enjoyment”, which found themselves in uncomfortable proximity at the seaside. Just along the coast, the small, genteel resort of Ilfracombe, faced with a decline in numbers of wealthier visitors, attempted to reconcile the needs of a new and rather less welcome class of tourist from Wales, with limited success as Morgan and Pritchard have observed. In Weston-Super-Mare, whilst municipal efforts were clearly made to provide suitable amusement, transport, refreshment, and
accommodation which met the needs of its more select visitors and residents - funding a luxurious Pavilion from ratepayers money, instigating excellent railway connections to London, encouraging high quality instrumental and vocal concerts for example – there was a marked diffidence towards the provision of entertainment and facilities for its working class clientele. One journalist remarked that had ‘the general public’ been reliant only on the town to provide its amusement, it would have been as cheerfully entertained as if in “the catacombs of Rome”.198 In 1913, angry and shocked correspondents wrote to the local press to complain about an incident in which the sheer crush of passengers waiting for a late steamer caused a dangerous panic-stricken surge: on the eventual arrival of a boat with space remaining for only thirty, the closing of the gate was met with “wild screams of women and terrified children” and several “were forced back through the crowd in a dead faint.”199 “During the whole of the time,” wrote one visitor from Cardiff, the pier officials were safely and comfortably attending to their duties on the other side of the white gates, away from the ‘madding crowd’. There were none on the pier side, and no attempt made to regulate the surging mass of people, who, as on previous occasions, were left to look after themselves.”200 It revealed not only the appalling “cattle-market” conditions of this type of working class excursion, but also the indifference of the authorities to the welfare, and even to the behaviour, of crowds who on this late, wet, evening, posed a threat only to themselves, and no longer to the resort.

The maintenance of “social tone” remained paramount which, as previously noted, in Weston could be partially achieved by social zoning in certain key areas of the resort, inevitably resulting in less integration between the classes. In contrast to the Old Pier, the Grand Pier, by means of its express provision of “musicians of the first rank...and variety entertainments of a refined and pleasing order”,201 regularly attracted a class of crowd of which the press approved. Its white and gold pavilion, high class orchestral concerts, resident band and bioscope entertained homogeneous crowds of so-called “good type visitors”,202 so generally well-behaved that the occasional transgression came as an unpleasant shock. One military band concert, repeatedly brought to a halt by a “well-dressed but decidedly hooligan mob...quite rare in the Pavilion” indulging in “crude horseplay”, exemplified the existence of underlying tensions and oppositions within these crowds.203 In August 1911, despite the “torrid heat”, the authorities, persuaded by householders and residents, intervened to ban bathing in Glentworth Bay: as the traditional domain of “the better class visitor”,
conflict had arisen because of “young men and women undressing on the sands and bathing not attired in what is considered correct mode” in front of the families of middle class holiday makers who frequented it. Typically, where space was contested and where there existed such potential for class conflict, it was always residential interests and the needs of polite society which prevailed. Rare moments may be identified, in which the normal relations of power between the day-trippers and the dominant hegemony were subverted - in the following instance, the observed became observers themselves:

In the town itself female pedestrians experienced a rough time in a double sense. At Messrs Lance and Lance’s corner no less than four policemen were continuously on duty escorting lady pedestrians past that exposed position: but despite the greatest care, occasional gusts of extra force worked such execution amongst the wearing apparel of the escorted subjects as must have occasioned the most furious blushes – each contretemps of this character being greeted with rounds of ironical applause from a host of hobbledehoy and adult excursionists who had assembled in the locality.

Here, male day-trippers were spying on “lady pedestrians”, subverting the norm, described previously, of the patriarchal gaze falling upon female excursionists: just briefly, it was the visitors who held the gaze, and thus the power.

Whilst these daily offences to middle-class sensibilities consistently caused alarm and drew critical comment, yet they hardly constituted the major transgressions so regularly predicted, and feared, by the press and authorities. Occasionally, reports appearing in the more measured Weston Gazette depicted the tripper crowds which arrived by road, rail and steamer as self-regulating and orderly, quietly engaging in a variety of wholesome activities: “Speedily dispersing on arrival, they spent the day in various ways. Most, we should say, spent their time strolling about the sea front, drinking in the ozone-laden and invigorating air; others repaired to enjoy a quiet rest in the beautiful woods; while the rest feasted eye and ear on the best of entertainment which the town’s entrepreneurs could provide.” In fact, the threat of widespread drunkenness and total disorder, so repeatedly emphasised elsewhere in the press, never in fact materialised on any great scale during the period under scrutiny. Notwithstanding this, tales and tallies of the drunk and disorderly in court, formed a regular part of the ritual Bank Holiday reportage, the “Inevitable Sequel” which appeared to confirm both the existence, always suspected and feared, of the subversive element amongst the
holiday crowds. Yet the actual number of arrests made each Bank Holiday was very low, and from the crowds which numbered their tens of thousands, usually less than a handful of prisoners appeared before the Bench the following morning: of the estimated 42,000 who arrived for the Bank Holiday in 1911, for example, merely three ended up in the courts.\textsuperscript{207} To the would-be social controllers, this represented a victory for discipline and authority: in 1900, the \textit{Mercury} boasted that “[d]runkenness, disorder and general revelry did exist it is true, but fortunately the strict hand exercised prevented a repetition of such wholesale and pandemonic scenes of debauchery as we have had occasion to formerly notice.”\textsuperscript{208}

In 1904, similarly the editor of the \textit{Weston Gazette} in 1904 triumphantly described the successful policing of the Whit-Monday holiday: “The extra police had a comparatively easy task, and the few boisterous ones were quickly made to realise that their conduct, if persisted in, would inevitably lead to a prolonged stay in the town, without that freedom which is the Britisher’s boast.”\textsuperscript{209} This discourse, with its imperialist overtones, which implied the trippers’ anti-patriotic, if not anarchic, behaviour, sought to broaden the dimensions of this local incident into a much more significant conflict for its readers, and to demonstrate the legitimacy and effectiveness of the action taken by the authorities. In fact, the threat of disorder amongst the holiday crowds and its repeated successful countering by rightful authorities continued to be mythologised in the press throughout this decade: exaggerating its scale served first to alarm and then to reassure its readers, who could consequently draw comfort from the fact that the forces of law and order had apparently once again saved Weston from the dangers of the democracy.

Those who significantly failed to appreciate the social and cultural codes by which Weston was governed, felt the force of the law which could uphold them. Whilst the seaside was traditionally a space in which to escape the constraints of everyday life and where a certain relaxation of \textit{mores} could be expected, it could paradoxically also be a repressive world with rigid rules and equally clear expectations of behaviour. The responsibility to conform to these lay firmly with the visitors, and serious failure to do so, concluded inevitably in court: “There was only one case of rowdysism to be dealt with and it was entirely the unnecessary fault of the visitor – not the police – that he came to spend a night in the police cells. Our local force are to be congratulated on the leniency extended by its members towards those who have unwisely celebrated the
Thus, transgressors were criminalised – arrested, forced to spend at least a night in custody, brought before magistrates the following morning, and then fined or given a prison sentence. Whilst misdemeanours were often trivial and for many, the first ever committed, penalties could be very harsh: three of the four men brought to court in 1900 faced seven days in prison if they defaulted on their fines, and one faced a week of hard labour. Furthermore, these “deviant individuals” were rarely habitual criminals, a fact exemplified in June 1911 by the three people charged then for being drunk and disorderly. An appearance before the magistrates was ironically one of the rare occasions when any one of the mass of individuals briefly emerged from the anonymity of the Weston leisure crowd, to reveal a name and identity, and a voice, of their own. Prevailing prejudices, promoted by the press and authorities of a homogeneous social and cultural group, sharing the same morality and codes of behaviour, were brought into question when as individuals, they were singled out and brought to court. Of the three in June 1911, all were employed: to the evident surprise of the Bench and police, two were respectable working girls from Cardiff, a secretary and a servant. This rare opportunity for greater knowledge and understanding of the individuals who constituted the tripper crowds, and for interaction between them and the authorities, came unfortunately at a time when these individuals had already been forced to assume a new, much grimmer seaside identity – that of “prisoner”.

There was a degree of ambivalence in the attitudes of the press and the authorities to those who frequented the resort of Weston-Super-Mare: as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have observed, the “Top” attempts to reject and eliminate the “Bottom” for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover “... that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other...” Within an article containing a disapproving account of the excesses of the day-tripper visitors on a certain Whit Monday in 1900, which quantified in tons and barrels the amount of bread and beer consumed by an estimated 25,000 of them, there is also the underlying admission that the local economy was benefitting considerably from their presence. In 1911, the Bank Holiday crowd of 42,000 was estimated to have spent “£3,150 locally”, only allowing a modest 1s 6d per capita. The following year was one of industrial unrest and uncertainty: the press, which had previously so consistently claimed its diffidence towards the custom of the Welsh collier and the Bristol labourer, in a rare moment admitted there had been “much nervous apprehension felt locally” at the prospect of a
Whitsun holiday where financial uncertainty might cause the crowds to stay away.\textsuperscript{216} Finally obliged to acknowledge publicly the day-trippers’ contribution to the economy of Weston, the press remarked hypocritically: “surely the workers of our country are entitled to what brief spells of pleasure possible in their arduous lives, and if a day at the seaside can assure the same, the few shillings spent in this way cannot be said to be unnecessary expenditure or productive of aught but good results.”\textsuperscript{217} After more than a decade of conflict, at least some accommodation and acceptance of the pleasure crowd had perhaps at last been achieved. In Weston-Super-Mare, as in many other resorts, in the words of John Walton, “it took a very long time for elite investigations of popular traditions to become translated into mainstream middle-class tolerance of contemporary working-class recreational behaviour.”\textsuperscript{218}

The annual fairs which accompanied the Regatta, and the holiday day-tripper crowds from Wales and Bristol, were both cultural phenomena which brought manifestations of popular pleasure into the public spaces of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare. Both events were predominantly peopled by working-class pleasure seekers, eager to experience a day of leisure and an escape from the social constraints of everyday life and work: both imposed an alternative culture on sometimes unwilling resorts which conflicted with normative practices and temporarily challenged the prevailing social order. Their presence in both resorts demanded a response from the dominant hegemonic groups and authorities who, whilst often disapproving, mostly yielded to the economic wisdom of the relationship. Whilst the passage of the Regatta fairs was fleeting, the impact of the regular and repeated visits of the pleasure crowds to Weston-Super-Mare appeared deeper and more permanent. The Torquay fair appropriated space from the select centre of the resort, and achieving only temporary ownership of it, returned it to the residents at the end of its stay; trippers to Weston enjoyed both the democratic space of the seashore and the fairground-like arena of the pier, whose rides and amusements remained after their departure as a permanent reminder of their visit and evidence of their certain return.

The Weston crowds were observed and managed by an association of hegemonic groups eager to maintain control, who, with “a strict hand”, whilst attempting to uphold social and moral order, did not shy away from invoking legal powers if necessary, and criminalising those who had come to holiday but had crossed their defined boundaries of decency and good behaviour. Often vilified and stereotyped
in the press, these excursionists were held responsible for their own behaviour. The Torquay authorities did not appear to experience a similar sense of alienation from their differently composed crowds, which were comprised predominantly of local people drawn from across the social spectrum, mixing and mingling together. Whilst some commentators considered the fair-goers shallow, frivolous, or misguided, they often exonerated their behaviour and instead heaped censure on the showpeople, blaming duplicitous practices for tricking and deceiving the naive crowds. The police here were a benign presence, rather than a force for law and order as in Weston:

A rumour of a disturbance with police interference sent us all whirling into eddies of excitement, but the wet turned it into mere frizzle and a parade of the awful majesty and importance of the law, who caped and tall of stature set us all out into the narrow channels of orthodox strolling.  

Within the confines of the Torquay fairs, a suspension of the everyday hierarchy was briefly possible, when “all sorts and condition of men” shared rides and together took pleasure in the fair. In Weston, whilst some expressed the desire for an end to the day excursions and the recurrent necessity to cope with its presence, in Torquay, there was generally a greater acceptance and understanding of the phenomenon, and even the Torquay Directory, so often its sternest critic, finally recognised the enduring appeal and place in the local culture of the Torquay Regatta fairs:

It is surprising when one gives the matter thought, to realise in how many things we are an intensely conservative people. It is so essentially with that phase of Torquay’s regattas which is characterised as “the fair.” Torquay has always had its regatta shows, and, so generally and heartily are they appreciated, and so great is the business done by the multitude of showmen and showwomen, it would appear that they are likely to continue...for generations to come.
2 See Introduction, 18.
6 *TDSJ*, 30 August 1905.
7 Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside*, 90.
9 *TDSJ*, 1 September 1897.
10 *TDSJ*, 2 August 1893.
11 *TT*, 26 August 1904.
12 *TT*, 26 August 1904.
13 *TDSJ* 28 August 1901; *TDSJ*, 17 September 1902; *TDSJ*, 27 August 1902.
17 *TDSJ*, 17 September 1902
18 *TT* 28 August 1903.
19 *TDSJ*, 27 August 1902.
20 *TT*, 29 August 1890.
21 *TT*, 26 August 1898; *TT*, 26 August 1904.
22 *TDSJ*, 24 August 1898.
24 *TT*, 30 August 1895.
25 *TDSJ*, 30 August 1895.
26 *TDSJ* 5 April 1893.
28 *TT*, 26 August 1904.
29 *TT*, 25 August 1911.
31 *TDSJ*, 2 September 1885.
32 *TDSJ*, 25 August 1909.
35 *TDSJ* 17 September 1902.
36 *TDSJ*, 25 August 1909.
37 *TT*, 1 September 1905.
38 *TT*, 26 August 1904.
39 *TT*, 29 August 1902.
40 *TDSJ*, 17 September 1902.
41 *TT*, 26 August 1898.
43 *TT*, 26 August 1898.
44 *TDSJ*, 29 August 1900.

TDSDJ, 25 August 1897


TDSDJ, 26 August 1903.

TT, 7 April 1893.

TDSDJ, 9 August 1883.

TDSDJ, 17 September 1902.


TDSDJ, 2 September 1885. Upton and Ellacombe were predominantly working class districts of Torquay, the latter having been given its own recreational space by local landowner Lord Haldon, on which fairs, circuses, and menageries were often held.

TDSDJ, 31 August 1910. See note above.


TDSDJ, 9 August 1883.

TT, 24 August 1898.

TT, 26 August 1903.


TDSDJ, 28 August 1901.

TT, 26 August 1904.

Hancock lost a leg in an accident with one of the wagons. See Scrivens and Smith, *Hancocks of the West* (Telford: New Era, 2006), 34.

TDSDJ, 27 August 1902; TDSDJ, 26 August 1903.

TDSDJ, 24 August 1904.


Ibid.

Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, 32.

TDSDJ, 24 August 1904.

TDSDJ, 28 August 1907.

TDSDJ, 25 August 1909; TDSDJ, 28 August 1907; TDSDJ, 24 August 1904; TDSDJ, 28 August 1907.

TDSDJ, 23 August 1911.


Ibid.

TT, 24 August 1904.


TDSDJ, 27 August 1913.

TDSDJ, 28 August 1907.

TDSDJ, 24 August 1898.

TT, 26 August 1904.

TT, 27 August 1897.

TT, 26 August 1898.

TT, 26 August 1893.

TT, 25 August 1905.

TDSDJ, 29 August 1900.

TT, 26 August 1898.

TT, 25 August 1893.

TDSDJ, 6 September 1895.

TDSDJ, 24 August 1898.


TDSDJ 28 August 1901.

Kember, “Showmanship in Freak Show,” 1.
94 TT, 26 August 1892.
95 TSDSJ, 26 August 1896.
96 TSDSJ, 28 August 1907.
97 TSDSJ, 27 August 1902.
98 TT, 28 August 1903.
99 TSDSJ, 30 August 1905.
100 TT, 27 August 1897.
101 TT, 27 August 1897.
102 TT, 26 August 1898.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 TT, 26 August 1904.
108 TT, 31 August 1906.
109 TT, 26 August 1910.
110 TT, 26 August 1910.
111 TT, 26 August 1898.
113 See Chapter Four, 226.
114 WM, 30 August 1902.
116 Gray, Designing the Seaside, 47.
117 See Walton, The English Seaside Resort, Chapter 7, Seaside Entertainment, for a detailed account of the entertainment provided at various Edwardian resorts.
118 Shields, Places on the Margin, 22.
119 Gray, Designing the Seaside, 9.
121 De Certeau, Everyday Life, 128.
122 WM, 30 August 1902.
123 WG, 14 May 1910.
124 WM, 9 June 1900; WG, 9 August 1913.
125 WG, 14 May 1910.
126 Shields, Places on the Margin, 5.
127 WM, 21 April 1900.
129 WM, 10 June 1911.
130 Bedminster was a predominantly working class district of Bristol.
131 WM, 10 June 1911.
132 WM, 21 April 1900.
133 WM, 21 April 1900.
134 WM, 21 April 1900.
137 WM, 11 August 1900.
138 WM, 11 August 1900.
139 WM, 11 August 1900.
140 Walton, The English Seaside Resort, 165.
141 WM, 19 May 1900.
142 WG, 4 July, 1910.
143 WG, 22 March 1913.
144 Shields, Places on the Margin, 3.
145 WM, 10 June 1911.
WM, 21 April 1900.


WM 10 June 1911.

WM, 21 April 1900.

WM, 10 June 1911.

WM, 10 June 1910.


Howells, London Films 1905, Chapter 1, n.p.


WG, 30 March 1910; WM, 24 May 1902; WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 21 April 1900.


WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 9 June 1900.

Morgan and Pritchard, Power and Politics, 21.

WM, 21 April 1900.

WM, 21 April 1900.


Prescott, “We had fine banners,” 126.


Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 206-7.

WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 12 August 1912.

WM, 30 August 1902.


WG, 2 July, 1902.

WM, 10 February 1900.

WM, 10 February, 1900.

WM, 10 February, 1900.

Walton, The English Seaside Resort, 131.

WM, 10 February 1900.

WM, 10 February 1900.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 20 May 1911.

WG, 22 July 1911.

WG, 1 June 1912.

WG, 1 June 1912.

WG, 25 May 1912.

WG, 25 May 1912.

Morgan and Pritchard, Power and Politics, 29.

Morgan and Pritchard, Power and Politics, 29.


WM, 14 April 1900.

WG, 16 August 1913.

WG, 16 August 1913.

WG, 4 June 1904.

WM, 10 June 1911.

WG, 13 April 1912.

WG, 19 August 1911.

WM, 11 August 1900.

WG, 1 June 1912.

WM, 10 June 1911.

WM, 9 June 1900.

WG, 28 May 1904.

WG, 17 May 1913.

WM, 9 June 1900.

WM, 10 June 1911.


WM, 9 June, 1000.

WM, 10 June 1911.

WG, 1 June 1912.

WG, 1 June 1912.


TT, 27 August 1897.

TDSDJ, 24 August 1898.
CHAPTER TWO

“TO ELEVATE THE MASSES, NOT JUST THE LEISURED CLASSES”: MAPPING THE MAGIC LANTERN IN THE AGE OF FILM, 1896-1914

How delightful are those day-dreams of youth; like the shadows of a magic lantern, that pass before the admiring eye in quick succession, each one as it comes more pleasing than the last.

As a new invention arriving in Britain in 1896, the cinematograph entered a world where other visual media, such as photography and the magic lantern, were already strong, established, dominant forms of representation which were fully integrated into the social and cultural fabric of Victorian life. Photography had long achieved a degree of widespread cultural familiarity and status as a representational form which appeared to guarantee factual realism. As the newer of the two technologies, photography had not challenged the role and importance of the magic lantern, but instead had contributed positively to the development of lantern practices and capabilities: acting as a companion medium, it had made possible the creation of photographic slides credited with giving the lantern a new impetus. Jens Ruchatz, exploring this relationship, considers it as having been a positive and mutually reciprocal one in which projection and photography met “to each other’s profit,” since “the accuracy of photographic transparencies creates flawless enlarged pictures, while projection demonstrates photography’s singular capabilities of delineation.” Melissa Banta and Curtis Hinsley have explained how this new “revolutionary” technology “at the onset of the photographic age…was hailed as an objective, factual means of visual communication.” The photographic lantern slide acquired the same status and reputation as the photograph: citing Carol Armstrong, Robert Nelson concludes that “in the first decades after its discovery, the photograph was regarded as “truth-telling”, the pencil of narrative” and evidence of a “novel kind…above all, photography was fact.”
To contemporary consumers, camera images appeared as a guarantee of the truthfulness of the material they were witnessing, and this, by extension, could serve to reinforce the authority of the lecturer. Whilst the adoption of photographic slides only slowly became established – John Barnes and Joe Kember conclude that their widespread acceptance was gained during the 1870s, two decades after their first production – their general use during the last three decades of the nineteenth century was one factor which also contributed towards the development of a more legitimate and better respected status for the lantern. One of the correspondents to the Optical Magic Lantern Journal paid tribute to this association in simple terms: “Photography has given us such beautiful slides – both views from nature and reproductions of motto slides – that one expects everything of the best of lantern lecturers nowadays.” Whilst Ruchatz has challenged some aspects of this version of magic lantern historiography as reductive, he nevertheless agrees that in the legitimising task of changing perceptions of the medium from magic lantern to optical instrument, “photography played an important part in rendering projection a rational medium.”

The somewhat cumbersome full title of the trade publication, The Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger, which appeared for the first time in 1889, reflects the close collaboration between these two visual media both as technologies and as industries. This symbiotic relationship also extended to the production and distribution of slides, lanterns, and photographic equipment. Mark Butterworth has mapped out the way in which photographic slides “opened up a completely new market” for the many expanding multipurpose businesses which developed in the photographic industry, exemplified by “many highly skilled and creative photographers, who went on to become lantern slide producers...because of the lucrative rewards available in the late nineteenth century.” It was an enduring connection: “the photographer of the present day”, noted J. Wright, writing in The Optical Magic Lantern Journal in 1899, “is very often a slide maker and lanternist too.” Locally, the photographic studio was often the place to go to buy a magic lantern, and the local lanternist, whose services were needed for community events, societies, or by visiting lecturers, was frequently its owner.

A search through newspapers for the years 1896-7, indicates a regular pattern of inclusion of items relating to the magic lantern, such as lecture reports,
fund-raising activities or Christmas entertainments, in a wide range of weekly and daily papers from *The Times* to *The Morning Post, The Daily News, The Standard* and *The Pall Mall Gazette, The Era, Lloyds’ Weekly Newspaper, The Illustrated Police News, The Graphic, The Star, Reynold’s Newspapers, The Penny Illustrated Newspaper*, and *The Era*. A survey of the periodicals from the same period offers a glimpse of both the remarkable variety of contexts in which the magic lantern was to be found and the degree to which it was culturally embedded by the time of film’s arrival. A wide diversity of periodicals and magazines such as *Chums, The County Gentleman: Sporting Gazette, Agricultural Journal, and The Man about Town, The Girl’s Own Paper, Illustrated Chips, The Woman’s Signal, The Young Gentleman’s Magazine, Wings, Hearth and Home*, and *Horse and Hound* all made some reference to the lantern in their very different individual publications during this period. This brief survey suggests the remarkable diversity of readerships, varying widely in both age and gender, for whom the magic lantern was considered by journalists and editors to have some degree of relevance or resonance.

In particular, these periodicals reveal a great deal about the relationship between the lantern and the social and leisure lives of men, women, and children in the late nineteenth century. References to the magic lantern of interest of gentlemen readers, for example, extended from a report in *Hare and Hound* where, linked with a microscope, it was employed to illustrate a lecture on ‘Fishes Scales’ at the London Piscatorial Society,¹¹ to an article in *The County Gentleman* describing an early private viewing of the cinematograph at the Empire.¹² Gentlemen’s magazines carried an abundance of reports of lectures and interviews with celebrated lecturers of the day such as Arthur Diosy and Sir Robert Ball, London entertainments, charity events, and society meetings, in all of which the lantern played an important role.¹³ The multiple ways in which magic lanterns were integrated into the educational and leisure lives of children were reflected in publications such as *The Boys’ Own Paper, Chums* and *The Young Gentleman’s Magazine*, which typically encouraged boys to experiment with science and carried advertisements for equipment and materials, as well as articles on how to make lantern slides and even magic lanterns themselves: “Any boy over twelve years old can make a similar one,” *Boy’s Own* advised its young readers, “and it will be a source of endless pleasure and delight in the long winter evenings, while the expenditure of pocket-money on slides will be infinitely
better than patronising the sweet-shop!”14 *Chums* offered magic lanterns as top prizes in their weekly competitions, ranking them above fountain pens and books, and thus demonstrating their contemporary interest and desirability for young readers. This desirability was further evidenced by the regular inclusion of magic lantern and slide sets alongside automatic walking dolls and train sets, as popular and exciting Christmas presents for the turn-of-the-century child (Fig.2.1).15 In 1896, women in *Hearth and Home* who pursued photography as a hobby were being persuaded to specialise in one field, such as the production of lantern slides from negatives,16 a later article encouraged its female readers “with means and social position” who were “yearning to ‘do something’” to organise Sunday entertainments across London, such as music, recitations, or lectures illustrated by magic lantern.17 Readers of *The Woman’s Signal* might have been inspired by an interview with Florence Nightingale, whose ideas on improving public health in India were centred on village to village lectures on the principles of sanitation, illustrated of course by microscopic slides and the magic lantern.18

From the “Travellers National Total Abstainers Union” and their tea, treats and magic lantern show reported in *Wings*, to *Punch*’s satirical poem teasing the clergy for their use of scientific inventions to deliver sermons by proxy some of the multiple and varied functions of the medium are revealed to be embedded equally in contemporary lives and in the literature which narrates the lantern’s many appearances (Fig.2.2).19 A futuristic magic lantern with the power simultaneously to screen images happening in a different location is of central importance to the melodramatic in a murder-mystery “999: The Secret Terrors of a Great City”, which appeared in *Illustrated Chips*.20 The imagery of the moving slide or the dissolving view permeated the fiction of 1896 and in sensational stories for boys or sedate prose for young ladies alike, played to the readers’ knowledge of the lantern’s functions, attractions, and capabilities. The vocabulary of the lantern was converted into simile and metaphor and used by writers of all genres to convey a variety of meanings to their readers.
In his appraisal of the relationship between language and lantern, Stephen Bottomore has concluded that the medium did not have one single meaning or figurative use, but could be associated with a range of notions such as “variety and multiplicity”, “transience, loss, and the ephemeral”, “falsity and deception”, in fact “a tabula rasa onto which various, often contradictory, meanings could be written.” The ability of the lantern show to project images in the darkness, to exude light and colour, to change, metamorphose and fade away, could serve multiple purposes for the writer, as this image drawn from the magazine Fun from 1897 exemplifies: “The shadow of the old
man became indistinct, like the dissolving view of a magic lantern and then slowly clear
again; but the shadow now resembled the form of the young man seated in the chair.
The transfiguration had taken place.

Fig.2.2 “At the Magic Lantern Show,” Illustrated Chips, 23 May 1896.

A similar overview of advertisements and reviews in the local press in the
coastal resorts of Torquay, Barnstaple, Weston-Super-Mare, Sidmouth, and Penzance,
for the period 1896-7 reveals that at the point at which film was beginning to arrive in
the region, the magic lantern was already embedded in a diverse array of contexts and
serving a wide variety of cultural functions. In a vibrant and active community such as
Torquay, with its abundance of benevolent societies, church and missionary groups and
organisations for young people, opportunities for magic lantern use occurred frequently,
as for example, with connective readings in a service of song at Chelston Mission Hall,
in the Wesleyan Church at a temperance lecture entitled ‘Work without Alcohol’, or
combined with music in an entertainment for the YMCA. Lantern shows for the poor, the orphanage and the workhouse were regular occurrences each Christmas, given by one or other of the local lecturers and lanternists, who also offered lectures on a range of subjects from local curiosities, to Queen Victoria’s reign and “Faust”, to a variety of audiences from the Literary Union to the Navy League. Torquay’s lady lecturer Dr. Minna Gray accompanied her talk on Exeter Cathedral in 1897 with lantern slides, and the celebrated scientific lecturer Sir Robert Ball used “a series of magnificent views by oxy-hydrogen limelight” to illustrate his presentation “Recent Researches on the Sun”. Whilst twenty-five of the thirty-seven magic lantern shows advertised in the local press during these two years might be deemed to fall into the category of instructive lecture, these figures taken alone present a misleading picture. Whilst, as will emerge later in this chapter, there is more than an element of truth in Torquay’s self-professed predilection for illustrated lectures, at least a dozen of these took place under the auspices of the Torquay Natural History Society, which, with a permanent building containing a library and lecture hall, as well as their own powerful magic lantern, was able to provide a substantial lecture programme each year for its gentlemen members, a significant part of which was illustrated by slides from the extensive collection they had assembled (Fig. 2.3).

Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, the towns of Barnstaple and Penzance, with less than a dozen advertised events involving the magic lantern each during 1896-7, would appear at this point to have preferred entertainment to instruction. Few purely instructive lectures appeared here in comparison to a significant number of travel entertainments which included ‘limelight views’. However, once again, the figures do not tell the complete story: in each case, the actual number of entertainments was increased significantly by the presence of a single travel lecturer who performed several shows during the same year. In Barnstaple, of the town’s nine advertised events in 1896 involving a lantern, six involved the traveller/lecturer Herbert Jones, who delivered a series of “brilliant dioramic lectures” on New Zealand and Australia, for which the ‘dioramic’ element consisted of a large lantern and about one hundred views taken from his own collection. Penzance’s experience of lantern entertainment was similarly enriched by a series of performances by the medicine man Sequah, better known as the travel lecturer Barnfield Salter, who during 1896 gave several weeks of talks on travel and remedies spread out over a number of months. In both
Penzance and Barnstaple these were bright spots in an otherwise slender calendar of lantern provision: in addition to these two colourful entertainers, only a handful of other contexts for viewing the lantern were advertised. These seemed tailored appropriately to the time or the place, such as a talk on “Coal and Colliers” illustrated by photographic slides, given by a Bristol vicar to the working men in Barnstaple,29 and a lantern lecture on Queen Victoria with one hundred and twenty pictures, offered at the Marazion Institute by the Reverend Lemon, to commemorate her Diamond Jubilee.30
A survey of these two years 1896-7 reveals the role the magic lantern occasionally had to play here in less familiar contexts. In a charity Bazaar held at the Bath Saloons, for example, limelight exhibitions, both lantern and microscopic, blurred the boundaries between science and amusement, being listed amongst the entertainments next to a ‘comicological museum’ and public washing competition.31 Also poised between science and entertainment, Mrs. St. Hill’s lecture on Scientific Palmistry used “numerous limelight slides...of curious celebrated hands” to illustrate her latest discoveries.32 Torquay offered an early example of using the lantern for promotional purposes, when views of electric installations and tramways were screened by a new electricity company keen to market the applications of electricity to Torquay householders.33 On occasions it was the venue which was novel: whilst slide shows were routinely a part of presentations on behalf of the Royal National Mission to Deep-Sea Fishermen, the location of this hour’s lecture “The Wild North Sea”, on the deck of a hospital ship moored in Torquay harbour, was more unusual.34 The versatility of the lantern locally was such that by 1897 it had already proved itself to be the well-established medium, with the flexibility to be as appropriate for small, community halls as large, expensive venues, affordable to church groups yet sophisticated enough for eminent scientists, equal to the task of illuminating slides from purchased sets or bringing travellers’ scenes of unknown worlds to life, portable enough to reach the remotest rural areas of the South West.

The sheer diversity of contexts and venues for magic lantern exhibition and the overlapping functions and roles it performed within these has problematised the categorisation of lantern shows. Richard Crangle has attempted to define lantern uses in the late nineteenth century by identifying three broad sectors of lectures, religious contexts, and home entertainment, freely acknowledging both the considerable degree of overlap between these distinctions and the inequality in terms of scale of these groups.35 An alternative approach to an appraisal of lantern exhibitions might be to visualise them as part of a continuum stretching between their two primary purposes of instruction and amusement, a framework which acknowledges the interplay between these functions, whilst at the same time accommodating many possible forms. Using this model, this chapter will seek to examine the range of lantern exhibitions in local resorts from 1897 to the beginning of the First World War, considering primarily the development or decline of its particular functions and contexts, and the possible
emergence of novel ones, as well as attempting to assess the impact of the arrival of film during this period as a cultural rival and alternative medium to the lantern.

In all the South-West resorts, lectures whose stated purpose was to educate were plentiful and regular in the late nineteenth century: occurring under the auspices of Oxford, Cambridge or Bristol Universities, or institutions such as the Gilchrist Trust, these treated of technical, scientific, historical or aesthetic subjects. Thus, for example, the focus of the Cambridge University lectures in Torquay in 1899 was “Dante”, the University Extension lectures in Barnstaple took as their topic “Pioneers of Empire” in 1898 and “Electricity in Its Modern Applications” in 1908, and the Cambridge lectures in Sidmouth in 1909 were entitled “English Architecture in the Middle Ages”. These targeted different audiences: whilst the Gilchrist Educational Trust advertised itself as offering “science lectures for the people”, the University Extension lectures were described in 1896 as being “a means of education for those who are leading busy lives.” Often these latter were in deep financial trouble, dependent as they were on the generosity of local subscribers. A correspondent to the Torquay Directory in 1897 gives an indication of the perceived value and importance to the status of the town of the University lectures: “We have few enough opportunities already for keeping up with the advance of modern science and modern thought, and in this era of rapid progress, not keeping up means falling hopelessly behind...” A meeting to revive them in Torquay in 1904 once again reiterated their significance for the cultural and intellectual life of the town, where it was stated that “the lectures took people out of their ordinary ruts and introduced them into another and fresher atmosphere. The result was that one left the lectures mentally buoyant and invigorated with a greater zest for the ordinary stern duties of everyday life.”

The majority of these courses of lectures were illustrated, the use of slides continuing until the end of the period in question, with the lanterns powered initially by oxy-hydrogen and then by electricity. Their role and importance within the lecture varied according to the topic and the individual lecturer. This was a subject of constant debate in the trade press, and one which extended to local forums. As illustration to the Gilchrist course entitled “Water and its Work” in Barnstaple in 1912, for example, a “powerful lantern” was felt to be required in conjunction with experiments. Conversely in Sidmouth, the Cambridge lecturer who offered an hour’s
instruction on the geology of Devon followed by a thirty minute conversational class, was more dismissive of the importance of illustration: “He trusted the lantern slides should prove interesting to them in the study of the subject, but they must not forget that the lantern was merely an accessory.”43 The opposite view was expressed by a journalist reporting on another lecture on geology, who noted that “[m]uch of the wonderful beauty of the district could be realised by the audience by means of the colour photographs thrown on the screen, taken on the spot by Dr. Roberts.”44 Here the lecturer’s slides were a valued part of the presentation, which contributed positively to the experience.

Whilst this type of course employed a mixture of local and visiting lecturers, the lanternists for the University Extension and Gilchrist Trust lectures were most frequently local, well-known, and well-respected by audiences and readers of press reports. These lanternists were called upon on occasions to operate the lantern for important visiting lecturers too, or regularly on behalf of the local scientific groups or literary societies. In Torquay, as previously noted, the Natural History Society (NHS) was a high-profile institution which provided a season of scientific and technical lectures annually: amongst its membership it boasted chemists, photographers, and the most prominent local lanternists of the period. Illustration by lantern slide was considered fundamental for lectures of this genre, and indeed was acknowledged by the NHS as central to achieving their professed aim of providing a centre for natural science research, since they considered a good lantern rendered “the lectures and monthly papers more attractive and intelligible to their audiences.”45 Investment by the NHS in 1908 in a polarscope which, attached to the lantern, could project mineralogical and biological objects on to the screen with especially fine detail and colour, reveals the continuing commitment to lantern technology and its perceived importance as a scientific tool. Owning such sophisticated apparatus enhanced the status of the NHS in the locality, and as a reporter acknowledged, “it was the first occasion in the West of England of a demonstration of polarscope views of rock sections being projected onto a screen, and it is doubtful whether there is any institution in the provinces where so good a presentation of rock composition has been given...”46
The Society’s openly expressed desire for a higher status, combined with its ideology of research and discovery, were motivating factors which encouraged members to engage in the collection of specimens as well as in the production of their own slides. Individual members were persuaded to contribute hand-made slides to enrich the Society’s collection, typified by their activities in 1909 and the announcement by the current President that the Society should focus on the hitherto neglected area of local marine invertebrates. Many members of the society were encouraged to collect specimens and mount a variety of microscopic objects: these were carefully dated and labelled, and appear, from the evidence of the thousands of slides still remaining in boxes in the Society’s premises, to have been catalogued together with sets of proprietary slides manufactured by companies such as Newton and Co., Sanders and Co. or Fradelle and Young, and classified under headings such as “Insects” or “Diatoms”. Many slides bear the names or signatures of Society members and can be linked directly to lectures. They provide evidence that the production of photographic, hand-painted, microscopic, coloured and black and white slides was a popular and prolific activity between the end of the nineteenth century and the First World War. These formed a significant resource on which to draw to illustrate monthly talks for those committed to scientific investigation, but also to share with wider audiences. A *conversazione* held at the Museum in 1897, combined together vocal and instrumental music, *tableaux vivants*, old books and an exhibition of curiosities, prints and photographs, with lime-light illustrations of the Jubilee procession and, following a Schubert symphony, an exhibition of scientific and geographical lantern subjects. Whilst the slides were identical to those used for the purposes of scientific lectures, they functioned here more as curiosities, novelties and attractions:

Mr. Bessell exhibited and described upwards of two dozen lantern slides of insects – including the flea ...and diatoms – unicellular microscopic plants...One of the slides – all of which were of beauty and of interest – was a diatom magnified no fewer than 15,000 times diameter. By the lantern which he so well manipulates, Mr. S. Bretton exhibited some clever atmospheric effects and a number of pretty flower and figure studies.
The significance of the contribution of local private enterprises to the wider culture and in particular the lantern and lecture culture of these resorts should not be underestimated. Private libraries such as Iredale’s, or Westley’s in Torquay,49 and Culverwell’s in Sidmouth,50 or businesses with related interests such as Miller’s Music Shop in Weston-Super-Mare51, Nicklin’s Music Warehouse in Barnstaple52 and Heard and Co., Penzance,53 had consistently acted as entertainment agents, hosting a succession of lectures, following well-embedded practices developed over previous decades which had their origins in bringing works of art, exhibitions, or musicians to their towns. These enterprises could respond quickly to new technologies and active in their promotion – thus the new phonograph, for example, was demonstrated at Mr. Heaviside’s Pianoforte Saloon in 1898.54 They could also broaden their remit beyond their town of origin: Moon and Sons of Torquay, for example, extended their agency beyond Devon, bringing celebrated performers and acts into Cornwall too.55

These businesses functioned in different ways – whilst some merely acted as advertisers and ticket agencies for visiting entertainments, others regularly organised cultural events of which visiting lecturers formed an important part. In the larger resorts in particular, these lecturers tended to be regionally or nationally well-established figures offering specialised discourses on serious scientific, technical, cultural or imperial themes, or personal experiences, most often illustrated by lantern slides. In Torquay, the piano merchants Paish and Co. had established “Paish’s Lectures” which already offered a well-respected programme of eminent lecturers, and were responsible for managing the visits of such celebrities as Winston Churchill who spoke about “The War as I saw it”,56 Captain Scott who described his Discovery expedition, and Arthur Diosy with his talk on Russia and Japan.57 Paish’s also extended these in scope to include the organisation of courses of lectures: these included a series in 1903 which covered the history of Ancient Egypt and a course of four lectures on nature study entitled “The Wonders of Creation” by Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Cecil Carus-Wilson, in 1910.58 Libraries, music and stationer’s shops in all these resorts also seized this commercial initiative and brought a significant number of illustrious lecturers to the South West, and especially to Torquay: “The Earth’s Beginning” by Sir Robert Ball,59 “Kruger and Khaki” and “Before Port Arthur” by Frederick Villiers,60 J. Foster Fraser’s “Round the World on
a Bicycle," and talks by war artist Rene Bull and explorers such as Nansen and Sir Ernest Shackleton were some of the many illustrated lectures by nationally known speakers who were engaged for these South West resorts by this means.

These were clearly marketed as high quality lectures delivered by eminent lecturers, and as such formed significant events which often commanded extensive coverage in the press, which detailed the lecturer’s approach, delivery and manner, and which invariably commented on the visual material included. Three considerations predominated in local reports: the status and qualifications of the lecturer; his command and delivery of his subject matter; and the effect of the illustrations and the skill with which they were produced and utilised. In J.W. Wright’s essay, “How to Deliver a Lantern Lecture,” which appeared in the OMLJ in 1899, the author complained of the “cheapest rubbishy class of slides” which he believed constituted “the greatest evil we in the lantern world have to meet today,” and which in his opinion marred the success of many lectures. In addition to the obvious distinctions such as the renowned research or heroic exploits which marked out the professional from the amateur lecturer, it was often the quality, production or provenance of the slides which impressed audiences and reviewers and which contributed materially to the individuality, reputation and status of the lecturer. The importance of the image and its ability to add legitimacy to persuasive argument, give credibility to its exhibitor, convey truth, or deceive its spectator, has long been the subject of critical debate. Within the context of the slide lecture, Robert Nelson considers the image to be essential to the “mutual interaction” which bonds together its participants, suggesting that the “shadow or representation on the wall, never remains mere projection, mere being, because it is part of a performative triangle consisting of speaker, audience, and image.” Lecturers, in particular in cases where they have collected their own visual material, have a special relationship with the images they project onto the screen: one outcome of this, as Nelson explains, is that when lecturers present their slides to an audience “they tacitly make the claim that while all present may be looking equally at the image, they know it better.”

Frederick Villiers, for example, war artist for the Illustrated London News, who in 1900 brought his lecture “Kruger and Khaki” to the Assembly Rooms in Weston-Super-Mare, the Manor Hall, Sidmouth, and the Bath Saloons,
Torquay,60 made and screened nearly 200 lantern slides from his own sketches and snapshots of the war. Villiers’ continuing use of intermedial techniques to illustrate his experiences of the South African war in 1902 with his lecture entitled “Kangaroo Land: its Mine, Men and Manners” and in 1905 to accompany his lecture “Before Port Arthur” strengthened his credibility as war reporter and lecturer.70 Villiers was known to commence his lectures by denouncing as fakes some of the pictures which had been published by others as being from the front.71 Whilst the reproduction of his own sketches proved his proximity to the action, his photographs added the realism sought after by contemporary audiences: one Weston reviewer acknowledged the importance of the illustrations to the whole, observing that “thanks to camera and sketch-book the lecture was in every way an enjoyable success.”72

Lecturing on the war with the appropriate accompanying visual material rapidly became a popular and competitive activity: the OMLJ for March 1900 observed that ninety per cent of the advertisements for forthcoming lantern lectures related to the South African conflict. In his analysis of the visual culture of the Boer War, Simon Popple has noted how photographic and cinematic pictures were the “new technological iconography of the war” which satisfied the public demand for visual representation and which provided “a new form of evidence considered far more legitimate than that of the war correspondent or the special artist.”73 Villiers himself, as Stephen Bottomore has investigated, credited himself with having been the first war cinematographer, claiming to have filmed the battle of Omdurman in 1898.74 Though apparently a pioneer of using the new technology of film in this context, Villiers continued to disseminate images in these regional lectures in the form of projected lantern slides, even favouring another traditional mode of representation, the war artist’s drawing, over the photograph, as his reported lecture in Weston revealed: “Notwithstanding the improvements in photography, the sketch was still the best for representing the actualities of war.”75

Although known to be a devoted fan of the cinematograph,76 the young Winston Churchill, brought by Paish’s to lecture on the Boer War to the Torquay public in 1901, also opted to use photographic lantern slides as illustration.77 Whilst only twenty-six at the time of his visit, Churchill had already acquired a distinguished reputation for his participation in several campaigns which, combined
with his privileged birth as grandson of the Duke of Marlborough, meant that he was already a well-known national figure. His capture by the Boers, dramatic escape, and subsequent exploits were known narratives which dominated this lecture and thus overshadowed the importance of the illustration: the Torquay reporter judged a formal report to be unnecessary since “the facts which he has disclosed” had been “broadcast over the land”. Lantern slides and photographs were not perhaps needed to add to the status or credibility of this somewhat unique lecturer, but were nevertheless credited for their contribution to the overall success of a lecture which with “its great interest, vivid word-painting, quaint humour, and excellent lantern pictures, was keenly enjoyed by a crowded audience.”

Of the many lecturers who through local agency came to the South West resorts to lecture on the Boer War, for the majority it was their ability to screen photographs of incidents from the conflict which was crucial in proving their authenticity as eye-witnesses and authorities and in demonstrating their personal bravery: it was therefore an important asset in drawing audiences and one which was highlighted in advance advertising. Rene Bull, war correspondent for *Black and White* magazine, thus sought to impress Weston audiences not simply with the photographs but with the danger with which they were captured: “The celebrated War artist, on his return from the South African battlefields will graphically describe scenes he has witnessed and illustrate them with over 200 photographs of the actual fighting, taken by him under fire at the front.” Ownership of the photographs and sketches which constituted the lantern slides created a connection between lecturer and material which seemed crucial to audience interest and belief in the lecturer. Thus Whitfield-Brindley’s slides and presentation on “Sidelights on the South African War” disappointed audience expectations because he merely “contented himself by displaying, describing and chatting about a number of war scenes and portraits of war heroes” instead of offering “personal experiences”. Following months of extensive local press coverage, audiences, especially well-informed and knowing ones such as in Torquay, looked to personal narrative and visual material to mediate the war for them in a way which the printed text of journals and papers alone could not do. In the eyes of the reporter, Whitfield-Brindley’s lecture, which lacked either original discourse or illustration, “the anticipation was not realised” and was
merely able “in conformity with its title ... [to] cast a number of “sidelights” upon the war.”

With their highly personalised narratives complemented by unique photographic material, there are many parallels between these Boer war lectures and those given by the long series of distinguished explorers who visited Torquay under the auspices of Paish’s and other agencies. Lectures by internationally celebrated explorers tapped into the continuing popular interest in polar exploration which, with their imperial overtones and narratives of bravery and conquest, seemed suited to the national mood at the time, for as the journalist Neil Tweedie, writing of Scott’s final Antarctic expedition, elaborates: “...Britain, although challenged by rising new powers, most notably Wilhelmine Germany, still held sway over a quarter of the earth’s land surface. The heroic age of exploration was not quite at an end and the British hunger for desolate places had not yet abated.” The importance of the illustration within the lecture, and the degree of reliance placed upon it by the audience in achievement of a successful experience, varied according to a range of factors, which obviously included the skill of the photographer and of the lecturer in the hall himself. The dangers and difficulties experienced during the acquisition of the photographic material added to the appreciation of the audience and was invariably remarked upon by journalists and exploited in advertisements: material acquired by the explorer himself, such as the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen’s exhibition of “a series of beautiful oxy-hydrogen lantern pictures from Dr. Nansen’s own negatives” authenticated his experience and lent immediacy and originality to his discourse. In some cases, the photographic material, projected by lantern slide, provided the primary interest and could cut across both cultural boundaries and the barriers of language: in the case of Roald Amundsen lecturing to English audiences in Torquay, lantern slides offered a clearer idea of the expedition than might have been afforded simply by listening to a presentation reportedly marred by a heavy accent and suffering from an “entire absence of little personal touches and flashes of humour which do so much to constitute the charm of lectures.” In this instance, many of the skills which Joe Kember has identified as “the key structures of performance and personality that would help ...interpret the show” which audiences anticipated experiencing from a famous lecturer were apparently absent from Nansen’s lecture.
By contrast, however, the photographic slides screened by Nansen drew much praise from the press. In this instance, they had taken over some functions more usually performed by the lecturer himself, had conveyed meaning where the lecturer had seemingly failed to do so, and had helped to create in the audience that all important sense of having been there: “The lantern slides and cinematograph films which illustrate the lecture are excellent. The beautiful prints – the delicate blue of the Antarctic sky – one can almost feel the chill - are represented as if they were from an artist’s palette. They make one think of what one would give for some such records of the brave deeds of Franklyn McKintock Kane and all the heroes of polar discovery.”87 By contrast, film and slides served a very different function in Sir Ernest Shackleton’s talk on the South Pole which, delivered with a “breezy freshness”, exuded a confidence and assurance evidently lacking from Amundsen’s delivery. Shackleton manipulated film and photographs to add drama and humour, combined pictures with the phonograph to humorous effect, and from a tale by then well-known, created an entertaining illustrated account which repeatedly drew laughter and applause from its Torquay audience.88

Captain Scott, who lectured to Torquay audiences in 1904, was one explorer who quickly recognised the value of the careful photographic documentation of his expeditions. As Dennis Lynch has pointed out, this was not the case with all explorer/lecturers: “The first years of the twentieth century prior to the Great War saw several major expeditions, which were duly chronicled in the press and many public lectures were given by their members. But observers felt that they failed in at least one essential element – illustration.”89 To local audiences, Scott appeared a lecturer “unschooled in the tricks of the platform”, whose “story of the expedition partook more of the nature of a long chat over a cigar than of the orthodox lecture.”90 Scott assumed his audiences were knowing and informed, taking it for granted that “his hearers knew all about him personally”, and launched into his topic with little preliminary explanation.91 The slides he screened thus provided additional visual information to illuminate a delivery that was “markedly simple and straightforward”: “The unique series of photographs which illustrated the lecture afforded Capt. Scott’s auditors delightful glimpses of the frozen southern regions, and cast many a sidelight on the life of the intrepid voyagers.”92
Evidently, the problems associated with photography in the extreme conditions of the polar regions were daunting: merely capturing and developing any material at all proved a challenge. One of the few polar photographers to go beyond the realms of simple photography was Herbert Ponting, whom Scott deployed in an official capacity on his final expedition to the South Pole. As Lynch has explained, Ponting was a talented, experienced, and meticulous photographer, whose enthusiasm for using the cinematograph to record moving images of the expedition did not prevent him from continuing to take still shots.\(^9\) Scott’s diaries contain many observations of Ponting at work, and offer insight into the importance and relevance of such material when projected onto screens at home (Fig. 2.4): “Today Ponting went within a few feet and by dint of patience managed to get some wonderful cinematograph pictures of its movements in feeding and tending its [skua] chick, as well as some photographs of these events at critical moments.”\(^9\) This cameo of a polar photographer at work neatly encapsulates the essential elements which the slide illustration to these polar lectures provided: the difficulty of obtaining the shot, the rarity and uniqueness of the image, the new knowledge derived from the exercise,

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Fig. 2.4. Herbert Ponting.

Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Centre, University of Exeter

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and the extreme lengths to which the photographer had gone to bring back such material. Whilst Scott himself was never able to use this material to illustrate his own lectures, such shots, carefully crafted and skilfully achieved, served Ponting as illustration to his own talks on the Scott expeditions for the next twenty years or more.95

Lectures by such high-profile explorers, which could command ticket prices of as much as ten shillings and sixpence, could only have been successfully organised and commercially viable for the elite audiences of Torquay in refined surroundings such as the Bath Saloons.96 Yet the popularity of a significant number of travelogue-style lectures in all the resorts under consideration evidences the widespread and enduring appetite of local audiences for knowledge of other regions and cultures. Jens Ruchatz has stressed the importance of the lantern and its ability to give audiences the sensation of ‘virtual travel’ as a crucial factor in this success:

The bond between projection and travel was most firmly established with the arrival of the photographic slide. From the start photography was recognised for its ability to accurately capture, transport and exhibit the unknown, which in this case meant the unseen... The notion that photographic images could be trusted, even without comparing them to the actual place, proved especially important in the portrayal of far-away scenes.97

As a genre, it was broad and inclusive, embracing both amateur and professional lecturers, original photographic material and commercially manufactured slides, a half-hour entertainment or a two-hour instructive lecture, locations from North Devon to New Guinea, entertaining audiences in a diversity of venues from parish rooms to theatres. Popular lectures were typified by lecturer/travellers such as J. Foster Fraser, who having ridden 19,000 miles across three continents, created a travelogue entitled “Round the World on the Bicycle”, illustrated by photographs taken en route, and brought to Torquay audiences in 1899 by the agents Moon and Sons98, or the 200 lantern slides of Herbert Garrison’s travels entitled ‘Our World-Wide Empire’ shown in Barnstaple in 1910.99 At the far end of the travelogue spectrum from the adventurer or traveller/lecturer lay a considerable number of amateurs, the local lanternist or vicar perhaps, who offered collections of slides and connective readings to local audiences, with little embellishment and no personal experience. Railway companies, for example, eager for the publicity, provided slide
sets free of charge to those willing to exploit them: thus the Reverend Jenning’s ‘lecture’ “Holiday in North Wales” was scripted and illustrated by courtesy of the London and North West Railway, and performed to Penzance audiences in November 1912. In her study of the lantern in provincial Ireland in the same period, Niamh McCole also notes the significant number of lecturers drawn from the clergy. This she attributes to the overriding need of the audience to respect and trust the lecturer: in the case of the clergy, their “social authority was immediately visible.”

Herbert Jones, who gave a series of popular lectures on Australasia in Barnstaple in 1896 and in Weston-Super-Mare in February 1904, put a marked emphasis on the visual, his address being illustrated by numerous slides: his lecture “New Zealand” included ninety, and his evening lecture “Volcanoes, Geysers and Earthquakes” offered one hundred and twenty. Advertisements for these laid emphasis on the quantity, quality, and size of the projected illustrations which were calculated to enhance the audience experience: Jones boasted possession of “magnificent pictures” which formed “the finest collection in existence”; these repeatedly drew praise in press reports, and in conjunction with Jones’ skill as a “cultured and vivacious lecturer” formed a lectured entertainment which pleased local audiences and satisfied reviewers and “for a couple of hours held the close attention of the audience with his eloquent narration”.

One of Herbert Jones’ professed aims was to broaden the horizons of local people, believing it “highly important that Englishmen should know something of the Empire beyond the seas.” Though evidently underpinned by imperial pride in British possessions, his lectures were also enthusiastic celebrations of the glories of the natural landscape, and not, as was true of some contemporaries, a denigration or exploitation of indigenous people and customs. Observations in the press on one early lantern exhibition in Sidmouth on the country and inhabitants of Zululand reflect attitudes towards native peoples which may be found across all these resorts throughout this period: “One thought could not but arrive in the mind of a listener – How great must be the motive power of that Christianity which can constrain educated persons...to spend their lives in teaching and benefiting such specimens of human nature as were shown that night by the aid of the magic lantern.”

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Images projected by the lantern did not always serve to enlighten or instruct, but could be interpreted by audiences in ways which conversely reinforced existing stereotypes and prejudices. Some lecturers relied on the compliance of audiences in the knowing manipulation of illustrative material to serve certain racial or ethnic discourses: one travel lecturer invited by members of Sidmouth Literary and Scientific Institution to talk of the West Indies in 1903, was said, for example, to add to the “interest of the fixture” with lantern slides and narratives of “old black women” who threw coal at them and whose natives were “a bad lot”.\(^{107}\) The traveller and journalist Mr. E.G.Prasathnam Cotelingham’s lecture “India, the Oriental Wonderland”, “profusely illustrated by a magnificent series of lantern pictures”, professed to “blend entertainment with information” as he exposed the “grotesqueness” and “terrible reality” of India.\(^{108}\) One talk in Torquay on Africa, in which as the customs and habits of natives were outlined and illustrated, repeatedly drew patronising laughter, each incidence of which was faithfully recorded in the press report.\(^{109}\) Kember has commented on the “dissemination of knowledge from expert to initiate” as being predicated on “an identification of lecturer and audience as the civilised, the touristic, the British – as precisely the opposite of the objectified alien.”\(^{110}\) Thus in Weston-Super-Mare, the title of Mr. James Liddiard’s 1910 travel lecture “Cannibal Islands” set the tone for an illustrated tour of the island world of the South Pacific which, whilst extolling the beauty of the tropical scenery, simultaneously laid emphasis on the perceived savagery and eccentricity of the native populace.\(^{111}\) Introducing the location as a place where “the horrible human sacrifices, infanticide, and the brutal murder of the aged people had already been stamped out in some parts and was fast disappearing from others”, Liddiard’s slides of the Fiji islands featured natives whose “styles of hairdressing” were “both wonderful and fearful”, where “the social life of the natives” contrasted with other islands where the natives remained “savage”, “ferocious”, “fierce” and “treacherous”.\(^{112}\) Part of a continuing tradition of travel photography established previously in the nineteenth century, such material was usually accepted as factual or truthful by unquestioning audiences: in their work on photography and anthropology, Melissa Banta and Curtis Hinsley cite the critic Christopher Lyman, who affirms that photographs “were not viewed as metaphors of experience, but rather as sections of reality itself. If photographs showed gigantic trees and awe-inspiring mountains, then
all the trees were gigantic and all the mountains awe-inspiring. When photographs depicted Indians as ‘savages’, Indians were confirmed as ‘savages.’”

Gathering one’s own personal experiences and photographs could serve a lecturer well in a multiplicity of ways once he had returned to the public hall or museum lecture room. Professional travel lecturers, who like their more illustrious counterparts the polar explorers, had often personally completed more modest, but nevertheless arduous or dangerous journeys, also used lantern slides often made from original photographs to authenticate their experiences. Liddiard’s subjective narrative and personally selected views of the Pacific Islands, a destination few of his spectators were likely to have experienced themselves, was accepted by the packed audience as being “exceptionally qualified” as an authority by virtue of his having “travelled extensively in many of the comparatively little known parts of the world, and therefore speaking from first-hand experience.” One local lecturer in Sidmouth was able to exhibit his own shots of Martinique taken both immediately before and after the volcanic eruption there: “Here he secured some very lovely photographs of the place and surroundings which were shown and very highly appreciated. He visited the island three times and on the third occasion the volcano was already smoking.” This photographic evidence that the lecturer had been as near as possible to the drama of the event, combined with his personalised narrative, was an important factor in gaining the confidence of the audience: it was felt that “the lecturer carried his listeners with him in spirit, from the start to the finish, through the West Indies.” Another local speaker, Cecil Carus-Wilson, a native of Weston-Super-Mare who lectured across the South West and to each of the resorts under consideration, had as his objective to bring these first-hand experiences to local people: “Midst Ice and Glaciers”, illustrated by his own photographic lantern slides aimed “to infuse a desire for further knowledge of that subject and hoped that it would lead them (the audience) to read about the glaciers and perhaps visit them when the summer came on.” In his column for lecturers and lanternists in the OMLJ, the journalist George Brown advised that “travelling and touring are, of course, always popular, but they lose half their colour if the lecturer has not himself been over the ground.”
Yet the process by which travellers appeared to become acknowledged experts simply by visiting exotic locations and recounting their experiences angered some contemporaries, amongst them the American C.H. Townsend, curator of the New York Art Museum and Aquarium. In his 1912 article, ‘The Misuse of Lantern Illustrations by Museum Lecturers,’ Townsend accused the profession of lecturer of sliding towards mere showmanship, denouncing in particular those he viewed as less than professional practices, observing that “when a fine collection of pictures of the Grand Canyon, accompanied by the talk of a mere traveller, is announced as a lecture on geology, it is a sign that we are losing our powers of discrimination. When some superb pictures of Indian habitations…are described by a mere photographer engaged in making money out of lantern slides, shall the authorities…allow the performance to be advertised as a lecture on ethnology?” Townsend’s argument was founded on the quality and availability of photographic material for making slides, whose excellence was not always matched, in his opinion, by the lecturer who accompanied them. “Lecturing with lantern illustrations has so nearly superseded the well-prepared, authoritative discourse,” he concluded, “that the latter has become a rarity.”

The British trade press had been similarly deploiring the general standard of some lectures, and throughout this period sought to raise standards through the publication of practical guides and advice to lantern lecturers, as Joe Kember has explored more fully. He cites amongst several others the comments of G.R. Bryce in 1897 who was also of the opinion that “although so many lantern lectures are held nowadays, there are, comparatively speaking, very few which come up to the standard which this class of entertainment should hold.” Bryce also queried the role of the illustrations and their significance within the lecture, reaching similar conclusions to Townsend: “Instead of having to explain the slides, the lecturer should have the slides explaining him….It too often seems that the slides are the principal attraction, and the lecturer a mere accessory to the entertainment, or as it then becomes, a show of slides.” Also addressing the question of poor standards, the author of the 1900 article ‘Lecturer’s Profits’ in the OMLJ considered, as Townsend would also do, that the amateur was to blame, yet disagreed with him in the detail: this OMLJ journalist denounced the type of lecturer who accepted low fees and addressed the smaller institutes, armed only with “a wretched collection of about five
dozen home-made photographs, the actual cost of which may not have exceeded half-a-sovereign.” Most commentators in the trade seemed in broad agreement, wishing to uphold the ideal of the lecturer as an authoritative expert able to discourse knowledgeably and fluently on his chosen topic, assisted by equally expertly handled lantern slides of the highest quality, which together constituted instructive entertainment of the finest kind.

Echoes of these sentiments were to be found locally: at the 54th Annual General Meeting of the Natural History Society in Torquay, it was noted that whilst the organisation was healthy and prosperous, “a growing difficulty which the Society had to encounter was the ever-increasing number of popular and other lectures in the town in connection with church, literary and other societies, which certainly had the status to reduce somewhat the status (sic) or esteem which the Society’s lectures had formerly enjoyed.” They agreed upon a need for lectures on subjects which “whilst being sufficiently popular would be strictly original – something to rank them above the flood of commonplace lectures so abounding.” In these South West resorts, it would appear however from a survey of reviews and reports of lectures occurring during this period that the quality of the lecturer or his illustrative material were in fact rarely the subject of criticism. Since, as has been previously mentioned, the majority of lecturers both resident and visiting drew upon the expertise of the local lanternists, the quality of projection and operational skills was frequently of a consistently high standard. Each of these resorts had at least one established lanternist well known to the local community, whose knowledge and skill often elicited praise from the press. As photographers or scientists themselves, the slides they produced themselves were of a high quality; visiting lecturers often provided visual material of a similar high quality; and there is evidence from several press reports that these foremost local lanternists were keen to update equipment and keep standards of exhibition high.

Lecturers, both amateur and professional, were mostly drawn from professions, occupations or backgrounds traditionally in the male domain: they were frequently also scientists, doctors, members of the clergy, travellers or adventurers. Yet a “growing tendency for ladies to give lectures illustrated by lantern slides” was observed in the OMLJ in 1900. Women often spoke on social issues, such as Miss
Pollock whose lecture on factory girls and London life to Torquay audiences in 1899 introduced the work of the Factory Helpers’ Union through a series of limelight views, or Miss Morley who lectured on factory work at the Museum there the same year. Lectures on public health, such as the six arranged by the local authorities on “Health and Sanitation” in Barnstaple in 1898, were also frequently carried out by women. Missions which sought to help girls and women only, such as some of those run by the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission in India, were often represented by female lecturers in Britain. Female missionaries who had lived and worked among Indian women had first-hand experiences to share with audiences at home, and were thus authorities on the medical and educative work undertaken and advocates for the cause. Photographic slides, often taken by missionary lecturers themselves, authenticated these experiences.

In the resorts studied, there were several lady lecturers who were well-known in their locality who gave illustrated talks, the lantern most frequently being operated by one of the local lanternists, all of whom were men. Some of these women, such as one of the daughters of the well-known novelist and scholar, the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould, were fortunate enough to have travel experiences to share: in the presence of her father in 1902, for example, she recounted her visits to China, Japan and India to a large audience in Sidmouth, illustrating her talk with slides made from her own photographs. The distinguished and long-established Natural History Society in Torquay welcomed women by this time who were equally as engaged in the collection of specimens, production of slides, and lecturing as the gentlemen. At the 65th Annual General Meeting for 1909, for example, ladies were listed as being “competent observers”, tasked with recording flora and fauna, and making lantern slides, also giving some of the monthly papers. The Natural History Society in Torquay actively encouraged its female members to participate in the lecture programme: Minna Gray, for example, spoke on “The Recent Decoration of St. Paul’s Cathedral” in 1896, Exeter Cathedral in 1897 and “The Spirit of the Gothic” the following year, each time aided by local lanternist Stephen Bretton. She offered original illustrative material – a number of diagrams drawn by herself when she “enjoyed the exceptional privilege of free access to the scaffolding” at St. Paul’s, and about two dozen “beautiful and unique” lantern slides, created by one Mr. Dovaston who had built a special scaffolding for the camera. Art and
architecture were two from the rather restricted range of topics on which women tended to speak - Miss March Phillipps, also addressing the Torquay Natural History Society members in 1910, also chose as her subject the architecture, and gardens, of Italy, giving two lectures in which the slides constituted both structure and spectacle: “She led her auditors from villa to villa, illustrating special features – fountains, stonework, clipped hedges and aqueducts. The lantern illustrations – the larger number of which were coloured - were very beautiful. They furnished an excellent idea of the charms of the old gardens, where fountains flashed in the green dusk of ilex woods and lizards slipped along the shafts of sunlight.”

Whilst Miss Gray and Miss Phillips reportedly lectured to large, mixed audiences, some women chose to discourse on topics which did not appeal equally to both sexes. The writer Sarah Grand, lecturing in Torquay on the subject of ‘Mere Man’, an exposé of man’s idiosyncracies, appeared before a packed audience of women, and only twelve men, whilst the balance of the audience for another Torquay lady lecturer, Clare Goslett, which featured a “fine set of lantern views showing the right and wrong methods of draining houses”, is much harder to estimate. Since many lady lecturers tackled topics relating to female health, medical problems, and other issues of interest to women, such as the Mary Stuart Glassford’s lecture in Torquay entitled ‘Essentials of Perfect Womanhood: some causes of ill-health amongst women’, their audiences would most naturally have been composed of women.

With the limited information available, building a complete picture of audience profiles for other types of lantern exhibitions is not a straightforward process. Whilst their sheer number and diversity in all these resorts during this period inevitably raises questions about spectatorship and the nature of the audiences who came to view them, Richard Crangle has termed any attempt to define audiences for lantern shows as “problematic”, due to the complexity of interwoven factors – subjects, contexts, instigators - involved in any given show. Two possible approaches to achieving an estimation of audiences for local lantern shows, might be firstly to consider pricing structures and venues for shows in these resorts, whilst secondly to examine the glimpses occasionally afforded by journalists in local press reviews and reports.
The exhibition of lantern slides, unlike film, never diverged away from its traditional practices and sites to be housed in one exclusive venue: rather, it continued its dependence on pre-existing contexts and venues, and it was these which often defined the audiences collected before the lantern. Clearly workhouse, Sunday school, orphanage and old people’s entertainments, the annual show for tramway navvies in Torquay, lectures at the YMCA, the Torquay NHS or the many Church lantern lectures each have a relatively homogeneous spectatorship drawn from one congregation, one workforce, society or institution. Lectures such as those advertised by Paish and Co. in Torquay could be expensive, a single reserved seat costing four shillings.140 This, combined with their afternoon position, would have ensured audiences drawn from the leisured and wealthy classes. The Cambridge lectures in Sidmouth, with their admission price of two shillings per session and their positioning at three o’clock on a Tuesday afternoon, similarly targeted the leisured class, and as correspondence in the Torquay Directory reveals, it is apparent that the daytime University Extension lectures here also appealed to those whose afternoons were more usually spent in a “round of tea and calls”.141

There was a move to attract teachers, however, by the offer of half-price tickets.142 The Gilchrist lectures, on the other hand, aimed at a much wider demographic by means of pricing and seating strategies and were attended by significant numbers. Sales of tickets for the course of Gilchrist lectures in Torquay during the 1903/4 season numbered 1,242, meaning that over 6,000 people attended the five lectures143. No less than 905 of these were “artisans tickets”, indicating the success of the Trust’s policy of deliberately setting aside half the auditorium for members of the working classes who paid the reduced price of one penny, dividing it from front to back so that holders of the cheapest seats were entitled to seats in a position quite as good as the highest priced ones.144 It was noted that at the first of the 1899 lectures in Torquay, the penny ticket holders assembled an hour and a half before the lecture was due to begin for the “fine educational treat” and several hundred of them rushed to occupy the front seats as soon as the doors were opened.145 A report in 1903 on their success once again reiterated their unusually democratic intention: “The lectures are designed and intended specifically to awaken an interest in and encourage the study of science. They consequently appeal to the young, and inasmuch as the larger proportion of the seats are bound, by the terms of
the Trust, to be available at the exceedingly low price of a penny per lecture, hundreds of young people of both sexes may be expected to attend.”

Often reporters offer an indication of the gender balance within the audience: the Torquay Camera Society meeting for February 1911, for example, boasted as many female members as men. There is evidence too that some courses of lectures cut across some of the boundaries of both gender and class: in 1908, for example, it was noted that the six Cambridge Extension Lectures in Barnstaple were attended by around 250 ‘artisans’, whilst the absence of the “lady friends who usually supported University extension lectures” was remarked upon by the Mayor. The reason for the ladies’ absence, however, that the subject of electricity, chosen by the committee, was “too practical”, indicates that the educative lecture here was still dominated by the middle-class male, an impression confirmed by the Mayor’s remarks, followed by laughter and applause, that “having regard to the spirit of aggression which was being displayed by the fair sex, one would have thought that no subject whatever would be of any special interest for one sex more than the other.” Whilst some lantern audiences appeared to be socially inclusive, such as one evening lecture in Sidmouth on the subject of lifeboats which attracted a “large, representative and appreciative” audience who frequently applauded the lecturer, others were manifestly elitist or exclusive: Whilst the membership of the Torquay National History Society stood at 196, average attendance at lectures was only twelve. This, combined with a tradition of holding NHS talks on Mondays at twelve noon, would indicate an audience drawn principally from the leisured class. Size could also vary dramatically: at the local vicar’s “Passion Play at Oberammergau” lecture in Weston-Super-Mare, “so extensive was the attendance that a large number of persons had to be content with standing positions.” However, lecturers were on occasions victims of extreme weather conditions which deterred audiences from attending: one visiting London speaker in Torquay, having booked three lectures in a week which because of its exceptional cold became subsequently known as “The Glacial Period” had to suffer the indignity of only three ‘auditors’ on each evening.

There was often a simple equation between the cost of a lantern entertainment and its target audience and primary purpose. There were a great
number of free lantern exhibitions in all these resorts, provided by social groups, religious groups, political parties, or other institutions who had often a message to promote, some of which will be explored further later in this chapter. Amongst the most successful and persuasive of these locally were agents, recruiting young men and women as emigrants to British colonies overseas, who were particularly active in the rural areas of the South West targeting farming families, and in the mining areas of West Cornwall. The promise of free land, gold mines, fisheries, free schools and perpetual sunshine drew significant numbers to the free slide shows and presentations; these fed into discourses in the press which promoted the potential of a new way of life to the less well-off in the region. Repeated advertisements for cheap passages on the steamers to South Africa and Australia featured in the press. Interest in those who had left for Canada, Australia or the Transvaal was steadfastly maintained with regular reporting of the lives of the “brave sons” of Cornwall who had embarked on new and sometimes difficult lives abroad, and the “anxious Cornish hearthsides” they had left behind, filling many columns in the local press.

Deaths overseas were routinely and often melodramatically reported as typified by this 1896 example: “With such emigration as obtains in our county we may expect that not a few will remain behind on the great African continent or some other distant country, and many a wife or mother will ask – who will be the next?” Yet it was the rhetoric of sacrifice, opportunity, duty and service in the imperial cause which prevailed in the minds of many who, following attendance at one of the free recruitment lantern show evenings, were noted to have been swayed by “Life in Queensland”, “A Trip to the Transvaal”, or “The Open Door to Prosperity” and other such persuasive evenings, where limelight views were followed by the chance to book passages there and then at the “lowest fares” on the steamers of the Castle and Union or Cunard Line.

The South West, with its maritime connections, had always proved a fertile hunting ground for new recruits to the Navy: one typical evening in 1909 in Sidmouth assembled together an eminent diplomat and a Lieutenant of the Royal Navy whose illustrated lecture on “Patriotism” was followed by patriotic songs, the whole said to prove a “pleasant and instructive” evening calculated to “arouse the patriotism of all true hearted Devonians”; “just now it appropriately synchronises with the interest shown throughout the country on behalf of the Navy and the
Territorials.” Seeking to counterbalance this, a recruitment drive of a different type drew “an audience of old, middle-aged and young men” to Penzance Central Hall in 1896, when one Colonel of a local regiment used his lantern lecture to seek to persuade his all-male audience of “The Advantages of the Army”. Screening “a series of beautiful slides depicting the various cavalry and infantry regiments of Great Britain”, Colonel Knox’s was a carefully constructed show which stirred the patriotic sentiments of an already partisan audience through its blend of songs, music and images. Similarly patriotic in intent were the various habitations of the Primrose League, with membership at its peak during the Edwardian years, whose members signed allegiance to the sovereign realm, and Empire, and who combined social activities with their aim of spreading Conservative principles more widely. Local branches regularly used the lantern to illustrate lectures on the patriotic and political themes and issues which largely preoccupied its members: during the Boer War it came to particular prominence in the region, using specially prepared lantern slides, exhibited by one of the local lanternists, for example, to illustrate an address by a delegate of the Imperial South African Association from Johannesburg on “The War: its Causes and Issues”.

Particularly powerful in Torquay, and opening a new branch in Penzance in 1910, the Navy League made extensive use of the lantern throughout this period right up until the beginning of the war. Its Honorary Secretary in Torquay was Stephen Bretton, a well-known local lanternist: unsurprisingly therefore, many meetings and events involved an exhibition of slides to accompany a lecture, typified by a prize-giving for local boys by the Mayoress which was used as an occasion to deliver to all an illustrated address on “The Defence of the Country and the Flag”. Central to their imperialist discourses was the “necessity for a strong Navy, unchallenged and unchallengeable upon the seas, so that their interests as a nation might be protected and their homeland safeguarded.” Whereas illuminated lantern lectures such as “What Nelson Did”, a presentation with slides specially obtained from London and shown in Penzance in late 1912, offered local people the opportunity to engage in triumphant celebrations of the power and importance of the British Navy, by this time the League saw their purpose as being primarily one of education. With war an imminently foreseeable prospect, the Navy League used lantern shows to seek to convince people of the need to protect trade routes and
increase naval power.\textsuperscript{167} By 1913, the campaign intensified, with public meetings which whipped up patriotic feeling with a blend of music, heightened rhetoric, and rousing speeches from visiting MPs and celebrities. Ladies were dressed as sailors, the Boy Scouts and Church Lads Brigade flanked the platform, and streamers, flags and ferns adorned the auditorium in one Penzance meeting that year.\textsuperscript{168}

Using the lantern for persuasive purposes was a widespread practice. A survey of Sidmouth alone, the smallest of these resorts with a population of just over five thousand, reveals that in addition to the Church of England Temperance Society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,\textsuperscript{169} the British and Foreign Bible Society,\textsuperscript{170} the Protestant Reformation Society,\textsuperscript{171} the Congregational Church,\textsuperscript{172} Sidmouth Band of Mercy,\textsuperscript{173} the Salvation Army,\textsuperscript{174} the Religious Tract Society,\textsuperscript{175} the Young Men’s Christian Association,\textsuperscript{176} the Good Templars,\textsuperscript{177} the Church Missionary Society,\textsuperscript{178} the Evangelists,\textsuperscript{179} All Saints Church,\textsuperscript{180} Sidmouth Wesley Guild,\textsuperscript{181} and Sidmouth Convent,\textsuperscript{182} all made extensive use of lantern lectures during this period to promote their work or entertain their members. As Richard Crangle has pointed out, although the production of slide sets in general began to decline after the turn of the century, an examination of Riley’s catalogue for 1908 still found 63 sets of “Illustrated Hymns” and 136 sets of “Scriptural and Religious Subjects” in just this list alone, testimony to the enduring demand for this genre of material.\textsuperscript{183} It was a pattern representative of the other regional resorts in question, where the use of the lantern by religious groups and in churches became a common and widespread phenomenon.

However this practice was not without its critics. There were many who believed that the connotations of entertainment which the lantern brought to services could detract from the gravity and sanctity of the religious message. In 1894, one correspondent to the \textit{Optical Magic Lantern Journal}, whilst accepting that the use of the lantern in churches was common, however remarked upon the “shock” still manifested by both congregations and clergy at the idea.\textsuperscript{184} One lantern slide company in an 1897 edition of \textit{Titbits} cited religious organisations as his main clients: “We consider now that no church or chapel is complete without a lantern. Until lately, a magic lantern in connection with a religious service would have been looked upon by some … as most objectionable; but now the demand for pictures of
this character is such that we supply sets of slides for throwing upon the screen practically the whole of the Church service both in English and in Welsh. The OMLJ continued to debate the question of its use with its readers, contending in 1899 that confronted with declining congregations, many churches had experimented with lantern services “with no appreciable success”. In January 1900 the OMLJ published “A Lanternist’s Creed,” formulated by a Baptist minister, which celebrated 13 years of illustrated work, stating the author’s belief in the sacred use of the lantern, and advising that “an ounce of picture is worth a ton of talk.” Significantly this creed sanctified the lantern as a tool with which to do God’s work: “Solomon said, ‘The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.’ I believe in using them both, and the Lantern is my agent.”

At a local level others saw more prosaic benefits in the use of the medium in churches. School children in audiences for a Good Friday service in Torquay were said to have demonstrated “profound interest and remarkably quiet behaviour” when occupied with the magic lantern. For adults too, it was seen to draw in audiences and act as an aid to concentration: “There are many who believe that ministers of religion lose a grand opportunity of really reaching the hearts of their congregations,” remarked an editorial in the Torquay Directory, “by not more generally adopting the wonderfully effective methods afforded by the lantern services in their churches.”

The vicar of Newport in Barnstaple regularly held lantern services throughout Lent in his church: here the “brilliant lantern pictures” were considered to encourage the participation of the audience, being both an explanation of the address, and an illustration to the hymns which the “well-filled” room sang “heartily”. Writing in favour of one Good Friday lantern lecture given locally in particular, the Torquay reporter advised that this “in no conceivable way could be called a “show,” or as anything but sterling object lessons in Christian faith.” What distinguished this exhibition from mere entertainment in the eyes of the commentator was the unusual way in which the lantern was used. Here it was felt, the slides did not dictate to the narrative or supersede it in importance, but seamlessly illuminated it: “There was a complete absence of any signals or pause for change of pictures, usually inseparable from lantern illustrations. As Mr Goldsmith told the awful story, the pictures followed smoothly and skilfully.” This approach drew praise from the local reporter because the well-known local lantern operator, Stephen Bretton, seemed to
have specially adapted his technique in a manner appropriate to the needs of the context: “The charm of the service was not that the preacher described or explained the pictures as they were presented, but rather that they formed the background or illustration of his remarks, which assumed the form of a series of sermonettes.”

Employing the lantern in a variety of functions was a well-embedded practice within many religious institutions and groups in all these coastal resorts by this time. As David Robinson, Stephen Herbert and Richard Crangle have noted, it was the non-conformist sectors and evangelical movements who rapidly and fervently first embraced the use of lantern, realising it was “a potent weapon in their struggles against the evils and the intemperance of modern life.” Locally, the Salvation Army welcomed the lantern, adopting it for their own formulaic Sunday evening meetings, exemplified by one in 1908 in Barnstaple, which commenced with an “illustrated address” entitled “The Crucifixion of Our Lord”, and “illustrated hymns” led by the singing brigade. This same Barnstaple branch provides an example of the lantern being adapted to local needs, in an evening illustrated lecture offering specially prepared slides of the life of one of its former members. Whereas for some of these groups the use of the lantern became a regular and institutionalised practice in the conventional settings of meeting rooms and halls, other groups travelled with the lantern deploying it in less traditional or more exotic contexts. The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, for example, mounted a travelling ‘Palestine Exhibition’ which toured the country before reaching the South West in 1896. This mobile multimedia experience set bridal processions, oriental music and costumes amongst models of rock-hewn tombs and Bedouin tents, designed to “illustrate the manners and customs of Bible Lands” and to collect for the sick Jews of Jerusalem. Limelight lectures on a variety of subjects were delivered daily to a “crush of visitors”, promoting the work of the Society and acting as fund-raising tools. Similarly, for Canadian Evangelist J.J. Sims touring the country with a spectacle of light and music housed in a vast marquee, coloured lantern slides and two powerful electric lanterns provided dramatic illustrations throughout his 1912 appearances in Torquay. This intermedial entertainment encompassed Bible Talks and addresses, sacred solos and duets all illustrated by two screens on which were simultaneously projected both words and images, punching home the evangelical message in a novel way. In this respect the
projected images, as ‘truthful’ reflections of the natural world, were given a central role: “One unique feature of these services is the introduction of beautiful scenes of Nature, to illustrate the great spiritual truths of the Gospel.”

Somewhat later the established church also appropriated the lantern for its purposes, with the Church of England going on to develop its own lantern hire and slide publishing business and by the late nineteenth-century its adoption of the lantern for temperance work was widespread. Photographic slides, in particular the Life Model genre, lent impetus to the temperance campaign, as Judson Bonner, lecturing in London at the World Temperance Congress in 1900 acknowledged: “The growth of photography has made the production of lantern transparencies so easy and cheap, that the optical lantern has been brought within the reach of nearly all societies, both as to price and simplicity.” Since the temperance movement, as Mervyn Heard and Richard Crangle have observed, was never wealthy and always dependent in the field on volunteers, the affordability of visual material facilitated by new technologies was crucial: “for such groups to exploit slides for propaganda as vigorously as they did, they needed the affordable prices and the standardisation of images and messages brought about by mass-production.”

Yet with an insistence on the “darker side” of the temperance imagery of children and death, proprietary slide sets and readings, and unvarying message, temperance meetings were acknowledged by many to be formulaic: “even the most ardent enthusiasts” explained one Torquay reporter, “experience pleasure in escaping from dry, matter-of-fact meetings, with their inevitable round of speechifying.” The C.E.T.S. – the Church of England Temperance Society – was particularly active regionally during this period, with weekly meetings which often included a lantern exhibition. Typically these might take the form of an entertainment or be of an instructive nature, informing members about the work of the society. In Sidmouth, for example, one such brought to local members images which illustrated temperance work in metropolitan and urban areas where “pictures of many of the principal prisons, workhouses, and lunatic asylums were shown, the lecturer remarking (on the authority of the governors of these Institutions) that 75 per cent of the lunacy, 80 to 90 per cent of the crime, and nearly the whole of the poverty of the country, was due, directly or indirectly, to intemperance.” Here lantern slides were employed to
validate such ‘facts’, to strengthen the case for temperance work, to provide a grim backdrop to accompany the equally sombre narrative of police courts and prisons. The flexibility of the lantern, and its capacity to serve as a tool for entertainment as well as instruction, is neatly demonstrated by its use by this group a few weeks later. The same C.E.T.S branch in Sidmouth the following month held a Bank Holiday entertainment, where the “short temperance address...illustrated by humorous anecdotes” was buried deep in an evening of music, Punch and Judy, readings and refreshments, with “a lantern entertainment by Mr. A.W. Ellis, who showed by aid of the acetylene light some very fine views of the Bermudas, also the “Story of the Tub” with “connective readings” all “novelties” which “provoked a good deal of mirth”. Temperance conversazione, like the one organised by the Temperance Federation and Women’s Total Abstinence Union in 1903, which aimed not to convert people to intemperance, but to provide an enjoyable meeting for workers and sympathisers, in an attempt to counter this image, scattered chairs “promiscuous-like” all over the room, combined entertainment with conversation, and celebrated with evangelical fervour the local successes and achievements of the movement.

The Young Men’s (YMCA) and Young Women’s (YWCA) Christian Associations, both very active in the region, were institutions which frequently made use of the lantern, adapting it to their need to offer their members attractive yet instructive material. With the aid of the lantern, the Christian message could be disseminated to young participants whilst sited within the contexts of evenings of readings, lectures, slides or song, the music or illustrations of other worlds and other cultures a ‘sugar-coating’ calculated to sustain interest in the movement. Thus in Torquay, local lanternists at the YMCA “conducted one of the latest style of entertainments – songs illustrated by lantern views” in 1896; in Weston-Super-Mare, a large audience in 1901 appreciated lime-light views of Switzerland; and in Barnstaple, the YMCA enjoyed lime-light views accompanying a lecture entitled “China, its Religions and its People” in 1905. For the illustrated lecture “Early Christianity in the British Isles” the mixing of the sexes was permitted – an additional attraction was that both YMCA and YWCA members were admitted free. As reviews of these evenings reveal, the Christian message which underpinned them did not remain usually discrete from the lantern show, but permeated it. Slides could give local members a sense of their identity as part of a worldwide organisation, by
bringing pictures of YMCA members and buildings in other countries: as one lecturer explained, the “YMCA was composed of all races and colours, all united by “the look” – ‘looking unto Jesus.’” Positioned within a framework of songs and prayer, at this lecture in Sidmouth were screened 107 illustrations which comprised a pictorial tour of the mountains, rivers and towns of Canada: what also distinguished it from mere travelogue was the inclusion of slides of Canadian YMCA members and the Montreal YMCA rooms. To the local audience these latter provided visual evidence that they were part of a global network and proved to those present, as the Chairman remarked, that “they were not divided.” Neal Garnham, in his consideration of the “subsidiary events” additional to the “religious activities” which YMCAs organised in a bid to attract and retain members, notes that many of these, such as gym, football, billiards and smoking rooms, were controversial and thought by some to detract from the primary evangelistic purpose of the propagation of the Christian gospel. Lantern exhibitions on the other hand, could help to promote this message, and at the same time could improve the mind, be spiritually uplifting, were relatively low-cost, and were successful in attracting audiences of young men, accounting for their enduring use by local YMCAs throughout this period.

The YMCA were not alone in using the lantern as a means of connecting local members with their counterparts nationwide or abroad, evidencing work being carried on elsewhere in the name of the organisation, or for the purposes of motivating and uplifting members at home. Pictures of missionary work from around the world were used in all these resorts by a great many faiths and organisations including the Baptists, Wesleyans, the Zenana Bible Mission, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in Sidmouth, the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Penzance, the Church Missionary Society, and by visiting groups such as the London Missionary Society or the Zululand Mission. Most frequently these exploited the presence of expert witnesses who had lived, worked or travelled extensively in the regions which the missions served. Thus Dr. Lavington Hart, representing the London Missionary Society in front of Torquay audiences in 1900, brought a large number of illustrations for his lantern lecture on China prepared from his own photos, and from the London Missionary Society came the veteran missionary the Reverend Lawes who had worked in the South Seas for 35 years.
Such representations of the work of societies across other continents linked local people with global concerns, and the apparently immense scale of the areas in which work was carried out in their name contributed to their standing in the eyes of the audience. The Religious Tract Society, for example, in 1899 offered a slide exhibition which moved from “views of the poorer parts of London” followed by “pictures of the hop pickers in Kent, scenes on the Channel, thence in Paris, Marseilles, Malta, Egypt, China, and North America...” Whilst lantern slides, often personally collected by British representatives abroad, could bring reassuring images which reinforced to those at home the perceived triumphs of Christianity and successes of missionary work overseas, conversely these illustrations could disturb this apparent equilibrium through their ability to reflect the scale of the challenges faced. At a meeting for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1899, it was noted that “out of 250 millions in India only 2.5 million professed Christianity”: the Indian missions, they concluded “were never more prosperous than they were at present. Every country which was added, perhaps by the stroke of a pen by the British Government, meant a further responsibility for the English Church.” Missionary lectures, exemplified by “Between Four Heathendoms: Across India with the Religious Tract Society” given to Wesleyans in Barnstaple in 1908, or “Visit to Swaziland” which was offered by the Zululand Mission to Penzance audiences in 1910, with their dozens of “beautiful limelight views”, not only celebrated achievements, but also formed illustrated balance sheets of the financial and moral burden which home churches and their members believed they faced.

Many of these same religious groups realised and utilised the various applications of the lantern in their work with children and young people: as Steve Humphries observes, the “first taste of the magic lantern came for the majority at Sunday School or Band of Hope meetings where Bible stories and moral fables were spelt out in melodramatic picture shows.” Other benevolent and social groups made routine use of them also: from Band of Hope instructive lectures to Christmas teas in the orphanage, lantern slides were employed to entertain and to educate, and were almost invariably warmly regarded by institutions and recipients alike. Within these paternalistic environments, the degree of control which could be exercised over visual material was crucially important. Unlike film and the cinema, whose influence on youth was continually in question, as will be explored in depth in Chapter Four,
slides could be carefully selected for their wholesome moral and instructive qualities, and during this period were cheap and plentiful. Judson Bonner, in his address to the World’s Temperance Congress in London in June 1900, laid a heavy emphasis on the use of the lantern slide for temperance work, stressing its special ability to “enforce a truth”: “The old as well as the young generally receive more lasting impressions from what they see than from what they hear. Hence it is most important in the teaching of temperance principles to attract the eye as well as the ear.”\textsuperscript{227} Often no distinction was made between “the young and the old” with respect to the material to which they were exposed. Bonner, for example, recommended in particular the illustrated lecture \textit{Temperance Sketch Book} produced by the Band of Hope, and their three slide sets, “The worship of Bacchus”, “Alcohol and the Human Body”, and “Abstinence and Hard Work”;\textsuperscript{228} all these were to be found in these South West resorts, often being shown to children as well as adults.\textsuperscript{229} At two consecutive meetings of the Junior Clergy Missionary Association, the first crowded with children and the second with young people, the lecturer’s illustrative material – his own “specially collected or specially prepared slides” of missionary work in India – appeared entirely unadapted for his young audiences.\textsuperscript{230}

Sunday School “entertainments” were typically instructive, moralistic addresses or readings accompanied by illustrative material and sometimes songs: slide sets, with connective readings were readily acquired and could be easily managed by amateur operators, such as the local vicar or the school superintendent. They are exemplified by the Congregational Sunday School magic lantern evening in Sidmouth which featured readings and slides illustrative of the Pilgrim’s Progress;\textsuperscript{231} or the Sunday School social at Upton Vale Baptist Church in Torquay which entertained its young members with tea and slides and moral readings such as “Christie’s Old Organ” and “Jessica’s First Prayer”.\textsuperscript{232} Karen Eifler points to the popular appeal of this particular life-model drama, which with its inclusion of community singing “aroused feelings of compassion because they relied on the spectators’ active participation in the exhibitions” and which “intensified their emotional involvement in the protagonists’ destinies.”\textsuperscript{233}

The annual lantern show given to the children of the members of Ellacombe Mutual Society in Torquay in 1904 by well-known local lanternist Stephen Bretton,
provides a further example of what was considered to constitute children’s entertainment. His “capital programme” consisted of “some local views and a series illustrating “Curfew shall not ring tonight”, the whole concluding with some slides depicting a battleship repelling a torpedo attack, the searchlight display and explosion of the torpedo being very realistic,” clearly drawing heavily upon visual material used elsewhere for his adult programmes, and including some slides which arguably were more instructive than amusing. The Torquay Errand Boys’ Association were offered supper and a display of lantern slides of war scenes in South Africa for their Christmas treat in 1900; and four years later, the theme of war still prevailed when a visiting J.P. put together as “a very kind and thoughtful act” a great many slides of the Boer War and the battle of Omdurman exhibited at the Museum Hall as “an excellent entertainment for the children of the town”. Once again, the boundaries between entertainment and education were blurred, the lecturer himself offering the slides for “instruction and interest”, the report in the press being entitled “Entertainment to children”. In two halves, the first hour of the lecture comprised a large number of Boer War photographic slides, taken by serving officers: in the second, seventy slides from photographs “taken by Rene Bull, the war correspondent of the Graphic, in the course of the last Soudan campaign, illustrating exciting incidents at the battle of Atbara, Omdurman, etc.” were exhibited. Once again, no differentiation was made between adults and children: evidently, the visual material to which the children were exposed had been previously captured, processed and commodified for adult audiences. In this instance, adopting a format to be found frequently in lectures for adults, it was packaged together with music and a military piper to form a patriotic entertainment which whipped up the fervour of the children, drawing their “keen appreciation” and “hearty and frequent applause”.

Occasionally however, lectures specifically for children were devised in which complex scientific and technical material was tailored to their needs: Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and experienced lecturer, Cecil Carus-Wilson brought his four instructive lectures to Penzance which by means of photographic lantern slides and experiments offered an exploration of world geology. Running for four consecutive Tuesday evenings, these offered reduced prices to teachers and groups of pupils, and aimed to maximise their audiences by selling tickets through local schools. Mike Simkin has identified the “many layers of involvement”
through which the lantern powerfully influenced children’s lives at this time: “it has provided a broader understanding of the world for many generations. But never was it more important or innovative than when working as a philosophical instrument, toy or device for the entertainment, information and education of children.”

Behind many lantern exhibitions given by charities and social institutions during this period lay the twin intentions of promoting the work of these societies and raising funds for them. Often these went hand in hand: in carefully crafted performances which engaged directly with audiences, emotive scenes of poverty, destitution, violence or drunkenness, could be screened both to inform people of the work undertaken and to persuade philanthropic spectators to contribute to the cause. Often such lantern shows were sited within contexts akin to the familiar and traditional variety entertainment, employing a variety of media to build atmosphere and intensify emotion. One of the most celebrated and successful of such organisations was Dr. Barnardo’s which tirelessly toured the country giving a succession of performances, reaching each of these resorts as well as many minor venues at the furthest extremes of the South-West region: in each, personal contact was made with a figure of authority – the local vicar, mayor, or MP - who by hosting their visit, set the correct tone and facilitated good attendances. Local people were encouraged to engage directly with the boys by acting as hosts during their visit.

An afternoon or evening’s “entertainment” combined hymns, prayers and lantern shows together in a multi-media fund-raising programme, which showcased the impressive discipline and skill of the Barnardo’s boys’ drilling, ringing handbells, playing and piping, calculated to arouse the admiration and appeal to the sympathies of audiences, rendering them more susceptible to the persuasive addresses by the Reverend Mayers, the well-known deputation secretary who regularly accompanied them. These regional shows, scaled down in size to suit the needs of touring and performing in a variety of venues, were nevertheless modelled directly on the practices employed in the Annual Meeting spectacles performed before mass public audiences in London. Susan Ash has described how these were designed to offer “visual, empirical ‘proof’ that even a few weeks of Barnardo’s corrective training successfully transformed human ‘material’ into ‘finished products’”. In the regional spectacles, representations of “human material” were provided by the
lantern slides of waifs and strays who formed a marked contrast with the healthy appearances and disciplined conduct of the children performing. Not utilised in the London Annual Meetings, where live children were brought on stage to perform the same function, limelight shows were thus a critical part of regional performances: Ash cites how Barnardo believed in the efficacy of such “before and after” images which were designed to “move his audience ‘subtly’ to the correct ‘moral’ view about child rescue and Barnardo’s training programme.”

The use of the lantern to represent this transformation process was just one of a number of effects drawn from popular traditional entertainment, which as Ash has explored, were combined uniquely with a repertoire of performances from the charity’s children, to form unique fund-raising events nationally and regionally. Local fundraising for Dr. Barnardo’s, undertaken under the auspices of the Young Helpers League, whilst without the stunning visual impact of the boys themselves, otherwise used identical strategies, combining music and prayer with lantern lectures such as “Work among the waifs” and “Life in the Homes” which sought first to engage audiences through their participation in song and prayer, and next to engender feelings of compassion through the use of moving images and emotionally stirring discourses. In Weston-Super-Mare, a large-scale multimedia entertainment at the Victoria Hall with orchestra, pantomime, dance and limelight effects was performed, which utilised the children from the Junior Helpers’ League and which echoed more closely the polished professionalism of the Barnardo shows.

Local charities employed similar strategies though evidently in a much more modest way adapted to local circumstances: an evening of mixed entertainment in the Assembly Rooms, Barnstaple, for example, sought to raise funds for the Post Office Widows and Orphans’ Fund, by first offering audiences a reassuring overview, illustrated with “beautifully clear and distinct…Post Office pictures”, of the national and international service it performed. Also typical was a lecture on behalf of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution whose stated aim was “to know more of the work and value of the institution in order to appreciate more fully its noble work.” This, too, was a carefully constructed evening, designed to provoke both an emotional and, it was hoped, financial response from the audience. The underlying raison d’être of the lantern exhibition, local scenes taken by Mr. Ellis
illustrating the launch and return of the local Sidmouth lifeboat during a recent gale, was fundraising: “These clearly depicted the difficulty experienced in getting the boat away and the lecturer expressed a sincere hope that some generous resident would come forward and assist in providing a decent slipway.”256 Ellis first built up the atmosphere, screening “views of wrecks and thrilling rescues” to accompany a narrative of the work of lifeboats, this followed by his own prepared slides which related to the local lifeboat. During the evening, George R. Sim’s “pathetic poem The Lifeboat” was recited and this was illustrated with yet more slides.

Working with the poor and disadvantaged, many social and benevolent societies operating under the patronage of local dignitaries or the auspices of local churches regularly used the lantern to provide “treats” for special functions and events. In her consideration of the use of lantern exhibition for charitable purposes, Karen Eifler has noted its regular inclusion in “varied programmes that included both instructive and entertaining elements”, in which relevant messages could be embedded, and which were often linked to traditional and seasonal events.257 Locally, these are exemplified by the regular Christmas and New Year entertainments held annually in all these resorts, which often extended well into January or even February, which frequently incorporated a lantern show into a programme of activities which, like the lantern itself, could offer cheap, wholesome amusement for large groups at a time. These are typified by one New Year’s Treat, provided by the Tor Mission Hall, for sixty working people of Torquay, which included violin solos, a service of song and recitations, performances from the Boys Brigade and the Fife and Drum band, followed by tea and gifts from the tree.258 Those thus entertained often became more the recipients of the entertainment rather than participants in it, such occasions frequently being appropriated by would-be social controllers as ready-made opportunities for instruction: occasions when, in addition to the Christmas trees and presents, the financial contributions of aldermen and councillors also bought time to preach messages of abstinence, sobriety, religion or thrift to their captive audiences.

Lantern shows were often central to these “gift packages” of music, oranges, buns, tea, a sermon of some kind and the singing of the National Anthem: not only useful occasions for proselytising, propaganda, or simply promoting patriotism, they
could also be exploited to publicise the munificence of councillors, mayors and other local benefactors when such gifts were reported in the local press. In 1908, the sponsors of the evening of entertainment for the inmates of the Barnstaple workhouse were named and praised and their generosity carefully detailed in each case. Here too, there were lantern slides which were both “instructive and interesting”, which the press report set apart from the “highly amusing” ones, a distinction which evidences again that such benevolent events were viewed not simply as pure entertainment but also as ideal moments to educate, instruct, or to promote a cause. Joe Kember has commented when writing about the relationship between lecturer and audience of the authority lent to them by their position and the “degree of complicity” entertained by audiences for these experts “whose culture they were encouraged to share”. Such evenings preserved a similar hierarchical structure between the civic dignitaries, councillors, local gentry and nobility, and social institutions as philanthropic givers of these entertainments, and their humbler recipients. Such discourses, illustrated by lantern slides, could offer words and images of reassurance and reaffirmation to these audiences which typically reinforced the ideology of their benefactors.

Few of these benevolent groups missed the opportunity to sweeten their ideological messages by placing them in the midst of such seasonal festivities. Very typical, therefore, were the New Year’s entertainment for the inmates of Redruth workhouse in 1897 which consisted of “lantern views on temperance subjects”, or the entertainment to accompany the Annual General Meeting of the Sidmouth Band of Mercy which included an address by the RSPCA, illustrated by lantern slides, exhorting kindness to animals. The very detailed account of the “Christmas Entertainment at the Sidmouth Orphanage” makes explicit a contemporary awareness of the distinction between amusement and instruction, highlighting also the careful and deliberate contrast between the secular and religious material in the programme and its different functions. This early evening lantern show, somewhat unusually, was provided as a separate addition to the traditional Christmas gifts and tea of the week before. Divided in two halves, each rounded off with a musical item, it offered two discrete entertainments of very differing themes and mood, the first part of the programme containing two sacred lantern lectures given by the vicar, the second slides “of a miscellaneous description” which ranged from scenes of a Canadian life
to snow-bound travellers in the Bernese Alps. Whilst termed a “Christmas Entertainment”, the sombre mood and heavy religious emphasis of the numerous slides, which represented first scenes from the Holy Land and subsequently the life of Jesus, would not have been misplaced in Church or Sunday School. To “shrieks of laughter”, the second lantern show ended with a dialogue between a “dummy visitor” and the reverend/lecturer whose picture filled the screen, before “cheering” and the “hearty singing” of the illustrated National Anthem. Yet whilst the material of each half was apparently intended to be instructive or entertaining, each part borrowed strategies from the other to achieve its aim successfully. Scenes of the St. Bernard monks and their rescue dogs were “terseley (sic) yet lucidly explained” and thus became instructive; the “beautiful pictures…illustrating the Saviour’s life” were there to attract the children and “to familiarise and interest them in their lessons in Bible History” and were therefore entertaining.

There are plentiful examples in each of these South West resorts which testify to the continuing presence of lantern exhibition throughout this period - reviews and reports of these shows evidence the fact that in many cases the culturally embedded, traditional practices endured unaltered up to the beginning of the First World War. The lantern remained influential as the visual medium of choice for local clubs and religious groups, missionary societies and Sunday schools. 1913 in Torquay saw many social and benevolent organisations, political groups and visiting lecturers including the Young People’s Social Union, the Zenana Mission and the Navy League still continuing to use the lantern in traditional ways for the purposes of instruction, education, fund-raising, persuasion or propaganda. In Sidmouth, for example, the Band of Mercy continued to offer regular lantern lectures, and the Christmas entertainment at the orphanage was still a lantern show, even as film, and the cinema, were becoming prominent in the town. The year 1914 opened there with the traditional Band of Hope Christmas meeting, which blended together carols and an address by the Vicar with a lantern lecture illustrating “Canadian winter scenes, life studies and boy scouts.” Even in 1913, the lantern was still an effective force: recruitment agents persuaded record numbers in Barnstaple of the opportunities awaiting them in Canada, their lantern and slides of land and farming practices the same tools of persuasion regularly employed throughout this period, whilst the following month one hundred members of the Juvenile Rechabites there were treated
to a unique collection of photographic slides of the Boer War, an experience which persuaded thirty-two new members to enrol. The old technology of the lantern teamed up with the modern craze for aviation, to produce illustrated lectures such as “Flying: its Perils and Pleasures”, a talk illustrated by models and lantern slides in Weston-Super-Mare, given by the aviator S.F. Cody, or Captain Marriott’s “The Flying Man in War” at the Museum Hall in Torquay. Instructive lectures continued to be popular, and like the lecture at Torquay’s Carnegie Library by the International Committee for Bird Protection, were still illustrated by “beautiful coloured lantern slides”, or in Penzance, where those given by the School of Mining, for example, often continued to be illustrated by lantern.

Yet whilst still apparently an important visual medium in these resorts, a simple comparison of the number of lantern exhibitions advertised in the local press at the beginning, middle and end of the period in question reveals an actual decline in the number of shows or lectures given. In 1898, they were popular and frequent as expected in the larger resorts, with nineteen in Weston and twenty-three in Torquay, whilst the smaller towns of Barnstaple, Sidmouth, and Penzance had seven, six and four respectively. Over the next five to six years, numbers of lantern shows held steady or even showed a slight increase, swelled in the resorts of Sidmouth and Weston by courses of six university extension lectures, and in Torquay by the continuing importance of the NHS lecture programme. Herbert Jones, who visited Weston-Super-Mare in 1904 with “The World’s Wonderland”, and Winston Churchill, who gave a war lecture in Torquay were two examples of lecturers who continued to illustrate their talks with images projected by a lantern. Richard Crangle’s analysis of the Riley slide catalogue for 1908 identifies that lecture sets made up as much as 29 percent of its stock on offer at the time. Yet he points to an overall decline in the popularity or market for lecture slides, only six new sets being added in 1906, compared to twenty-five in 1894, attributing this changing trend to the expansion of moving pictures. By 1912, there was a visible decline in advertised lantern exhibitions in all resorts. In Sidmouth, only the course of extension lectures boosted the tally to nine, with Torquay only offering three lectures in addition to the season of NHS talks. The number of exhibitions in both Barnstaple and Weston were increased by recruitment for emigrants, with only two or three in addition in each case. In both Weston and Penzance, where only three lantern
lectures are recorded for 1912, entertainments columns began to focus heavily on film and the cinema from this period onwards.

Always central to the needs of instruction and education, the optical lantern had never played so robust a role as a medium for popular entertainment. Following the arrival of the cinematograph in the region in 1896, much of the lantern’s share of this market appeared to melt away. The following description of a travel entertainment, given in Penzance in that year by Sequah pinpoints the exact moment when new and old technologies met for the first time in the town, when enthusiasm for the new technology shone through in the review and clearly took precedence over the familiar medium:

Sequah has delivered in Penzance interesting lectures upon his personal travels through the U.S.A. and Canada...After the lectures, nearly 100 limelight views were shown. They were descriptive of his travels through the above-mentioned countries and were very beautiful and were much appreciated. The lecturer then explained the marvellous invention the cinematograph, and shewed several animated photographs on the screen. These were received with much enthusiasm, this being the first time this marvellous invention has been seen in Penzance. By its aid scenes of people, vehicles etc. as seen on the streets, are shewn vividly upon the screen by powerful limelight. In all the entertainment gave great satisfaction to the fairly large audience present, and we do not hesitate to say it is well worth seeing.  

Integrating the cinematograph promptly into his traveller’s tales and medicine shows, which previously he had illustrated with lantern slides and performed extensively in Cornwall throughout 1896, the lecturer Sequah/ Barnfield-Salter showed himself to be one of the first of many regionally to recognise the commercial potential of the new medium. For these early pioneers and performers, film at first formed a parallel strand in their entertainments, and was continued in tandem with lantern slides. Mervyn Heard has termed these “‘double-fronted’ performances”, observing how these occurred into the early years of the twentieth century, with “many showmen and women… relying upon the familiar, slower-paced, romantic and often brilliant colour imagery of the magic lantern to complement the unpredictable, often jerky, largely uncoloured and random product of the cinematograph camera.” Barnfield-Salter, however, lecturing to Torquay audiences the following year in 1897, had already dropped lantern slides from his show in favour of film.
The Walford Family had also rapidly understood the commercial imperative to embrace new technology, and proudly used this to promote themselves in their programmes: “The Walford family were, you will remember, the first to bring you Animated Pictures, they purchased two of the original machines, since when we have been first in every new phase of the Cinematograph (Fig. 2.5).” With their shows initially founded on the musical talents of the family itself, featuring more unusual instruments such as handbells, mandolins, and zithers, and vocal contributions from all members of the family, they toured nationwide, most extensively in the South-West region. This was already a visual spectacle too, which included tableaux, oriental costumes, and magic lanterns: their early adoption of the cinematograph and experimentation with the new technology allowed a new intermediality, and

![Fig. 2.5. Programme for the Walford Family. Courtesy of the Nelson (Walford) family archive.](image-url)
during their visit to Sidmouth, in a show which described itself as “Pictorial, Vocal, and Instrumental,” animated pictures were “projected on screens covering the whole end of the hall by three cinematographs and optical lanterns all working together.” The Walfords were one company who appeared to be able to re-evaluate their entertainment and respond innovatively to the new medium: their introduction of the cinematograph facilitated a complete re-structuring from a technological perspective, whilst their use of the films themselves, and in particular their choice of topical, actuality and interest films, led to a shift in representational practices, and a move later towards themed spectacles, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Change elsewhere in regional lantern practices was mostly slow. As Steve Humphries has stated, “the lantern did not disappear overnight” In Richard Crangle’s opinion too, “it was not the case that one practice gradually changed into another, nor that a new practice superseded the old one instantaneously.” The lantern, as has been demonstrated in this chapter, continued to play a significant role regionally, particularly for the illustration of lectures, especially in the fields of education, travel and science during the years leading up to the First World War, where film was slower to establish itself. For the 1905 lecture “Mr. Punch’s Modern England”, for example, the lantern was still the ideal medium by which to reproduce the famous Punch cartoons and trace their “Victorian history”, slides performing a function here for which film would have been eminently unsuitable. In the South West, isolated examples exist also of the lantern being used purely for entertainment even after the arrival of film. In Sidmouth, for example, the town’s Christmas multi-media evening of attractions for adults in 1898 was a variety show of vocal and instrumental music, handbells, and humorous sketches, drills and Punch and Judy, followed by “a trip from New York to Washington by the stereopticon magic lantern.” In November 1899, The Optical Magic Lantern Journal had approached the new year and new century full of confidence in the magic lantern, raising the hopes of those in the lantern trade, and casting doubt on the future of the cinematograph which was not yet quite four years old: “We have now arrived at a time when many users of the cinematograph have become painfully aware that the best days of that at one time promising instrument are over, and no doubt some will be looking about for a new means of attracting the public taste without departing from the realms of optical projection...
Yet, as the author of “The Decline of the Dissolving Views” in the OMLJ admitted just a few months later in 1900 when he was forced to acknowledge the existence of a public eager for movement and action, “[b]e it ever so well painted and the effect ever so perfectly produced, it is not satisfying enough to an end-of-century hypercritical audience. Realism is the cry, and realism they must have.”

Noting that the professional lanternist had already taken up the cinematograph as a much more attractive or lucrative form of entertainment, he concluded with the question which many lanternists, viewing reactions to film, must have posed themselves: “what child of five, having once seen a good animated photograph show, is content with the too often ridiculous action of a lever or a slipping slide. The truth is, these things have been with us too long.”

1 NDJ, 22 December 1910.
2 Mrs. Rowson, Reuben and Rachel; or Tales of Old Times. A Novel (Boston: [n.p.], 1798), 210.
7 Optical Magic Lantern Journal, February 1900, 14.
8 Ruchatz, “The magic lantern in connection with photography,” 43.
12 The County Gentleman, 14 March 1896, 326.
14 “A "Boy’s Own' Magic Lantern and how to make it,” W.A. Leonard, Boy’s Own Paper, 25 April 1896, 478.
15 “Our Prize List,” Chums, 1 January 1896, 303; Hearth and Home, 3 December 1896, 145.
17 “Passing Events,” Hearth and Home, 15 December 1898, 220.
18 “Health Missioners for Rural India,” The Woman’s Signal, 25 February 1897,117.
20 “999 or the Secret Terrors of a Great City,” Stanhope Sprigg. Illustrated Chips, 8 August 1896, 2.
22 “‘Spooky’ Spondulicks, Esq.,” Fun, 28 December 1897, 206.
23 TDSJ, 24 November 1897; TT, 26 February 1897; TDSJ, 11 March 1896.
24 “Our Village,” TDSJ, 12 February 1897.
25 TDSJ, 24 February 1897; TDSJ, 13 October 1897; TDSJ, 24 November 1897; TDSJ, 24 February 1897.
26 The Torquay Natural History Society was founded in 1844, and a dedicated building was constructed in 1874. Now renamed Torquay Museum, it has had continuous occupancy as the home of the Natural History Society. See http://http://www.torquaymuseum.org/
27 NDJ, 16 January 1896.
28 CM, 9 July 1896.
29 NDJ, 16 January 1896.
30 CM, 11 March 1897.
31 TDSJ, 11 March 1896.
32 TDSJ, 20 October 1897.
33 TDSJ, 24 March 1897.
34 TDSJ, 25 August 1897.
36 TDSJ, 4 October 1899.
37 NDJ, 3 November 1898.
38 SHD, 6 February 1909.
39 NDJ, 26 September 1912.
40 TDSJ, 22 January 1896.
41 TDSJ, 14 July 1897.
42 TDSJ, 23 November 1904.
43 SHD, 2 February 1901.
44 TDSJ, 9 March 1904.
45 TDSJ, 25 March 1908.
46 TDSJ, 25 March 1908.
47 TDSJ, 27 October 1897.
48 TDSJ, 27 October 1897. There are a number of slides of fleas and diatoms still extant in Torquay Museum which bear Mr. Bessell’s name.
49 TDSJ, 21 January 1885.
50 SHD, 21 July 1900.
51 WM, 13 October 1900.
52 NDJ, 16 January 1896.
53 CM, 14 December 1899.
54 TDSJ, 27 April 1898.
55 CM, 31 March 1896.
56 TDSJ, 6 March 1901.
57 TDSJ, 16 March 1904.
58 TDSDJ, 21 October 1903; TDSDJ, 2 November 1910.
59 WM, 3 March 1900; TDSDJ, 23 May 1904.
60 SHD, 21 July 1900; WM, 28 April 1900; TDSDJ, 1 February 1905.
61 TDSDJ, 18 January 1899.
62 WM, 13 October 1900.
63 TDSDJ, 2 February 1898.
64 TDSDJ, 25 February 1910.
67 WM, 28 April 1900.
68 SHD, 21 July 1900.
69 TDSDJ, 21 November 1900.
70 WM, 4 January 1902; TDSDJ, 1 February 1905.
71 SO, 18 July 1900.
72 WM, 28 April 1900.
75 WM, 28 April 1900.
77 TDSDJ, 6 March 1901.
78 TDSDJ, 13 March 1901.
79 TDSDJ, 13 March 1901.
80 WM, 13 October 1900.
81 TDSDJ, 9 January 1901.
82 TDSDJ, 23 January 1901.
84 TDSDJ, 2 February 1898.
85 TT, 18 December 1912.
86 Kember, Marketing Modernity, 75-6.
87 TT, 18 December 1912.
88 TDSDJ, 23 February 1910.
90 TDSDJ, 14 December 1904.
91 TDSDJ, 14 December 1904.
92 TDSDJ, 14 December 1904.
96 TDSDJ, 9 February 1910.
98 TDSDJ, 18 January 1899. Moon and Sons were piano merchants in Torquay.
99 NDJ, 12 May 1910.
100 CM, 9 November 1912.
102 WG, 10 February 1904.
103 NDJ, 16 January 1896.
104 NDJ, 23 January 1896.
105 NDJ, 23 January 1896.
106 Lethaby’s Sidmouth Journal and Directory, February 1886.
107 SHD, 4 April 1903.
108 TDSDJ, 1 April 1908; 8 April 1908.
109 TDSDJ, 23 November 1904.
110 Kember Marketing Modernity, 64.
111 WG, 5 February 1910.
112 WG, 5 February 1910.
113 Christopher Lyman, quoted in Banta and Hinsley, From Sight to Site, 39.
114 WG, 5 February 1910.
115 SHD, 4 April 1903.
116 SHD, 4 April 1903.
117 WG, 24 February 1904.
118 OMLJ, August 1900, 95.
119 Science, New Series 35, no.901 (April 1912), 529.
120 Science, New Series 35, no.901 (April 1912), 530.
123 Ibid, 422-3.
124 “A Lecturer’s Profits by the Showman,” OMLJ, March 1900, 39.
125 TDSDJ, 1 June 1898.
126 TDSDJ, 1 June 1898.
127 OMLJ, May 1900, 60.
128 TDSDJ, 1 February 1899.
129 TDSDJ, 18 January 1899.
130 NDJ, 6 January 1898.
131 TDSDJ, 11 May 1898.
132 WM, 5 March 1910.
133 SHD, 18 January 1902.
134 TDSDJ, 2 June 1909.
135 TDSDJ, 29 April 1896; 24 November 1896; 12 January 1898.
136 TDSDJ, 23 February 1910.
137 TDSDJ, 12 March 1902.
138 TDSDJ, 16 February 1898.
140 TDSDJ, 21 October 1903.
141 TDSDJ, 14 July 1897.
142 TDSDJ, 11 September 1895.
143 TDSDJ, 16 March 1904.
144 TDSDJ, 4 October 1899; 28 October 1903.
145 TDSDJ, 4 October 1899.
146 TDSDJ, 29 April 1903.
147 TDSDJ, 8 February 1911.
148 NDJ, 30 January 1908.
149 NDJ, 30 January 1908.
150 TDSDJ, 24 February 1904.
151 WM, 3 November 1900.
152 TDSDJ, 6 April 1881.
153 CM, 31 January 1901.
154 CM, 9 January 1896.
155 CM, 23 April 1896.
156 CM, 14 October 1896.
157 CM, 18 February 1896.
158 CM, 25 October 1913.
159 *SHD*, 17 April 1909.
160 *CM*, 27 February 1896.
161 *CM*, 27 February 1896.
163 *SHD*, 28 April 1900.
164 *TDSDJ*, 17 February 1909.
165 *CM*, 8 February 1913.
166 *CM*, 26 October 1912.
167 *CM*, 28 October 1911.
168 *CM*, 8 February 1913.
169 *SHD*, 25 October 1902.
170 *SHD*, 15 November 1902.
171 *SHD*, 25 January 1902.
172 *SHD*, 12 January 1901.
173 *SO*, 15 March 1899.
174 *SO*, 2 March 1898.
175 *SO*, 29 March 1899.
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177 *SHD*, 13 March 1909.
178 *SO*, 15 March 1899.
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182 *SHD*, 22 January 1910.
183 Crangle, “Hybrid Texts,” 47.
186 *OMLJ*, 1899, 93.
187 *OMLJ*, January 1900, 2.
188 *OMLJ*, January 1900, 2.
189 *TDSDJ*, 15 April 1903.
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191 *NDJ*, 19 March 1908.
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194 *TDSDJ*, 15 April 1903.
196 *NDJ*, 13 February 1908.
197 *NDJ*, 9 April 1896.
198 *TT*, 23 August 1912.
200 *OMLJ*, October 1900, 121.
203 *TDSDJ*, 28 January 1903.
204 *SHD*, 14 March 1903.
205 *SO*, 15 April 1903.
206 *TDSDJ*, 28 January 1903.
207 *TDSDJ*, 11 March 1896.
208 *WM*, 19 January 1901.
209 *NDJ*, 2 March 1905.
210 *SO*, 15 February 1899.
211 *SO*, 15 February 1899.

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NDJ, 4 November 1909.
NDJ, 4 November 1909.
TDSJD, 11 May 1898.
SHD, 21 October 1905.
CM, 22 January 1910.
TDSJD, 25 November 1896.
TT, 15 November 1912.
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TT, 26 February 1904.
TDSJD, 3 January 1900.
TDSJD, 13 January 1904.
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TDSJD, 13 January 1904.
CM, 5 March 1904.
CM, 5 March 1904.
NDJ, 9 October 1913.
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CHAPTER THREE

“GUESTS IN OTHER PEOPLE’S HOUSES”: EARLY EXHIBITION CONTEXTS FOR FILM IN SOUTH WEST COASTAL RESORTS, 1896-1909

Film has taught us to see the world anew, but it seems that the one thing it could not properly picture was its own birth.  

From London to the coast: innovation and exhibition in 1896

The rapid spread of the “good animatograph show”, as previously observed, was initiated in the capital by its music halls: whilst their early appropriation of cinema influenced perceptions of film and gave it a low cultural status in some areas of opinion, siting film within a variety context offered a pattern for exhibition which could be imitated, adapted and adopted nationwide, and which would serve in some settings for the forthcoming decade or more. Richard Maltby, observing how the Alhambra and Empire audiences were very different from the select audiences who viewed the early and scientific screenings, has commented that when “animated photographs were exhibited, the physical constraints on the duration of early films ensured that the programme conformed to the aesthetics of the music hall and the popular press and produced a miscellaneous and ever-changing assembly of novelties, sensations and human interest enclosed within a finite space and time.” It was from this newly-found niche as a novel turn in variety shows that film went out from London to the provinces to find fresh commercial venues and new audiences. In its many guises and with a varied nomenclature, the new technology rippled out quickly to the regions: by as early as June 1896, using one or other of the various new devices, film had been projected on to the screens of towns as far apart as Cardiff and Edinburgh, Bradford and Birmingham. It took a few months more to filter through to some of the more distant and rural locations of the far South –West, but by mid-November the cinematograph had travelled the length of the peninsula to Penzance where it received an enthusiastic welcome. A close examination of three
of the earliest appearances of film in the region usefully illustrates the diversity of entertainments which first hosted the new medium and the exhibition practices deployed and highlights the widely contrasting social and cultural contexts in which film was initially tested.

Fig.3.1. “The Theatrograph,” North Devon Herald, 1 October 1896.

The coastal market town of Barnstaple provided a very early exhibition venue in the South-West region in October 1896: film was brought here first by a small touring company, John Ablett’s, whose tour mostly comprised one or two night stays in modestly-sized market towns. Whilst the advertisement made much of the
associations between this new invention and the Alhambra in London, the show which arrived in this small provincial town was evidently more modest in scale and scope (Fig. 3.1). Yet the arrival of ‘The Theatograph’ (sic) which remained in Barnstaple for just two nights before moving inland to the smaller neighbouring town of Bideford,⁸ achieved much, since it brought these minor provincial towns a first glimpse of film only days after regionally-important centres like Exeter had also witnessed it for the first time.⁹ The absence of a music hall or variety theatre in both Barnstaple and Bideford, as in each of the other South West coastal resorts, meant there was no immediate or obvious home for film here as had been the case in London and other larger urban centres. Combined with the limitations in size of provincial audiences, this also meant that there was no possibility of a long stay in each venue. Suitable exhibition sites, and audiences, had to be found in each and every location of this tour which met both the operational needs of the new medium and the cultural demands of a new type of entertainment. The chosen venues – the New Theatre, one of Barnstaple’s two principal establishments, and the Assembly Rooms in Bideford - sited film immediately in genteel contexts and lent it refinement and respectability. In turn, these select venues defined their audiences for early film exhibition. Advertisements for these film performances advised the time at which carriages should be ordered, an indication that some of the audience, at least, belonged to the class who travelled home in them: with seat prices rising to three shillings on a par with other expensive high-class entertainments and only limited numbers of 6d tickets available, this first experience of film would have undoubtedly been beyond the means of many in this market town.

The variety programme which formed the first exhibition context in these two North-Devon towns included “Star Vaudeville Artists” and a ladies’ orchestra. Audiences witnessed a show in which film, somewhat unusually for these early exhibitions here, had been given an important status on the bill, a fact reflected in local reviews which listed films first and in some detail before subsequently describing the variety acts. The films themselves, *Whit-Monday on Hampstead Heath* (1896), *Train running into a station* (1896), and the film of the 1896 Derby which famously had been screened by Paul within twenty-four hours of being made,
already very familiar to metropolitan audiences who by now had had several months to experience them, were evidently a complete novelty to small town audiences here. This early touring show was clearly devised simply to showcase film, and to test the commercial potential of the new medium as a novel form of entertainment for these provincial audiences. Reviews of the identical Barnstaple and Bideford shows reveal a curiosity, excitement and enthusiasm for the new medium locally: in keeping with early metropolitan and other regional reviews, it was the “reality of the subjects” which local spectators appreciated and remarked upon. Local reviewers were at this point equally inexperienced at interpreting the images for their readership: one from the North Devon Herald assured its readers that these were “marvellous living representations of the real thing. It is just as though one saw the actual thing with all the life and movement, only in miniature.”

On the same night as the first film exhibition in Barnstaple, Robert Paul’s Theatrograph appeared in another venue in the South West. Screened for the first time at the People’s Palace, a music hall in Bristol, alongside a ventriloquist, a juvenile gymnast, and Jules Keller, the ‘Human Enigma’, film slipped just as comfortably into the familiar type of variety context here as it had done previously in the capital. Bryony Dixon has explained how “the films and music hall acts shared similar forms of low comedy, from the individual performer singing a comic song, to the antics of the traditional pantomime characters.” The Bristol audience was recorded as having responded especially well to the comic shorts. Early audiences and reviewers regionally, as nationally, placed film on equal terms with the other acts: in this Bristol performance film of a man falling off a camel into the river drew laughter from spectators and praise from a reviewer, who noted that “[t]he turn was an entertainment in itself.” The film programme was very similar to the Barnstaple exhibition, with several actualities and Robert Paul’s 1896 Derby being shown here also. Paul’s Theatrograph met with enormous success at the People’s Palace, Bristol, as it had done in the New Theatre, Barnstaple, yet the two audiences would have been very different. In a large urban setting, and with “popular prices” of 3d (a price which would be virtually unattainable for any advertised entertainment involving film in the five selected coastal resorts until the arrival of permanent
cinemas), combined with a full week of nightly performances, these exhibitions of film in Bristol would have reached audiences immeasurably more socially-mixed than those of Barnstaple or Bideford. Moreover, film exhibition in Bristol continued to be available to local audiences: whereas the Barnstaple show departed after two days taking the Theatrograph with them, managers of the Bristol music hall responded rapidly to the favourable reception accorded to film by their patrons, and as early as the next month another full week of nightly performances had been booked. Regionally too, therefore, music halls could offer an instant and ideal context in which to house film initially and a semi-permanent home in which to exploit it. At the People’s Palace, commercial imperatives almost immediately dictated to the rapid development of new and favourable exhibition strategies, such as the practice of changing films every night, which due to the cost and difficulties of distribution would not be feasible in most of the regional resorts for some years to come. For the North Devon towns, film’s next appearance would be in April of the following year: for the urban audiences of Bristol, embedded nightly into the music hall routine, film by then would already have begun to assume a degree of familiarity.

The venue, audience, context and function of one of film’s first appearances in Torquay at the Bath Saloons a few weeks later provides a sharp contrast to both the Barnstaple and Bristol exhibitions and clearly highlights the remarkable diversity of these early regional attempts to include film within existing entertainment frameworks. The performance of 7 December, 1896 by Mr. and Madame André, the ‘European Mahatmas’, marks an important moment when two traditional and familiar genres came together with the fledgling new technology of film, almost certainly for the first time in Torquay, to produce an entertainment. Here, the novelty of film contrasted sharply with its context, a highly sophisticated and expert performance by two accomplished practitioners, whose skilful manipulation and control of the audience ensured a hugely successful entertainment. Film was exploited here not as an attraction in its own right, but as an interlude which created a period of suspense between the two halves of Madame André’s tense and highly charged performance. It functioned primarily as a grand contrast to the
other acts which partnered it: silent, compared to Madame André rattling on “at a furious pace”; dark and “somewhat hazy” in comparison with the danse lumineuse and its designs “in the most beautiful colours.” To an audience who sought to immerse themselves in a world of visions and mystery, it offered only realistic representation of scenes of everyday life. It was the advent of an unfamiliar medium, whose silence and detachment from the audience was the very antithesis of the intimate and interactive nature of the Andrés’ performance.

Torquay audiences showed little curiosity for film, which was not as well received here as at the early shows in Barnstaple, Bideford and Bristol: the hyperbole and epithets were all reserved for the Andrés, and the success of their personal performances undisputed. In the context of a familiar show which was eagerly anticipated by local audiences, the cinematograph was almost an unwelcome intrusion, relegated in the long and lively newspaper review to merely lukewarm praise in the final sentence. Yet the siting of film in this show in this most elite of resorts reveals that the medium reached select audiences here immediately. In the prestigious Bath Saloons, where seat prices ranged from 6d to three shillings, it was a genteel audience consisting of gentlemen who had lost five pound notes and ladies who wished to know if their servants were dishonest, whom Madame André helped and reassured by means of her clairvoyance. Whilst film had a function within this entertainment which was somewhat singular and not widely deployed, and its potential appeared undervalued or underused, the new medium nevertheless benefited from an appearance in such a respectable context. With its place in the Bath Saloons, film placed itself immediately on a par with shows of a similar status, and gained an early legitimacy through its association with both the artists and Torquay’s prime venue.

These three exhibition contexts for early film exemplify the wide diversity of roles, functions and audiences which film initially enjoyed on its arrival in the region in 1896. They demonstrate the variations possible both within a relatively small defined geographical region, and between provincial areas and London. The broader urban audiences of Bristol thus experienced film in a setting not dissimilar to the metropolitan music halls, where it blended in as a turn of equal length and status
as the other acts. Already by its second appearance, a changing programme offered its spectators the possibility of choice, and a repeated opportunity to view films. The positive reception of the medium in Bristol had helped to ensure its quick return, and the permanence of the music hall as a venue facilitated a long stay. In the small North Devon towns of Barnstaple and Bideford, and the South Devon resort of Torquay, the story is one of much more limited opportunity. In her study of local and regional venues for early film in Sweden, Asa Jernudd emphasises in particular the wide range of admission prices charged for the first screening of film in Orebro, a small town comparable in size to Torquay. This, in conjunction with the choice of venue, she argues, would have resulted in audiences coming from a wide social background which crossed existing class barriers. The early screening of film in Torquay, Barnstaple and Bideford was not so democratic, since it took place in select venues with high prices on a par with other theatrical, musical or operatic entertainments. Moreover, the irregular nature of its appearances here meant that film could not immediately establish itself as a permanently available entertainment option, but remained for some time a sporadic and occasional experience. These constraints combined to limit the consumption of early film in its initial phase in these resorts. In these provincial venues, for reasons of class, cost and availability, whole sectors of the community would have been excluded from these first experiences of film: even spectators who had the leisure and means to access such entertainments had little opportunity to do so and continued to lack both agency and choice. In Sidmouth, Penzance, Barnstaple, Weston and even Torquay, all were dependent on the arrival of the next travelling film show.

This examination of three of the earliest exhibitions also highlights some of the issues which immediately arose and which would continue to challenge any exhibitor hoping to bring film to the South West. Those who sought to embed film in a variety theatre setting, whilst having the clear advantage of fixed venues and larger audiences, were yet rapidly confronted with the need to vary programmes frequently to attract repeated custom. Those who chose to tour film to the provincial and rural areas of the South West region faced a number of different constraints - social, economic, geographical and cultural – which would all impact on the success of their
commercial exploitation of the medium. Long distances and poor infrastructure, for example, added to the cost, time and difficulty of reaching all parts of the region. Secondly, small towns could only furnish small audiences and provided correspondingly low returns, yet most early touring shows lacked the flexibility to return to the same audiences immediately with a change of film programme and so were constantly obliged to move on to fresh ones. Finally, companies had to know and accommodate the differences of each of many individual locations, including the size, suitability and availability of venues, audience demographic and pricing structures. Whilst many of the established travelling shows had long since adapted themselves to some of these demands of touring, the appropriation of film into their acts was still an added imperative which gave rise to new concerns about expenditure, equipment, staffing and space. It also had a significant impact on the vital framework which underpinned all of these shows - the programme.

**Small beginnings – 1897-1902**

In the three years which followed its arrival in these South West resorts, the exhibition of film continued to be characterised by a dependency on travelling shows and the infrequent and irregular pattern of provision which they collectively offered. From 1897 onwards, whilst an immediate growth in the number of contexts in which film was incorporated was clearly evident, it was modest and gradual. Of the numerous variety shows, dioramas, circuses, theatrical companies, missionary societies, charities, and lecturers that visited during the Victorian period, only a small proportion began to adopt the new medium. A large majority, which as previously noted included celebrated lecturers such as the scientist Sir Robert Ball or the explorer Nansen, or charities such as Dr. Barnardo’s and the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fisherman, continued to use the magic lantern as their preferred visual medium. Major touring spectacles, such as Ginnett’s Circus, Fourpawrs Great Olympia and Barnum and Bailey’s, were events which did not include film in their
advertised shows here at this time. Spectacles which did include film therefore, though intermittent, somewhat paradoxically were ones which provided a continuity of context and familiarity; their absence would have revealed what little fertile ground existed purely locally for the new medium. Whilst home-grown educative entertainment and rational amusements were plentiful and still rapidly expanding in the larger resorts during the last few years of the century, talks, lectures, bazaars, fund-raising events, Sunday Schools, and charities all continued to rely heavily for their illustration on magic lantern slides. Thus, in Torquay in 1899, for example, whilst there were at least thirty events affording the opportunity to view lantern slides, there were merely three known to have introduced film. Even in Sidmouth, where visual culture had been slower to establish itself, that same year residents were provided with half a dozen lectures or entertainments involving lantern slides, compared to just one visit by the Velogaph. Thus film exhibition in these early years was the domain of a handful of touring companies, not all of which visited all of these resorts. Since most made only an annual visit, film during these early years was still an occasional entertainment, to be encountered once every three or four months in the livelier cultural climates of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare, and as infrequently as once or twice a year in a more marginalised resort such as Sidmouth.

The touring companies who initially made a decision to exploit film commercially, whilst having in common the vision to recognise the potential of the new medium to amuse, entertain and make money, were in other respects not a homogeneous group. Whilst they all travelled film around the region, they included it in a wide variety of models provided by a very disparate collection of companies or individuals. Evidence from these first years of film exhibition in the South West region can be used to challenge the view of some film historians that travelling showmen were simply “a romantic interlude in the story of film exhibition, a kind of sideshow on the way to “real” exhibition in the movie palaces...”18 Deac Rossell has already sought to dismiss this as an unnecessarily reductive view of early travelling shows in which “exhibitors are lumped indiscriminately together.”19 Whilst Colonel Bromhead, head of the Gaumont Company, famously identified three categories of film exhibitor who operated in the early days, locating them in fairgrounds, music

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Rossell extends the number of categories to four, which Vanessa Toulmin has summarised as follows: “fairground showmen who turned to moving pictures from already existing fairground shows; independent travelling showmen who presented short term movie shows in public venues and rented spaces; the theatrical exhibitor who used an agent to present a variety of music hall bookings in fixed theatrical venues; and finally, the eager amateur or outsider with little experience of the entertainment industry.” Each one of Rossell’s last three categories is broad, and embraces a wide diversity of shows, venues, exhibitors, operators, companies and individuals, with differences at least as numerous as their similarities, which seem far from constituting a cohesive group.

The evident diversity in the form and function of local exhibition practices resolves itself into clearer patterns upon analysis of the history and provenance of the shows in which film was embedded. Distinct sectors of the business may be identified, each offering a different model for the appropriation of film: well-established spectacles with a reputation nationwide; smaller, nationally touring shows, well known to local audiences; local professional performers; touring companies which devolved from prestigious national or London shows; and finally, new companies set up expressly to tour film. The first of these sectors embraced the well-established, nationally recognised shows which first incorporated film as a new feature into their traditional format, of whom the foremost were undoubtedly the Poole’s companies, who with their dioramic spectacles collectively formed the backbone of provision in these South West resorts at this time. Brought by companies such as Birrells of Scotland or Reed’s Myrioramas, dioramas had for many preceding years formed part of an established regional visual culture. In their heyday in the late Victorian period, they formed ideal ready-made contexts in which to exploit another visual medium. The scope and influence nationwide of Poole’s was impressive: between them they toured the length and breadth of England and ventured into Scotland. Short films had been projected by Poole’s “Myriograph” as early as Christmas 1896 and as John Hudson Powell has established, subsequently formed part of all shows toured by various branches of the family. Already an established presence in the region, four brothers from the Poole’s family, Harry,
Fred, Charles W. and Joseph, operating three individual companies between them, continued to bring their myrioramas to Weston-Super-Mare, Barnstaple, Penzance and Torquay regularly during the late Victorian period, easily outnumbering in appearances all of their competitors.

Also of major importance to the South West at this time, a second category of touring company offering South West audiences multiple opportunities to view film may be identified: these were the smaller ones such as Joshua Dyson or the Walford Family. Whilst less ambitious in scale than Poole’s, they were no less well established and familiar to both national and local audiences. Dyson’s was already a widely acclaimed spectacle which had been designed for touring well before the advent of film, following his appearances at the London Polytechnic: it was anticipated regularly in both the north and south of the country, playing to large towns such as Liverpool and Nottingham, as well as smaller venues such as Dover or Hereford. Often credited in the local press with bringing film first to Weston-Super-Mare audiences, his show, combining dioramas with a “gypsy choir” also made a substantial contribution to the number of opportunities for local audiences to view film, making regular visits to Weston-Super-Mare, Penzance, and Torquay.

The Walford Family, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had also moved swiftly to appropriate film. Like Dyson, they engaged on circuits which extended across the country, and to larger venues in more distant places such as Darlington and Norwich. Yet their importance for the regional dissemination of film lay in their ability to bring the latest technologies to even the smallest communities which were often ignored by other more high-profile touring companies: thus they were to be found in the minor provincial towns and villages in the south of England, making brief, but frequent, stays in modest venues such as the town hall in Castle Cary or the village schoolroom in Wrington. Aubrey Bennett, a resident of the small town of Buckfastleigh, recalled the Walford Family visiting his part of rural Devon, bringing “pictures for a start and variety entertainment” to the Town Hall. Their coverage of all the resorts in question, including Sidmouth, during this period was therefore of great significance.
Performers of local provenance constitute a third sector, who with well respected and established shows also had an important role to play in the provision of film at this time for regional audiences. These exhibitors are typified by the André couple who, as mentioned earlier, had provided some of the earliest experiences of film in the region. Drawn to these shows because of their established reputation, local audiences were then also afforded the opportunity to view film. The Andrés made repeated visits with their magic and mind-reading performances to the resorts of Torquay and Barnstaple and had a special relationship with local audiences on which they traded.

Two further categories of exhibitor may be identified as having a significant impact on the introduction of film to the region: whilst the majority of touring companies who fitted film into their traditional formats were existing and established ones, others were expressly created for the purpose of marketing the new moving pictures. One of the most nationally celebrated performers to have formed companies to bring film as part of a variety show to audiences in the provinces was the celebrated magician David Devant. His regional shows sought to excite and attract local audiences by exploiting both his connection with the illustrious Egyptian Hall shows in London, with his partner the famous illusionist Neville Maskelyne, and evidently with himself (Fig. 3.2). They also played to a contemporary interest in magic: often referred to as “The Golden Age of Magic”, the late Victorian and Edwardian periods were a time when, as Edwin Dawes observes, “scarce any week went by in the principal towns and cities of the land without a conjurer or illusionist appearing on the bill.” It was certainly a genre firmly embedded in the local entertainment culture of these resorts where magicians such as Professor Duprez were well-known regionally and gave regular performances. Devant’s shows,
Fig. 3.2. Cover to the programme from David Devant’s touring company, visit to Exmouth 29 August 1898. Courtesy of Edwin Dawes.
moreover, coincided with a public curiosity not only for magic, but also for spiritualism, the supernatural and the paranormal: Frank Gray has located the existence of these phenomena as being widespread in popular culture, citing in particular “fairy tales, pantomime, magicians such as David Devant, Pepper’s Ghost, magic lantern shows, and the new medium of illusionism—film.”33 With all of these connections in place, Devant had firm foundations for his newly created touring companies.

In the late 1890s, the young (and then unknown) Albany Ward formed one of a number of speculative touring companies which at this time tested the regional appetite for film shows. This last category of exhibitors had neither an established show nor even a reputation acquired in a London venue on which to trade. As a pioneer in the very early days of showing pictures, Ward had joined the Velograph Company in 1897 and began touring with his own company soon afterwards.34 His importance to the South West is twofold: firstly, like the Walfords, he served smaller provincial audiences as well as those in larger industrial towns, continuing to tour the West Country, even after he had purchased a permanent venue in Oxford in 1900, because “he had built up appreciative audiences there.”35 In a letter to Rachael Low in 1946, Ward gives himself credit for having first brought moving pictures to much of the West of England.36 His strategy of having brief stays in numerous minor venues meant that he reached out to smaller communities across the region in a way which few other exhibitors did, as his succession of correspondence addresses for replies to an advertisement in The Era for a cinematograph operator ably demonstrates: “A. Ward. Sunday, Assembly Rooms, Lymington, Hants. Monday, Post Office, Milford-on-Sea. Tuesday, Post Office, New Milton, after, Empire, Oxford.”37

With their differing skills, backgrounds, experience, and resources, these pioneers of early exhibition furnished an equally diverse array of contexts in which to site film. The effective positioning of an ultra-modern medium in a well-established, traditional context presented a challenge to which showmen responded in various ways: to new enterprises, commodifying and marketing the medium posed some different problems. It was a time of novelty and experimentation, when ways to
optimise the new technology for commercial benefit were being sought both nationally and regionally. The variety model which had first brought film to these resorts continued to be an essential context for early film, where it fitted easily into a programme of discrete items as an additional “act”: it was therefore possible for film to become a part of some existing institutions without modifying them significantly. This is exemplified by Joshua Dyson’s shows which, despite their billing as dioramas, were in reality two and a half hours of variety turns, each distinct from the last, which included musical and comic sketches, vocalists, dance, lantern slides, sleigh bells and piano. As a detailed review for the show which visited Weston-Super-Mare in 1898 reveals, there was no thematic connection between the films and any other items in the programme: this in turn allowed for a greater flexibility for the company who could alter the variety turns, and also the films, to suit their own circumstances. Thus whilst the films screened at this performance were the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee procession and some comic shorts such as Clowns’ Race, the diorama which followed was entitled “Round the World”.

It was the type of show which, according to the local press, greatly pleased local audiences: “The novelty and variety of the programme provided make it additionally attractive and since there is a change every evening one need not limit oneself to a single entertainment for fear of being bored.” Attracting repeat custom was evidently a further advantage of this type of variety programme. There is evidence that Dyson did not substantially modify his programme during the next few years and continued to operate this successful combination of film and other acts: a review two years later describes how “from a programme of 71 miscellaneous items, an admirable entertainment was provided.”Whilst there were shared references between some of the items – the films, lantern slides and some of the songs played to patriotic sentiments of audiences already aroused by the South African war – there were many more which stood alone. There was still no move to create a blended spectacle, and the advantageous interchangeability of the various items was once again remarked upon by the reporter.

Throughout this period, in a continuity of exhibition practices, Dyson continued to narrate the films as he had done with his lantern slides. Dyson’s ability
as a lecturer and his skill in mediating the views for his audiences in an apparently easy and informative way drew comment in many reviews nationally: the reviewer of his Colston Hall show in Bristol found his lectures to be “well-delivered” and “instructive, and at times diverting” skills which he could transfer to the new medium of film. This would have been particularly useful during this early period of film, when especially popular films, such as those relating to the Queen’s Jubilee for example, were repeatedly screened by many companies: lecturing them could offer fresh interpretations and new perspectives to local audiences who might, even in the distant South West, have seen them all before.

In some respects the myriorama presented also as another variety model: Joseph Poole’s “Sights of the World Myriorama”, for example, which in 1898 visited Penzance in April, Torquay in October and Barnstaple in December, proudly boasted the inclusion of Poole’s Grand Orchestral Band and Poole’s Consolidated Variety Confederation. Yet, at the time of film’s arrival, the myrioramas were importantly already a diverse and skilfully interwoven intermedial experience, highly-suited to accommodating another kindred medium into it. These were vast visual spectacles, already with an accent on “effects”, views, tableaux, scenes, and pictures, to which moving pictures added an alternative mode of representation. In Harry and Fred Poole’s Diamond Jubilee Myriorama which came to Torquay in September 1897 and Weston-Super-Mare in February 1898, the cinematograph was employed for the first time. From the outset, there was continuity between the filmic and dioramic programmes: while the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee service at St. Paul’s Cathedral was represented by diorama, her Jubilee procession was shown on film.

Positioning film in this milieu made possible an intertextuality mostly absent from other models of entertainment appearing in regional resorts at this time. Films such as the Jubilee procession neatly fitted the framework of Poole’s shows, which focused on patriotic and royal themes, pageantry and people, and great and spectacular events. By uniting together all the visual material under the banner of “Stirring Events during the Victorian Era”, Poole’s could link together traditional dioramic scenes such as the “Matabele War” and the “New Gold Mine at Johannesburg” with topical footage of recent events. Whereas the function of film
in the Andrés’ early programmes might be seen as deliberately disruptive, intruding into
the performance, in the myrioramic setting it contributed to its continuity, binding the spectacle together and forming a smooth transition from one set of scenes to another. By its inclusion of the latest events, screened by the latest invention, it simultaneously performed a further function of fusing modern technology with traditional practices, rendering the spectacle both up-to-date, yet at the same time, familiar.

Entrepreneurs seeking to establish new touring shows to host film were not constrained, as some established showmen were, by the need to adapt performative practices or alter existing programmes. Often, however, they looked back to traditional models, and in particular the variety show, as settings in which film could be commodified for regional audiences. For Albany Ward, who had entered the entertainment industry as a principal film projectionist, a travelling entertainment was a completely new enterprise. His decision to attempt to exploit film commercially necessitated the creation of a variety show with which he could tour, which included songs, sketches, and the skills of Joseph Blascheck, the humorist, and Edward Daisley, the ventriloquist and mandolinist who, since both bigger names at the time than Ward himself, gave their own to the touring company. Without its traditional reliance on a central performance or star act, film became the most important element in the programme, reflected in its prominence on the bill. Unlike most other contemporary entertainments, Ward’s advertisements carried extensive details of films to be shown and the focus of his advance notices was also on the films, rather than the accompanying acts. In the advertisement for the 1898 show which appeared before Torquay audiences in March and in Weston-Super-Mare in April, most unusually Ward stressed the breadth of subjects covered, offering a “collection of films not confined to English snapshots”: whilst these did inevitably include the Diamond Jubilee procession, and the State Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, they also featured footage of the Black Diamond express in North America and German troops sailing for China. An early attempt to tailor these even at this early stage to local audiences was evident, when Rough Sea at Torquay became Rough Sea at Weston-Super-Mare the following month. Ward’s advertisements and
programmes also placed an emphasis on the apparatus used, the Velograph, and the quality of the picture, with which, as a former projectionist himself, he was particularly concerned.  

Albany Ward’s touring shows continued to showcase film: the 1899 programme for Sidmouth, for example, consisted of about fifty short films, from England, America and France, many of which had a military theme, such as Charge of the 21st Lancers and Seaforth Highlanders marching to the front. Ward’s star film that year was Méliès’ trick film, The Man in the Moon (1898), which he admitted to be particularly successful with audiences. He talked of the “very fine reception” he had received in the West of England, particularly in Devon and Cornwall: for the smaller towns, such as Sidmouth, to see a show of this quality was a rare treat. These early touring exhibitions, combined with the experience gained at his permanent variety venue in Oxford, the Empire, gave Albany Ward a vital first foothold in the market and a knowledge and understanding of the fledgling industry, positioning him ideally to take advantage of the later move towards fixed exhibition sites and the building of new cinemas. Richard Brown has classified all public hall exhibitions as being “dead-end”, contending that “[t]hey did not foreshadow later practice” and that “virtually no aspect of their ‘individualised’ form of presentation was carried into the later homogenised permanent cinema operation.” Showmen like Ward, who grew with the industry through the early years of peripatetic exhibition and made a smooth transition onwards to the establishment of their own permanent cinemas challenge this position. With his insistence on high standards of projection, and by featuring film in his shows, Ward proved that from an early stage, entertainments with film as their focal point could be of sufficient quality and amusement to attract regional audiences, without the addition of high-profile names and acts. He also contributed to the wider democratisation of film, through his instigation of an intensive schedule of performances which brought the experience of film within the reach of many small rural and provincial communities, anticipating by some years the popular appeal of cinema. Finally, and most significantly perhaps, Ward established a commercially viable model during these years which would continue in a similar form in the years
after permanent cinema: there is evidence locally, that whilst Ward established film-only cinemas in some locations, he also continued to include live acts in his cinemas in others such as Ilfracombe and Weston-Super-Mare, thus demonstrating direct continuities between these later film exhibitions and their earlier counterparts. This second very important contribution to the development of film in the region, the establishment of his own permanent cinemas, will be explored later in the following chapter.

Equally novel, and yet with a weight of experience behind them, David Devant’s touring shows formed another variant of the variety model. An appreciation of the complexities of his original Egyptian Hall shows, with their careful construction and first-class artistry, informs our understanding of their regional counterparts and the ways in which these were carefully adapted to the needs of regional touring. Devant and the Egyptian Hall shows in London created a model for early film exhibition which was highly innovative and creative in its use of media and intertextuality: as an early exponent of Robert Paul’s Theatrograph, Devant himself was the subject of some of Paul’s earliest films, which were then included as part of the programme interspersed with his own live performances. The Egyptian Hall shows were complex intermedial spectacles also involving light and shadow, visual effects and magic lanterns. At “England’s Home of Mystery”, trickery and illusion combined to engage audiences in a carefully crafted atmosphere of pseudo-scientific experiment and mysticism. Sophisticated and polished, these shows depended on the outstanding skills and creativity of individual performers such as John Nevil Maskelyne, who performed illusory sketches, hypnotism and levitation, Herr Valadon who presented “psychological problems”, and David Devant himself, who excelled at sleight-of-hand and shadowgraphy. Moreover, films here were not simply screened, but “explained” by Maskelyne: this narrative, said to be instructive, interesting, and very musically delivered” was part of a transformative process by which film became another of his acts.

The Devant shows which travelled out to the South West region were of two quite distinct types. Firstly, Devant’s “Zauberwunder” shows which arrived in 1898 were styled quite similarly to the London model. They entertained large urban audiences...
audiences in such centres as Bristol and Exeter, and featured eight stage illusions
devised by Devant, as well as variety artists, some of whom had performed in
London, even at the Egyptian Hall itself, as well as a typical selection of Paul’s
films. In these shows, as at the Egyptian Hall, magic and illusion dominated the
programme, with films forming an interlude between the acts. Secondly, there also
existed Devant shows operated by three separate companies simultaneously, which
were scaled down and adapted for regional touring. Whilst also claiming to be
direct from Maskelyne and Cook and the Egyptian Hall, these only partly resembled
the great London productions, and made no attempt to emulate their originality and
ingenuity. Local advertisements contained a certain, probably deliberate, ambiguity,
and appeared to promise the complete London entertainment, if not the presence of
Devant himself. These shows, in fact, merely comprised a selection of films similar
to ones chosen for the Egyptian Hall, which went on tour under the Devant name.
There is no evidence of the pictures being introduced, as Maskelyne so skilfully did
in London: nor was Devant himself present. Both were still themselves performing
regularly in the capital, whilst companies bearing their name, starring lesser-known
artists, simultaneously toured at opposite ends of the country from Kent to Devon.
Films were not even necessarily positioned within a magic or mind-reading context,
but were placed in a type of variety setting more akin to an “Alhambra model” than
the Egyptian Hall one, and the Robert Paul films of performances by Maskelyne or
Devant which had featured in the Egyptian Hall shows, along with their own live
appearances of course were absent from the South West shows. Supporting acts, as
for example in the Bath Assembly Rooms performance in 1898, were ventriloquists
or dancers. Whilst some of the accompanying acts did involve magic - the
exhibition which came to Torquay in August 1898, before moving to Barnstaple the
following week, employed Maurice Victor to give conjuring and hand-shadow
performances in a faint echo of Devant’s own role - other acts consisted of “diverting
songs” and a comedian, the show embracing “many elements of variety” as one
reviewer concluded.
Fig. 3.3. Inside page of programme from David Devant’s touring company, visit to Exmouth 29 August 1898. Courtesy of Edwin Dawes.
Fig.3.4. Centre pages of programme from David Devant’s touring company, visit to Exmouth 29 August 1898. Courtesy of Edwin Dawes.

A brochure preserved from Devant’s tour which visited Exmouth, Torquay, Barnstaple, and other South West resorts in 1898, allows a close analysis of the way in which this programme of entertainment was constructed (Figs. 3.3., 3.4). In these symmetrically-structured shows, each half commenced with a musical introduction, followed by a sequence of films, and ended with a magic performance from friend and associate of David Devant himself, Maurice Victor. Since films in 1898 only averaged forty to eighty feet in length, the two cinema sections of each half necessarily contained numerous short individual films with a diversity of subject, mood, and location which together comprised an entertainment. Charles
Musser identifies a continuity between the practices used by some lantern exhibitors who “showed a miscellaneous selection of images, each a self-contained attraction” and the early period of cinema identified as a “cinema of attractions” by Tom Gunning and Andre Gaudreault, characterised by a series of discrete spectacles. Musser also points to early attempts to sequence films by subject, giving the example of Lyman H. Howe, who ran several fire scenes together to form a primitive narrative. Whilst Devant’s regional film shows function primarily as a collection of discrete spectacles, there is evidence in this programme, if not of sequencing films by subject, then of them being deliberately grouped together based on the emotional responses they sought to elicit from the audience.

The two halves of the 1898 programme are thus broadly themed and contrast markedly with each other. In part one the films are mostly light-hearted, comic, or exciting: the selection of Robert Paul films included his comic shorts *Twins Tea Party* (1896) and *Comic Costume Race* (1896), and early travelogues such as *The Spanish Bull Fight* (1898). Actualities such as *The Phantom Ride* and interest films like *The Doomed Chimney* are featured. By contrast, the second half is dominated by the topicals so conspicuously absent from the first. One essential function which topical films served regionally was to bring national events to local populations. In both Barnstaple and Torquay in 1898, for example, they still constituted a relatively rare opportunity to view images of recent events known to them from newspaper coverage. Devant was therefore able to capitalise anew on films which had entertained London audiences over preceding months but were fresh to regional audiences: Torquay audiences had only had limited opportunities, for example in September 1897 and again in June 1898 even to watch the Queen’s Jubilee Procession, which Devant had included in his 1898 programme. He provided up-to-date films too, for example the newly released Robert Paul film of the Albion disaster, or of Gladstone’s funeral procession. Barnstaple audiences were even less experienced than some, with the likelihood that at least some residents of the town would not have experienced film at all even two years after its arrival, as the advance notice in the press for Devant’s exhibition demonstrated: “Those who have never seen the ‘animated photo’ can scarcely realise the wonderful effects
which this marvellous development of the photographic art makes possible...We would strongly advise those who have not seen the animated photos to patronise the entertainment; those who stay away will miss a real treat.”78

*Launching of a Battleship* (1898), Robert Paul’s controversial film of the Albion disaster, opened a carefully constructed sequence of films with a mostly serious or sombre content which played to the contemporary appetite for loyal and royal themes. The film historian and director Vincent Pinel viewed such early films as representing “the image that the dominant class at the end of the century seeks to give of the world and itself. An image of self-satisfaction, a clear conscience, a quiet certainty, and values posited (or imposed) as universal and eternal.”79 Certainly a thread of patriotic narrative ran through this section of the programme, and bound together a succession of films of a similar genre, supported by regular bursts of the National Anthem, culminating in Mr. Gladstone’s funeral procession and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Processions as a climax. There was thus an added value to this programme of two halves, which had progressed from the simple variety programming for film, described by Richard Abel as “a discontinuous series of attractions” to form a lightly themed and more cohesive spectacle.80 Devant’s shows thus appear poised part way between earlier programmes composed only of unconnected film, and the later highly complex themed spectacles involving film which featured in shows such as those of Poole’s or the Walford Family.81 These regional touring shows of Devant did not in fact represent an attempt to recreate the sophistication and skills of the Egyptian Hall, or even to imitate the genre, but formed an imaginative adaptation of the variety model which served as a vehicle to move film around the region. It was a simply structured format, carefully adapted to the needs of touring, which trading on the Egyptian Hall reputation, and tapping into the widespread appeal of magic, showcased film. Dan North has remarked that the contribution of magicians and illusionists to early film exhibition has been overlooked, and has concluded that “[m]agic shows and magicians were crucial components in the establishment of a cinematic industry and art.”82 David Devant’s touring film entertainment, which encompassed many smaller locations, created a
format which certainly made a significant contribution to the introduction of film to
the region.

“Good programmes, good prices”

Whilst a great deal is known about the production, distribution, exhibition, and
content of films of this period, much less is known of the audiences who watched
them. Whilst over the past decade much research has been undertaken by Luke
McKernan and Nicholas Hiley amongst others, its focus has principally been on
metropolitan audiences. Richard Brown’s question, “How can the public hall
audience of a century ago be identified?” nevertheless remains pertinent, particularly
in relation to regional audiences, about which still less is known. Narrowing the
focus yet further to just five resorts in the South West, it is possible to construct some
idea of their audience profiles through close consideration of evidence drawn from
the first five years of film here. As has already been established, film appeared in
only a relatively small number of contexts during this period, with a reliance on high-
class or well-established touring companies in rented venues. With very few
exceptions, it was only to the very best venues on offer that these shows came, in
each resort, and as it gradually made its way into everyday life here, film derived an
immediate cultural legitimacy from its association with the sites in which it first
operated. From Alfred Bromhead’s three categories of companies who toured film,
only town hall showmen are credited with exhibition within permanent buildings
with the potential for real respectability. Deac Rossell, as previously noted, more
closely identifies a category of “theatrical traveller” who operated within the “normal
touring practices of variety artists” renting spaces which he collectively classifies as
“fixed theatres”. In these five South West resorts this definition would have
encompassed a diverse variety of accommodation, from Sidmouth’s modest, but
genteel, Manor Hall, to Torquay’s most lavish and prestigious showpiece, the Royal
Theatre and Opera House (Fig. 3.5).
In the first five years of cinema, film was screened in both of these, as well as in all the venues which had the distinction of being the finest and most respectable in each town, which included the grand Assembly Rooms and beautiful Victoria Hall in Weston-Super-Mare, the New Theatre and the Music Hall in Barnstaple, as well as the distinguished Bath Saloons, site of some of the most exclusive entertainment in Torquay (Fig. 3.6). Prime venues such as these already served the needs of high-class culture: touring theatre companies, operas, celebrity vocalists, orchestras and lecturers. In this sense films were “guests in other people’s houses”, and by this means borrowed a respectable reputation by association with the space which they rented.
The overwhelming majority of the shows which arrived in the region, as previously outlined, were long established and already well-respected locally, with habitual venues and loyal audiences. Only rarely did detailed accounts of audiences appear in the local press: one exception to this was the unusually full descriptions of Torquay audiences and crowds given by the experienced local arts columnist for the *Torquay Directory* and London playwright, Walter E. Grogan, as noted earlier in Chapter One.90 As one of the spectators himself, Grogan put himself in the role of both observer and participator. Through his eyes, the audiences for the Andrés’ early performances of mind-reading, magic and film appear both moneyed and leisured, owning property and employing staff: he noted, from the enquiries they made to Mrs. André, that they went on journeys, paid rates, and received legacies. Grogan defined the 1896 audience as being preoccupied with “money and matrimony”;91 those of 1897 were “a collection of decorous people” which, in his opinion,
constituted a “thoroughly respectable British audience.” In both cases, the concerns of the audience, which Grogan summarised as “lost articles, prospects of wealth, and absent relatives” typified them as genteel and respectable. Children were understandably not present at this show, which billed itself as “The Dark Continent of Science”: indeed, there were no children’s concessionary prices listed. Yet it appeared an audience in which women were well-represented, attending the séance to discover the whereabouts of “…pins with diamonds, pins without, watches, purses, what not, all lost…”

Some estimation of audience profiles for early film exhibition in public halls may be also attempted by examining pricing structures. In these early years, with a mere handful of exceptions, the minimum entrance price for every show in each resort was 6d. Those who could not comfortably afford this would have been excluded from virtually all public hall exhibitions. Sixpence, at this time, was the price of a loaf of bread, a quarter pound of tea, or the smallest tin of cocoa. In entertainment terms, it would have purchased a boat trip around Torbay, entrance to the wonders of Sanger’s, Fourpawrs’ Great Olympia, or a seat in the gallery to attend Mr. Herbert Jones’ Dioramic Lectures in the Theatre Royal, Barnstaple. It would not however, have afforded entrance to Bostock and Wombwell’s show in Sidmouth or a seat at Ben Greet’s 1898 production of Hamlet in Weston-Super-Mare. Sydney Carter, manager of the St. George’s Hall, Bradford, made the following observations about the pricing structures which had contributed to the great success of his own business: “Our first cinema was in ’96; the first full programme of nothing but animated pictures was in 1901...And in those days we had good programmes, good prices, (2s, 1s, and 6d)...” Richard Brown terms these “high prices” compared with other local shows, and argues that the New Century Picture Company who charged them had a twofold purpose in doing so. “The price level informed potential customers in advance that this was a superior show and certainly not a cheap form of entertainment.” This created a deliberate demographic profiling which targeted the middle class, whilst excluding the working class. In these South West resorts, the least expensive range of seats available was 6d, 1s and 2s, which Dyson’s and others billed as “popular prices”, and was only
offered by the smaller, less prestigious companies such as the Walfords.102 Yet frequently, 6d seats were situated at the back, still considered the least favoured part of the auditorium, and were of limited availability.

Pricing and seating strategies thus discriminated consistently against the less wealthy: on the contrary, many shows deliberately conspired to appeal to the more elite. Companies like the Andrés, Devant’s, and Poole’s offered more expensive options still: three shilling seats were standard, with one Poole’s run at the Royal Theatre and Opera House Torquay charging four and five shillings for the balcony, and an astonishing £1 11s 6d for a private box, the price of which equated to thirty one seats in the pit.103 There is further evidence, too, that the genteel classes were regularly attracted to exhibitions of film within the context of other shows in these regional resorts: inducements such as advanced seat reservation (at extra cost), and “Grand Fashionable Nights,” which took place with the patronage and presence of civic dignitaries, were calculated to appeal to those who wished to set themselves apart in some way and who had the resources to do so. “Select matinees,” or “select day performances” could only have been attended by those at leisure during working hours. Evidently, these spectators of early film were drawn from the cultural elite and the well-to-do; they felt at ease attending the finest venues, and could afford prices on a par with high-class theatrical and musical entertainment. This does not appear to accord with Asa Jernudd’s study of provincial Swedish audiences at this time in which she concludes: “It was the expanding middle class and the working class who formed the main audience for the earliest screenings, though an attempt was made to attract the bourgeoisie...”104 Nor does the regional pattern for early exhibition mirror the paradigm which Michael Chanan has offered for the assimilation of film, which privileges the contribution of the lower end of the social spectrum:

The enormous social impact of cinema reached the most remote corners of society long before the upper echelons knew what it was really all about. Previous new inventions, like the telephone and the phonograph, entered the market somewhere near the top and then filtered down. Film, after initial screenings for society audiences, went the other way.105
Chanan’s period of “initial screenings” is left undefined: however, evidence from these South West resorts indicates a reverse pattern, in which touring shows and the films included within them immediately fitted first into an elite cultural framework. In the absence of music halls, and with the exception of the fairground, most early film shows here therefore could not have been an inclusive activity with widespread appeal, but rather would have been the domain of the type of audiences who regularly accessed the high-class cultural provision of these select venues.

Some evidence of attempts at uniform pricing exists: Albany Ward’s Velograph show in Weston-Super-Mare attempted to make commercially viable an enterprise that only charged a flat rate of 6d, by offering multiple screenings at 3pm, 4pm, 5pm, 7pm, 8pm and 9pm.106 This model was not widely repeated, and from all the advertised public hall shows of this period only a handful offered the chance to view film for less than 6d: one of these featured the travel lecturer Barnfield-Salter (alias Sequah) and his accompanying variety performance which offered a 3d ticket in addition to its 6d and 1 shilling ones for the Saturday matinee only;107 another was the Trades Exhibition of 1898 in Torquay, where, between tasting stalls and washing competitions, the cinematograph could be seen for just 3d.108 There was another sense in which film exhibition in some towns was undemocratic. Generally speaking, the auditoria in these regional resorts were only modestly-sized: the Bath Saloons in Torquay, with a total capacity of 1,250, was one of the largest ones, whereas the Manor Hall in Sidmouth held only five hundred.109 Whereas shows often remained in Weston-Super-Mare or Torquay for a week, their stays in lesser resorts were often much shorter: even assuming full houses therefore, with most touring companies averaging only a two-night stay in Sidmouth, less than twenty per cent of its population could have availed themselves of the opportunity to view film on each of its visits. An account of a Poole’s visit to Cornwall, whilst estimating that 6,000 people gained entrance to the show, offers an insight into some of the difficulties for rural populations seeking to access entertainment at this time: “Poole’s Myriorama every night of last week was crowded. On Wednesday the demand for tickets at early door prices was double the seating accommodation. Hundreds, from a distance of six
or eight miles, had to return, being unable to gain admission.”

For these would-be spectators the next opportunity would almost certainly be several months distant.

Early responses to the new medium in these regional resorts were overwhelmingly positive. Local audiences, as elsewhere in the country, reacted most strongly to what they perceived as the “realism” of the films. The reviewer commenting on Devant’s shows in the *Torquay Directory* in 1898, for example, enthusiastically remarked on “the animated scenes depicted” which “proved at once so faithful and attractive it would be difficult to say which was regarded with the greatest favour.” His comments are typical of reviews nationwide at the time which reflected an appreciation of the new medium based on traditional and established terms of reference and experience: “The photographs are undeniably what they claim to be – a brilliant display of the latest, original, entertaining, and exciting scenes, with realistic effects.” Andrew Shail has concluded that “[n]ot only were participants in the production, display and viewing of the first film shows understanding film images using borrowed models, they largely did not understand the ‘Kinematograph’ to be distinct from a range of older amusement practices.”

Responses to these early films within a setting such as Poole’s seemed influenced by their dioramic context, the following comments being typical of reviews across the country: “A special attraction was the eventograph or improved cinematograph, the selection of films being well chosen and highly realistic.” Local audiences were reported to be impressed with the truthfulness of a camera which gave them moving pictures which as Christian Metz has emphasised, were “not just some plausible reproduction of motion, but motion itself in all its reality”. “The pictures of the ‘Derby’, ‘Whit-Monday on Hampstead Heath’, ‘Engineers at Work’, and ‘Train Running into a station’” enthused a Barnstaple reporter, “were marvellous living representations of the real thing.”

There was also an underlying feeling here that whilst these resorts lay geographically remote from the capital from which new trends emerged, film was a new means of remaining technologically and culturally in touch. Thomas Elsaesser has contended that the “cinematographe, bioscope or vitascope, despite their many antecedents and an almost total dependence on technologies typical of the 19th
In the final years of the Victorian period, the attention of the nation was acutely focused on the conflict in South Africa. J.B. Priestley remarked how people were caught up in what he termed the “glittering tide of Imperialism” which swept people along in the conviction that it would be but a “brief colonial adventure.”

It was a war which also invaded the local press and touched local populations in an unprecedented way. A barrage of reports from the front, letters home from soldiers, requests for relief funds, or notices for fundraising activities, filled its pages week after week, month after month. Whole pages in the local press were devoted entirely to the imagery and words of war; it permeated mining reports, editorials and local correspondence; it filled columns and
inspired cartoons; it was, quite simply, all pervasive. Almost without exception, the tone and rhetoric were intensely patriotic, or even jingoistic. Communities such as Penzance, who felt themselves particularly connected to the conflict through their links between the colonies and the mining industry, were encouraged to feel an especially deep sense of involvement through the impassioned rhetoric of columns such as “Westcountrymen at the War”, exemplified by the following extract:

“Englishmen, except in heart, and sympathy, and imagination, do not hear the sound of the cannon and the rifle, or witness the agony of the wounded soldier, but our minds are racked with anxiety and we are alternately cheered and saddened by the news.”

The conflict impacted enormously on the tenor and substance of a vast number of entertainments, from lectures and conversazione to dioramas and “Grand fashionable Naval and Military Nights” at the Royal Theatre and Opera House, Torquay: responding to the wave of patriotic fervour which washed over the country during these years, shows adapted themselves to respond to a heightened sense of nationalism and imperialism in their patrons and to appeal to their enthusiasm for war-related topics. Opportunist touring shows incorporating film exhibition, capitalising on the public interest, sprang up at regular intervals, toured once through the region and disappeared again with the signing of the peace: thus in Sidmouth, “Through Shot and Shell in South Africa” combined patriotic songs with “Living War Pictures” narrated by a witness from the Transvaal; Luscombe Searle, the “African Traveller” lectured to pictures of the war in “Boers and their Devious Ways” in Weston-Super-Mare; and Calverto-Chalmers brought a “Grand Patriotic Entertainment” to Torquay which offered a cinematograph exhibition of “all the most up-to-date Scenes from the Transvaal.” Simon Popple, debating the nature of the “symbiotic relationship” between these visual texts and other narratives of the war, has concluded that “[a]s entertainment, and as a news medium, the war films in their broadest sense, both mirror and mediate cultural and political concerns within the emergent mass visual culture of the early twentieth century.”

Thus in Sidmouth in 1900, for example, of the nine notable events of the year, six of them related directly to the war, including visits by the war
correspondent Frederick Villiers and Rene Bull the war artist. Simon Popple has noted the rise of the phenomenon nationally in which visual representations of the war were combined with song, soldiers or tableaux vivants, to create the “special patriotic programme”. The regional picture followed the same pattern: here, patriotic shows provided a locus in which local people could unite and express and share common sentiments. The Walford Family sequenced together 3, 586 feet of films of the Boer War under the banner “With our Flag to Pretoria” which they claimed would provide “a complete Pictorial excursion of that journey which has been responsible for the lives of five and twenty thousand of our British and Colonial troops.” The programme included other films with loyal and royal themes, such as the procession and opening of Parliament and the funeral of Queen Victoria, deliberately layered together to form a spectacle with a strong patriotic discourse, in which film was the dominant medium, which they billed as “the greatest military and naval pageant ever witnessed.” Richard Maltby has found the imperialism of popular culture to be “undoubtedly more theatrical than theoretical” which “lauded patriotic virtue rather than arguing the economic or political benefits of Empire…” The Walford visits in 1901 and 1902 were vital oases in the very limited cultural calendars of Sidmouth and Barnstaple, their visits to smaller venues a significant opportunity for local people not only to view film, but to feel part of a wider community through their shared participation in these emotive and patriotic spectacles.

**Change and continuity: film exhibition 1902-09**

Following the region’s early encounters with film, the opening years of the new century witnessed a gradual expansion in the number and diversity of visual entertainments. The changes that occurred were neither sudden, nor dramatic. In the largest of these South West resorts, film began increasingly embedded in the flourishing local visual culture of Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare, and began to assume a role of greater importance in smaller communities such as Barnstaple. This was evidenced by the number of new touring companies seeking to rent space and
show film that expanded quite noticeably from year to year, the steady increase in opportunities for regional spectators to view film, and the gradually expanding range of functions which film began to serve locally. Even smaller resorts such as Sidmouth, which had lagged well behind its larger and better-resourced neighbours, experienced a period in which optical recreation began, rather belatedly, to flourish. The numbers of lectures and entertainments involving the magic lantern, which had previously averaged one or two a year in the 1880s and 1890s, rose rapidly to one or two a month at the turn of the century. Simultaneously, exhibitions involving film, which had been slow to gain a footing in the town, slowly assumed a more regular pattern of appearance, moving from one or two visits each year, to performances linked to seasonal events and times such as Boxing Day and the Whitsun holiday.

The first decade of cinema in these regional resorts was thus in many respects a period of stability and continuity, during which the traditional and established exhibition contexts and respectable venues which had been the first to host film continued to dominate the field. The variety, magic, mind-reading or dioramic formats remained popular here, and in combination with assembled collections of films, continued to form heterogeneous spectacles which played to select audiences in respectable venues. Locally then, the developing film culture was in essence modern, yet rooted firmly in the past. The advent of picture palaces, which would result in a radical transformation of social and cultural practices, was still some years away: in Torquay, it would not be until 1909 that anyone would seek to provide a semi-permanent or permanent home for cinema, whilst audiences in the other four resorts had to wait a few years longer still. In the meantime, locally people continued to rely on travelling shows to refresh their experiences of cinema, and to maintain the vital connection between provincial life and events in the wider world around them.

Most of the new companies that reached these regional resorts for the first time during this period continued to offer local audiences an experience of film embedded in recognisable, traditional contexts: thus performances such as “Professor Crocker’s Animated Horses” integrated film, projected by the “Equimatograph”, into what was effectively a type of variety show, the only
difference being the involvement of performing ponies. The exhibitor Leon Vint constructed an entertainment to house film which, as a complex intermedial spectacle with its blend of lantern slides, tableaux, electrical effects and the biograph combined with music and mind-reading in a variety format, served to entertain Barnstaple audiences until the end of 1908. In yet another show which traded on its Egyptian Hall associations from St. George’s Hall, London, Devant and Maskelyne created ‘Mysteries, Joad Heteb and the New Egyptian Entertainment Company’, which also presented film within a standard variety programme. Although some showmen had initially shown themselves to be pioneers in the field of film exhibition, having begun to exploit the new medium at a very early stage, many did not attempt further innovation or develop the relationship between film and their own performances or shows. Advertisements for the Andrés’ shows in Barnstaple shows in March 1908, for example, reveal them to be conceptually identical to their first appearance with film in Torquay in December 1896: film in the later show was no more important or synthesised with the other performances than it had been thirteen years before. It still featured last on the bill, continued to remain supplementary to all the other performances and was once again relegated to the final phrase in a long newspaper review dominated by praise for Mrs. André.

Undoubtedly, the most prominent company to exhibit film regularly in regional resorts during this period remained the Poole family. During this period four branches of the family, each with a separate company, travelled to the South West every year between 1900 and 1909, providing annual shows in Barnstaple, Torquay, Penzance and in Weston-Super-Mare. Their reputation regionally for being enduring and reliable was unparalleled, yet at the same time, these traditional spectacles demonstrated a modern emphasis. Poole’s boast was to be at the forefront of entertainment trends: “‘Better than ever’ will be the verdict of those who visit Poole’s Myriorama at the Theatre this week. It is practically a new entertainment from end to end – new pictures, new music, new songs, new sideshows.” The inclusion of film allowed the Poole families to introduce novelty, modernity and variety into their well established format, without comprising its traditional features. Adapting the names of the film projectors to “Pooleograph” and “Myriograph” seemed to give them ownership of the medium itself, and incorporating
the latest technologies, such as the “cine-phono-matograph” which allowed spectators to see and hear artistes at the same time, appeared to put Poole’s at the cutting edge of technology and change.136

This balance between the old and new modes of representation was carefully managed and promoted, as a 1905 advertisement for a myriorama demonstrates: “There are numerous pictorial representations of foreign cities after the old ‘panoramic’ style, varied by many up-to-date cinematograph or animated pictures.”137 Changing both films and the dioramic subjects regularly gave local spectators the impression of a dynamic spectacle which was constantly reinventing itself. One Torquay reviewer noted that “Messrs. Harry and Fred Poole aim at excellence and up-to-dateness, and achieving their object, they control a Myriorama which is constantly undergoing change and progressing in artistic conception and treatment.”138 Yet, beyond the initial major modification made to their shows when they first adopted film in 1897, an examination of the shows which followed demonstrates that Poole’s subsequently modelled each new spectacle similarly. Whilst the varying content of the spectacle, the films and dioramas themselves, offered audiences a perception of change, both their performative practices and the structure and balance of items within the programme remained little altered in subsequent years. Whilst for some members of the Poole’s family these early experiences of film exhibition would lead to their later involvement with permanent cinemas, the dioramic model, with its inability to react quickly and spontaneously to events, was one which had no future in the fast-moving modern world of film.139

Many of the shows in these resorts in the period up to the end of 1908 demonstrated similar continuities of exhibition practice, providing reassurance and familiarity for regional spectators well accustomed to the traditional performance practices of well-known companies. Yet these continuities began to be disrupted in two ways, both of which were significant for the development of film exhibition in the region. Firstly, changes to existing exhibition practices within some established settings began to create different emphases and directions for film. As a detailed study of show profiles over this decade clearly reveals, some performers and companies periodically re-evaluated the function of film within their particular
entertainment, and constantly sought innovative ways of using it to enhance, modernise, rework or complement existing shows. One clear example was the Walford family, mentioned previously, who continued to utilise the new medium to enliven and rejuvenate a variety programme which had previously changed little in the twenty years before the arrival of film. Secondly, the emergence of altogether new exhibition contexts and strategies began to change the face of film provision: regionally, as nationally, this was a period, as Rachael Low explained, when “exhibitors tried many new, and often extraordinary, ways of reaching the public before they settled down in picture palaces.”

T.J. West, arriving in the region with West’s Pictures for his first visit to Torquay in October 1902, brought dynamic new approaches, practices and technologies for film exhibition which in many respects were not equalled by any other company visiting the South West. By the time of his arrival West had already established the principle of the longer stay, still unusual for touring showmen, following a first season in Bournemouth lasting four weeks. By the time of his 1904 visit, he had come direct from a six months’ continuous season there, which as Jon Burrows has noted, constituted a very early instance of film exhibition in a semi-permanent venue. This practice in turn impacted on the length of T.J. West’s stays when touring. Having established that his appeal to the genteel clientele of Bournemouth could sustain his show there for a month, tours of two weeks were easily feasible in the similarly high-class resort of Torquay, where one week had previously been the established norm. In Bournemouth, Burrows has commented that West’s prices, ranging from 6d to 2s 6d, were “not cheap” in Torquay, whilst the 1902 range was identical, ticket prices were increased to 3s for West’s subsequent visits, charges wholly in keeping with the high-class entertainments of the Bath Saloons, and on a par with Poole’s Myrioramas, for example, in their performances at the Royal Theatre and Opera House in 1902. Moreover, for his first visit, West offered a completely different programme of films for the second week, thus creating the potential for repeated custom and increased income.

At the time, T.J. West’s publicity was more detailed and more striking than that of his rivals and was twice the size: in an adjacent column, the traditional
familiarity of Harry and Fred’s Poole’s 1902 advertisement looked dull by comparison.149 This bold style of advertising, with its varied fonts, interesting layout, and excited tone, reflected the novelty and innovation which T. J. West had to offer local audiences. This publicity detailed West’s programme, a skilfully constructed variety show of films which boasted an originality which set it apart from the other touring film shows with which the South West was gradually becoming familiar. West typically promised the “Best Animated Picture Show in the World!”: in 1902, his diverse programme featured a series of discrete attractions which included not only the topicals and actualities so routinely screened by other exhibitors, but also the major up-to-date films such as East Lynne (1902) and A Trip to the Moon (1902), and comic ones such as The Human Fly.150 Having a second week’s programme with a complete change was in itself an innovative practice: this one offered its audiences a series of entertainments within an entertainment, screening in sequence film of a carnival, a pantomime, and a fair. Most unusually for this period, too, West catered to the needs of children, with footage of Captain Scott’s pet deer, and filmed nursery rhymes.151 He was also a keen exponent of local films, offering Torquay audiences pictures of the familiar and readily identifiable figure of W.C. Hancock at the fairground.152 Almost a decade before the 1911 Delhi Durbar films and the rush of cinemas locally to secure the commercial advantage of screening them first, T.J. West understood and exploited the keen desire of local audiences eager to view immediately pictures of distant public spectacles. With his Coronation pictures screened in Bath on the day of filming, West had established his reputation for speed: in Torquay, film of Saturday’s royal progress in London thrilled audiences the following Monday, a “feat” which the reviewer declared “notable”.153

West’s repeated ability to astonish and startle his audiences is a recurrent theme in contemporary reviews: his understanding of how technologies could be exploited to enhance entertainments led to innovative practices and successful initiatives. West excelled not only in the speed with which he could react to live events, but also with standards of projection, with pictures in Torquay said to be “surprisingly steady and clear”, and most significantly with the actual films themselves, many of which, “to the gratified surprise of the sightseers”, were
coloured. His programmes, whilst already striking and imaginative in their composition, further distinguished T.J. West from his competitors by their inclusion of this unbeatable attraction. West’s “coloured cinematograms” included pantomimes and fairy tales, and 600 feet of hand-painted film, *The Prodigal Son* (1902). For one enthusiastic reviewer in 1902, these marked “an epoch in cinematography”: another commented that “the artistic colouring of many of the pictures causes the spectators to wonder how far the cinematograph really will go to (sic) super-sensational.”

In 1903, in conjunction with some of the many films he had screened previously in Bournemouth, West brought “The Unseen World” to Torquay. Once again, West was at the cutting edge: Charles Urban’s new scientific series, which put nature under the microscope and projected it onto a screen, had only been shown for the first time less than two months previously at the Alhambra in London. These now celebrated films of hugely magnified cheese mites and bees and blood circulating in toads, and the reactions of contemporary audiences to them, are well documented. Luke McKernan cites some of these from the *Daily Telegraph* which recorded how “the rapt attention of the audience and the thunders of applause at the conclusion testified to the way in which popularity had been at once secured by these unique pictures”, and notes how audiences were in particular fascinated by *Cheese Mites* (1903). Torquay audiences responded similarly, and the *Directory* concluded that “for the beauty and variety of films shown no other company can give a display within reach of Mr. West’s.” By their inclusion, West could reinforce his claim that his show was “not only educative but entertaining”, essential for an entertainment which depended on the cultured clientele of the Bath Saloons. Whilst John Barnes claimed that T.J. West positively encouraged being mistaken for A.J. West, the creator of “Our Navy”, there is evidence in Torquay at least that he discouraged it: “he is no way connected with any other Establishment bearing another name” announced his advertisement in 1902, and again in 1904 confirmed that there was “No connection with West’s “Our Navy”. Thomas James West had no need of another’s reputation: he had created his own highly successful business model, which with programmes tailored to a refined clientele, moved between his
semi-permanent home in Bournemouth and other touring locations such as Bath, offering audiences, as one journalist enthused, “what can truthfully be characterised as the finest exhibition of animated pictures which Torquay has yet seen.”

Alfred J. West, with his celebrated collection of films which comprised “Our Navy”, was able to offer audiences in the South West the novelty of an entirely fresh show which was both innovative and ground-breaking in its practices. One of the foremost contemporary visual spectacles to visit the South West, it had been touring Scotland and England for several years, following well-respected performances at the London Polytechnic. Its first arrival in Torquay in March 1902 coincided with the local patriotic fervour of the last months of the Boer War, thus resonating with audiences already well-attuned to discourses of patriotism and imperialism. A.J. West’s was of particular importance for providing local experiences of film, repeatedly visiting all the five resorts in question throughout this period. “Our Navy” shows visited Torquay, Weston-Super-Mare, Penzance and Sidmouth in 1904, and returned again to Torquay in 1906 as “West’s Grand Naval and Military Entertainment”, and to Barnstaple in April 1909 with “Life in Our Navy” and “Life in our Army”. With spectacles calculated to play to the patriotic sentiments of both genders and all ages, West’s quite deliberately marketed the show to a family audience, each advertisement carrying a reassuring statement: “It is an entertainment every father should take his son to see, every mother and daughter delight in.” West, furthermore, carefully put in place a variety of innovative pricing and ticketing strategies to result in the greater democratisation of audiences. There was the rare provision of family tickets: however, at 10s and 6d or 7s for a family of four, these were expensive, even by the standards of the select Bath Saloons. The protracted stay of twelve nights which included nightly shows and four matinees, most unusual even in Torquay, whilst indicative of the show’s importance, evidently also allowed a much greater number of spectators to view the show. In the other resorts, initially prices fell into the range of 2s, 1s, and 6d. and the show visited the most prestigious venues, such as the new Knightstone Pavilion in Weston-Super-Mare, and the Manor Hall in Sidmouth; in 1909, an attempt was made to widen audiences to “all classes of the community” by the management of the
Albert Hall, Barnstaple, where half-price admission was offered on production of the newspaper advertisement. This in itself was a novel strategy in a resort where ticket prices remained traditionally high.

The spectacle which West’s brought to the South West was ground-breaking also in terms of technological innovation, with its inclusion of sound and musical effects, as well as other exhibition practices modelled on the successful performances at the London Polytechnic, in which film was sequenced together to provide a narrative of life in the navy which lasted two hours. A comparison of the programmes of metropolitan performances with regional ones shows a great similarity between the two, with the entertainment being divided in both cases into a number of themed parts, with titles such as “The Training of the Bluejacket” or “At Sea”, which were then further sub-divided into individual films. The 1904 programme for Sidmouth, for example, took audiences on a journey from “The Nursery Ship” to “The Battle” and “Home Again”, each film having its own self-contained story which contributed to the formation of a continuous narrative. This footage was unique, shot by Alfred West himself, whose value to the Navy was such that he gained unique access to it. West had special permission to film from both the Army and the Admiralty; the 1902 performances in Torquay moreover included “The Cruise of the Ophir”, unique footage which West had taken by special invitation of the Duke of York, also ground-breaking in its intimacy and access.

John Barnes has emphasised the originality of a show which in his opinion defied categorisation within any of the groups defined by Colonel Bromhead. Barnes further noted: “In some respects the Wests were unique as far as film exhibition was concerned, for they not only produced all their own films but also made the lantern slides with which the films were often interspersed during performances.” These original films, screened together with “excellent musical accompaniments”, as reported in Weston, combined to offer audiences in these resorts a filmic experience which was both novel and intense. They generated an unusual excitement in the press, the North Devon Journal deeming that “finer pictures have never been seen in Barnstaple”, whilst in Weston, the reviewer considered the pictures “striking”, “picturesque”, “unsurpassed” and “of such a brisk
character that there is not a single dull moment.” This same Weston report gives an insight into spectator responses: here audiences were deeply involved in each “chapter” of the narrative: “Gun firing on the land and sea as well as skirmishing and the destruction of land force came in for continuous applause. The skill manifested in the handling of the guns by our handy men evokes frequent applause...The entertainment, however, is not without its comical side, and the naval sports and Jack’s many exploits cause much laughter.” Their spontaneous applause and laughter show this audience to be responding in a mode which Jean Chateauvert and Andre Gaudreault suggest was typical of what they term ‘first period cinema’, with spectators here engaged in frequent free participation and acting as a “collective entity”.

Overt, collectivised demonstrations of approval and patriotic sentiment from audiences were in fact deliberately fostered by West, who in his Preface to his unpublished autobiography *Sea Salts and Celluloid* written in 1936, confessed himself to have been “greatly encouraged by the intense enthusiasm” with which his work was received. West’s shows, whilst purporting merely to show the realism of naval and military life, were carefully constructed as highly persuasive discourses which had the conversion of patriotic sentiment into positive action as one outcome. The huge numbers of new recruits who stepped forward after each performance of “Our Navy”, was concrete evidence of their huge impact. In his study of West, Russell Baldwin comments that West often made donations from his takings to naval causes, and further observes: “It is obvious, even from a cursory reading of his autobiography, that West was a dedicated supporter of the British Empire and all its social, political, economic and institutional implications.” In his autobiography, Alfred West explained that the aim of his work was to make himself useful to his country by creating “an entertainment of imperial interest”: “With the aid of these pictures it was made possible for people to realise what life in the Services is like. And in the Midlands, where many people had never seen a ship and some not even the sea, the films aroused intense patriotic feeling and stimulated recruiting.” For the coastal resorts of the South West, in particular Penzance with its strong maritime connections, West’s subjects held a special interest. In Torquay, West’s films also
had a special resonance: the town had enjoyed a close and historic relationship with
the services which dated back to the Napoleonic Wars; a large number of retired
naval and army officers continued to reside in the town; and the many vessels which
lay anchored in its bay, which numbered one hundred and thirteen in 1905, were a
visible reminder of the might of the British Navy. West continued the tradition of
bringing innovative film experiences to the region to the end of this period, and
beyond. In the 1909 Barnstaple show “Alfred West’s Naval and Military
Entertainment”, the addition of “pictorial stories”, including a “photoplay” of a
young boy running away to sea, proved a new way to engage the emotions of
audiences. It typified West’s ability to adapt, innovate, and entertain, skills which
would carry his films forward into the next era of film exhibition in the region.

Lectured entertainment, which had a long history in these resorts, entered a
new transitional phase during the early Edwardian years: whilst many lecturers
continued their traditional reliance on lantern illustrations, others began to
experiment with the introduction of moving images. This shift altered the balance
between word and image: film, whilst continuing to underpin the authority of the
lecturer in the same way as lantern slides had done, offered its spectators an
extradiegetic quality which opened up different perspectives and proposed alternative
narratives. Sandon Perkins and Harry de Windt were two travel lecturers who both
combined lantern and cinematograph to form their own hybrid entertainments and
exploited these media in different ways within their lectures. Sandon Perkins was a
Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who had spent seven months on board a
whaling ship, the Morning, photographing and filming the Polar region. He
brought the lecture of his travel experiences entitled “Midst Arctic Snows” to
Torquay twice in the spring of both 1908 and 1909. Harry de Windt’s lecture
“Through Savage Europe” came to Torquay in March 1906. Traveller, lecturer, and
contributor to the Optical Magic Lantern Journal, his talk focused on Eastern
European countries such as Roumania and Bulgaria, and included the German and
Austrian Balkans. Both lecturers claimed to be motivated by serious or scientific
purposes: Perkins’ declared intention was to record the wildlife and landscapes of the
Polar region, whilst de Windt was accompanied by a correspondent from the Westminster Gazette who was responsible for filming.192

Both Perkins and de Windt used these media to convey certain messages to their audiences in similar ways. De Windt presented audiences with images of the Eastern European countries through which he had travelled, utilising both slides and film. Each medium was used to convey a different kind of reality: whilst photographs illustrating the May Day riots at Warsaw, taken by him and projected by lantern, were presented as objective and truthful representations, film was synchronised together with national music played on the gramophone, thus enhancing the “authenticity” of the experience. In a similar way to de Windt, Perkins consciously chose each medium to fulfil specific and precise functions. Thus images he wished to appear natural and objectively observed formed the subjects of still slides: these included the Polar landscape or people at work and at play.193 Whilst this kind of everyday reality was habitually the filmmakers’ choice for numerous actualities and interest pictures, de Windt did not consider it suited to the medium of film: “The silent Arctic land is not a happy hunting ground for a man with a cinematograph”, one reviewer commented, “Animated scenes were few and far between.”194 Perkins chose to use film in a very different way from slides, behaving not as objective observer, but intervening in the filming process to create a spectacle: “After some persuasion, he was able, with the assistance of a member of the Morning’s crew to induce the natives to “get a move on...Following the example of their European leader, the natives performed a number of evolutions in a simple way.”195 The resulting footage he labelled “Perkins’ Arctic Pageant”, a name which implied his exploitation of both the people and the place. This “most vivid wordless narrative” wrote one reporter, was an “exciting adventure and bold commercial enterprise.”196 The intervention of Harry de Windt, when securing film to illustrate the Turco-Bulgarian conflict was equally deliberate and controlling: “He could not get the natives to look sufficiently animated, for they stood stolidly gazing at the instrument. They were only brought to a sense of what was required by flinging handfuls of piastres at them, when some admirable skirmishes took place.”197
This evident imposition of the filmmaker’s will on the indigenous subjects of his film, with all its overtones of cultural and racial superiority, was not an uncommon feature in a genre where “natives” were routinely made to perform for the camera. Filmmakers could intrude into other cultures, and present them on the screen as they wished them to be seen. Nevertheless, the reception of these scenes by the leisureed afternoon audiences in the Bath Saloons revealed local spectators prepared to accept not simply the lecturer’s views, but also his viewpoint. As vicarious travellers, upon contact with new cultures these Torquay spectators appeared to share Sandon Perkins’ perspective and found the pictures “amusing”.

These Torquay audiences seemed able to identify strongly with the ideology of cultural supremacy promoted by these films: the performances and commentaries of the lecturers and the way in which they mediated their own images, were a critical part of this process. Audiences here, moreover, would not have been strangers to notions of othering and unfamiliar cultures. Alison Griffiths has pointed out that spectators experienced ethnographic imagery in a range of encounters from world’s fairs to vaudeville, which informed their interpretation of screen images, and observes that “[a]udiences made inferences about the representations of native peoples they saw on the screen based on their prior knowledge of non-Western cultures.” She comments further: “The travelling lecturer-exhibitor commodified alterity by means of a consumable package of voyeuristic pleasure and rationalist rhetoric of uplift, comfort and affordability.”

Filmic representations fostered a self-belief in their own normality for spectators confronted with images of others unlike themselves, which Charles Musser has termed a “cinema of reassurance”. Perkins and de Windt created an intimacy between themselves and their local audiences, bringing them powerfully reassuring images which served to reaffirm their mutual cultural superiority to the races and places they pictured. The title of de Windt’s lecture “Through Savage Europe” thus implied much more than simply images of wild landscapes: to Western audiences it spoke of the unknown “other half” of the continent, who shared the same ethnicity, yet were culturally quite different. Both Perkins and de Windt moved beyond scientific, educative, or aesthetic considerations, and on occasions exploited the people and landscapes they had come to see. Both fell within the popular traditions of the travelogue: poised
between entertainment and education, their lectures combined examples of modern science and technological progress, with the drama of the exotic and the dangerous. The accounts of the risk-taking and hardships encountered by both lecturers in their quest to bring the images before the public brought an added sensational element to their undertakings, and made them appear more like adventures, rather than scientific studies. Noting the rising popularity of travel films at this time, Rachael Low has explained these pictures “gave these audiences for the first time in history a direct reproduction of life in other countries, and so a more vivid impression of the world than could ever be gained by still photographs or drawings of contemporary popular periodicals.” This was the important function served by de Windt, Sandon Perkins, and other similar lecturers, who pioneered the use of film in their travelogues, and put it before South West audiences.

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, the emergence of local and regional entrepreneurs would prove of increasing significance to early film exhibition in the South West. Whilst all residing and working in the region, in many ways this group was a disparate one. It comprised both individuals and small companies, with operations on a modest or major scale, and exhibition practices which ranged from amateur to professional. Whilst some might be classed alongside Deac Rossell’s eager amateurs and outsiders with little knowledge of the entertainment industry, at the other end of the scale this category included professional entertainment agents. The Baring Brothers, based in Cheltenham, put cinema into their entertainments over a wide area of the South West, bringing “Edison’s Animated Pictures” to small resorts and modest venues such as Sidmouth, as well as to Torquay’s grand Royal Theatre and Opera House. The Baring Brothers targeted high class audiences: the films were combined with “society” artistes, vocalists and humorists, to produce expensive entertainments, and even in Sidmouth, seat prices for their evening with the celebrated war artist Mr. Rene Bull, started at one shilling. In 1902 in Weston-Super-Mare, when the local council opened its new and lavishly appointed Knightstone Pavilion, it entered into a contract with the Baring Brothers to provide it with “a continual change of entertainments during July, August and September 1902, on sharing terms, they providing (sic) the
entertainments and usual printing for 65% of the gross receipts, the Council funding Pavilion, staff, light, advertising, posting and usual locals for 35%.”207 Thus Barings gained control of a prime venue at a key moment, in what would prove in the future to be a very competitive but dynamic environment for film exhibition: shortly afterwards, the council acceded to the pressure it felt under from other commercial venues, and voted to allow films to be screened at Knightstone.

At the other end of the entertainment spectrum, small-scale exhibitors like the Messrs. Dunscombe from Bristol, travelled to Weston-Super-Mare each year to show the cinematograph at the ‘poor children’s treat’ or ‘Old Folks Tea’.208 At the latter in 1904, a typical range of comic, dramatic and travel films, such as The Big Swallow (1901) and Elopement by Motor Car (1903) were shown, which, when combined with “Mr. Colling’s conjuring and plate-spinning performance”, offered a faint savour of the Egyptian Hall.209 In regional resorts where much of the organised entertainment was still dominated by large spectacles in select venues, local exhibitors could use their local knowledge to provide film in a way which met the needs of more isolated communities. In Barnstaple, groups who were socially or geographically marginalised, the workhouse inmates or the inhabitants of tiny outlying villages, for example, nevertheless had access to film, catered for by individuals such as Frederick Pyne, who combined concerts and the cinematograph to provide an entertainment. Pyne’s model was a novel one, replacing lantern slides with film, and using a gramophone, or the vocal talents of himself and his wife, to provide musical interludes.210 Unlike major touring companies with all their attendant commercial constraints, individuals in possession of a projector could reach out to modest venues, small clubs, or rural populations, much as magic lanternists had always done. A small or single operator had wider access to audiences from different classes, ages, and incomes. Being well known in the community was not always wholly to the advantage of these amateur showmen: in a predominantly Liberal town, Frederick Pyne’s other role as Local Unionist agent brought him into conflict with his audience and provoked hostile reporting in the Liberal press, when a roll of film caught fire during an entertainment in aid of the Men’s Social Club. Whilst the Tory paper The North Devon Herald dismissed the fire as “a trifling
incident”, its Liberal counterpart considered it “a sensational occurrence” during which flames shot several feet into the air, the room was evacuated, and about £12 worth of damage was caused. Pyne’s decision to replace the damaged roll with footage of Mr. Chamberlain and the film *John Bull’s Fireside* (1903) drew praise from the Herald and was gleefully exploited by the *Journal*, who sought to stir up a controversy: “This was by no means acceptable to a large section of the audience, the pictures being greeted with loud hisses and countercheers, which prompted the Vicar to remark that he was afraid that Mr. Chamberlain was deaf.”

If the *Journal’s* account is to be believed, it provides a clear example of an audience responding, not simply to the cinematograph as an entertainment medium, but rather to the films themselves and the political messages they carried, and a rare example of a negative reception for film locally.

As a minor resort, Sidmouth, which lacked the resources to attract regular visits from regional touring companies, turned increasingly during this time to one of its local providers for opportunities to view film. As proprietor of the one of the local photographic studios since 1899, Arthur Ellis had been well-placed to offer an occasional magic lantern show for several years before moving later to acquire an Empire bioscope. This connection between the photographic trade and a new breed of showmen was noted early on: “The kinematograph has proved itself to be an agreeable means of spending time for an hour or two, and consequently opticians and photographic apparatus people have for the time being got ‘another string to their bow.’” Having a studio in the centre of the town facilitated bookings and advertising, and Ellis gradually began to dominate professional cinema entertainments in the town. He developed a variety entertainment with comic turns, sketch artists, musical items and a fire dance, in which films rose further and further up the bill, to become the focus of the show by 1908. Initially performances were intermittent and coincided with high days and holidays, such as Boxing Day, Easter, and Bank Holidays. Even throughout 1909 these were still infrequent and always confined to just one or two shows on a single day. However, the town depended on these shows for its visual recreation: they represented a significant proportion of all the optical entertainment for the year, with only a few magic lantern shows serving to
enliven the months in between. Moreover, these latter tended still to be lantern entertainments for churches and charities. Few professional companies or lecturers included Sidmouth on their circuit. Thus the novelty, modernity, and professionalism of Mr. Ellis’s entertainments were much needed and well appreciated by the town, and especially by the press, whose support he enjoyed from the first: “We feel a particular interest in Mr. Ellis’ variety show, for we were the first to appreciate its importance as an ancillary to the winter’s amusements in this and surrounding districts, and hence we note with much pleasure its continued improvement and increasing popularity.”

At this stage, Ellis’s shows enjoyed the use of Sidmouth’s finest venue, the Manor Hall, where the prices – 2s, 1s 6d, and 1s, with limited 6d seats – would once again have precluded many. Yet prices for the children’s matinees which Ellis was assiduous to provide were a mere 2d and 1d: any adult who wanted to be certain of a cheap seat, could attend these performances instead for 6d. In a performance held at the Drill Hall, pricing was for once more democratic: whilst “Comfortable Deck-Chairs” at the front could be reserved for 1s 6d, any seats remaining at 8 o’clock could be sold for just 3d. These more affordable seats were rarely offered, since making a profit in a provincial town with modestly-sized venues was challenging. As a one-man business, Ellis had to bear all the expenses including film hire, which for the famous Burns-Johnson fight in April 1909 was a costly £25, necessitating an increase in ticket prices. Nevertheless he contrived to bring other major films such as some of the series of Passion Play films (1903), or the melodrama Black-eyed Susan and film of the Italian earthquake. The press continued its support for his enterprise adding on the occasion of his Boxing Day show in 1908 that “Mr. Ellis enters thoroughly into the matter of giving the best value for money. He spares no expense to ensure the best pictures, hence it is not surprising to find his events so popular.” By the time of his Boxing Day show in 1909, after a decade of working with the local community, providing them with photography, magic lantern shows and film, he had clearly established himself as the foremost local provider of high-class entertainment in Sidmouth.
The years 1908 -9 were a significant time of transition, key months during which a paradigm shift occurred which would fundamentally affect commercial and performative practices involving film. In Torquay, as in Sidmouth, it was the enterprise of one local individual who, through attempts at regular exhibition of film, disrupted the familiar continuities of travelling shows and visiting companies. In late 1908, Mr. Mellor attempted to introduce regular, weekly performances of film, on two separate days, with a change of programme each week. Mellor did not enjoy the same lack of competition as Ellis had done in Sidmouth: in the confident cultural environment of late Edwardian Torquay, there were many diverse entertainments on offer. Film here still continued to be screened predominantly in respectable, high-class venues within the context of major touring shows. Mr. Mellor seems to have been both the first to recognise the existence of untapped potential new audiences, and to engage with the concept of regular, weekly, exhibition. Selecting less prestigious public halls, such as the Albert Hall, St. Marychurch Town Hall, and the Drill Hall, Mr. Mellor put “Pioneer Animated Pictures” into areas of the town new to cinematic entertainment. Combined with a new, lowest price of 3d, these were groundbreaking marketing strategies designed to appeal to new audiences, for whom the Bath Saloons and the Theatre Royal and Opera House, where film most often had hitherto been found, were socially and financially out of bounds. There are many parallels between these two local entrepreneurs in Sidmouth and Torquay: both continued to site pictures within the familiar variety context, and both sought to attract inclusive audiences including children, for whom they provided matinees once a week. Mellor’s early attempts at regular provision were no more frequent than Ellis’s: they too were fraught with the problems of finding a suitable venue on a permanent basis. Those wishing to avail themselves of Mr. Mellor’s films needed to be alert, for as a note in the press explained, “...until this difficulty is surmounted he is obliged to change the venue of his exhibitions daily,” adding optimistically: “There is no reason why the venture should not succeed.”

Moving from venue to venue evidently conflicted with Mellor’s stated aim of providing “picture exhibitions at Torquay permanently”: throughout 1909 he was obliged to alter days and abandon venues, relying on his advertisements in the press.
and often carrying the caveat “All other times and places discontinued” to keep his
audiences informed of new arrangements. Even given that Torquay was a much
larger town, the intermittent and unpredictable nature of these performances alone
would have hindered the development of a close relationship between proprietor and
community, such as the one enjoyed by Mr. Ellis in Sidmouth. Mellor had not built a
reputation and a relationship with a local community over time, as his counterpart in
Sidmouth had done. However, when functioning, Pioneer Animated Pictures
managed to bring a series of films such as the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race,
Wilbur Wright, and the 1909 Grand National to the Drill Hall, until another hiatus in
June, when unsurprisingly, the Drill Hall was needed for drill and the shows were
discontinued. Yet despite these setbacks, just six months later Mellor had fitted out
the Market Hall with a maple floor, seating, cloakrooms, and a film projector,
simultaneously giving Torquay its first skating rink, and its first permanent home for
film, the Picturedrome. This was the cutting edge of film exhibition locally. These
developments were viewed in a very positive light: a reporter commented proudly
that the “electrical arrangements are entirely novel to this part of the county,
including as they do the new Westinghouse Mercury converter for lighting and the
cinematograph pictures.”

For Torquay, the arrival of the Picturedrome marked a transformative
process: with films now screened nightly and changed weekly, a radical new pattern
of exhibition had emerged which was unique in the town, was under the control of a
local provider, and which empowered new sectors of local society. It disrupted
continuities of performative practice, establishing a new paradigm for the exhibition
and exploitation of film in these regional resorts which had the potential to be
adopted, imitated, or developed. The Picturedrome shows had not evolved
organically over time as in Sidmouth: instead, they arrived abruptly in a local
entertainment culture with little prior ground work, and were modelled directly on
trends nationally, where speculation and investment in buildings were a growing
phenomenon. As Nicholas Hiley confirms, “[e]verything capable of conversion to a
cinema was bought for exploitation, including old drill halls, chapels, public houses,
and assembly rooms.” The future of cinema seemed uncertain, with many
experienced showmen doubting the wisdom of setting up permanent sites for film shows. Yet there was a degree of optimism in the trade: an article in *The World’s Fair* in 1909 considering the “advance of the cinematograph” and “its place in the entertainment world, concluded that the ‘‘newcomers’, the Electric Palaces, were doing very well.”\(^{225}\) According to editorial opinion, picture theatres were the way forward: “In this country...the enterprise is still in its infancy, but its boundaries are daily being extended. Further, as complete success has so far attended the efforts of the promoters – as the results from a financial standpoint are eminently satisfactory – it may be taken for granted that the ball thus set rolling will quickly assume larger and still larger proportions.”\(^{226}\) For the moment, those who had “set the ball rolling” locally were not the touring companies and travelling showmen who had introduced film to the region and sustained its presence for more than a decade: this next step in the process of film’s cultural integration had been taken by small entrepreneurs, serving their own communities, firmly rooted in the South West.

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5 *The Era*, 16 May 1896; *The Era*, 6 June 1896; *The Era*, 11 April 1896; *The Era*, 30 May 1896.
6 *CM*, 12 November 1896.
7 *NDH*, 1 October 1896. Its unfamiliarity, perhaps, was a possible explanation for this misspelling of its name in the press.
8 Ibid.
9 Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post, 3 October 1896.
10 *North Devon Herald*, 15 October 1896.
14 *TDSDJ*, 9 December 1896. Whereas this is the earliest mention of the cinematograph found in the *Torquay Directory*, it is difficult to establish with certainty that it was indeed the first, since the complete run of the *Torquay Times* for 1896 is crucially missing from all archives.
15 *TDSDJ*, 9 December 1896; *TT*, 24 September 1897; Ibid.
16 Asa Jernudd, “Reform and Entertainment: Film Exhibition and Leisure in a Small Town in Sweden at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *Film History* 17, no.1 (2005): 98.
17 Ibid.
22 Local amateurs showing film was a practice which emerged later in this period.
23 TDSDJ, 1 December 1886; TDSDJ, 2 January 1891.
25 Liverpool Mercury, 7 October 1896; The Era, 14 September 1895; The Era, 1 February 1896; The Era, 6 April 1895.
26 WM, 1 January 1898; CM, 31 March 1898; TDSDJ, 2 February 1898.
27 Information from unpublished diaries in the Walford Family archive; Northern Echo, 11 December, 1897.; The Era, 2 December 1893.
28 Bristol Mercury and Daily Post, 21 August 1878; Bristol Mercury and Daily Post, 21 August 1884.
30 http://www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=2000
31 TDSDJ, 15 September 1897.
32 NDJ, 3 February 1898.
35 Barnes, Boer War, 78.
38 The Era, 15 September 1900.
39 TDSDJ, 2 February 1898.
40 WM, 8 January 1898.
41 In this and subsequent chapters, where exact films cannot be precisely identified, no date is given.
42 Ibid.
43 Derby Mercury, 18 April 1900.
44 Ibid.
45 The Era, 2 March 1895.
46 Liverpool Mercury, 5 September 1899.
47 CM, 14 April 1898.
48 NDJ, 8 December 1898; TDSDJ, 12 October 1898.
49 TDSDJ, 22 September 1897; WM, 12 February 1898.
50 TT, 3 October 1897.
52 WM, 9 April 1898.
53 Ibid.
54 TDSDJ, 9 March 1898.
55 WM, 9 April 1898.
56 TDSDJ, 9 March 1898.
57 SO, 15 November 1899.
58 Low, British Film 1896-1906, 116.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 TDSDJ, 22 March 1899.
96 TDSDJ, 8 July 1896; TDSDJ, 13 July 1898; TDSDJ, 11 May 1898; NDJ, 16 January 1896.
97 SHD, 26 May 1900.
98 WM, 23 April 1898.
99 Quoted in Brown, “A Slippery Job,” 68.
100 Brown, “A Slippery Job,” 79.
101 WM, 1 January 1898.
102 SHD, 9 March 1901.
103 TDSDJ, 16 October 1901.
104 Jernudd, “Reform and Entertainment,” 100.
105 Chanan, Dream that Kicks, 206.
106 WM, 9 April 1898.
107 TT, 19 February 1897.
108 TDSDJ, 2 March 1898.
110 Royal Cornwall Gazette, 11 October 1900.
111 TDSDJ, 10 August 1898.
112 Ibid.
114 The Dundee Courier and Argus, 17 August 1898.
116 NDH, 15 October 1896.
118 TT, 12 February, 1897.
119 TT, 24 September, 1897.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
124 CM, 2 November 1899.
125 TDSDJ, 1 August 1900.
126 SHD, 5 May 1900; WM, 21 April 1900; TDSDJ, 2 May 1900.
128 SHD, 21 July 1900; SHD, 6 October 1900.
130 SHD, 9 March 1901.
131 SHD, 9 March 1901.
133 TDSDJ, 24 February 1904.
134 NDJ, 29 October 1908.
135 TDSDJ, 16 November, 1896.
136 TDSDJ, 16 October 1901; TDSDJ, 8 November 1905; TT, 25 October 1901.
137 TT, 10 November 1905.
138 TDSDJ, 29 October 1902.
139 For the involvement of the family with the local film industry see Chapter Four, 217.
140 *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 21 August 1878.
142 Jon Burrows, "West is Best!: or, what we can learn from Bournemouth," *Early Popular Visual Culture* no.8, vol.4 (November 2010), 355.
143 *TDSDJ*, 12 October 1904.
144 Burrows, "West is Best," 355.
145 *TDSDJ*, 12 October 1904.
146 Burrows, "West is Best", 356.
147 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902; 7 October 1903; 12 October 1904.
148 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
149 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
150 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
151 Ibid.
152 *TDSDJ*, 29 October 1902.
153 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
154 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
155 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
156 Ibid.
157 *TDSDJ*, 7 October 1903.
158 Burrows, "West is Best", 354.
159 Low, *British Film 1896-1906*, 60.
161 *TDSDJ*, 7 October 1903.
162 *TDSDJ*, 14 October 1903.
163 Barnes, *Boer War*, 103.
164 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902; 12 October 1904.
165 *TDSDJ*, 22 October 1902.
167 *TDSDJ*, 5 March 1902.
168 *TDSDJ*, 6 April 1904; *WG*, 15 June 1904; *CM*, 20 February 1904; *SHD*, 2 July 1904; *TDSDJ*, 20 June 1906; *NDJ*, 1 April 1909.
169 *TDSDJ*, 20 April, 1904.
170 *TDSDJ*, 5 March 1902.
171 *NDJ*, 8 April 1909.
173 *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 November 1900.
174 *SHD*, 2 July 1904.
176 *TDSDJ*, 5 March 1902.
177 See this chapter, 161.
178 Barnes, *Boer War*, 97.
179 *WG*, 15 June 1904.
180 *NDJ*, 8 April 1909; *WG*, 15 June 1904.
181 *WG*, 15 June 1904.

John Pike, *Torquay, the Place and the People* (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1992), 41. The bay referred to here is the curve of coastline on which Torquay lies.

SO, 23 April 1913.

*TDSDJ*, 22 January 1908.

Low, *British Film 1896-1906*, 121.

*TT*, 30 March 1906; *TDSDJ*, 21 March 1906.

*TDSDJ*, 5 February 1908.

*TDSDJ*, 5 February, 1908.

Ibid.

*TDSDJ*, 29 January 1908.


*TDSDJ*, 5 February 1908.

Alison Griffiths, “‘To the World the World We Show’: Early Travelogues as Filmed Ethnography,” *Film History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 291.

Griffiths, “‘To the World,’” 285


*TT*, 30 March 1906.


*SHD*, 23 August, 1902; *TDSDJ*, 17 September, 1902.

*SHD*, 6 October, 1900.

*WM*, 26 April 1902.

*WM*, 8 February, 1902; *WG*, 6 January 1904.

Ibid.

*NDI*, 12 January 1905.

Ibid.

*NDH*, 9 March 1905.

*NDI*, 9 March 1905.

*NDI*, 9 March 1905.


*SHD*, 29 February, 1908.

*SHD*, 2 October 1909.

*SHD*, 17 April 1909.

*SHD*, 4 April 1908; *SHD*, 10 April 1909; *SHD*, 30 January 1909.

*SHD*, 26 December 1908.

*TDSDJ*, 16 December 1908.

Ibid.

*TT*, 16 April 1909; 23 April 1909; 30 April 1909; 4 June 1909.

*TT*, 10 December 1909.

Nicholas Hiley, “‘Nothing more than a craze?’: Cinema Building in Britain from 1909 to 1914,” in *Young and Innocent?: The Cinema in Britain 1896-1930*, edited by Andrew Higson (Exeter: Exeter University Press), 114.


Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR


“Changes in the moving picture situation are kaleidoscopic in their nature. Seldom a day passes, without a reshuffling of the cards.”¹

During 1909, it had become apparent in the industry that a transformation in the way film was exhibited was underway, and that the survival and success of those who depended on it for a living, rested on an ability to respond and adapt to rapidly changing demands. Until then, film had been the province of the fairground or the travelling showmen, the “penny gaff”, music hall, town hall or public hall. As Nicholas Hiley points out, a combination of investors’ lack of confidence in the long-term sustainability of permanent film shows, and the difficulties with adapting properties and meeting fire regulations, resulted in a pattern of film appearances in London still “characterized by the irregular performances of travelling lecturers in church halls and institutions, rather than by any form of regular and permanent exhibition.”² Throughout 1909, trade journals began routinely to report instances of novel and reciprocal partnerships between film and other activities, which marked a divergence away from traditional practices and contexts for exhibition. It noted examples such as scenes from opera being screened with music in Brighton, film being shown after dinner in the Princes Restaurant, Piccadilly, or in a temporary structure at the Aberdeen flower show.³ A link between skating and film had been established as early as July 1896, when the ice-skating palace in Sauciehall Street, Glasgow, acquired one of the first cinematographs.⁴ The craze for roller-skating, at its height during 1909-10, had exploited this association, providing “rinking” and film together in numerous sites across the country. Despite periodic gloomy warnings in The Bioscope that “the Skating Rink Gamble” was heading for a crash, investment in these joint ventures continued and more establishments opened.⁵

Most importantly too, these trade journals documented the initial months of what would prove to be a growing and persistent trend for permanent exhibition sites
for film, a trend which would continue its momentum until the outbreak of the First World War. By the end of October, 1909, the World’s Fair calculated that about one thousand “picture theatres” were already in existence, ranging from “the display in the black-lined tent, to the ‘theatre’ in Piccadilly where there is music and tea.” At the same time, reports in The Bioscope further evidenced an industry still in search of an identity, with a quite remarkable diversity of provision all laying claim to the title “permanent”, from converted tram sheds at Willesden, to T.J. West’s attempt to build the largest picture hall in the world in Melbourne, seating four thousand, following his successful ventures in Britain.

**Industry and investment**

Whilst this was still a time of uncertainty, when the future direction and possibilities for the cinematograph remained unclear, conversely the industry appeared to offer multiple opportunities for enterprise to both large and small-scale investors and experienced showmen or amateurs. The World’s Fair believed there was great potential for the adventurous individual: “A cinematograph machine costs £35 to £50, and films are sold at 4d a foot. A man may set up business in a white-washed hall, hiring some chairs, two operators, a man to sell tickets and lecture during the show, a ‘shouter’ to stand at the doors, and a girl to sell programmes.” Though encouraging, this advice offered a business model which would quickly prove over-optimistic and grossly over-simplified. Moreover, whilst hiring a few chairs in a hall might serve well for a few months more, by the end of 1909 the move towards screening film in well-equipped and comfortable surroundings, which would swiftly culminate in the creation of picture palaces of light and luxury, was already well underway. In his article “Miles of Films”, a reporter for the Star observed of suburban London: “Nearly every small hall which was formerly carrying on a precarious existence with dancing classes, lectures, and meetings, has been seized upon by the enterprising living picture syndicates, repainted, relit, and newly furnished – to blossom out as cinemas, picture palaces, picturedromes, and ‘electric palaces.’” Nicholas Hiley maps out a pattern for investment in these first picture theatres which foregrounds large-scale injections of capital by private limited companies: suggesting that small showmen had no further capital to spare, he has argued that “the new breed of disinterested investors and professional managers was
hoping to make a quick profit from moving pictures without any commitment to their future development. This was a pattern which was not entirely replicated in the South West.

For four of these five resorts, the years from 1910 onwards were indeed a period of expansion and development. Torquay, Weston-Super-Mare, Barnstaple and Penzance were all in receipt of some form of outside investment in their local cinema industries to provide new premises or outlets for film exhibition. Locally, the rinking craze continued to flourish hand in hand with film, despite the continuing foreboding about its future in the trade journals, and the alarming collapse of one of the largest enterprises, the Empire Rinking Company in Leeds, in the spring of 1910. In a resort with few attractions and limited resources, the newly opened Palace and Skating Rink in Penzance marked both a significant moment in the town’s cultural development, as well as an economic milestone. The Director of Penzance Palace and Skating Rink Limited, was also a Manager for Keith Prowse Limited, and travelled with its Chairman and Manager, Mr. Prowse-Jones and other managers to Penzance for inauguration of the cinema. Investment of this kind by a major London entertainment company was unprecedented in Penzance, and the arrival of the party in a special saloon car attached to the Paddington-Penzance train, sensational. Whilst this well-established company evidently had expertise in the industry, it clearly had no knowledge of the immediate community, a problem which was solved by the appointment of a local manager very familiar with providing entertainment in the town, Mr. Robert Thomas.

In Weston-Super-Mare, the Victoria Hall was converted into a Skating Rink and Cinematograph Hall in February 1910 by its proprietor, Mr. W. M. Shanly. Shanly already had wide interests in the entertainment industry locally, being the supplier of deckchairs and bathing machines to Weston and other resorts (Figs. 4.1., 4.2). Yet whilst publicity in Weston included his photo and stressed his apparently local credentials, Shanly was, in fact, owner of a London based company which had numerous, successful venues across the country including at Bognor, Ramsgate and Worthing. His monopoly on fixed-venue picture exhibition in the town was short-lived – in December, the Weston-Super-Mare Electric Theatre Company was
Fig. 4.1. Advertisement for Shanly’s skating rink and cinematographic room at the Victoria Hall, *Weston-Super-Mare Holiday Guide 1910*. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Library.

Fig. 4.2. Advertisement for Shanly’s skating rink and cinematographic room at the Victoria Hall, *Weston-Super-Mare Holiday Guide 1910*. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Library.
registered, part of an expanding picture theatre circuit which already boasted twenty-seven theatres in operation by August 1911. This powerful company, which at the height of its expansion was offering its shareholders a twenty-five percent dividend, had the resources both to buy into a share of Weston’s cinema potential and to build rapidly. Despite delays by the Council to approve the plans, by August 1911, the town’s first purpose-built picture theatre had been completed in a mere twelve weeks. It was a lavishly appointed building, on which the Company’s money had been “freely spent in the determination to make the premises a place of entertainment worthy in every respect of the town.” It was an instant rival to the Council’s own new expensive venue, the Knightstone Pavilion, which had been mired in controversy over cost and function from the outset, and which was struggling to make a profit. Rather than appoint a local person, the Electric Theatre’s policy here was to employ a manager with experience in the industry: Weston’s Mr. Marston had previously worked at the London Polytechnic for West’s “Our Navy” for seven years, before opening three of the Company’s new picture theatres. Whilst these companies clearly had few local connections, neither can they necessarily be classified, to use Hiley’s terminology, as “disinterested investors”. The two brothers, George and Leo Bliss, who opened the second of Barnstaple’s two picture theatres to open in the same month, were already well-known in the entertainment industry. Keith Prowse Limited and Shanly’s were professional entertainment companies who had a vested interest, not only in making a profit, but also in creating large and comprehensive entertainment business empires, and brought their skills and reputations to these enterprises. They sought to combine the best of both worlds, by appointing locally sourced managers who could use their expertise and knowledge of the immediate community, in conjunction with the financial power and business acumen of the larger company.

For several of the principal touring companies, already familiar and well-established names in the West Country, the move generally towards fixed venue cinemas offered an opportunity to expand their business interests and capitalise on their knowledge and expertise of the industry and the local area. Some had long experience of both the entertainment industry and the region which pre-dated film; all had travelled their dioramic or variety shows extensively in the South West, and had incorporated film exhibition into their shows. Most of those who made the transition from showman to cinema owner or manager had come from modest beginnings, and were enterprising
individuals, or families. The Walford family, having established their considerable reputation locally over many years, opened an Electric Palace in the Drill Hall in the village of Combe Martin, North Devon, later going on to establish their own cinema in Barnstaple. Leon Vint, known in the region for his travelling Scenorama, Globe Choir and Biograph show, an intermedial entertainment which included tableaux, colour photography, limelight and electrical effects, worked his way into the “front rank of showmen”, announcing his intention to open nine new Electric Palaces in 1910 – his circuit included Exmouth, from where he also managed his cinema business, his headquarters being in a large marquee there.

Even the best known of this new breed of cinema entrepreneurs, Charles W. Poole, originated from a family partnership, although with admittedly expansive business interests and generations of experience. Having regularly visited resorts such as Torquay, Barnstaple, Penzance and Weston-Super-Mare over many years, Poole was well placed to have a stake in the new cinema industry locally, and entered into a business partnership to convert the Assembly Rooms in Taunton to the Empire Picture Theatre as early as October 1910, whilst still continuing to tour Myrioramas, and becoming Managing Director of Poole’s Theatres, Limited in 1911. Poole began to acquire cinemas across the South West, including the Empire in Newton Abbot, the Riviera in Teignmouth, and The Ellacombe Empire in Torquay, until this latter was taken over from him by another showman turned cinema entrepreneur, Arthur Haslam, who, as Captain Rowland, had travelled his lions and film shows as part of the locally celebrated fairground operators, Anderton and Rowland’s. Individual entrepreneurs or families of showmen were able to capitalise on the expertise and local knowledge gained through years of touring shows and exhibiting film in its early days, and build new businesses in the expanding cinema market. Albany Ward moved away from touring variety and film shows to develop his own cinema and rinking business, with ownership of an impressive circuit of eighteen picture theatres by 1913. This spread across the West Country from Weymouth to Exmouth and beyond and constituted the most extensive cinema network here at the time. From small beginnings, playing to audiences in towns as modestly sized as Sidmouth, Ward went on to influence cinema culture in the region in a significant way. This was not only because of the sheer number of cinemas which he controlled, but also because of his insistence on high standards of customer satisfaction everywhere, clever marketing, and shrewd
programming, as Patricia Cook has observed: “Most of the others developing cinemas concentrated on large venues in large cities. He was not always the only exhibitor in town, but he was often the only one developing a circuit that could successfully maximise his return from any film he was renting.”29 Ward’s longevity in the business played its part here too. His entry at a young age into an industry which was still finding its future course was fortuitous: it was an association which would continue on and develop long after the First World War, into the 1920s and beyond.30

Of the many private companies that formed to speculate in local cinema-building projects, some clearly had no local connections: in 1910, for example, three of the directors of the newly-registered Barnstaple Picturedrome Ltd. were from Liverpool, and those representing Bioscope Theatres Ltd in their new Exeter venture the same year were all from London.31 Others formed a partnership between London companies and local tradesmen: thus in Torquay, it was a London syndicate in association with some of the town’s most distinguished businessmen, who with £10,000 capital had begun the project to build an Electric Theatre there.32 Faced with losing the money already invested, the local subscribers succeeded in floating another company, Torquay Entertainments Ltd., and for a mere £1,500, acquired the previous company’s assets worth an estimated £4,000.33 In a further example of local vested interest in the cinema project, it was only the intervention of Colonel Cary, owner of the vast Cary estate and also the site of the cinema building, which allowed it to proceed.34 Other companies consisted entirely of local individuals, such as Redruth Electric Picture Palace, whose directors all had addresses in the town,35 and the Riviera Picture Palace Company, which drew them all from Penzance.36 This latter offers one example, at least, of speculators with a conscience. When the company went into liquidation in August 1911 just a few months after its registration,37 with nineteen creditors owed £193 between them, and only £23 10s in assets, the impact on local business was potentially grave. The directors, a group of local gentlemen which included an architect, two surgeons and an auctioneer,38 acted honourably as the local press noted: “To the credit of some of the local speculators who started this undertaking, we hear they are willing to regard the whole amount as a debt of honour, knowing that but for the standing of the promoters, the credit would not have been given by Penzance tradesmen.”39 Altogether, the local picture seems to accord with the “fragmented” film exhibition sector which research by Jon Burrows and Richard Brown has identified: by
demonstrating that many of cinema entrepreneurs were in fact responsible, knowledgeable, and small in scale, they have modified our understanding of the film exhibition business, demonstrating conclusively that it was “dominated by undercapitalised ‘independents,’ impressive in numbers but lacking much power…”

Exemplifying one of the smallest possible players in the field was Arthur W. Ellis, owner of the cinema in Sidmouth. The investment boom which had transformed the cinema industry elsewhere had clearly bypassed small provincial centres such as Sidmouth. Ellis arguably conforms to Hiley’s category of “earliest exhibitors”, whom he characterises as having “been in close touch with audiences, and willing to stake their livelihood on the success of the purpose-built cinema…” Ellis’s commercial exploitation of film in Sidmouth owed a great deal to his already established position and vested interest in a small, closely-knit community which he already served and whose needs he already understood. Through his ownership of a photographic studio in the town and regular magic lantern and film shows, Ellis had acquired knowledge both of the industry and the people. This was an advantage recognised by the local newspaper, which commented on the opening of his new cinema: “It is better that such a place should be in the hands of a well-known tradesman and especially one who is known to have always exercised wisdom and sound judgement.”

Although the small scale of the town might have discouraged other potential investors from involvement with the cinema industry, it was the understanding and manipulation of the advantages of just such a community which contributed to Ellis’s achievement. Despite there being a population of only 5,612 in 1911, Ellis determined to provide the town with regular film shows in a permanent setting. The Bioscope in its columns frequently took the side of the small provincial operator, fearing that they were at a disadvantage in an industry dominated by powerful companies. In January 1912, the same month that Ellis was undertaking his conversion of the Drill Hall into a cinema, the journal was warning another correspondent and would-be cinema owner in a small provincial town of the initial and on-going financial burden involved in establishing such a venue, with expenditure required for everything from electricity to chocolate sellers. The following month it further advised: “The showman owning a theatre of small seating capacity cannot afford to pay £20 or £30 extra per week for a film that is boomed by a manufacturer as the last word in
cinematography, whereas his near neighbour with a large theatre can afford to speculate, placing the small man at a great disadvantage.” 47 Whilst not completed until 1912, some two years later than the other four resorts, Ellis’s conversion of the Drill Hall brought not only a new cinema but also a whole new culture to the town: throughout the following year, regular weekly performances established regular local audiences for film, and instigated the new leisure practice of cinema-going. Ellis had revealed both his keen awareness of these potential outcomes and his shrewd grasp of the potential market for his entertainment, during the course of a long interview with the local reporter. He had also outlined his business strategies, which showed his recognition and understanding that the success of the new cinema would lie in the careful planning of the programming, the purchase of new equipment, pricing, and seating arrangements of the new cinema, as well as in his unique knowledge of the industry and local community. 48

A year later, in February 1913, the success of this semi-permanent venue led to the acquisition of new premises and their conversion into a permanent cinema for the town. As proprietor, Ellis was taking a financial gamble by setting up in such a small town and modest resort, where other investment in entertainment and buildings had been conspicuously absent: it was not until the summer of 1913, that Sidmouth could boast two further attractions, Trump’s Winter Garden, and The Merry Magnets al fresco concerts, and even these were very modest in scale. 49 Ellis turned this lack of competition to his advantage, providing consistent amusement for the town and its visitors as no other had done, until the First World War and beyond. The Sidmouth Observer regularly acknowledged the debt of the town and its shared pride in its cinema: “...it is a commendable instance of local enterprise. Visitors here this season will find a thoroughly up-to-date- picture palace. We do not wish to infer that it is as elaborately fitted up as some exceptionally good houses in our large cities, but for a town the size of Sidmouth no more comfortable or well arranged building will be found anywhere.” 50

Cinematograph exhibitors in other places were not in the same privileged position with regard to competition. 1910, which The Bioscope terms “the year of the boom in the business” saw a leap in the numbers of cinema companies registered nationally to two hundred and thirty-one from merely seventy-eight the previous year. 51
Luke McKernan, documenting the phenomenon of the spread of cinema provision in London, notes: “Here was an entertainment form of unprecedented social impact. Cinemas in a very real sense were changing the face of the city...” It was changing the face of regional centres too. 1910, in particular, was a year of growth in these regional resorts: at the start of this year, the Picturedrome in Torquay was less than a month old and the Penzance Picture Palace and Skating Rink newly opened. In Weston-Super-Mare, the Victoria Hall was converted to provide skating and cinema, whilst Mr. Lambert’s Bioscope made daily appearances at the Pier Pavilion. In Barnstaple, film exhibition practices were transformed with the opening of two cinemas in the same month, the Picturedrome on 6 October, and the Lion Picture Palace on 27 October 1910.

Fig. 4.3. “Our Weekly Whirligig,” The Bioscope, 28 April 1910.
This burst of regional enterprise was remarkable, particularly in areas such as Barnstaple and Penzance, which had seen little evidence of cultural investment in previous decades. It came at a time of great drama in the industry, the highs and lows of the business amusingly and neatly illustrated by a cartoon in *The Bioscope* in April 1910 (Fig. 4.3). It was undoubtedly risky, given that three of these new establishments, in Penzance, Torquay and Weston, were all linked to rinking, which as mentioned previously, was thought to be a bubble about to burst. Moreover, it was speculative investment which had disregarded grave warnings from the financial press about the uncertainty of the industry:

Following the skating rink boom, whose seamy side is now being exposed at the Bankruptcy Court and elsewhere, like methods are resorted to by promoters of cinematograph theatres. In this instance, as in that, attempts are being made to dazzle the public imagination with visions of big profits, whilst the inherent risks of such enterprises, the possible evanescence of the craze and the evils of excessive competition, are carefully ignored.57

In 1911, the number of cinemas in the region increased further with the addition of an Electric Palace in both Weston and Torquay, which also gained a third picture house, The Ellacombe Empire, in the following year. The Electric Theatre in Weston drew attention in its newspaper column to the already competitive market for entertainment in Weston:

The multitude of supplementary attractions in the way of amusement of which the town can boast have become so numerous that competition amongst the various managements has become additionally keen, all recognising that it is a contest for the survival of the fittest. That the picture palace management is determined not to be included amongst those that are doomed to go under, is evidenced by the spirited manner in which the public are catered for...58

1912, as previously seen, marked an important cultural moment for Sidmouth with the provision of its first cinema, and was a time of consolidation and experimentation for Barnstaple’s two establishments. In the same year in Weston and Penzance, the advent of yet more sites for film exhibition acted as a catalyst, injecting a new dynamism into the industry and stirring up a sense of competition locally, at the same time creating unprecedented tension between private and public provision of cinema entertainment in these resorts. In common with their urban neighbours, coastal
resorts already had theatres, music halls, or cinemas: in addition, wealthier or more
dynamic resorts might boast possession of one or more of the type of buildings which
most symbolised their seaside identity, principally the pier and the pavilion. The
investment of tax-payers’ money in such facilities had begun to grow from the 1890s
onwards and into the Edwardian period, by local authorities eager to keep their resort at
the forefront and allow it to compete successfully with its rivals. John Walton indicates
how local governments were motivated by the need “to provide attractions for visitors,
to keep up-to-date and obtain favourable publicity, and to keep potentially lucrative and
useful monopolies in local hands and free from private competition.” 59 This high level
of investment – Torquay’s Pavilion cost £20,000 in 1909 – was often locally
controversial, and needed to be profitable (Fig. 4.4). 60 Local authority management of
these buildings necessitated a commitment to providing attractions which were suited to
the local environment, residents, and clientele, and an involvement in and understanding
of the entertainment industry, which would bring about a substantial return from the
investment of tax-payers’ money.

Fig.4.4. Torquay Pavilion. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association.
In Penzance, a gentle cultural transformation was already underway, following the opening of the privately operated Star Theatre the previous summer, which although small, significantly provided the town with its first experience of regular theatre, or indeed regular entertainment. Councillors, wishing to promote Penzance as one of Cornwall’s foremost pleasure resorts, voted for an ambitious project to construct a Pavilion and Winter Gardens in conjunction with Cornish Riviera Entertainments, which opened in August 1912 (Fig. 4.5). In November, with both the re-opening of the Picture Palace, and the arrival of the brand new picture theatre, “The Cinema”,

![Fig.4.5. Penzance Pavilion. Courtesy of the Morrab Library, Penzance.](image)

the town’s cultural provision was rapidly and dramatically expanded. The publicly funded Pavilion, initially intended to provide luxurious facilities for summer concerts and winter promenades, began almost immediately to screen films, a practice it continued throughout the following year too, assuming the name “Pavilion Pictures”. In Weston, the publicly-owned and lavishly-appointed Knightstone Pavilion attracted controversy and drew criticism from press, residents and councillors alike for its poor management and unspectacular profits (Fig. 4.6). Whilst an early decision to screen films shortly after its opening in April 1902 had led to occasional performances, a decision was made in 1911 to install cinematograph equipment there. With the
opening of the new Electric Theatre in 1911, Albany Ward’s Palace of Varieties in 1912, the Regent Street Picture Palace in 1913, and Electric Pictures nightly each evening on the Grand Pier, by the summer of 1913 this competition between public and private attempts to provide cinema for Weston’s residents and visitors intensified, and contributed to a dynamic and vibrant environment for film exhibition in the town.\textsuperscript{65}

![Knightstone Pavilion](image)

\textbf{Fig.4.6.} Knightstone Pavilion. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association.

Thus the finance which lay behind the provision of cinema in these South West resorts stemmed from many sources – large London-based companies, small private companies, public funds and private individuals. Whilst there was indeed speculative investment, many venues had the backing of locally connected individuals. Across the nation, the cinema industry both flourished and failed, the boom in building being accompanied by the bust of liquidated companies. Yet without exception, all of the cinemas to emerge during this period in these resorts survived and succeeded, at least until the start of the First World War.
Converting to cinema

Clearly, much of the original investment of funds into film exhibition was absorbed in the erection, or purchase and refurbishment, of buildings for use as cinemas. Luke McKernan cites the theatre critic W.R. Titterton, who observed the “[b]rand new stucco and gold in the broad streets, tottering dwelling houses in the back alleys, slapped over with newness and disembowelled, old drill halls, chapels, public houses, assembly rooms, anything with a roof-cover and space for a curtain and a crowd, hung out its sign and hung up its magic screen.” McKernan himself notes that though these might have been “hasty creations” they were also “highly visible and ubiquitous” and constituted a “significant addition to the modes of visual communication” of the city. In these five resorts too, the first cinemas were housed in premises converted from existing structures, a practice which led to a considerable diversity, even within such a limited area. Sidmouth’s first regular home for film was a Drill Hall; Torquay’s Picturedrome was sited in the Market Hall; Penzance’s Picturedrome was based in Central Hall; Weston-Super-Mare’s Victoria Hall was converted into a cinematograph hall and skating rink; Barnstaple’s Picture Palace was sited in the Theatre Royal, whilst its Lion Picture Palace was based within an old foundry and ironworks (Figs. 4.7., 4.8).

Fig.4.7. The Drill Hall, Sidmouth. Courtesy of the Sid Vale Association.
Locally, halls were not always as readily available as in London: in Torquay, William Mellor had to plead for a venue in the press for a year before one became available. Using second hand or borrowed buildings could be problematic: in Sidmouth, there was little space available to rent other than the Drill Hall, which also continued to be simultaneously needed for drill. Since not expressly designed for the purpose of showing film, these buildings could be an inconvenient shape and size. Mellor’s space in the Picturedrome at the back of the market in Torquay measured merely twenty feet in length and forty feet in width; and in Sidmouth, on returning the Drill Hall to the Territorials after its use as a cinema, there was an admission that its owner “did not have a proper chance before, though he catered well ....at the Drill Hall, but it was not a suitable building for these kind of entertainments.” In a retrospective look at the
industry, Colin Bennett, writing in *The Kinematograph Year Book (1914)*, considered that this phase of cinema building was still a time of uncertainty, when temporary structures and makeshift arrangements reflected the underlying concern of investors that cinema was just another craze: “These picture shows, for all their garish scheme of outside arcs, stood for the transient as opposed to the permanent.”70 The subsequent phase, he noted, would be based on a “new-found solidity of structures.”71

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**Fig. 4.19.** The Regent Street Picture Theatre, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association.

From 1911 onwards, the second wave of cinemas to establish themselves in these resorts was mostly purpose-built. Patrick Keiller has observed that “the
development of cinema was a significant factor in the transformation of urban and other space during the 1900s.”72 The Weston Gazette commented on the construction of the new Regent Street picture house in March 1912 that the “theatre will undoubtedly be a great addition to the architecture of the town (Fig. 4.9). The front elevation is executed entirely in Bath stone and the design is that of the Renaissance period, the Doric order being employed on the ground floor and the Ionic on the first floor”.73 Cinemas such as this, as well as the Electric Theatre in Weston, the Electric Theatre and Ellacombe Empire in Torquay, and The Cinema in Penzance were new buildings with ornate facades and elaborate exteriors which visibly stamped their mark on local streets. They were part of a final flourish of construction and expansion of entertainment provision in the decade before the war: resorts such as Weston-Super-Mare had gained the Knightstone Pavilion in 1902 and the Pier Pavilion in 1904, whilst Torquay and Penzance both benefited from new Pavilion buildings in 1912. These publicly funded Pavilions were effectively statements of cultural one-upmanship by local authorities seeking to impress residents, visitors, and external observers, and other resorts, and were expensive, lavish showpieces (Fig. 4.10., Fig. 4.11).

They were also venues which hosted film. As such, they set high standards for entertainment venues in these towns in general, and for the local cinema industry in particular, having the potential to outshine their neighbours, the new cinemas. Knightstone Pavilion, for example, was designed by a London architect, cost £30,000, and was fitted with crimson tip-up seats, plush drapery, electric chandeliers, and decorated in gilt, cream and white.74 Even without these models of the latest in luxury on their doorstep, there was a wealth of advice regarding cinema construction, furnishing, and operation from within the industry itself to be considered: trade journals regularly proffered advice on the decoration, or general running of picture theatres; manuals, such as How to Run a Picture Theatre (1911) were published, which covered all aspects of cinema operation; and some companies owning a number of cinemas, for example Provincial Cinemas Theatres Limited, required each to conform to certain uniform standards of accommodation and management.75
Fig. 4.10. The Concert Hall, Torquay Pavilion. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association.

Fig. 4.11. Interior of Pavilion, Grand Pier, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association.
Andrew Shail sees the self-conscious splendour of the new cinema buildings as an endeavour by the industry to distance itself from its dubious ancestry and re-brand itself as dignified and acceptable and notes that “...the desire to disassociate itself from the penny gaff was fundamental to the dignifying practices of the industry-led film discourse of the early picture theatre period in the UK.” Rachael Low had already outlined how this desire sought expression in elaborate furnishings and exciting exteriors: “More and more effort was spent in impressing the audience with comfort and elegance, and proving the pictures worthy of better-class audiences. Red plush and marble, furs in brass pots and plenty of electric light were guaranteed to give that air of “cosy refinement” which was wistfully sought by a trade anxious to disclaim its low birth.” Yet, as has already been demonstrated, film in these regional resorts already had a long history of exhibition in acceptable, even refined or luxurious, venues which had already helped to legitimise it and place it before “better-class audiences” from the first: it was in fact broader audiences which cinemas here needed to attract. Adrienne Scullion also confirms this post 1911 expansion and shift in the standards of cinema accommodation, and suggests:

...exhibitors were building more cinemas and appointing some with increasingly lavish interiors. Marble decoration, carved wood, plush seating, orchestra pits and even tearooms...these and other design features and gimmicks were pitched to attract and maintain audiences in the certainly competitive, but potentially richly profitable, area of film exhibition.

One of its frequent advice columns in *The Bioscope*, “The Furnishing of a Picture Theatre”, drew attention to rising standards in the industry and the need to provide comfort and quality: “This is an age of high development. In every walk of life it is the best and the best only that is demanded...where modern audiences are to be catered for, the consideration of creature comforts will go a very long way towards bringing success.” In the competitive environments for film exhibition which existed in Weston, Torquay, and Penzance by the end of 1912, new cinemas needed to be highly attractive: venues in these three resorts in particular were showcases for all that was considered to be the most luxurious in furnishings and finishes. The Regent Street picture theatre in Weston was especially fine, with Georgian style interiors, Spanish mahogany doors, and moulded plaster figures. Penzance’s Cinema had gold silk paper, ruby glass lights, and rich Axminster carpets. Long and finely detailed reports
of these new buildings frequently featured in the local press, an indication of their novelty, status and importance. These grand buildings were viewed as an asset to the town by the local press, and by Mayors and Councillors who queued up to toast their arrival at opening ceremonies, luncheons and dinners, and made speeches in which they were eager to recognise the contribution of these cinemas to local culture.

One obvious exception to this pattern was Sidmouth, where progress was slower, resources not so forthcoming, and expectations somewhat lower. Following the removal of film exhibition from its temporary home in the Drill Hall, it was relocated in 1913 to a newly-created picture house consciously modelled on London standards, which immediately outstripped all other venues in terms of modernity and luxury: “It really was a replica of Oxford Street down to the smallest detail. The brilliantly illuminated front - the attractive vestibule, the attendants in Uniform, and the gazing crowd, all absolutely up-to-date.”82 The Sidmouth cinema could boast many of the refinements so necessary for social respectability, from its pretty pay box and plaster decorations to its richly upholstered tip-up chairs. To Low, such embellishment constituted “inept efforts to be dignified”:83 to Sidmouth audiences, unaccustomed to the glamour or the dazzle, these visual attractions, which were eagerly and proudly described by the newspaper, more than fulfilled expectations and “could be summed up in one word – perfect.”84

Luke McKernan’s observations on the brightness and exoticism which cinema buildings brought to dull urban scenes has a resonance here: “Next door to the rows of houses in identical style, shops and civic buildings, the cinema stood out as a place of glamour. Just as out of the darkness of its interior bright entertainment appeared on the screen, so the venue itself shone out among its surroundings.”85 In Sidmouth, the front of the cinema was said to be “formed of two arches richly ornamented with plaster decorations and at night outlined with rows of electric lights. A couple of huge flame arc lamps will make the exterior as bright as day.”86 Yet in 1913, Sidmouth’s picture palace represented exactly the type of compromise advised against by the trade manuals: it was not one of the new and shiny Electric Theatres or purpose-built picture houses which by then were clustered in most of its neighbouring towns and resorts, but was housed in the old Belle Vue restaurant, which had been empty and available to let for some time, and converted to the design of a local architect who whilst skilled, had no previous experience of cinemas (Fig.4.12).87 Yet this was one cinema designed to
suit its community, who from the outset felt a sense of ownership and pride in their new and unique facility. An editorial in the press suggested that “it is evident that if Mr. Ellis had not ventured on the enterprise, some outside agency would soon have come and perhaps been satisfied with a building of not nearly so palatial or creditable a character to the town.”88 This conversion from semi-derelict building to permanent picture palace seemed to mirror the cultural transformation effected on the town by the advent of the cinema. The amount of space devoted in the press from detailed descriptions of the cinema’s interior and exterior, construction, design, and opening, to accounts by visiting reporters and lengthy interviews with the proprietor, was unprecedented and indicative of the value placed on it by a town which, unlike other larger centres, had had little entertainment and few venues to choose from: for in “dear dull Sidmouth” one reporter asked, “what else can we turn [to] for an hours (sic) amusement during the dark, cheerless evenings.”89

Fig. 4.12. The Sidmouth Cinema. Courtesy of the Sid Vale Association
Cinemas in towns where amusement was plentiful offered additional attractions and comforts to entice customers in. Several venues offered chocolate, cigarettes, tea or light refreshments. Penzance Cinema also had its own orchestra, a centrally heated crush hall with palm trees, and adjacent cloak rooms, whilst the Electric Theatre, Weston, had three fans for summer coolness, and heating that would reach sixty degrees in fifteen minutes. The Electric Theatre in Torquay was heated by gas radiators, and boasted no less than three hundred lamps, most impressive at a time when electric lighting had not yet reached all parts of the town. The Picture Palace in Barnstaple constructed a reading room “to obviate any necessity of waiting”, whilst in the grand Regent Street Picture Theatre in Weston-Super-Mare there was “...the tea-lounge provided for the use of patrons, more particularly ladies, where they may read papers, magazines, write letters or take refreshments.” This picture theatre also boasted a balcony with sea views, its own orchestra, and a parcel service so that shoppers might have their purchases sent directly to the picture house for collection later. The Lion Palace of Varieties met the rather different needs of its own particular patrons by kindly offering to store owners’ cycles free of charge.

Whilst providing every possible comfort and luxury for their patrons, arrangements for their safety were also of vital importance. Following high-profile fires and disasters involving film screening widely reported in the local, national, and trade press, and the introduction of the Cinematograph Act (1909) which had regulated safety precautions in picture theatres, significant changes had occurred in the industry, an awareness of which was clearly reflected in cinemas locally. Long press articles explained in detail the position of the fire-exits, the number of panic bolts fitted and the entirely fire-proof qualities of the operating chamber, to reassure a public, potentially deterred from attending because of previous cinematograph dramas, of the safety of their local enterprise. Local cinemas were also cognisant of the need to demonstrate adequate ventilation and central heating, all familiar attributes for cinemas elsewhere. Whilst an editorial in The Bioscope grumbled about the practice of disinfecting auditoria during the performance and likened it to the workhouse, sanitising sprays were used widely and became part of the ambiance of cinema locally, and as “petrolin hygienic fluid and essence vaporisers” even took on a mystique of their own.

The potential anxieties and alienating effects of modern life on populations subjected to modern industrialisation and urbanisation are well documented. At the
time of cinema’s arrival, the initial part of this process of accommodation involved the industry and the press, and its readers and spectators: faced with the rapid technological shift which cinema represented the popular anxieties which arose needed to be accommodated by an industry eager for acceptance. Locally, this was often through the medium of a press able to glory in the new technology, and offer it up as a benefit to its readers and its community. Newspaper reports of new picture theatres revelled in the complexities of scientific and technical data, and measured in volts and candle-power the extremes of the new machinery’s capacity. Details of Pathé projectors, Wrench machines, and Westinghouse Mercury converters filled column inches of the local press to accompany the opening of new cinemas and lent them gravitas, helping to establish in readers’ minds that their local establishments were as modern and well-equipped as any others in the country. This kind of detail helped foster local pride, and linked their cinema – and thus their town, and themselves - to new ideas and to a sense of progress. In Cornwall, the Mayor thanked the proprietor, Mr. Ramsay, for “erecting almost solely at his own expense such a building as that”, declaring that “they would all experience feelings of pride that they now had in Penzance one more hall which was worthy of the town,” and one Torquay reporter remarked proudly that “the electrical arrangements are entirely novel to this part of the county.”98

An exemplification of modernity, electricity itself had the potential to alienate and to mystify. It seemed to have even the power to transform night into day: in Sidmouth, for example, readers were given the sensational information that the cinema dynamo could generate enough power to light up the whole of their High Street with ease.99 Tom Gunning, describing The Palace of Electricity at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, observes that “the new scientific era of electricity was presented as a strange and otherworldly spectacle” and quotes an observer from The World’s Work who remarked:

As you enter the Palace of Electricity you hear uncanny whirrings and snapping; you see electrical lights of hues and intensities that you never saw before; strange machines begin to glide or whirr or glow or click. The meaning of all these things is that electricity is put to more varied uses than ever before. 100

At the small cinema in Sidmouth, though the new electrical equipment was correspondingly modest in scale, reactions to it were equally strong: here, it was the
organised tours of the cinema’s new machinery which offered people their own local spectacle of technology:

    The switches and appliances are truly bewildering, and to the man in the street very awe-inspiring, but to Mr. Lennard, the master mind, who planned it all and carried it out from first to last, it is all A.B.C. This lever touched and up go all the lights, another pulled and one or two or three as required are operated. A big switch is pulled and a blaze like sunlight fills the chamber. It is the lantern arc burning, and for a moment or two we are blinded by its glare. ¹⁰¹

These spectators were initially both literally and figuratively dazzled by this new technology, which they found simultaneously alienating and attractive, and regarding its unprecedented and unfamiliar power with a mixture of awe, fear and delight. Yet here the cinema sought to negotiate these anxieties directly with its customers, who by visiting the cinema were able to share ownership of its new technology. Its advent in their locality provided evidence that their town too was part of a wider process of change and progress, and came to be viewed positively: “The projection machines are here also – two of them – both of the very best and latest type, wonderful pieces of machinery...fireproof, and giving a picture as brilliant and rock steady as at the finest Electric Palace in the world.”¹⁰² Much later still, the latest film processes and techniques retained the power to produce the same mixture of wonder and pride in spectators who felt themselves on the periphery of new technologies, as in the remote county of Cornwall, on the occasion of the arrival of Urban’s Durbar films and colour photography: “Although familiar to the frequent visitor to London, to the vast majority of residents of Penzance and its neighbourhood, Kinemacolor was but a name, and its wonders in no way comprehended.”¹⁰³

Metropolitan cinemas during this period were widely characterised by their availability, affordability, and accessibility: they could provide a warm, safe haven for women after shopping, an unprecedented form of freedom for children, or a brief escape from poverty for a penny. McKernan believes part of their attraction stemmed from “the degree to which cinema fitted in with people’s own sense of time, as distinct from other entertainment options or other forms of social activity (or, of course, the workplace)...”, and emphasises the importance of the continuous show, which allowed audiences a sense of control over their viewing practices and which fitted their everyday lives.¹⁰⁴

With its rolling programme of one-reelers and long opening hours, it was a model which
met the needs of suburban London audiences well. The trend was already well established there by the end of 1909, as an article entitled “How the Living Picture Craze is Spreading in London” noted: “In many of the suburbs, shops in the busiest thoroughfares have been converted into film shows and nearly all are doing big business. The majority ‘run’ all day, the afternoon being the favourite time for mothers to take their children.”

By contrast, few of the new cinemas in these resorts initially adopted a policy of continuous shows: indeed, only a few elected to become film-only venues. Cinemas in these regional resorts found a variety of ways to fulfil the needs of their patrons, adapting flexibly to the rhythm of rural working communities and seaside towns, and fitting in with a rather different “sense of time” in a very different social and spatial landscape. Cinemas locally were evidently not as ubiquitous, mostly charged more than a penny, and did not routinely provide long hours of film exhibition. Here, continuous performances were commonly a deviation from the more regular practice of separate shows, and were mainly used as a marketing strategy to draw crowds at certain special times. Thus the opening of the Barnstaple Picturedrome was marked with an evening of continuous performances and an invitation to “Come when you like! – Go when you like!” During the three days annually of Barnstaple’s annual Great Fair, films were continuously screened there between 2.30pm and 10.30pm to encourage the attendance of fairgoers and to compete with the bioscope shows at the fairground.

Shrewd managers, in touch with the communities they served, effected clever adaptations to performance schedules to suit the work patterns and everyday practices of their own clientele. Thus the Picturedrome in Barnstaple introduced special matinees for farmers, recognising that on market day afternoons they could capture an audience from this particular group of people who might only venture into town once a week. Cinema-going in Sidmouth began to embrace new and wider sections of the community and seemed unusually responsive to their needs. Shop-workers, historically burdened with excessively long hours, were empowered by the owner’s decision to alter screening times especially “to enable shop assistants to stay to the end of the performances.” In March 1912, the Torquay Picturedrome made an effort to accommodate all of its patrons by introducing an earlier finishing time to the programme for those who had to leave early, and by repeating the first portion of the programme at the end, for those who arrived late. In a further effort to please its patrons, this same cinema welcomed
any suggestion from patrons as to the class of pictures wished for - or in any way they think the entertainment can be improved, and if the ideas tendered are practicable, and tend to the benefit of the patrons generally, they will be acted upon." Many had to adopt appropriate strategies to cater for residents in winter and a changing clientele in summer. Cinemas in areas with high visitor numbers sought to exploit the commercial potential of the holiday crowds, and provided extra shows on high days and Bank Holidays, such as in Torquay, when the Picturedrome adapted its screening schedule to provide two special shows for the August holidays. In Burnham, a small resort close to Weston-Super-Mare, the management, hoping to capitalise on a rainy summer and pleasure seeking day-trippers, declared the Electric Theatre to be “Open every evening at 6.15. Matinees Wednesday and Saturday 2.30 and every Wet Afternoon.” Holiday crowds and weather were both variable and unpredictable: cinemas, realising that continued and regular custom came dependably from residents, sought to embed themselves in the local community and to promote picture-going as an established routine.

A number of strategies were adopted aimed at fostering a sense of ownership of local cinemas and which endeavoured to promote picture-going as a collective and shared experience. Rituals and associations were developed which linked spectators to the experience in a unique way. In Sidmouth, a “regular list” gave frequent cinema-goers a valued status and identity; special “blue-trip slips” were handed to patrons on arrival; uniformed attendants on first-name terms showed customers to their seats; notices flashed onto the screen requesting ladies to remove their hats and gentlemen not to smoke; a blend of disinfectant and perfume permeated the auditorium; and the ever-genial proprietor made a personal introductory speech before every performance. Competitions were a popular means of drawing spectators together and could invite their active participation. One in Barnstaple at the Picture Palace offered a prize of a silver watch for the best imitation by a member of the audience of Leo Alder, a Hebrew comedian and eccentric dancer, whilst the Electric Theatre in Torquay tied in a competition for local riders to performances by Astley’s American Circus and an unrideable mule. Special performances offered extra inducements to patrons: when the midget ‘Lady Little’ appeared at the Picturedrome, Barnstaple, each member of the audience was invited to receive a souvenir gift from her in person.
Cinema in the community

Links to the community were carefully forged and nurtured by many local cinemas, which served the dual purpose both of creating goodwill and reaching out to potential new audiences. The Torquay Picturedrome prioritised the importance of local news by throwing the results of the ward elections onto the screen just minutes after they had been declared, and announcing: “In future, anything of national or local interest, coming through whilst the show is in progress, will be at once made known by the use of lantern slides.”117 The Electric Theatre there appealed to “Torquay fanciers” to attend, when screening a film of “The life of the Racing Pigeon”.118 In the sensitive months running up to the First World War, the Electric Theatre in Torquay offered free entrance to members of the Torquay Veterans’ Association, and half-price seats for serving members of the Armed Forces, to its “Military Night” which promised a night of patriotic material including “Famous Battles of Napoleon”.119 Collaboration with local authorities and institutions was especially sought: officers from the local fire brigade can be seen together with cinema staff in a photo (Fig. 4.13) taken to accompany the screening of Clarendon’s Saved by Fire in Weston-Super-Mare in June 1912, in an example of co-operation between community and cinema which served the dual purpose.

Fig. 4.13. “Saved by Fire,” The Electric Theatre, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Library.
of broadcasting messages about fire safety and the dangers of overturned lamps, whilst at the same time using the opportunity to promote the Electric Theatre.

Many local cinemas used children as a bridge between themselves and their local communities, fostering good relations and nurturing potential new audiences by means of treats, competitions, free tickets, and by showing films of their involvement in local or distant events. The practice of making local individuals and activities into spectacle, had continuities with the traditional practices of photographers’ High Street studios, which still routinely displayed still photos of people and events to attract crowds to their shop windows. Cinemas often targeted organised groups, such as the Boy Scouts or the Band of Hope, which put them quickly in contact with large numbers of children, and often had the added advantage of thereby forging positive links with the local Church who so frequently exercised control over childrens’ leisure time. Thus, in Sidmouth, the proprietor offered free admission to West’s “Our Navy” to the Church Lads’ Brigade and the Boy Scouts, and in Barnstaple, in conjunction with Derby Mission School, hundreds of poor children were entertained at the Picture Palace. Footage of the Royal Review in Windsor, which included 170 Boy Scouts from Torquay, would no doubt have attracted scores of parents to the audience when it was screened at the Picturedrome the following week. Schools, too, were an obvious potential source of new customers for cinemas - one hundred schoolchildren were brought into the new Barnstaple Picturedrome from outlying areas to watch *Pygmalion* and film of the 1910 Derby free of charge, a generous gesture which evidently also helped publicise its opening. Some of these ideas for promotion undoubtedly came from manuals such as *How to Run a Picture Theatre* (1911), one of several sources of advice to proprietors on how to attract and maintain customers, including its younger ones. Organising an essay-writing competition was one such idea adopted by the Sidmouth cinema, which here was linked to, and thus encouraged attendance at, the screening of *Queen Bess*. Entertaining the children from the Workhouse for their Christmas treat, as the Penzance Cinema did in January 1913, was an apparently altruistic gesture, yet served of course to promote the standing and reputation of the cinema in the local community.

Locally, the cinema had created an entirely new and unique space for children, which offered an experience socially and culturally distinct from the other church-orientated and educational provision on offer (Fig. 4.14). Cinemas nationwide
welcomed large numbers of children and adolescents; as Luke McKernan has noted, this was not “some accident of policy on the part of the cinema trade...and it was on the habit of regular attendance that was inculcated in the young audience that the original cinema business in Britain was so successfully built.” Brian Lawrence, writing in *The Bioscope* after attending a children’s matinee in 1909, observed a “warm pulsating mass of excited little optimists” queuing up to purchase “a pennyworth of Paradise.” Most of the cinemas in these regional resorts made special provision for children in the form of Saturday matinees, with pocket money prices of 2d, or even 1d at Barnstaple’s Picture Palace or the Penzance Cinema. Since there were few films specifically for children, matinée programmes were generally identical to those of the rest of the week.
Censorship and morality

As cinema-going began to embed itself nationwide as a regular leisure pursuit, so questions regarding morality and censorship began to arise. In America, differing patterns of development within the industry, including the explosion of nickelodeon provision, combined to stimulate discussion and action much earlier than in Britain. The formation of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) at the end of 1908, who advertised their products as being “Moral, Educational, and Cleanly Amusing” was, as Tom Gunning notes, an attempt to appeal to “sterling middle class virtues”: “If the films released by the MPPC could be certified as inoffensive to middle-class morality it would be an important step towards achieving the Film Trust’s announced intention “to encourage in all possible ways the commendation and support of the moving picture business by the better class of community.” Shortly afterwards, in March 1909, The
National Board of Censorship was formed. In Britain, there was no co-ordinated mechanism by which films could be monitored with regard to public morality and suitability until the establishment of the British Board of Film Censors in 1913. With no nationally organised scheme of censorship in place, film exhibitors locally could be at the mercy of any one of a variety of authorities, from magistrates to police constables, each of whom might have the power to restrict performances or to withdraw films they personally considered unsuitable. This led inevitably to inconsistencies. Whilst a “Special Holiday Show” of pictures and music was enjoyed on Good Friday in 1910 in the Torquay Picturedrome, the manager of the Picturedrome in Penzance was obliged to seek approval for his special performance on Good Friday the following year, a request which magistrates felt inclined to refuse on grounds of immorality. Similarly, in Weston-Super-Mare, magistrates were able to intervene directly in the regulation of cinemas in the town: their consideration of a licence application from the newly opened Regent Street Picture Palace resulted in the granting of merely a temporary one for just a fortnight, and provoked both a review of all cinema licences in the town, and the decision to insert into the conditions certain new “safeguards” for the benefit of the public.

The exposure of children to uncensored film material, in particular, frequently gave rise to discourses in the London and local press. Since there was no national system of regulation for children’s cinema, their welfare fell to locally empowered individuals, such as local magistrates who could bring in legislation, or cinema managers, who were in a position to introduce their own rules. Authorities in Liverpool in particular had led the way by introducing tough conditions relating to film exhibition for children, which included no unaccompanied children under fourteen being allowed entrance after 6.30, and the requirement to submit to the police every Monday morning a list of all films to be screened, with only those judged suitable for children being allowed. It was a model debated in other places, including distant Weston-Super-Mare, where magistrates moved decisively to revise their own licence conditions. Weston magistrates, who had consulted directly with Liverpool magistrates over the issue, justified this paternalistic approach by reason of their own professional experience, stating that “...it is extremely unfair to get boys there at the children’s court and punish them for stealing, and things of that sort, when at the same time a license (sic) might be granted to allow those things to be shown...in a good many places,
Weston included, there seemed to be no supervision whatever as to the character of the films displayed.\textsuperscript{139} A lengthy and considerately-worded editorial in the Torquay Times, entitled “Our Youth and ‘The Pictures’”, having outlined in detail the Liverpool magistrates’ position, advocated a more liberal approach to the question, emphasising the social and cultural differences between the two towns, and advising that “Liverpool must not be compared to Torquay.”\textsuperscript{140} In Torquay, it was the Education Committee who had repeatedly discussed the question of children and picture theatres, and who held the power, as the press phrased it, “to introduce grandmotherly local legislation”.\textsuperscript{141}

Low believes this keenness in the industry for universal censorship arose largely because of just such examples of local vagaries, the “often irrational, incomprehensible and always unpredictable regulations” which frustrated exhibitors and manufacturers alike.\textsuperscript{142} The Bioscope consistently deplored the ability of this type of “arbitrary authority” to dictate to the film trade, and claimed to speak for the industry in seeking to create a National Association of renters, exhibitors and manufacturers and thereby introduce some form of self-regulation.\textsuperscript{143} The issue of censorship continued to be a problematic one, not least because of the “complex set of relationships” involved and the need, as Jeffrey Hill observes, to heed both “the commercial aspects of film and the tastes of the cinema going public.”\textsuperscript{144} The trade continued making this the subject of much debate and many articles, until November 1912 and the promised arrival of Mr. G.A. Redford as President of the newly formed Board of Film Censors, and manifested, as Low observes, an unusual degree of accord and agreement during the process of its achievement.\textsuperscript{145}

The morality of the cinema was persistently questioned and debated in contemporary discourses in the national press, church magazines, and film trade journals. Teachers, journalists, clergymen, members of charitable bodies and local councils repeatedly challenged the cinema industry with a range of accusations: film was said to corrupt young people’s minds, disturb their sleep, or turn them to crime. Examples were routinely cited of children who stole money to gain entrance to the cinema, or who having apparently witnessed criminal activities in a film, sought to imitate them. This impression of the corrupting influence of cinema transferred to local contexts, exemplified in Cornwall, where the story of a “Penzance Boy’s Extraordinary Theft” dramatically linked the young thief’s actions to a visit to the local picture
palace,\textsuperscript{146} and in Torquay, where a case of two boys breaking into automatic chocolate machines to steal money “to go to the pictures” was heavily reported.\textsuperscript{147}

Beleaguered by these criticisms, over many years the industry sought repeatedly and unsuccessfully to refute these claims of cinema’s evil influence on youth. \textit{The Bioscope}, which would continue tirelessly to defend its trade over the next few years, complained as early as 1910 of biased and unfavourable reports of the cinematograph carried in the national press, and deplored what it termed the “unfair attacks” from “journals of the reptile or crawling order”, and writers who were “silly old frumps” wishing “to see the world wrapped up in cotton wool.”\textsuperscript{148} Evan Strong, in his introduction to the first volume of \textit{The Illustrated Films Monthly} in 1913, drawing attention in his survey of the first years of cinema to some of the problems faced, noted that “[p]rejudice, ignorance and prudity have risen up in their manifold guises against the motion picture, and all have been hurled down and trampled underfoot.”\textsuperscript{149} Yet a few years later in 1921, Cecil Hepworth, in his editorial in \textit{The Hepworth Magazine}, still felt obliged to tackle the supposed link between crime and the cinema, a subject he confessed to find “detestable”. Hepworth pointed out that whilst in the past, crime might have been (wrongly) attributed to unsuitable reading matter, such as ‘penny dreadfuls’ and adventure stories, now it was too often linked to experiences of cinema:

> My instinct tells me that the old women of both sexes who condemn the cinema condemn themselves, either as unspeakable prigs or congenital idiots. My reason tells me that it is unwise to allow this weird tribe of killjoys to shriek curses on the kinema on every occasion that a small boy steals one of the lions from the Zoo.\textsuperscript{150}

Whilst most in the trade welcomed attempts at censorship, considering that it would uplift the reputation of cinema, there was a feeling that it might have a negative impact on the quality of films screened, expressed here by Colin Bennett, writing in \textit{The Kinematograph Year Book (1914)}:

> The public exhibition license is bestowed promiscuously upon maudlin, enervating, mush which, while nauseating enough to any healthy mind, would be calculated more particularly to sap the energy from young and impressionable brains. Rightly or wrongly I hold that the sight of a cowboy killing a bold, bad bandit is far less likely to be injurious to the average healthy child than some drivelling calf-love scene between a leering farmer’s boy and a smirking milk-maid.\textsuperscript{151}
Some articles in the daily press were thought-provoking and rationally argued: “Cinematographs: Truth and Fiction” for example, which appeared in *The Times* in April 1913, sought to explore the motivation which lay behind the impulse to visit the cinema. Somewhat controversially, it grouped cinema buildings together with public galleries, public houses, libraries and churches and asserted that “each offers some kind of resting room where you may recollect your human soul.” Comments from the public could be far less restrained – H.D. Rawnsley’s now celebrated tirade in response neatly encapsulates many of the prejudices about juvenile crime commonly held by the opponents of cinema, the heightened rhetoric of his letter contrasting sharply with the measured tone of the original article:

...before these children’s greedy eyes with heartless indiscrimination horrors unimaginable are in many of the halls presented night after night...Terrific massacres, horrible catastrophies, motor-car smashes, public hangings, lynchings, badger baiting, bull-fights, prize fights, pictures of hell-fire and the tortures of the damned etc. are passed before them...many children become petty pilferers to get pence for admission to the show, others actually begin their course of crime by reason of the burglary and pickpocket scenes they have witnessed...

Others feared that films exposed young people to too much emotion and excitement. An article entitled “The Cinema and the Child” which appeared in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* in February 1912, narrated a visit to a film show where children were found “supping on horrors” and advised: “The picture palace is no place for children as it is. If these moving picture exhibitions do not restrict their programme, the third generation will mean a race of individuals composed for the most part of types of the mentally exhausted, the incipient idiot, and the dangerous lunatic.” These melodramatic outbursts in defence of morality formed a continued discourse in the national press, and with an inherent hypocrisy, were often at least as sensational as the films to which they were objecting. Typically, such correspondents placed the responsibility for the moral welfare of children at the doorstep of the police, local authorities, schools, the industry, or after 1913, the film censors. These debates, when translated to other contexts, needed reappraisal according to local conditions. The editorial “Our Youth and The Pictures” which appeared in the *Torquay Times* in 1913, sought carefully to apply them to the town’s own particular environment, and ventured the rarely heard opinion that some young people, considered capable of work, could
take responsibility for themselves: “There are many youths and maidens in Torquay who, at the age of 14 years, have left school and commenced the battle of life. Are they to be prevented to be attending these entertainments after their day’s work is done, unless they are accompanied by their parents or guardians? The idea is altogether absurd.” The author sought to persuade his readers of the educative role of cinema, and reassured local readers of the respectability of their own picture theatres: “In Torquay there are three highly respectable picture houses, patronised by all classes of the community, and the introduction of anything of a questionable nature would do them infinite harm...if the slightest lack of taste were shown it would be quickly heard of, and steps taken to prevent its recurrence.”

When these national debates transferred to a local context, they became personalised in a community where the cinema operator’s role was a more prominent one, at a far remove from the remote and disinterested figure of his London counterpart. Thus, on the opening of the new Electric Theatre in Weston-Super-Mare in 1912, this accountability was openly passed to the new manager by a local councillor who hoped that “the theatre would be managed on high lines” since “public taste had been educated in Weston to expect good things.” Locally, it seemed opponents of the medium of film could attempt to hold a manager or proprietor personally accountable both for the perceived immorality of the industry as a whole, as well as for the youth of the town in question. In this way, general calls from anti-cinema campaigners to discourage children’s attendance at the cinema, became on the ground an attack on local businesses and local tradesmen. In April 1912, this debate came publicly and prominently to Sidmouth, where a consortium of local clergy, led by an Evangelist, published a letter in the local press entitled “Crime and the Kinematograph”. It was openly hostile, condemning what it termed “this growing evil” using the heightened rhetoric and well-rehearsed arguments familiar to opponents of the cinema. Citing two specific, distantly located cases of juvenile crime apparently traceable to cinema pictures as evidence, the four signatories urged “parents, Sunday School teachers and all who have the training of the young” to discourage them from “witnessing any sensational exhibitions which are likely to lead to the same results.”

This brief but caustic letter, wholly uncharacteristic of the correspondence columns of a local press more usually focused on charity bazaars and changes in the weather, provoked a number of responses, from the proprietor, parents and patrons of...
the cinema, and the press. Though not specified by name, the Sidmouth Cinema, being the only one in the town, was clearly implicated. Whereas a second letter from the clergy contended that “the question is becoming not so much a local, as a national matter,” Arthur Ellis, the cinema manager, sought first to argue a clear distinction between practices nationwide, and those of a local cinema in closer touch with its local community:

To read this letter, one would suppose that the Picture Palaces of Great Britain were veritable hotbeds of iniquity and spreaders of pernicious vice, and that my Cinema was just as debased as the others... I have succeeded in making and keeping, a respectable, well-conducted, clean and healthy place of public amusement which anyone may visit themselves, with their womenfolk or young children without fear of ever hearing or seeing anything that would cause the slightest shock to the most sensitive nature possible.

Questioning the sole authority of the Church, Ellis sought to position the cinema as an equally valid site in which moral instruction of the young could take place, where “[e]vil is condemned, the evildoer is greeted with groans and hisses. Good is extolled, the hero is cheered. Triumph of good over evil is always met with tumultuous applause.” Three years earlier, the National Board of Censorship in America had had similar aims in view, seeking to effect a transformation of status for film by its acquisition of a “moral voice,” and as Gunning explains “reinforcing a conception of film narrative as a form of moral discourse, a form that had a responsibility to present “moral lessons.” As cinema proprietor, Ellis appeared keenly aware of these possibilities for film, evidenced by his thoughtful, deliberate approach to programme planning which contradicted his critics. “Can such pictures as ‘The Siege of Calais,’ ‘The Battle of Trafalgar,’ ‘Joseph and his Brethren,’ ‘Saul and David,’ ‘Thrown to the Lions,’ ‘Drink,’ ‘Two Little Waifs,’ and hundreds of others be shown without a good influence attending the same.” As a local exhibitor, he clearly already acted as self-appointed censor in respect of the films screened, demonstrating careful consideration of their potential impact on young minds: “Take the story recently shown at our hall, ‘From the Bottom of the Sea’. Sensational, true. Yet what a picture. A lesson of bravery, faithfulness to duty, courage in the hour of death, and finally the right triumphant. That picture, I venture to say, will live in the minds of especially the boys throughout their lives.”
One strength of Ellis’s position lay in his ability to cite examples of his previous good practice, such as his collaboration with institutions which lay at the moral heart of the community - a local Reverend, the Church Lads’ Brigade and the Boy Scouts. He was able to appeal to this very community with which he had carefully established such a close rapport – hundreds of people reportedly offered him their support. Local residents who joined the debate defended the local cinema: one parent wrote to reassure of “the educative and amusing possibility of this wonderful instrument...which in the case of Sidmouth is never harmful, but on the contrary is usually both elevating and instructive.” The press, whose columns were regularly enlivened by dramatic accounts of forthcoming films, no doubt wishing to maintain this close working relationship, barely disguised their partisan stance. A short editorial suggested readers should visit the cinema to judge for themselves, advising: “Harmless entertainments can do no one any ill....To laugh is no sin. A visit to the Cinema will provide many an innocent laugh.” This was later repeatedly followed with the deliberately controversial juxtaposition in the paper, of correspondence from and photos of the objecting clergy, next to bold advertisements for the cinema, and subsequently with an amusing and mischievous “interview” with Ellis which satirised and ridiculed all the clergy’s claims and arguments.

Whilst Ellis’s responses could be well-evidenced and based on his past performances, by contrast, the clergy’s position appeared ill-informed, vindictive, and contrary to the interests of a local community pleased and proud to own a cinema. What began here as an assertion of the immorality of film broadened into an ideological tussle between church and cinema, and resulted in an engagement by Church, cinema, and community in a far wider debate which questioned matters of religion, ethics, class and patriotism, as well as morals. It highlighted the degree to which cinema had embedded itself in the local consciousness, and consequently, the importance and influence of the proprietor’s position within the community. In small and large communities, the relationship between Church and cinema could be a pivotal one: it is an ironic sequel to this conflict, that less than one year later, Evangelist Church services were being held in Ellis’s own cinema building.

The relationship between the local press, community and cinema could also be vital: in small closely-knit societies, newspapers performed essential functions beyond the obvious one of disseminating news, binding communities together through shared
experience and reinforcing a sense of local identity. Cinemas, which wanted to be seen in a beneficial light by the local community, could use the medium to promote a positive image. The press allowed local cinema a unique form of direct address to the reader/spectator, and was home to a new film discourse which played a key role in the emerging local film culture of the pre-war period. However, there was a considerable degree of variation in the relationship between cinemas and the press in each location. Some cinemas, such as Penzance, whilst viewed favourably by the local press, did not initially perceive the benefits of regular promotion through the medium: it was not until driven by competition from other new cinema provision in the town, that regular advertising and reviews began to appear. In other locations, the existence of two politically opposed newspapers resulted in differing relationships with each: in Torquay, for example, where the Liberal press had a long tradition of favouring high-class entertainment, it was the Tory paper, the Torquay Times, which carried the more detailed film synopses and enthusiastic cinema reviews.

The emergence of a popular film discourse in the press locally coincides with the arrival of motion picture story magazines in this country. Andrew Shail has debated the importance of these “fan” magazines to an emerging “uniform national film culture”, noting that the relatively small circulation of a publication such as The Pictures could not have serviced all the needs of the much larger cinema-going public. Shail advances the argument that these magazines coincided with the current popularity for short fiction, and cites editorials from The Pictures which demonstrated that their stories might function in a variety of ways: as fiction in their own right; to whet the appetite of the cinema-goer; or as reminders of a film watched, thus constituting a “logical afterlife of the lamentably ephemeral film-watching experience.” As early as January 1908, the North Devon Journal had taken the unprecedented step of printing the lengthy synopsis of the Colonial Picture Combine’s film The Story of the Kelly Gang, which filled an entire column of the back page. Divided into seven acts, it formed a sensational narrative, its dramatic impact heightened by the unfamiliarity of its context. This experiment seems not to have been repeated: it would be not until several years later that synopses of films about to be screened, routinely formed the subject of short narratives in the local press.

That one of the first places to do this was Sidmouth is unsurprising, given the need for cinema here to embed itself quickly and securely in a small community. The
process of establishing a cinema here clearly depended not only on the involvement of the industry and the audience, but also that of the press, who together formed a vital triangular relationship. The month of January 1912, when a semi-permanent cinema came into being here, marked the commencement of a new phase in this process. The regular screening of films became linked to the appearance of regular advertisements, reviews and reports, and an intermedial relationship emerged in which the cinema itself seemed to become news and the texts of the films screened became stories. Synopses of films formed simple narratives which previewed future screenings, but which could also stand alone as entertaining, melodramatic or sensational stories in their own right. Often the complete story, including the ending, was recounted. The advent of film in the town sparked a lively, compelling style of journalism which was an entirely new genre to a local press accustomed to conventional and dull arts reporting consisting of accounts of mainly amateur performances, and which would have more in common in tone with the relatively new phenomenon of film magazines. Advance notices of films, published programmes and reviews, started to form a lively and significant portion of the paper which, like film magazines also, made a direct appeal to readers in their new role as cinema-goers. The conversational tone was enticing, intimate and inviting. Repeated invitations to share the new experience encouraged readers to identify themselves with this emerging culture and forged a new relationship between reader/spectator, press and cinema. In a town of little activity, where the repeated cry was always of the dullness of local affairs, accounts of chases, villains, robberies and revenge were a substitute for real news and added spice and glamour. Articles about celebrated artistes such as Sarah Bernhardt seemed to bring her personally to the town, as indeed the advertisements for the film Queen Bess promised to do. Boundaries between fiction and reality became blurred: when a local paper carried the story of the actor who fell over the cliff whilst filming in Brighton, the report named him only as ‘Lieutenant Daring. His ‘real’ escape was reported as just another filmic episode, a “drama” which was “played out on a cliff-top eighty feet high.”

In Weston-Super-Mare, rinking and cinematograph had combined to form the basis of a dedicated weekly column in the Weston Gazette called “Runs Round the Rinks”. On one level, this lively and enthusiastic reporting provided a regular digest of the film shows and skating events in all the rinks across the town, mutually benefitting both the venues and the newspaper itself, by entertaining readers and attracting new
audiences and participants. Although of relatively short duration – the column was clearly redundant once the fashion for rinking had passed – yet it was nevertheless ground-breaking and constituted something of a milestone for the local press. With its chatty and intimate tone and direct appeal to younger readers, “Runs Round the Rinks” introduced a modern, light-hearted style of journalism which was well suited to its coverage of the two latest trends in entertainment. These press reports of hockey team triumphs and film-going also importantly acted as a type of film and entertainment magazine which unified cinema and rinking participants through their collectivised experiences, and fostered a sense of belonging to an exclusive group. Andrew Shail concludes that one function of the new motion picture magazines, in addition to the obvious one of marketing, was to overcome problems in the industry, such as the public unfamiliarity with American produced films, and the need to lead exhibitors to new titles.\footnote{174} Film discourse in the local press, whilst evidently much less systematic and more modest in scope, arguably also fulfilled some of the same functions, through its presentation of unfamiliar texts to inexperienced audiences, and by filling its columns with enlivening film stories to attract new audiences. Additionally, these stories entertained readers, regardless of whether they were potential cinema-goers, and enlivened the often dull repertoire of provincial newspapers. Most importantly, film discourse strengthened the bond between cinema and community, and contributed significantly to the formation of a new film culture locally.

After the decline in interest in skating in Weston-Super-Mare had caused the demise of its dedicated column in the paper, regular reporting of the cinema moved to the “Music and Drama” column in the Weston Gazette and began to be incorporated in a similar feature in the Weston Mercury headed “Places of Amusement”. Both columns sought to depict an entertainment culture for Weston which was increasingly vibrant and energetic, characterised by an enviable quality, diversity and vitality: the resort continued to offer traditional amusements, but also appeared progressive, forward-thinking and modern, and it was in this latter respect that the cinema, with its novel technology, splendid buildings and exciting new culture, could make a significant contribution. As the number of cinemas in the town increased, and the competition for customers intensified, these lively arts columns became an important arena in which the drama of the rivalry between them was played out publicly.
A similar site for cinema discourse was provided by one of Torquay’s two weekly newspapers, the *Torquay Times*. This paper had a well-established tradition of lively arts reporting, and in contrast to its Liberal counterpart, promoted a wide range of entertainment. Its “Summer Season”, “Public Amusements” and “People’s Pleasures” columns enthusiastically endorsed cinema entertainment and afforded it increasing amounts of space. In a town twice the size of Weston-Super-Mare, but with the same amount of cinema provision, competition for custom was perhaps not so overtly intense: reporting on film exhibition here appears more gently focused on the consumer, the choice of subjects, and the excitement of viewing films of major importance, than on the individual efforts of the cinemas to outshine each other, as in the Weston press.

Following years of inclusion within existing entertainments coverage, film was given its own long and prominent column, headed “Cinematograph News”. In picture magazine style, with photos interspersed with the text, this was ground breaking in its coverage of cinema news from around the world, with a primary focus on America. It began to introduce local spectators to the unfamiliar world of the American film industry, performing a similar function, as Andrew Shail has suggested, to the movie magazine. This brought a new awareness of an international community of people with an interest in film, to readers and cinema-goers in Torquay, who suddenly found a new identity for themselves as part of an expanding and world-wide film culture.

In general, therefore, cinemas in these resorts enjoyed positive and mutually beneficial relationships with local newspapers, which contrasted with the tensions which often surfaced between the cinema industry and the national press. In an article entitled “Picture Promotions” *The Bioscope* bemoaned the “prejudice and ignorance of the ordinary daily Press, which never tires of attributing conflagration, panic and disaster to the moving picture...” and in repeated articles, criticised some of the press for what it regarded as its consistently negative and unfair attitude towards the industry. There is no evidence at all to indicate that there was any friction between the press itself and the cinema locally. The contrary was true: cinemas and the local press developed a reciprocal relationship in which cinemas, perceived as both a social and cultural benefit to the community, collaborated with a press content to carry their advertisements, reviews and reports, which in turn brought them revenue and readers. In turn, the cinemas in Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare thus enjoyed substantial coverage on a weekly basis: short film titles were published in detail, and with the advent of the longer
feature, plots of these films were included as simple, short, yet complete narratives. The juxtaposition of these texts made comparisons between establishments simple for the reader or would-be spectator. Importantly, they focused attention on the primary tool used by all these cinemas to compete with one another – the programme, a subject which will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

1 Bioscope, 25 November 1909.
3 Bioscope, 12 August 1909. Bioscope, 28 October 1909; Bioscope, 28 October 1909.
4 The Era, 4 July 1896.
5 Bioscope, 8 July 1909.
6 Hiley, “Nothing More than a Craze?,” 120.
8 Bioscope, 2 September 1909.
9 World’s Fair, 30 October 1909.
10 Quoted in the Bioscope, 18 November 1909.
11 Hiley, “Nothing More than a Craze?,” 118.
12 Bioscope, 7 April 1910.
13 Board of Trade Company Registration files, National Archives, Kew: BT31/19117/106227, Penzance Palace and Skating Rink; Bioscope, 9 December 1909.
14 Bioscope, 9 December 1909.
15 WG, 5 February 1910.
16 Bioscope, 14 September 1911.
17 WM, 12 August 1911.
18 WM, 5 August 1911; WM, 12 August 1911.
19 WM, 5 August 1911.
20 WG 5 August 1911.
21 Bioscope, 27 October 1910.
23 NDJ, 19 October 1905; 29 October 1908.
24 Bioscope, 9 June, 1910; 16 December, 1909; 16 March, 1911; 22 June 1911.
25 Bioscope, 6 October 1910; Bioscope, 16 February 1911.
26 TT, 10 March 1911; Brian Hornsey, Ninety Years of Cinema in Torbay and Surrounding Areas, ([n.p.],1989), 12; Ibid, 17; Interview between Haslam’s grandson, John Wilson, and the author, 10 October 2008.
28 Bioscope, 3 July 1913.
31 Bioscope, 22 September, 1910; 9 June, 1910.
32 TDSDJ, 13 December 1911.
33 Board of Trade Company Registration files, National Archives, Kew: BT31/13487/113512, Torquay Electric Theatre; TDSDJ, 13 December 1911.
34 **TT**, 22 December 1911.
35 **Bioscope**, 22 September 1910.
36 **Bioscope**, 2 February 1911.
37 **Bioscope**, 5 August 1911.
38 List of company directors drawn from the Board of Trade Company Registration files, National Archives, Kew: BT31/13496/113217, Riviera Picture Palace, Penzance.
39 **CM**, 16 December 1911.
41 Hiley, “Nothing More than a Craze,” 118.
42 See Chapter Three.
43 **SO**, 26 February 1913.
44 Albany Ward, the Walford family, and Anderton and Rowland had all exhibited film in Sidmouth Figures from 1911 census, available from [http://www.1911census.co.uk](http://www.1911census.co.uk)
46 **Bioscope**, 4 January 1912.
47 **Bioscope**, 8 February 1912.
48 **SO**, 10 January 1912.
49 **SO**, 23 July 1913.
50 **SO**, 23 July 1913.
53 **TDSDJ**, 8 December 1909.
54 **CM**, 1 January 1910.
55 **WG**, 20 July 1910.
56 **NDJ**, 6 October 1910; **NDJ**, 27 October 1910.
57 Quoted in the **Bioscope**, 21 April 1910.
58 **WM**, 26 August 1911.
60 **TT**, 11 July 1913.
61 Board of Trade Company Registration files, National Archives, Kew: BT31/32107/117848, Cornish Riviera Entertainments, Penzance.
62 **CM**, 9 November 1912; **CM**, 23 November 1912.
63 **CM**, 20 November 1913.
64 **WM**, 22 October 1910.
65 **WM**, 5 August 1911; **WM**, 16 March 1912; **WG**, 10 May 1913.
68 **TT**, 10 December 1909.
69 **SO**, 19 February 1913.
70 *Kinematograph Year Book* (1914), 22.
71 Ibid.
73 **WG**, 22 March 1913.
74 **WM**, 3 May 1902.
75 **Bioscope**, 14 March 1912.
79 **Bioscope**, 15 June 1911.
80 **WG**, 22 March 1913.
Luke McKernan, “‘Only the Screen was silent...’: Memories of Children’s Cinema-going in London before the First World War,” Film Studies 10 (Summer 2007), 5.
Bioscope, 6 April 1911.
WG, 22 March 1913.
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CHAPTER FIVE

“ENTER THE DREAMHOUSE”: FILMS AND THEIR AUDIENCES,
1909 -14

“Enter the dreamhouse, brothers, sisters, leaving
Your debts asleep, your history at the door:
This is the home for heroes, and this loving
Darkness, a fur you can afford.”

The rapid arrival of cinemas in metropolitan areas and their significant impact on the leisure habits of the city has been often commented upon by film historians. An editorial in *The Times* in 1912 noted the rising popularity of cinematograph shows, and argued that they posed a threat to the music halls: just as theatres in London had suffered from “growing encroachments upon their province” by the music halls, so in turn music halls now feared the incursion of cinemas into their territory, with their tendency to “take up some of the functions of the halls.”

Films, however engrossing, do not appear fully to satisfy all the cravings of those who patronize the cinematograph shows. They want music as well, and when they have got instrumental music they want singing too. When once the managers have command of these two attractions in addition to their pictures, no great ingenuity can be needed to combine the three so as to form a musical sketch.

Furthermore, as the article went on to point out, there was “nothing to hinder theatres and music halls from offering picture entertainments if they see fit.” Whilst these arguments were ones primarily devised to oppose to the policy of Sunday opening of cinemas (when music halls and theatres were obliged to remain closed), they also highlighted the degree of overlap between two forms of mass entertainment, the well-established music hall, and the newly arrived cinema. In the South West resorts, the term “cinema” was certainly a nuanced one, since this was a period in which film here was rarely allowed to appear alone. Film itself played a varied role in programmes shaped by many elements which included the amount, length and genre of films, the number, type and class of variety acts, the musical or other items accompanying it, and the capacity, location, budget, and intended audience of the cinema in question. All of these varied subtly from one site to another. Yet these blended entertainments, with
their differing emphases, aims and audiences, all conformed in some way to a definition of cinema locally which showed itself to be both broad and inclusive.

At the Picture House: the programme, 1910-1

Throughout this period in these South West resorts no single model of exhibition was universally adopted, and a broad diversity of practices and strategies co-existed. Amongst prevailing exhibition practices it was the variety model, in which film was screened alongside a wide range of acts, which continued to predominate and thus had many continuities with the exhibition practices which had existed in the early years of cinema. These traditional practices transferred to the new fixed venue sites, such as the Electric Theatre in Torquay, and the Picturedrome in Barnstaple, which both opened immediately with combinations of film and variety acts, drawing upon diverse patterns of performative practices which had continuities with the fairground, the music-hall or the menagerie. At a time at which some new cinema buildings in these South West resorts were still being designed and adapted to accommodate the variety format, and continued to include stages, proscenium arches, and dressing rooms in their design, many elsewhere in the industry had already moved on, as Rachael Low explains: “The question of whether the programme should be interspersed with song slides or variety turns, too often inferior, was the centre of another sharp controversy...variety turns persisted well into 1912 in the provinces although they had long ceased to be popular in London.”

In fact, in some South-West venues, they ‘persisted’ much longer still, even to the First World War and beyond. In Barnstaple, for example, both picture houses offered performances of variety and films combined, the balance between these two elements altering and shifting to reflect new trends in the industry or new styles of management. The arrival of both the Picturedrome and the Picture Palace almost simultaneously – as previously mentioned each opened in the same month in 1910 – meant that both were seeking to become established and attract new audiences at the same time. In the absence of significant visitor numbers, both venues operated winter seasons only from 1910-13, seeking instead to attract a regular clientele from Barnstaple’s residents. In addition to the appearance and facilities of the picture theatre
itself, the role of the manager was crucial in this respect: it was his choice of films, and in some cases, variety acts, which were blended together and formed the programmes on which the identity of the cinema itself largely depended. Lewis Melville, writing in *The Bioscope* in 1911, articulated at length the difficulties inherent in this role:

This is a duty not so easy as it may sound to some. There are good pictures, and indifferent pictures and bad, and also suitable ones and unsuitable. He [the manager] has to take into account the taste of his audiences – and this is supremely difficult, though to a certain extent is guided by the locality in which his palace lies, since each neighbourhood requires different catering....whereas the theatre clientele exists, he has to create a following for the newer entertainment. And the final court of appeal is ...the manager, who selects the films he shows. In his hands is the ultimate decision, and according to the judgement he possesses and exercises will he in the long run be rewarded.7

Within days of opening, the Picturedrome sought to distinguish itself as a respectable and legitimate picture house, inviting dozens of schoolchildren to a film-only performance of *Pygmalion* (1910), *The 1910 Derby* and a combination of “thrilling” short dramatic and comic pictures.8 The early programmes here, with their sequences of numerous, discrete film spectacles, retained continuities with Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions”, and still demanded audience participation: the children here responded throughout with “tumultuous applause.”9 The following month, the management of the Barnstaple Picturedrome widened its appeal to the surrounding agricultural community, with *From the Old Home to the New*, a tour through Canada which featured “wheat harvesting and warehousing”, primarily designed to attract new emigrants from British farming communities.10 Whilst this performance was the result of a business arrangement between the cinema and the local Canadian Emigration Office – a representative from the Canadian-Pacific Railway was on hand to give advice on each occasion – it was nevertheless presented as an entertainment and incorporated into a programme of selected films, singers, and serpentine dancers.11

The equally new Lion Picture Palace launched itself with a flurry of dramatically punctuated advertisements, which mixed details of films and variety turns indiscriminately together, and which addressed readers colloquially and convivially
(Fig. 5.1). Its promises of sketches by “Music Hall Artistes” and prominent references to the Oxford and the Tivoli, appeared to point to a desire to position itself as Barnstaple’s music hall in miniature, and to have a broad appeal to audiences. It was a world in which the “Handcuff King” was prioritised over the late King, and in which vaudeville dominated over film. Here, when the cinema had the advantage of screening the film of King Edward’s funeral procession before its rival, it minimised its importance on the bill, instead giving precedence to Mauritius, the escapologist, and “the light comedian, Arthur Savory,” variety acts both undoubtedly less famous, but considered more diverting, than His late Majesty.13

![Early advertisement for the New Lion Palace, Barnstaple, North Devon Journal, 24 November 1910.](image)

Fig. 5.1. Early advertisement for the New Lion Palace, Barnstaple, *North Devon Journal*, 24 November 1910.

In these resorts, at the cinemas, the term “variety” was a broad one, encompassing the widest possible diversity of acts drawn from the traditions not only of variety theatre or the music hall, but also from classical concerts, opera, theatre,
church, foreshore entertainments, shop-shows, circus, fairground and menagerie. In 1911, the introduction of “high-class variety entertainments” into the programmes of film at the Victoria Hall in Weston-Super-Mare resulted in ever more various acts, ranging from mental telepathy experts to Welsh choirs, and even extending to a special sacred vocal concert, in the management’s quest for new audiences. This decision to diversify away from film-only cinematographic sessions was made by a Victoria Hall management under pressure from the newly opened Electric Theatre, and which in an already competitive market for film exhibition, was in the summer season without the additional attraction of skating.

The managers, Shanly’s, moved to continuous film exhibition in the summer months, with programmes of short comic, dramatic and travel items such as *Across the Plains* (1911), *The Animated Armchair* (1910), films of famous rivers and of Windsor McKay, a cartoonist from the *New York Herald*. Reports of these performances, which were long and enthusiastic, prioritised film over other amusements, and mentioned both the appreciation of the audiences and large attendances for these programmes. Yet just a few months later, the Victoria was giving the impression of a venue struggling to survive in face of the intense competition from other providers of cinema in the town. Forced to seek innovative ways in which to compete, in January 1912 the management diversified the programme once again, and in addition to the roller-skating and programmes of short comic and dramatic pictures, took the unusual step of introducing boxing evenings. These “pugilistic exhibitions” offered spectators the chance to witness local and championship matches, and quickly became a chief feature. In the months during which rival cinemas in Weston were screening the Durbar films and important films such as *The Colleen Bawn* (1911), the Victoria Hall was offering *Back to the Soil* (1911), *The Way of the Eskimo* (1911), *Bobby and his Donkey* (1911), *Tiny Tom, Detective* (1911), and *Billy and his Friend* (1911). These films and variety programmes were not sufficient to save Shanly’s Victoria Hall, which for a while had led the way for film exhibition in the town: with the demand for rinking already waning, and an Electric Theatre newly opened, the Victoria Hall was taken over in March 1912 by Albany Ward.

There is much evidence to suggest that many managers in these resorts sought to maximise audiences, and thus profits, by tailoring the programme carefully – both the
acts and the films – to the specific needs of their local audiences. The Electric Theatre, Torquay, provided an example of yet another variation on the variety model. Completed in late December 1911, uniquely amongst these resorts, it was entitled a ‘Picture Playhouse’, which hinted at the mixed programme it would offer. It delivered a variety entertainment which it termed “refined”, borne out by moderately expensive seat prices of 3d, 6d and 1s. Here, the management’s strategy was a slightly unusual one: putting on three discrete performances daily, at 3, 7, and 9pm, the cinema engaged a series of high-class sopranos, baritones, pianists, and humorists to entertain in addition to the films. These performers, which would have been equally at home in a concert hall or opera house, would have been designed to attract a more discerning audience, possibly new to cinema-going, drawn from a Torquay society accustomed to accessing high quality, refined entertainments, for as an editorial comment in the Torquay Directory had previously observed, Torquay was “not a music-hall town.” This Electric Theatre chose, moreover, to use its visiting artistes discreetly and selectively, only including one in each weekly programme. Whilst select performances, such as the “Grand Souvenir Night” in late December 1912, were occasionally organised for special dates, with several vocal artistes and a programme of films, routinely it was the films which were prioritised on the advertisements, the reviews, and the programmes. The Torquay Electric took the trouble to specify which films it was showing, and provided carefully selected blends of travelogues, comic offerings, as well as star films such as Molly Pitcher (1911) and Romeo and Juliet (1912), films of note and distinction that would match in quality and status the variety performers engaged.

The rinking boom, which overlapped the rush of speculative investment in the cinema industry, had a significant impact on entertainment businesses in the South West, as previously noted. Rinking, where operating in tandem with film, also had a direct influence on the way entertainments were structured and film schedules. Nicholas Hiley has documented the astonishingly rapid growth of the rinking industry, which led to the establishment of more than twenty metropolitan rinks and three hundred nationwide at the beginning of 1910. In these resorts, the fashion for skating gave rise to a great many new venues, or drew new crowds to existing ones, with piers, Drill Halls, and even theatres being pressed into use, requiring only a large, and hopefully smooth, surface as a basis for a business. Many here saw an opportunity to combine the two latest crazes, and brought the cinematograph and rinking together under one roof.
In many ways, they were ideal partners: together they could provide continuous entertainment which stretched from ten in the morning until ten at night; both adapted readily to the large, underused spaces of piers and halls; and both appealed to a new, broadly inclusive patronage of all ages and both sexes, as a visiting reporter testified:

Mr. Race kindly piloted me skilfully across the track over which agile skaters darted, swayed, swerved and circled in a bewildering, kaleidoscopic throng. People of every age – certain and uncertain- and like myself, to the very tiny totlets with ringlets and chubby cheeks were whirling round in a never-ending stream. “Come and look at the pictures,” said the manager, and away we went to a portion of the spacious gallery set aside for the exhibition of cinematograms. The management is to be congratulated, on catering as far as possible for the tastes of everybody.25

The popularity of film coincided with a public craze for roller-skating which Weston-Super-Mare adopted with a passion, sharing its venues and column inches in the press. For two years, rinking was the predominant leisure activity in the town and looked likely to outshine its partner, the cinematograph. The weekly local press column, “Runs around the Rinks”, asserted the town’s determination to act as it pleased, faced with the knowledge that the trend had already lost popularity elsewhere: “Despite all the gloomy prophecies of the ‘Financial Outlook’, a paper which avers that the popular pastime is already a burst bubble, it is after all, the World and his Wife who regulate success, and at present nothing seems likely to dethrone the now favourite method of rolling along a portion at least of life’s thorny road – in Weston at any rate.”26 Indoor provision had the advantage of being able to guarantee skating daily, since it was predominantly a winter amusement. In 1910, a new maple floor on the Grand Pier was home to roller-skating, the old Pier reopened its rink, whilst the Victoria Hall, owned by the London based firm of W.M. Shanly, was divided into two separate areas, and provided a skating rink and dedicated cinematographic room.27 Skating was divided into three sessions, with animated pictures shown twice daily at 6.45 and 8.45. A number of strategies were adopted to attract both new participants for skating and new audiences for films: special film matinees were provided for children; skating sports were organised which offered prizes of cigarette cases for men and silver hairbrushes for ladies; and books of tickets were available which offered reduced admission prices to the hall.
In Penzance, varied programmes of films were shown in separate performances twice nightly, whilst the adjacent rink brought novel amusements such as skating carnivals and fancy dress evenings to the town. It was hugely successful and drew praise from the local press: “The public have taken to this popular indoor recreation in a most hearty manner which proves that such a place was badly needed in our midst.”

Torquay’s earliest cinema, the Picturedrome, also had both a maple floor and a picture screen, and divided its weekly programme between rinking and film entertainments, with Saturdays and Mondays being reserved for the cinematograph, and Tuesdays through to Fridays for roller-skating from 11am to 10pm. Throughout 1910 and 1911, the first two years of its existence, it had a monopoly as the sole permanent venue for film in Torquay – conversely it was the roller-skating at the Picturedrome which faced stiff competition from other rinks at the Bath Saloons and on the Princess Pier. William Mellor adopted a strategy of using the cinematograph as an added attraction to rinking, screening a film “during skating” sessions on three nights a week. Conversely, skating drew new crowds to participate in novel events such as rink hockey matches, roller-skating gymkhanas and skating carnivals. Skating also opened up the venue to new social groups: Agatha Christie recalled in her autobiography mornings spent with groups of young ladies on the rinks of Torquay, since significantly, this leisure activity had the added advantage that women could freely participate in it, and whether married or unmarried, could skate alone in the daytime, having their own rink hockey teams, matches and sports.

The Torquay Picturedrome’s film programme was at least as important as the skating which partnered it: offering “a revelation to Torquay audiences,” William Mellor’s programmes, in fact, leant towards the patriotic, the classical and the historic. Detailed programmes were published in the press, and 1910 and 1911 were years which brought him the exclusive opportunity to screen film of important public events such as the funeral of King George, the unveiling of the Queen Victoria Memorial in London, or the Coronation procession. Programmes included the weekly “Animated Gazette”, Pathés’ Gazette, or the Warwick Bioscope Chronicle, which helped to keep local audiences in touch with worldwide events. These, and films such as that of the opera Faust (1907), The Fall of Troy (1911), A Tale of Two Cities (1911) or Selig’s Lost in the Jungle (1911), established the cinema as a place of respectable and refined entertainment. The Picturedrome’s programmes also often noticeably sought to draw
audiences together in a shared exhibition of patriotism: actual footage of events such as Lord Kitchener’s inspection of Boy Scouts or the Pageant of Empire Festival at the Crystal Palace, was woven together with episodes from series such as Clarendon’s 

*Lieutenant Rose and the Royal Visit* (1911) to form an entertainment highly suited to the patriotic interests of Torquay audiences.\(^38\) Alex Marlow- Mann notes how many series of this latter kind fed into the “xenophobic anxieties” of the pre-war spectator: “the *Lieutenant Daring* and *Lieutenant Rose* films, with their plots to assassinate royalty, and their spies, anarchists and exotic but threateningly ‘other’ foreigners, reflect not only an imperialist mentality but also fears about the changes that the early twentieth century was bringing.”\(^39\) Mellor’s Picturedrome was lively and up-to-date and responded to customer demand: he introduced the cinephone in January 1910, thereby developing an intermedial show with pictures and music together; he secured the latest films such as those of the Delhi Durbar, and screened them soon after their arrival; he devised thoughtful and well-constructed programmes which, combined with his skating facilities, endeavoured, as he advertised them, to “suit all tastes”.\(^40\)

**The long film**

In contrast to other models of cinema, venues purporting to be ‘film-only’ arrived relatively late in these resorts. The Electric Theatre opened in August 1911 in Weston-Super-Mare with the recognition that it was different from the three other venues showing film in the town: it was “the first building to be erected in Weston primarily and wholly for the purpose of the Kinematograph business” and vowed to set “a high standard.”\(^41\) This new purpose-built picture theatre sought to distinguish itself from these, implying that whilst others merely dabbled in cinematograph exhibition, the Electric Theatre was a specialist in the field (*Fig. 5.2*). Advertisements emphasised the credentials of the new manager, Mr. Marston, who had previously worked at the London Polytechnic, and marketed a superior standard of exhibition which it claimed
Fig. 5.2. The Electric Theatre, Weston-Super-Mare. Courtesy of Weston-Super-Mare Library.

was “free from flicker”.\footnote{42} In the absence of other additional attractions to draw in customers, the Weston Electric Theatre made much of its programmes and provided increasingly detailed accounts of films, giving synopses, and describing lengths of film or the latest technologies in an unprecedented way, always being, as it explained, “ever on the look-out for something entirely original in the world of cinematography to bring before the audiences.”\footnote{43} With the only additional attraction being the “effective accompaniments at the piano” of the manager’s wife, the Electric Theatre in Weston was the first, and remained for some time the only picture theatre to concentrate solely
on film entertainment. In contrast to other cinema provision in the town, the Electric initially distanced itself from the cowboy dramas and comic films more routinely offered by its main competitor, the Victoria Hall, and the Knightstone Pavilion, which had recently also begun to call itself a “picture theatre”, and focusing on promoting programmes characterised by their “selectness”, began to feature ‘star’ films such as *The Colleen Bawn* and *The Black Arrow* (1911). When therefore, as Roy Armes describes, “the feature-length film...burst upon the British cinema in 1912-13”, which could contribute towards the creation of the distinctive programme needed to compete with its opposition, the Weston Electric was ready and well positioned to take advantage of this new development.

The shift towards making longer films which had began to occur in Britain from about 1910 onwards was not paralleled by American production companies. Whilst feature length films were screened in America, their provenance was predominantly European, since as Ben Brewster explains, American production was concentrated on short films destined to supply the ubiquitous nickelodeons or shop-front shows. Film production and exhibition were thus locked together in a limiting relationship, in which economic considerations were allowed to dictate to aesthetic ones. Exhibitors here required numerous films to attract repeated custom to their continuously screened and frequently changed programmes, which, Ben Brewster argues, they were forced to obtain from coalitions of producers who controlled the market:

Such a system effectively tied all parties to the thousand- foot reel unit; exhibitors needed a standard length module to construct their programs and had no room in them for anything longer than the two-reeler or rare three-reeler; producers, committed to extremely demanding schedules of production for their regular program of short films, did not have the immediate capacity to develop regular feature production alongside short film production.

Differing dominant practices in Britain, in which film exhibition moved from travelling and temporary accommodation, to permanent sites with capacity and comfort, arguably contributed to the success of the long film here. Nicholas Hiley notes the importance of considering the medium within its economic context, and observes that
whilst the traditional pattern of short films had suited shop-shows and fairground, the new cinemas demanded something different: “By 1914 it was obvious that the new generation of picture-goers was prepared to spend much longer in the auditorium, and would tolerate individual films which lasted for twenty minutes or half an hour, rather than the five to ten minutes of the earlier travelling shows.”

Amy Sargeant concurs, suggesting that “the shift at the end of the 1900s towards the production of longer films and self-standing programmes (dispensing with elephants and variety turns)” arose from a need to attract “patrons prepared to pay for novelty, comfort and for content directed, perhaps, at more elevated tastes.”

Roy Armes does not consider the growth of the longer film to be attributable to either the demands of either the exhibitor or spectator, concluding that feature-length films grew not organically out of existing film forms, but from “contact with other art forms and ... a desire to emulate the successes of the legitimate theatre”, emphasising in particular the influence of melodrama on cinema.

The emergence of new techniques, such as parallel editing - the interweaving of simultaneous lines of narrative development within one film - facilitated “a new continuity of narrative logic”, and addressed some of the problems which the new longer films began to pose, as Tom Gunning elucidates: “With its specification of temporal/spatial relations, its effect of an omniscient point of view on action, it is exemplary of the techniques that begin to allow films to formulate works that aspire to the genres of the novel and drama.”

The emergence of films of ever-increasing length, which were made possible by developments in technology, enhanced by new techniques, facilitated by the move to fixed-venue sites and influenced by other cultural forms, instigated a profound cultural shift which affected producer, exhibitor, spectator and press alike.

_The Bioscope_, aware of resistance to this development from some in the industry, published “A Plea for the Long Film”, in which L. Stanford Cook deplored this tendency, accusing many exhibitors of “setting their faces against the long films.”

He argued that the public themselves were ready for a change, no longer finding short films stimulating or novel, and set out the advantages to the exhibitor of the longer film, which, he argued, could offer fine scenery, good actors, and interesting subjects:

To get your better, your satisfying play, you must have longer films, and that is why the long film is bound to reach the highest pinnacle of public favour. Why, therefore, should the manager complain? Let him bill one or
two long films as an evening’s entertainment, and let him arrange for a few minute’s interval between the acts... and he will not find that his patrons object to the new conditions.55

Longer films, however, did not fit so well into the cine-variety programme, with its reliance on film as one of a series of short attractions; nor was it easily accommodated, as the article pointed out, into the continuous programme, where it might be interrupted by the “irritating bustle” of spectators departing and arriving.56 Rachael Low sees a financial motive for this disapproval by exhibitors who believed that the appeal of the cinema to its audiences lay in variety: “People went to picture theatres rather than to ‘real’ theatres, it was felt, because there they had comedy, drama, interest, and news in one programme and because they could walk in at any time and pick up the thread within a few minutes, when a new film began.”57 In an article in The Bioscope entitled “Picture Politics” in 1912, addressing the question of the long film, the columnist “Flickergraph” mooted the idea of a “revolutionary change”, consisting of the emergence of a two-tier system within cinema provision, in which there would be a correlation between length of film and size of cinema: thus the “present usual type of programme” of films of 1,000 feet or less would be shown in smaller cinemas, whilst in those with a seating capacity of thousands “complete dramas or musical comedies” would be exhibited.58 Whilst this vision of cinema to come would prove itself to be somewhat misplaced, the questions posed by “Flickergraph” to exhibitors everywhere were very pertinent:

...where is this mania for “feature films” leading us to? Where is it leading you, Mr. Showman? You may say you are doing good business, at present with exclusive feature films. But what’s going to happen when the man up the street, and the one down the street, the man opposite, and the one round the corner, what will happen when they are all running feature films? What will the public say? That’s the question that you will have to answer before long.59

Exhibitors could not simply disregard the issues raised by the presence of longer length films: they had to address their existence, and make the decision, either to adapt their existing schedules and programmes in order to accommodate them, or to maintain and develop competitive entertainments which did not include them. The impact of these developments filtered through to the regional cinemas, where a variety
of exhibition practices currently prevailed. The decisions made by cinema managers in the South West resorts under consideration as to whether to adopt longer and feature-length films into the programme were enormously influenced by conditions locally. These depended on a number of factors: the perceived tastes and needs of their regular clientele; the success and popularity of the existing programme; the number and style of rival cinemas in each location; the seating capacity and ticket prices of each individual picture theatre and the consequent economics of renting longer, and more expensive films.

Following a month which had witnessed the screening of the Delhi Durbar films by both the rival cinemas in Torquay, the Picturedrome attempted to stake out some territory for itself with which its audiences could begin to identify: it advertised itself as “The Original Picture-House”, with “The Celebrated Pathé Frere’s (sic) Historical Subjects and Topical Events a Speciality.” The cinema’s marketing policy was now predicated on the effectiveness of the feature film as a means by which to create a separate identity and a loyal customer base. Starting with *Notre Dame de Paris* (1911), and *The Two Orphans* (1911), it published a long and confident statement of intent which promised: “...no shoddy or second-rate films find a place in the programme. Another stupendous programme has been arranged for tomorrow, some thousands of extra feet, including the great coloured historical set, *A Court Intrigue* (1911) and *The Three Musketeers* (1911) will be projected...” With programmes composed of this “excellent fare” the Picturedrome hoped to distinguish itself from the Electric Theatre, with their offerings of trick films, fire dramas and cowboy romances. However, as a weapon with which to compete, the long important film could be something of a double-edged sword: obviously rival cinemas could adopt a similar strategy, and in April 1912 it was the Electric Theatre, and not the Picturedrome, who first featured Selig’s *Christopher Columbus* (1912).

Yet the long film had other perceived benefits, having the potential to draw a different type of customer to the picture theatre, as Andrew Higson elucidates: “...adaptations of classic literature and patriotic costume dramas were central to the relative revival of British production in the early 1910s. They were also an integral part of the simultaneous bid to move upmarket, to establish an aura of respectability around cinema, to cultivate a middle-class quality cinema.” Advertisements from the
Picturedrome, Torquay, evidence a management following just such a policy, and trying to influence public perceptions and prove the cultural credentials of the film industry, such as the following: “We are to have tonight... ‘After darkness – Light’, a film nearly 3,000 feet in length, one scene of which alone cost £240 to stage. Five or six years ago the possibility of a real or virile drama springing from the apparently slight and limited material offered by the cinematograph would have been scouted as absurd; today it is an accomplished fact and these dramatic pieces which are being shown are quite as much a serious work of art as the ordinary productions of the legitimate theatre.”66 The Picturedrome, therefore, stuck to its policy, routinely celebrating the length and cost of the films it was promoting, and focusing on the important adaptations and dramas which it shrewdly assessed to be the future face of cinema: featuring two and three-reelers from companies such as Selig, Itala, Pathé, Bison, Cinés, Barker’s, Nordisk, Gaumont, and Vitagraph, and showing films such as *The Relief of Lucknow* (1912), *The French Spy* (1912), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1912), or *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1912).67 It confidently asserted in its advertisement columns: “Undoubtedly the future of the up-to-date picture show, is the screening of the long film, dealing with the drama, and to which so many of the legitimate actors are turning serious attention. This, for months past, has been watched by the management of the Picturedrome, thus it is we find pictures of this description of late so much in request.”68

Yet consistently screening long films week by week was in some respects also a risky strategy: evidently those who disliked the prospect of any one particular film might simply avoid certain performances altogether. Some managers still believed that to offer a variety of short films, perhaps accompanied by other entertainments, was to play safe and please the majority. After nearly a year of promoting long films, William Mellor took the rather unusual step of publicly lamenting the fickleness of audiences in the local press, following disappointing houses for two major films:

A film of sterling worth, well “banked up”, was the fine Vitagraph film “The Money Kings”, and although such was by not any means the case, the enterprise of the proprietor well deserved an overflowing coffer. Like “The Pilgrim’s Progress”, “The Money Kings” deserved record houses, and one is at a loss sometimes to understand what the public really desire in pictures.69

In simple economic terms, films such as these could mean a large investment with no safe guarantee of a return. By the start of 1913, Mellor had extended his programme to
three and a half hours in length, nearly twice the length of some, unusually combining
his preference for “complete story films” with a continuous-show policy. This could
be an expensive strategy: whilst long films by definition filled more time, they could be
costly, especially when screened shortly after their release. To rent the film Colleen
Bawn would have cost £4 per week in January 1912, and At the Bottom of the Sea £7.
The weekly feature film list for Butcher’s for May 1913, shows that rates for each one
varied from between £1 to £4 for just three days hire: thus Shaughran (1912), just one
of the films screened by the Torquay Electric Theatre in one of their May programmes,
would have cost £2, or When Lee Surrenders (1912), screened there the following week,
cost £3 15s at the time of showing. With five to ten films in each programme, and seat
prices of 3d, 6d and 1s, cinemas needed a constant flow of customers just to cover rental
costs. As one of the larger picture theatres, the Torquay Electric appeared to do this
successfully: in its first ten months of trading it reported a turnover of £4,886, with
profits in excess of £2,000.

The Bioscope speculated that the longer film, in particular the exclusive, was
suited to larger picture theatres, contending that “the showman owning a theatre of
small-seating capacity cannot afford to pay £20 or £30 extra per week for a film that is
boomed by the manufacturers as the last word in cinematography whereas his near
neighbour with a large theatre, can afford to speculate, putting the small man at a great
disadvantage.” The marketing of films as “exclusives”, a system by which renters
could secure the sole rights to screen certain important films, was rapidly embraced by
all of the big dealers and led to steep rises in prices for certain exceptional films such as
Quo Vadis (1913) or British and Colonial’s The Battle of Waterloo (1913). The prices
of exclusives, as Rachael Low states, “seemed fantastically high” and inflated prices
dangerously. Low Warren, writing in the Kinematograph Year Book (1914), noting
the tremendous expansion in exclusives, noted that they had little to recommend them to
“the astute showman”: whilst they provided a competitive edge for a few days for the
cinema which managed to secure them, it was an advantage which came at a high
financial cost. On the other hand, screening such high profile films had a direct impact
on the local market. In Torquay, for example, whilst it was the Picturedrome who
claimed that “complete story films” were their “speciality”, they were unable to
prevent the Electric Theatre from securing the exclusive rights first to Clarendon’s
celebrated Lorna Doone (1912), the first British five reeler. The uniqueness of the
exclusive allowed a new drama and excitement to be injected into the advertising of the film. For the showing of *Lorna Doone* in Torquay, performance schedules were altered specifically to accommodate its extra length, more matinees were added every afternoon, and a special exhibition was arranged nightly at 9.20 to enable visitors to Torquay to view the film after dinner.81

The use of the longer film was a significant factor, too, in the competing programmes on offer in the resort of Weston-Super-Mare. Audience profiles here, drawn from both the crowds of day-trippers from Wales and Bristol, and the select streets of the town itself, varied from those of Torquay on the opposite coast. Whilst Torquay, with twice the residential population of Weston, had only three cinemas, Weston’s six venues for film exhibition could be attended not only by the local community but also by some of the thousands of visitors and day-trippers. Each needed an individual product to sell to an arguably diverse market: here too, each cinema developed and promoted its own individual profile, based both on the amenities it boasted, and on the programme it provided. Throughout most of 1912 and 1913, the Electric Theatre in Weston battled alongside other rival film venues, most noticeably Albany Ward’s Picture Palace, to screen the better picture or the most attractive programme. Ward’s enterprise proved formidable competition, winning the contest to screen such popular films such as Captain Scott and *A Dash to the North Pole* (1909),82 but losing the race to be the first to show *The Badminton Hunt*, the Electric Theatre having already screened it the week before.83 The manager of the Electric Theatre, Charles Marston, demonstrated in the press columns a great awareness of the importance of the film programme, regarding which by his own admission, “the greatest difficulty has frequently been experienced in the selection of a film to occupy the premier position in popularity.”84 The programme was a product he marketed carefully and skilfully, consistently publishing detailed advertisements and reviews which enthusiastically anticipated films to come and recounted reactions to those already screened. His programmes typically comprised selections of shorter films with a familiar mix of comic or dramatic genres, complemented with a longer film or feature, exemplified by the programme for the first week of January 1913, whose diversity aimed to please broad audiences:
“Death or Glory”, (a magnificent film, 2,500 feet in length, containing a powerful series of war pictures, with a throbbing story of love and adventure, with the great Napoleon and his army conspicuous features throughout), “Blossoms”, (a nature study), “The Cat’s Cup final, (a trick film), “In his Father’s Footsteps” (drama), “Contagious Music”, (comic), “Broncho Billy’s Escapade” (a drama of the Wild West), and “the Adventure of the Thumb Print” (detective drama).85

The Alfred West films Our Navy continued to circulate, and were secured exclusively by the Electric Theatre to exhibit in competition with the Palace’s screening of Nicholas Nickelby (1912) and Jack and the Beanstalk (1912), a Christmas pantomime on film.86 West’s Our Navy, which as previously mentioned had been a well respected spectacle originating from the London Polytechnic familiar to the South West resorts over the last decade, had by now become a sequence of eight films.87 These therefore functioned in the same way as a serial: the Electric Theatre capitalised on their value as an aid to repeated custom and screened them one at a time over a period of a month.88 Part Five was said to “gain the approbation of all present” and to be the most popular item on the programme.89 The manager, Mr. Marston, also made good use of topicals, thereby filling something of a gap in the Weston market, choosing to show film of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race instead of a feature, to coincide with the opening of yet another picture theatre for Weston, the Regent Street Picture House.90 Gerry Turvey notes how the British and Colonial Company ceased all other production on the day of this 1913 Boat Race, so that films could be processed and rushed out to waiting cinemas the very same evening.91 Topicals played on the drama of their freshness and immediacy and had to be screened quickly – Marston ignored the weekly change of films and put the Boat Race into every programme for a week.92 Topical films such as these were “concerned with putting on a show of upper-class worlds”: for Weston audiences, they offered a chance to imagine themselves with the Londoners on the Thames towpath, since as Turvey explains, “the viewpoint of B&C’s cameras was assimilated to that of the crowd – a popular perspective accessible to all, but occupied on their behalf by the topical operative.”93

Whilst the presence of so many closely competing sites for cinema entertainment created a vibrant cinema culture in which both the Palace and the Electric Theatre played a prominent role, the advent of yet another picture palace in Weston may
have been a cause for concern. In March 1913, the luxurious and expensive Regent Street Picture House opened, offering film-only continuous performances from 3 to 10.30pm, tea-rooms, lounges, light refreshments, and a central location opposite the Grand Pier.\textsuperscript{94} Having lost its exclusivity as the sole venue only to screen films, the Electric Theatre’s advertisement that week began with the cry “Yes – we are still here!”\textsuperscript{95} its only principal advantage now lay in the fact that it could offer the cheaper 3d seats, in comparison to the lowest price of 6d at the Regent Street.\textsuperscript{96} The new Regent Street Picture House immediately sought to establish itself not simply as a cinema, but as a unique social space, a select club where patrons could eat, read or relax, in addition to watching a film or two. Its higher prices spoke of exclusivity; its description as a “retreat” contrasted it with the usually close intimacy of the cinema crowd.\textsuperscript{97} Within the first few weeks of its existence, the Regent Street Picture House had defined itself as a provider of quality cinematographic programmes, each headed with a major feature film: Asta Nielsen in \textit{In a Fix} (1913), \textit{Quo Vadis}, \textit{The Miracle} (1912) and \textit{Lorna Doone} had all been secured as early as the end of May 1913.\textsuperscript{98} Andew Higson notes the way in which film engaged with literature at this time to produce innovative cinema: such films, he believes, “ushered in significant developments in length, extravagance of production values, bids for authenticity, cost, marketing techniques, even the use of colour.”\textsuperscript{99} The Regent Street cinema made much of Pathé’s’ three part colour film \textit{The Countess}, which it programmed alongside a “Wiffles” comedy, a travel film of Sweden and Pathé’s Gazette.\textsuperscript{100} Two more major films, Vitagraph’s \textit{Pickwick Papers} (1913), and \textit{Lady Audley’s Secret} (1912), were shown on consecutive weeks.\textsuperscript{101} From the picture theatre perspective, the genre could attract what Higson characterises as the equivalent of “the art-house market”, and was thus ideally suited to the hushed superiority of the select new Regent Street cinema, to serve what the management viewed as the “fastidious tastes” of its patrons.\textsuperscript{102} Important films made for large headlines, bold advertisements, and long descriptions in the press: the Regent Street immediately exploited all of these, and quickly dominated the front page of the press with its prominent publicity, and in so doing, raised the stakes for the other venues.

\textbf{The topical film}

Also influencing local programmes in a significant way was the ubiquitous topical film: an examination of the exhibition of the 1911 Delhi Durbar films in these resorts, for
example, illuminates the many ways in which such material impacted on local screening practices and audiences. The accession of King George V and his subsequent investiture as Emperor of India at the Delhi Durbar, which took place during December 1911, posed one of the first challenges of 1912 for cinema managers endeavouring to incorporate the topicals into their programmes. Film of this spectacle, a costly and lavish display of pomp and ceremony, had been taken by representatives from Barker’s, W. Butcher and Sons, Gaumont, Pathé’s, Charles Urban and The Warwick Trading Company, who all competed to rush the pictures back to Britain, knowing that their impact on waiting audiences depended principally on their immediacy and topicality. “Everyone”, notes Stephen Bottomore, “cameramen, production companies, distributors and picture palaces – wanted to beat the competition, and old news was no news.” The Gaumont Company triumphed and managed to show their first pictures on 30 December 1911 at the Electric Palace, Marble Arch.

In the South West, the reputation of the Torquay Picturedrome was immeasurably enhanced and its revenue increased by the very early exhibition of the Durbar films on 4 January 1912. These films engaged local interest, with audiences ready and waiting, their enthusiasm already fanned by a series of related stories and articles in the local press. Locally, there was also great interest in the technological advances which the Durbar films represented: a series of articles on the Cinematograph in the Torquay Times focused attention on the medium and implied the town to be at the forefront of progress through its very early screening of the Durbar films. “Rush, speed, these are the watchwords of everyday life, and nowhere are those watchwords more forced home than in the cinematograph world. A topical film has got to be rushed with all the speed that the film manufacturer is capable of. The very seconds are precious! The race to London with films of the Durbar was a test of what can be done in quickness.” The catalogue of difficulties and obstacles overcome in the drama of racing home with the first films served to create a sense of self-importance in waiting audiences, and conferred a certain status on those cinemas regionally who had secured and afforded them: the local Torquay press commented that “the management of the Electric Theatre is to be congratulated upon its early illustration by cinematograph of the great Delhi Durbar,” aware that the Torquay public were almost as privileged as London audiences in their exceptionally early viewing of the films.
Fig. 5.3. Pathé advertisement for the Delhi Durbar films, *The Bioscope*, 19 October 1911.
In the months before their arrival, the Durbar films had been persistently marketed in the trade press to exhibitors, who in turn used the advance notice of these films, with accompanying publicity material, to create tension and expectancy in potential audiences locally (Figs. 5.3, 5.4). In an article, “The ‘Durbar’ Films”, The Bioscope had noted the financial and long-term advantages to cinema owners of the “topical” which it termed “the showmen’s best friend”, and which it suggested could attract “a large section of the public which hitherto has not deemed the picture theatre worthy of its support. But when these people realise the nature of the entertainment which is offered them – its variety, cleanliness, and innocent enjoyment – they can be numbered amongst the warmest supporters of the picture theatre.” This would prove to be particularly true in Torquay, a place where the genteel winter villa residents had viewed the previous Durbar films of 1903 in the exclusive setting of the Bath Saloons or the Theatre Royal and Opera House. The Torquay Picturedrome was able to exploit the fact that this was no longer an option: to participate in the Durbar experience, these
select residents of villadom were now obliged to visit the cinema, which announced: “A special show of these pictures is being screened daily from 11.30 to 1pm - the attendance of the villa residents so far being most gratifying.” New strategies were employed to entice new audiences: it was the Picturedrome, too, that cleverly generated many column inches and much valuable publicity by the proprietor’s prominent invitation to all the orphanages and poor institutions in the town to see for free “what they would never see again”. The Durbar films thus brought about a rare phenomenon locally, as both cinemas competed to benefit from their importance, popularity, and potential profits: whilst the Picturedrome screened Pathé’s Delhi Durbar pictures on four days of the week in separate performances, at the same time the Electric Theatre showed “the gorgeous ceremony of the crowning of His Majesty King George V as the Emperor of India” three times daily.

In September 1911, The Times had anticipated the potential of the Durbar to provide an intense visual experience to those fortunate enough to attend it: “With its varied character, its many vivid episodes, and its deep underlying significance, this visit, nobly conceived and nobly, we doubt not, to be discharged, must prove memorable indeed. Few will not envy those who are privileged to witness it.” At home, almost everyone could witness it on film: film promoters implied that to see it was to share in it. As Andrew Higson has observed, “images of a rich, powerful and successful nation” viewed on the screen helped to establish “a sense of nationhood through cinema.” The inclusive experience which this genre of film offered had arguably even more importance in regions at a far distance from the metropolis. One event in particular, which occurred during the 1911 Durbar, demonstrated how it was possible even for remote audiences to feel a sense of connectivity with a wider community through the medium of film. Following the incident where one of the Indian rulers allegedly did not follow the correct etiquette in the Royal presence, a debate raged nationally as to whether he had been deliberately disrespectful. The Electric Theatres in both Torquay and Weston tempted audiences locally to join in with this nationwide dialogue, referring in their publicity to the apparently “strange manner in which the Gaekwar of Baroda paid homage to his sovereign”. The Delhi Durbar films uniquely empowered every individual locally to make an informed judgement, simply by visiting their own cinema.
In these early months of 1912, a serious mood often prevailed in Torquay in which conflict and possible war were frequently contemplated: the Durbar films caught this mood, fed into the growing patriotic sentiments, and reinforced the identity and sense of belonging of local citizens who could connect with a vast and powerful Empire of which they were part. Thus Torquay enjoyed weeks of the Delhi Durbar films and other performances, plays, articles and lectures with an Indian or royal theme: the visible imperial glory of the Durbar films would have suited the ideology of a town beloved of army and naval officers, the gentry and nobility. It was a deeply patriotic environment in which groups such as the Navy League, The Primrose League and the Junior Imperialists flourished and stirring discourses, entitled “Patriotism before Play” or “Torquay and the Empire” abounded in the press at this time. One article in the Torquay Times entitled “Empire in Figures,” measured the Empire dispassionately by quantifying populations and possessions: the Delhi Durbars were an added visual measure of the might and magnificence of Empire, made universally accessible to all through the medium of film.

The local film

Another genre with a distinct commercial advantage for exhibitors, which enhanced the programme and distinguished the provision of one cinema from that of its competitors, was that of local film. Throughout this period, there were numerous examples in all five resorts of footage being taken by both amateur and professional cameramen of local life; fairs, fishing, and football all appeared as subjects of interest for filmmakers eager to engage with local audiences. Stephen Bottomore seeks to arrive at a clear definition of the local film genre, suggesting that a film is local “only if there is considerable overlap between the people appearing in the film and those who watch it or are intended to watch it,” that is to say, the film “should include recognisable people”. A film such as the one screened in the Electric Theatre, Torquay, of the Bowling match between Devon and Kent, fits this genre well, in which “several local gentlemen took part”, and in which according to the press, the “Torquay and Paignton players [were] easily recognised in the pictures.” Bottomore suggests that whilst the heyday of this genre
had perhaps been the years 1901 and 1902, evidence shows that local films continued to be a widespread and popular feature in the South West until the First World War.

Of this group of films, the most substantial sub-genre consists of footage of local crowd scenes, the so-called “factory-gate” films, the success of which was predicated on the public’s desire to see themselves on screen. Most of these coastal resorts lacked the busy streets, railway stations, factory exits and the jostling crowds which peopled them; however, local cinematographers therefore sought alternative opportunities for filming people at regular large-scale gatherings such as visiting fairs, which drew together thousands of visitors who could be captured on film and reappear on the screen again the following day. Thus the Barnstaple Picturedrome capitalised twice on the crowds attending the town’s annual Great Fair, firstly by filming them, and secondly by beginning to screen them whilst the fair was still running, thus benefitting from the potentially increased size of the audiences.119 Weston-Super-Mare regularly experienced huge Bank Holiday crowds on its piers and promenades, but these were composed mainly of day-trippers, and not principally of local people. However, opportunities sometimes arose to film residents too, such as the occasion of the aviator B.C. Hucks’ demonstration flights in a monoplane across the Bristol Channel in Weston in September 1911. Film made of this event was screened a few days later at the Electric Theatre, having been carefully edited and commodified for a very specific spectatorship: “Audiences are first introduced to the spectators, and as the film is especially clear, many well-known Westonians are easily recognised.”120 The film, which “possessed more than ordinary interest to the crowded attendances experienced” was arguably more commercially successful and easier to market than the actual flights themselves: a considerable number of vocal and discontented spectators departed after dangerous winds caused a two hour delay to the flights, which, since happening above their heads, it was discovered, could be seen for free anyway without the necessity of paying to enter the aviation grounds.121 The films of the event, on the other hand, which could be repeated on successive days, played to packed audiences.122 This repetition was an economic necessity, since all local films of this nature could only appeal to limited audiences and for a relatively short duration only. Thus, for example, film of the annual Torquay Regatta was shown at the Electric Theatre three times a day for one week.123 The screening of this local film was something of triumph for the Electric: the event itself lent the film prestige, further enhanced by the fact that the film had been
shot by the manager of the picture theatre himself from the deck of Sir Thomas Lipton’s yacht, as well as from the roof of the Bath Saloons, which was an advertising coup. The commercial advantage of screening local films is well evidenced here: the Picturedrome, too, secured film of the event, though not, it seems, from such a prestigious vantage point. Accompanied by the usual invitation to “come and see themselves”, these films tried to offer different perspectives on the crowd scenes, which the manager of the Electric Theatre promised together constituted “the Regatta perpetuated in moving pictures.”

Some local films may be seen as an extension of the tradition of photographs of local events and activities, displayed to the community by means of lantern slides, or as stills in local photographers’ shop windows. One exhibitor who maintained all three practices simultaneously was Mr. Ellis, who as proprietor of both the cinema, one of the photographic studios, and the only magic lantern in Sidmouth, had the necessary skills and equipment to faithfully record institutions, activities and everyday life in the town using all three media. Thus, for example, Ellis took photos of the fire brigade, showed lantern slides of the town’s lifeboat, and regularly took film himself of rugby matches and swimming galas, all of which helped to engender a close and mutually beneficial relationship between exhibitor and spectator. Unlike rented films, audiences for this type of local film gained ownership of them through their active participation in one or more of the processes of production, exhibition and reception. Local topical films thus connected communities and cinema, increased customer loyalty and boosted audiences, in marked contrast to the metropolitan experience, where a broad choice of picture houses meant audience loyalty owed less to a sense of identification with a particular film, than to attractive programmes or convenient positioning.

This genre of film, which was evidently made to be shown locally, could on occasion be exploited nationally, or even internationally. In 1912, both the Electric Theatre and its rival, the Picturedrome, screened footage of the Torquay carnival within hours of the event, the films being marketed using the usual lure of self-recognition: “The scenes and incidents along the route are reeled off, and many hundreds of faces must of necessity appear on the screen.” Whilst the Picturedrome had obtained its film from the Pathé’s’ Gazette cinematographer, the Electric Theatre had worked with the Gaumont Company to secure the pictures. Film of Torquay’s carnival had
currency locally as the representation of a community event; it also had a value to the Pathé’s’ Gazette and the Gaumont Graphic as items of topical interest. Film of the “high and fancy diving” from the Torquay Regatta that year, went on to form part of Pathé’s’ Gazette, and as such was known to have been screened as far away as California.\textsuperscript{128} Thus local films had the potential not only to reflect a community back to themselves, but outwards to other continents too. This evidently was perceived by the town as a boost to its status and own sense of importance, since as the press notice observed proudly: “...as this pictorial newspaper circulates the world over, Torquay will be brought immediately under the notice of millions of picture patrons.” \textsuperscript{129}

Stephen Bottomore’s definition of the genre focuses entirely on the reciprocity between subject and audience, which relies on the existence of a relationship between those filmed and those spectating.\textsuperscript{130} A broader definition permits also the inclusion of films which link people and place intimately together, reinforcing feelings of local identity and reflecting back to local communities a sense of themselves. This is exemplified regionally by films such as those of hunts, shot nearby at unspecified locations, but in obviously identifiable local landscapes: it was not pictures of themselves, but of aspects of their daily lives and customs which audiences were asked to recognise and share in here. The “fine film depicting a badger hunt near Lynton” which was screened in Barnstaple in 1912 had been lent to the picture theatre by a local sportsman: cinema in this case became an arena in which local life was celebrated, and film a modern medium which could bring rural traditions into the heart of the town.\textsuperscript{131} Films which had some connection to the locality could be more widely exploited in a commercial sense, and with their relevance to a greater number of spectators, made more economic sense. The Barnstaple press noted in 1913: “A firm of cinematographers aroused a good deal of interest during the month of June by making several films of scenes around Hillsboro’, the Harbour and Wildersmouth Beach; these were shown late in the year at the local picture palaces.”\textsuperscript{132} At least part of the appeal of these films to local people was to satisfy the curiosity which the previous weeks of well-publicised filming had excited. Their appeal to their producers, as Brigitte Braun and Uli Jung have pointed out in their study of local film in Germany, France and Luxembourg, was that in a competitive market, they could be sole owners/exhibitors of unique footage: “In this case,” note Braun and Jung, “a local view was a means of securing product differentiation.”\textsuperscript{133}

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Finally, mention should be made of fiction which used the locality as a backdrop. One picture, *The Vengeance of Daniel Whiddon*, was filmed in Devon and shown in Torquay where the management enticed readers to become spectators, by posing the question: “We wonder how many there are who will recognise the surroundings as seen on the Picturedrome screen.” More significant still were films such as the nationally acclaimed *Lorna Doone*, which as the *Penny Illustrated Paper* informed its readers, was “filmed in its precise location – rugged Devon.” Pathé’s decision to film in the setting of the original novel added to the legitimacy and status of the film, and as Bryony Dixon points out, locating a film in a traditional tourist destination helped to sell it. A film such as this which enjoyed success nationally could create an enviable (and here rather exaggerated) reputation for the locality itself, as *The Bioscope* enthused: “The great ‘Lorna Doone’ film was secured in North Devon, and pictures have also been taken at Clovelly, the village which so much resembles Jerusalem. The rugged cliffs and the moors all form excellent filming grounds, and it is surprising that even more firms do not realise the value of the scenery at their own doors.” The elevation of this locality in turn provoked a strong local response, great pride being taken in the utilisation of these landscapes by such a celebrated film company. The connection between film and place, well-publicised nationally, could be further commercially exploited locally, as in the example here of the Barnstaple cinema, which linked special matinee performances of the film, with excursions across “Doone” country by the Lynton Railway Company.

**Film and variety, 1912-3**

The individual with the greatest and most enduring influence on the face of film exhibition in Weston-Super-Mare was arguably Albany Ward. With his acquisition of the Victoria Hall, Ward had gained a foothold in the dynamic and challenging environment of cinema provision in the town, where he demonstrated remarkable business acumen and drive, by his readiness to adapt his business model to local circumstances. He responded rapidly to the declining interest in rinking, and abruptly closed the skating side of the business. Having entirely refurbished the building and renamed it “The Albany Ward Palace of Varieties”, Ward re-opened in the spring of
1912 with a combination of film and variety, which though less common in the metropolitan areas where music halls were plentiful, was still popular in the regions. In contrast to a socially selective picture theatre such as the Regent, Albany Ward launched a forceful marketing campaign which drew on his past reputation and the experience of the seventeen other picture palaces under his control, deliberately targeting broad and inclusive audiences: “Mr. Ward’s great endeavour (and one to which he owes the unqualified success secured in other towns),” observed a local journalist, “is to present a bright, clean, family entertainment – one to which paterfamilias may bring his wife and children without the slightest risk of their hearing or seeing anything in the least degree suggestive.”

This required innovative and somewhat unusual programming: whereas most cine-variety programmes commonly comprised a selection of short heterogeneous films from a range of genres, the management of the Palace regularly and exclusively screened star features, with films such as *Titanic* (1912) and Selig’s *Christopher Columbus* appearing in the same month in 1912.

Whilst the film programmes sometimes offered the usual blend of one-reeler comics, actualities and dramas, the Palace also offered its patrons the opportunity to view features such as *Jess* (1912), *The Queen of Sheba, Captain Scott’s Dash to the Pole, The Miracle*, which was accompanied by a full choir, and *Les Miserables* (1913), which it presented as an exclusive. A film such as this latter could attract huge publicity and could be “boomed” for several weeks before its actual arrival: Albany Ward took out larger than usual front page advertisements to promote his exclusive screening of *Les Miserables* (Fig. 5.5). Apart from the evident prestige attached to the screening of such significant films, exhibitors could tap into the atmosphere of anticipation which surrounded their release and profit from the excitement of the “waiting period” which preceded it, and as Rachael Low explains, film promotion began to assume a pivotal role: “...it became increasingly obvious that if a film was advertised in the right way a demand could be created for it, and one of the most conspicuous features of the market during this period is the increasing importance of publicity.”

Moreover, in contrast to its rival the Electric Theatre in Weston, which routinely continued to feature programmes of short comic, dramatic or topical films, the Palace capitalised on the public interest in popular serials and regularly screened the Lieutenant Daring ones, as well as popular comedies such as Tontolini or the Bunny films.
Ward’s manager in Weston, Fred Adderley, moved to showing these films in twice nightly programmes, and introduced a bi-weekly Pathé’s’ Picture Gazette, which as Jenny Hammerton has demonstrated with regard to the cinémagazine, was “one among the many attractions of the cinema going experience”, at home amongst the variety of other genres on offer.¹⁴⁶

*Fig.5.5.* Cinema publicity programme: Peckham Picture Playhouse, London, 1913. Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Centre, University of Exeter.

These were programmes, therefore, carefully designed to please as many as possible, a fact readily admitted by the management of the Palace in its columns:
To the uninitiated it seems well-nigh incredible that any place of entertainment in a comparatively small town like Weston could be able to boast of the sustained interest which night after night, week after week, and month after month, is taken by patrons of the Boulevard Palace of Varieties. The resident manager, Mr. Adderley, will have nothing but the best...What is more, with the large number of places of entertainment under his control, Mr. Albany Ward can secure the most high-class and attractive entertainers to be found anywhere in the provinces, and patrons can depend on it that Mr. Adderley looks after Weston’s interests when making his selections.\textsuperscript{147}

This ethos of respectability and appeal to family values had to extend to both halves of the programme: since the balance of variety and film in these programmes was mostly tipped in favour of the former, it proved to be the suitability of the variety performances, and not the films, about which the customers needed reassurance. The management advised its patrons: “The varieties are selected from the best procurable, one commendable feature of both turns being that the artistes engaged indulge in little or no conversation with the audience, that is conversation of the usual well-worn patter nature.”\textsuperscript{148} Whilst initially, films were accompanied by a standard range of performances from acrobats to comedy cyclists,\textsuperscript{149} over the following months, the vaudeville turns continued to be drawn from a succession of ever more spectacular acts, which had continuities with the variety theatre, music hall, and even the fairground, including as it did performing lions and cycling chimpanzees.

In the opening months of 1913, the Palace of Varieties seemed to be a venue striving for an identity calculated to suit the widest possible tastes. On one hand, it sought to pose a challenge to its rival film exhibitors, triumphing in its acquisition of a class of films such as \textit{Nicholas Nickelby} and \textit{A Tale of Two Cities},\textsuperscript{150} and assuring its patrons that “the electric pictures will as usual form the principal items of the entertainment.”\textsuperscript{151} Yet, just the previous week, it had ambiguously advertised itself as “Weston’s one and only Palace”, whilst in the same newspaper had proudly announced itself to be “Weston’s one and only music hall”.\textsuperscript{152} Reassurances about the suitability and respectability of the entertainment on offer appeared to be needed: “one may be quite certain that, while the programme will be lively and diverting, nothing, generally speaking, will be seen of a vulgar nature. The variety turns are invariably selected with care and many first-class items may be seen at the Palace, while the pictures spooled are quite above suspicion.”\textsuperscript{153} In marked contrast to the rival new picture theatre, the Regent, it decided from then on to offer both “something to suit the multifarious tastes...
of the patrons”, such as topical gazettes, shorter comic or dramatic films, as well as “the best in vaudeville”: “the bio-musical speciality of the Five M.P.s”\textsuperscript{154}, or “Lady Little” who, billed as the “tiniest woman in the world”, added the unusual spectacle of a live freak show to the mix of film and variety amusements.\textsuperscript{155} The desire to carve out a neatly-cut slice of the entertainment pie, intensified by the arrival of the luxurious film-only Regent Street Picture House, prompted the Palace management to re-evaluate its programmes, and ultimately it was as the foremost provider of variety in the town, that Albany Ward’s Palace of Varieties entered the year 1914.

Throughout the winter seasons of 1911, both the picture theatres in Barnstaple had also continued to promote their ciné-variety programmes. Opportunities for free material, such as \textit{From Forest to Fireside} (1907), supplied by the Daily Mail,\textsuperscript{156} and the “Oxo” Film, which together with free publicity, was offered to showmen, which with its exciting scenes of horsemanship and prairie lands, seemed too good an opportunity to most to miss.\textsuperscript{157} Here too, the arrival of feature films effected some obvious changes to programming: their increased length gave them a higher status on the bill, and evidently meant less time available for either supplementary films and or acts. Thus, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities} at the Picturedrome was accompanied by a singing and dancing act, a combination which proved extremely popular and which played to packed houses to which many had to be refused admission.\textsuperscript{158} In 1912, it was the Picturedrome which included major films such as \textit{The Siege of Calais} (1911), \textit{Colleen Bawn} and the 3,000 foot long Asta Nielson film \textit{The Traitor} (1912) to their programme:\textsuperscript{159} in response, the new manager of the rival Picture Palace announced his own addition of an extra 1,000 foot of film.\textsuperscript{160} Over the following year, the balance of the programme and the relationship between film and variety shifted and altered, seemingly from month to month. The October visit of the performing chimpanzee ‘Consul’ to the Picturedrome, took precedence there over all other items, and the pictures, whilst “unusually varied and attractive”, remained unspecified.\textsuperscript{161} The Picture Palace made a feature by turns of the variety performances, or of more significant films such as \textit{The Relief of Lucknow} and \textit{Three Fingered Kate} (1912): the detective drama \textit{Nat Pinkerton} (1912) was matched with Little Brighty Beryl, a child artiste, for the Christmas performances.\textsuperscript{162}
Neither of the two Barnstaple cinemas used their space in the local newspapers to entice audiences with dramatic plot synopses, photos, or eager accounts of spectators’ reactions, as other local picture houses were doing. Whilst the Barnstaple Picturedrome in particular continued to screen some of the most important films of the year in 1913, such as *Queen Bess* (1913), *Ivanhoe* (1913) and *The Three Musketeers* (1913) which were exciting spectators and the industry elsewhere, little of the local audiences’ or even the local exhibitors’ enthusiasm for these films filtered through in the press (Fig. 5.6). There was instead a continuing and distinct focus on the variety acts, which underpinned the programme of both cinemas, which relied on them to attract customers. Both enterprises had clearly reflected on the needs of their locality and shaped their provision accordingly. It was undoubtedly a successful strategy which continued to please local audiences: in “Notes from Devon” in July 1913, observing the popularity and buoyant attendance figures of both the Barnstaple picture houses, *The Bioscope* confidently assured its readers that “the cinema has come to stay in North Devon”.

Long and enthusiastic reporting of these acts, and not the films, dominated the detailed narratives in the newspapers. In a notice detailing at length the future delights of...
performing lions and step-dancing horses, the Picturedrome revealed its mission was to provide a series of “attractions” which were “of a nature seldom seen outside the larger centres.” The inclusion of the previously mentioned freak exhibition in a Barnstaple Picturedrome programme in 1913 also exemplifies this point. A novelty rarely found in a cinema setting, “Lady Little, the Tiniest Woman in the World.” was nevertheless managed for public consumption here in a traditional way: press reports detailed her statistics, parentage, family and history; favourable reports from the Pall Mall Gazette detailing her appearances before gentry, which helped legitimise the show locally, were reproduced; and audiences were invited through the medium of the press, to touch and shake hands with her. These Barnstaple audiences would have been very familiar with the traditions of this type of exhibition from their experience of visiting fairs and travelling shows. The coincidence of cinematograph displays appearing alongside freak installations in the sideshows and penny gaffs of London has been explored previously by Joe Kember, Simon Popple, and Andrew Shail: the appearance of the “doll lady” in a Barnstaple picture theatre seemingly represented a variant form of this relationship. Little importance was accorded to the films in their own right, yet they appeared to provide an important legitimising framework for a more unusual variety turn in this cinema setting. Cinema experience in Barnstaple thus evolved differently to the other resorts in question. As a mid-sized town, in common with the four other resorts, Barnstaple had had no permanent variety theatre: the only experience of this type of entertainment for spectators here had been derived from touring shows. With their immediate popularity, the cinemas here created a new opportunity for variety to appear and a means of introducing it locally on a regular basis.

The Poole family’s response to the trend for fixed-venue film exhibition, as noted in the previous chapter, had been to diversify their business by the acquisition of their own cinemas. In the South West, Charles Poole had established cinemas in Taunton, Torquay, Plymouth, and Teignmouth by 1914. The programme for The Empire, Newton Abbot, another of Charles Poole’s cinemas acquired in late 1910, reveals that Poole’s too adapted the variety model in the fixed-venue enterprises: these sites were typically managed to become in effect a modernised, static version of their touring shows. One crucial difference was the absence of the dioramic exhibition from performances, which marked a shift away from their traditional roots as providers of dioramic spectacles which extended back over two generations of showmen. The
Newton Abbot Empire’s programme retained a traditional mix of vaudeville acts, in combination with “Poole’s Perfect Pictures”, in which film and variety had equal billing. These nightly shows and Saturday matinee were also interspersed with skating on two afternoons a week. Films here, appeared to be still only as important as the other variety turns: Poole’s Electric Theatre in Taunton even included “Music Hall” in its title, evidence of the fact that these programmes were rooted in past traditions of performance which continued to prioritise variety over film.

**Pavilions and piers**

An important distinction between cinema exhibition in urban and metropolitan areas, and in the regional resorts, arose from the fact that some larger, more successful, seaside towns had at their disposal a wider variety of sites which were ideal for the purpose of screening film. Resorts such as Weston-Super-Mare, Torquay, and Penzance had benefited from the construction of piers and pavilions, some of them publicly funded, which made an important contribution to the cultural provision and status of the towns. The coincidence of the arrival of film with the construction of these new piers and pavilions had a significant impact on cinema exhibition locally. The use of such sites for performances of film in these South West resorts put major entertainment venues, some under local authority control, directly in competition with all the other picture palaces which were managed by private enterprise. The huge expenditure on grand exteriors and lavish interiors of the pavilion buildings in particular, has already been noted. These buildings set high standards against which the local cinema industry was forced to measure itself. With far more modest budgets, even newly built cinemas would have had difficulty in competing with the scale, size and scope of a building such as the Knightstone Pavilion, built in 1904, which could seat 2,000, and the Penzance Pavilion, which opened in 1912 with capacity for 1,000.

Conversely, local authorities were obliged to react to prevailing trends in the industry. A report of the local Council meeting in Weston-Super-Mare noted that: “Plans were going ahead for the erection of a cinema on land adjoining the goods station... As a result, the Council has decided to push ahead with a scheme to provide equipment for showing cinematograph at the Knightstone Pavilion.” Councillors
managing the Pavilion, which controversially had not yet succeeded in becoming financially self-sufficient and was proving difficult to manage under the terms by which it had been set up, had possibly adopted this solution offered to them by the local press. “Electric or cinematograph theatres are all the rage,” observed the editorial, “Now is Weston’s opportunity to provide a cinematograph theatre.”

Electric Moving Pictures began to appear regularly at the Knightstone Pavilion from the beginning of 1911, first opening with a nightly performances and two matinees weekly of a two-hour programme of films. The Pavilion prices were the standard ones of 3d, 6d and 1s, and claimed to provide “two hours continuous enjoyment for all classes.” In an apparent attempt to attract audiences and to work reciprocally with local traders, its advertisements carried the following notice: “The Management respectfully ask all Lodging-house keepers, Hotel Proprietors, and Tradesmen to recommend this Entertainment to their Visitors and Customers.”

It screened full film programmes such as the Coronation procession of King George V and the review of the Fleet at Spithead, a patriotic selection which attracted large crowds. The Pavilion had the flexibility to alter schedules and programmes to suit the demands of the new season and of changing audiences: by the summer 1911, film performances had been reduced to “every afternoon at 3 when there is no Theatrical matinee, and Mornings at 11, if wet.”

Unlike the picture theatres, Knightstone had the facilities and flexibility to satisfy other entertainment needs beyond film, and could act as a theatre, concert hall or opera house, offering high-quality dramas, pantomime, comedies, Shakespeare plays, and opera in its programmes. By contrast, film programmes consisted of a mix of shorter comic, dramatic and travel films, such as *Tweedledum’s Adventures* (1911) or Gaumont’s *Royal Romance* (1912) which were accompanied by the piano, and sometimes followed by the local band.

Competition from the Electric Theatre and Albany Ward’s Palace appeared intense at this time, and longer, feature films were more likely to be screened there, or at the Regent Street picture theatre when it opened the following year. The Pavilion continued its flexible approach to programming throughout the following two years, alternating weeks of film-only performances with its other varied provision.

The Pavilion in Torquay finally opened in an unfinished state in 1912, following years of bitter argument and disagreement over every aspect of its construction. An article entitled “White Elephant or White Palace – Which?”, appearing
in the Torquay Times, summarised the dilemmas involved in maintaining such a venue without extending the franchise of the entertainment it offered, and concluded: “Exception might be taken to the estimated number of daily patrons. One has, however, only to observe the number who patronise our picture palaces, and the estimate will be seen to be not far-fetched or extreme. The Pavilion can be made the rendez-vous and place of amusement and entertainment for the artisan as for those of leisure and means, and should it fail in this it will be the fault of the working classes.”

It became obvious that in order to make the building pay, the Entertainments Committee who managed the Pavilion would have to embrace a greater diversity of entertainment than simply the elite and expensive concerts or the municipal orchestra. Inclusion of the cinematograph was inevitable: it was introduced there first by visiting celebrities such as the explorer Amundsen, who illustrated his lecture “How We Reached the South Pole” using lantern slides, and film taken of his expedition. The Pavilion needed some form of regular popular amusement to maintain its appeal to audiences - by 1914, the municipal orchestra and classical concerts had been supplemented with twice weekly performances of film shown on the Pavilion’s own cinematograph. Carefully selected subjects, such as America to Europe by Airship or The May Queen (1912), a film based on Tennyson’s poems, fitted with the programmes of classical music and well-known performers such as Albert Chevalier. The war provided the opportunity for the Pavilion to integrate into the weekly schedule of high class entertainment, discrete programmes of film which formed patriotic spectacles, with titles such as “Our Empire” and “The Whirlpool of War”. The film From Peace to War, for example, was screened twice daily, alongside cello concerts and popular operas. These spectacles were intended to appeal to the services, to whom were offered tickets for half-price entrance: but as a venue where the lowest ticket prices still started at 6d, and with its film matinees daily, the Pavilion in Torquay was predominantly seeking audiences from those at leisure in the afternoon, and providing them uniquely with an exclusive cinema. Even in 1913, it was noted, Torquay was still “a matinee town.”

With no compulsion to screen films on a weekly or even a regular basis, the Pavilions could cream off popular and profitable films, and screen them intensively over a short period. Thus in Penzance, during the “Big Week at the Pavilion”, Queen Bess was shown on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday only, during which time the number of performances was doubled. The same strategy was used to bring Kinemacolor and
film of the Delhi Durbar to the town which played apparently to “crowded and delighted audiences” for just three days, but with three performances on each. Furthermore, by offering a 3d seat, it managed to undercut the film-only ‘Cinema’ in Penzance where the cheapest price was 4d. In addition to being able to offer affordable prices, agreeable surroundings and additional facilities, such as pictures accompanied by tea served free of charge in the Palm Court, the Penzance Pavilion boasted a Winter Garden, large roof garden, and an open-air promenade concert hall. The Cornish Riviera Entertainments company who managed it also maintained a regular programme of high quality vaudeville, bands, plays and celebrated entertainers such as George Robey and Violet Vanbrugh during the year. Whilst these were never combined with cinema – only stand-alone programmes of films were shown – they nevertheless provided a wider context for their film entertainments and set a certain tone for the venue in general. Thus, despite the presence of two permanent cinemas in the town, it was the Pavilion in Penzance which screened many of the major films of the period, including such celebrated works as *From Manger to Cross* (1912) and *The Siege of Calais*, and which also secured the exclusive rights to pictures, such as of the Carpentier-Wells boxing match. It sited these feature length films in programmes which contained a blend of dramatic and travel films, as well as some local footage: thus Urban’s Durbar pictures were screened alongside pictures of the Panama Canal, Egypt, and Calcutta, and the Cornish Riviera. It was a highly successful strategy which consistently attracted audiences, and a shrewd way to draw people to the Pavilion, especially in the quieter winter months.

**Cinema in “small places”**

At quite the opposite end of the scale, was the Sidmouth Cinema: its relocation in 1913 to a refurbished building in the centre of the town marked a move away from ciné-variety, with its irregular schedules in temporary accommodation, to a customised space which permitted regular, film-only programmes. A three-day week, from Thursday to Sunday, was introduced in response to local demand: the number of matinees was doubled, the evening performance times were deliberately altered to suit working people, and in a hybrid of exhibition practices, a continuous performance new to local
audiences was introduced, which ran from 6 to 11 on Saturday evenings only. Pricing structures and seating arrangements also reflected the proprietor’s drive to be more socially inclusive: “...in the sixpenny seats...large hats do not obliterate the picture. To those who cannot afford the expense, then first-rate 3d seats are provided, whilst those who prefer to do so may enjoy an evening in a comfortable armchair for a few pence extra. Additional improvement will be added for the Easter week, in the shilling and eighteenpenny chairs, being raised tier above tier.”

Throughout 1912, in Sidmouth, programmes were standardised to two hours in length and generally included a heterogeneous mix of one or two longer “star” films, an educational or travel film, some shorter comic pictures and Pathé’s’ Gazette. Film advertising and newspaper editorials in the local press made an appeal to audiences to evaluate the films screened in different ways: they might be told the cost to the exhibitor, or the length in feet, which still remained a measure of importance. Local audiences counted, too, the amount of sensational or dramatic events a film possessed: from the very great many films available to exhibitors at this period, Sidmouth’s proprietor routinely favoured those with a dramatic content which featured daring rescues and exciting chases, which were popular and enthusiastically received by his audiences. The local press praised Mr. Ellis’s judgement of his clientele and informed its readers: “This, to our mind, is the secret of Mr. Ellis’s success. Careful selection of subject, coupled with increased comfort in the internal arrangement of the hall, have met with unqualified success.” Alex Marlow-Mann notes the importance to just such a context of the American serials, such as What Happened to Mary (1912), which he considers marks a “transitional moment” in the way in which they were distributed and exhibited: “As the feature-length film became more widespread, serials continued to serve at least two crucial functions: they could be shown in smaller cinemas that couldn’t afford feature length films as a feature attraction, or they could be shown as a supporting feature before the main film.” Equally sensationalist and particularly popular in Sidmouth were Clarendon’s Lieutenant Rose and British Colonial’s Lieutenant Daring series, which played well to young local audiences: “Mr. Ellis just mentioned that the next film would be “Lieut. Rose” when a great shout went up. Of all the patriotic people, children are the most patriotic. They freely displayed their disapproval of the doings of the enemy, and enthusiastically followed the thrilling adventures of the Lieutenant, cheering again and again, and at the end heartily joining in
with the crew of the battleship in giving “three cheers for Lieut. Rose.” As a film
comprising a series of exciting spectacles, Lieutenant Rose and the Stolen Battleship
(1912) falls within the boundaries of Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions.” Ben
Singer argues that the “type of situations that the Lieutenant Rose and Lieutenant
Daring films offer have much in common with earlier films offering the pleasure of
spectacle with a minimum of narrativization.” The display of applause and cheering it
provoked shows an audience engaged in active and collective participation, a response
more associated with first period cinema, which had not quite disappeared from this
Sidmouth audience.

Sidmouth audiences, whilst apparently valuing most of the films screened in
their cinema, demonstrated a greater appreciation of the short, the comic, or the
dramatic in preference to longer and more challenging films which featured too, in what
one reporter termed “Mr. Ellis’s very ambitious programmes.” Thus the reviewer of
one evening’s performance, which included Selig’s celebrated and lengthy film
Christopher Columbus, confessed that “the pictures that appealed to us most were the
comedy kind: they were excellent…” His indication of the viewers’ preference for
films in which they continue to participate, over the hugely popular, but more
challenging feature film, offers an interesting glimpse into the local audience: it
highlights their conception of cinema as a place of entertainment and enjoyment, rather
than education: “It was, of course, very nice, elevating, educating, very pretty, etc.,
might be shown to school children with much success – we shall have them no doubt
setting off in boats to discover Ladram Bay – but we own that our taste has not been
educated up to the classical; we rather lean to the comedy film, which makes a hearty
laugh, however nonsical (sic) it may appear.” The reference to discovering Ladram
Bay, a tiny neighbouring cove not three miles distant, appears ridiculously parochial
when juxtaposed with Columbus’s search for America, and implies an audience as yet
unready to engage fully with newly emerging and lengthier narratives. Nor
did audiences here respond very enthusiastically to literary adaptations: though billed as
a star film, Pathé’s The Lady of the Camellias (1912) which featured Sarah Bernhardt,
was similarly received two months later:
But while this high-class picture delighted everybody, there were also other films of equal merit. First should be mentioned Pathés Gazette, ... then a splendid romantic picture “Love or Duty”, followed by a star film, and a very pretty educational travel scene. The story of the “Old Silver Watch” was another delightful picture...and after this it only remained for the lengthy programme to conclude with the humorous film, entitled “Max Linder as an artist”, which pleased everybody.207

Despite this apparently mixed reception, as in Weston-Super-Mare, in 1913 cinema in Sidmouth made a gradual shift to longer feature films with a greater narrative content such as Queen Bess, Lorna Doone, Les Miserables, or A Tale of Two Cities, a move which also reflected national trends. To a provincial exhibitor, as mentioned previously, these films could prove very expensive – Itala’s Quo Vadis had cost a cinema in Hammersmith the vast sum of £200 to book in the week of its release.208 To make longer feature films commercially viable, and available to smaller audiences, exhibitors could adopt the strategy of screening them some months after their release, when rental prices had decreased to the point of affordability: thus Quo Vadis appeared in Sidmouth some seven months after its initial release. The Bioscope had recommended its screening to all exhibitors, convinced that it would “do more to promote the dignity and well-being of the film trade than any other production one has seen. A picture like this can be neglected by nobody. Once and for all it establishes the right of cinematograph to recognition as a serious and unique artistic instrument with infinite possibilities, to be esteemed accordingly.” 209 Melvyn Stokes believes exhibitors had an
additional motive for introducing better quality films into their programmes: “By broadening the audience for movies to bring in the middle class, they sought to secure for movie entertainment a greater cultural legitimation, something they eventually believed would generate higher profits.”

No doubt the Sidmouth proprietor was aware that since its release in February 1913, the film had acquired a spectacular reputation, and a review in the *Bioscope* lavishly praised it as a “gigantic triumph, gigantically conceived and gigantically executed, which is likely to stand for ever as a monumental achievement, in its own way unsurpassable.” This was another advantage of the delay in screening and could be used to good effect in local advertising: “It has been shown before their Majesties the King and Queen at the Royal Albert Hall, and in most of the principal cities and large towns of the country, but seldom in such small places as Sidmouth.” Rachael Low argues that the reputation of this genre of literary adaptation was not always due to its merit, but to its “prestige” which “awed and dazzled a still largely undiscerning public...” Sidmouth’s public must have been “awed and dazzled” certainly, by the unprecedented publicity which accompanied the screening of this film – a flyer, the size of full newsheet, was inserted loose into the local paper, the vast scale of the advertisement wholly in keeping with the momentous arrival, for the first time ever, of a film 12,000 feet long (*Fig. 5.8*). Yet the account in advance of the film’s arrival, entitled “Tomorrow’s Great Event at the Cinema” painted a somewhat incongruous picture of the great spectacle of *Quo Vadis*? sandwiched between “the local film depicting the swimming carnival of Thursday” and the “popular feature”, the Singing Pictures. This article, whilst striving to convey the wonder and magnificence of the production, once again queried the readiness of “such small places as Sidmouth” to appreciate fully a film of this length, stature and gravity. Given the reputation of the film, the account of its local reception contained only brief and faint praise in a review which moved quickly on in a rather anticlimactic way to an endorsement of D.W. Griffiths’ film lasting a mere twenty-five minutes, *The Little Tease* (1913).
Chateauvert and Gaudreault, adopting de Kuyper’s label for the period 1908-13 as “second period cinema”, define this phase as an “intermediary buffer period”, a time during which public space becomes private space, and collective applause makes way for more silent response. The reaction to *Quo Vadis?* reveals an audience both alert to the collective responses which the local topical and singing pictures continued to demand of it, yet at the same time moving transitionally towards the silence of more institutionalised cinema: “It was intensely interesting, and was followed with rapt attention from start to finish, some of the incidents receiving loud and sustained applause, whilst during other scenes there was a noticeable silence.” These patterns of audience behaviour correspond with the emergence of a “cinema of narrativization”, identified by Tom Gunning as a successive form to the “cinema of attractions”, which,
he argues, between 1907 and 1913, moves film through a transitional period where spectacle and narrative compete, to arrive finally at the feature film. To the reviewer of the performance of *Quo Vadis?* in Sidmouth, the “loud and sustained applause” is unremarkable, because traditional and anticipated – it is the periods of silence which are “noticeable”, and which, as they intercept the applause, constitute a new and unfamiliar response.

Following the screening of *Les Misérables* and *Quo Vadis?*, the final few months of 1913 in Sidmouth saw a return to the heterogeneous programmes more typical of the previous year. The tried and tested method of maintaining customer loyalty through screening series or serials continued to be employed: with its twelve parts, Cricks and Martin’s *What Happened to Mary?* (1912-3) was especially attractive to exhibitors, and in Sidmouth, was shown over several nights, seeming to suit its audiences well, a reporter noting: “The story is simple – yet extremely engrossing, and it appeals to all classes most strongly.” Moreover, these local audiences seemed in tune with “the prevailing fashion for extreme sensationalism” at this time, which as Low identifies, had to include “ultra-modern thrills.” One programme for late 1913 demonstrates clearly the sustained local appetite for sensational drama, when the leading picture *The War Correspondents* (1913) was “more than exciting” as the report enthusiastically announced, with “Aeroplane Smashes, Music Hall Wreckings, Battleship Explosions, and the Blowing up of a Railway Viaduct, and the hurling of a train into the river below….” The rest of the bill was composed of “‘The Two Spys’ (sic), a daring attempt to destroy an ammunition train…the usual quota of interesting and instructive films, The Gaumont Graphic, ‘The illustrated film paper’, and also a Singing Picture on each programme besides several humorous subjects.” This programme, with its concentration on the visual and the spectacular, presents a series of mainly short films which screened together also conformed to an earlier mode of representation, defined by Tom Gunning as the “cinema of attractions”. Ciné-magazines and newsreels, such as *The Gaumont Graphic*, with their “predilection for showing rather than telling”, fit this mode well, as Jenny Hammerton argues: “This is a non-narrative form where rather than being told a story, we are shown something: a scenic view, the latest fashion in footwear, or a four year-old child driving a car in the streets of Paris. These items are presented as glimpses of the many facets of human experience.” Programmes such as these, which offered an array of unconnected films from a variety of genres, blurred the
edges between fiction and reality and constituted entertaining spectacles of pleasure tailor-made for their expectant local audiences.

Cinema in other places

If 1910 had been the year which witnessed a notable growth in the number of cinemas in the South West, it had also marked a decline in the number of travelling and touring contexts for film exhibition regionally. This trend locally mirrored a collapse in film exhibition in halls and clubs nationally, which Hiley believes was due in part to the introduction of stringent regulations under the Cinematograph Act (1909). Although cinemas had begun to dominate film exhibition in most of these regional resorts, film locally, however, continued to serve a number of varied cultural functions from education and home entertainment, to political campaigning and charity work, and to appear in a diversity of contexts from fairground to fireside. Whilst many of these uses for film were already culturally embedded, new perspectives on the possibilities for film led to the emergence of some novel practices. In Torquay, for example, a London company sought to persuade middle class readers to stay at home for their entertainment: advertisements began to appear regularly from a London company for “A Picture Palace in Your Own Home”, an early form of home cinematograph which, delivered complete with films and instructions, cost 5s.226

Throughout this period, the dominant provider of touring spectacles continued to be Poole’s: this powerful enterprise, spread as it was over two generations and several families, had the resources both to exploit the commercial potential of fixed site cinema, and to continue with their travelling exhibitions too. The myrioramas, by now under the control of Charles W. Poole and another son, John R. Poole, continued to flourish, with seven separate companies still touring the country in 1911-12.227 There appeared to be no significant alteration in the balance these shows offered between film and other media, which they continued to perform in an unchanged variety format with dance and musical acts.228 “Poole’s Brilliant 1910 Myriorama”, which focused on Sir Ernest Shackleton’s expedition to the South Pole and brought to Weston by John R. Poole in the same month as Shackleton’s personal appearance in Torquay, made the bold announcement that this was “not a cinematograph film”, an indication of Poole’s
enduring faith in the popularity and effectiveness of the diorama, which they used here, in preference to film, for their showpiece.\textsuperscript{229}

For the new cinemas and for traditional dioramas alike, two events in particular provided spectacular opportunities and major challenges in 1911 and 1912. The responses of these two contrasting media reveal much about their capabilities, technologies and status at this critical time. The first of these was the Delhi Durbar, which as has already been seen, stimulated the development of new techniques, led to a re-evaluation of some exhibition practices and programme scheduling, and foregrounded the role which film could play in bringing events swiftly to a waiting public. This was the type of event, too, on which the older medium of the diorama could capitalise. “Our Indian Empire”, which toured the South West, reaching Penzance in September 1911, Torquay in November 1911 and Weston-Super-Mare in January 1912,\textsuperscript{230} was skilfully timed to coincide with public interest in the proposed and much publicised visit of King George and Queen Alexandra to the Durbar in Delhi. Since their arrival in India occurred some months after the commencement of the Poole’s tour, clearly no actual footage of the 1911 Durbar could be included. Instead, Poole’s had constructed a marketable, themed programme which re-packaged new and existing material together. The Penzance audience, for example, were promised films of the “Delhi Durban” (sic) which in September 1911 could only have been those taken of the previous Delhi Durbar in 1903:\textsuperscript{231} the Weston audience were offered “dioramic gems”, such as “The Coronation Naval Review” which together formed an “entertainment, by the aid of animated and panoramic pictures” in which “Mr. Cecil Cooper, business manager and cicerone, conducts his audience over the entire world, exhibiting and explaining many wonderful structures and scores of beautiful spots.”\textsuperscript{232} The Torquay audience was to experience scenes from “The Turko-Italian War”: all of these attractions were encompassed by one show, “Our Indian Empire”, lasting three and a quarter hours.\textsuperscript{233} Poole’s had created a spectacle which appeared topical, yet which had a commercial robustness necessary for a long tour. Whilst the diorama could not compete with the immediacy and excitement of recently shot film, it could outlast its transient impact: the much anticipated Delhi Durbar films which, brought dramatically with all speed from India to London and out to the regions, were merely a month later, as Stephen Bottomore has noted, “a dead duck.”\textsuperscript{234} The industry, which had rushed to exploit them, moved on just as quickly, and the Durbar film prices tumbled, for as
Bottommore further explains, “their value was in their timeliness”: the value of these Poole’s spectacles, on the other hand, was in their durability.

The sinking of the Titanic shortly afterwards in April 1912 posed a second problem for those obliged to try to represent it: in the immediate aftermath, the absence of actual film and photographs resulted in lecturers and cinema managers scrabbling for related visual material with which to satisfy audience interest. Thus in Torquay, the celebrated medical missionary and lecturer Dr. Grenfell linked references to the Titanic to lantern slides of Newfoundland icebergs, whilst the Electric Theatre screened film of the vessel “the Yermak”, used for breaking up ice in the floes, which it thought “especially interesting at the present moment whilst the ‘Titanic’ tragedy is still fresh in our minds.” Faced with the competition from modern cinema and in danger of becoming the dinosaur of the entertainment industry, it was nevertheless once again the diorama which proved the ideal choice of medium in this instance. This was an event which lent itself uniquely to dioramic representation: the vastness of the eight huge tableaux, which together formed a “gigantic representation illustrative of the loss of the Titanic”, seemed appropriate to match the scale of the tragedy. Brought to the St. John’s Hall, Penzance in September 1912, Bath Saloons in Torquay in November 1912 and the following week to the Albert Hall, Barnstaple, and billed as “The Immortal Tale of Simple Heroism”, it was bound together with a diorama of Drake’s defeat of the Armada and ‘Our Island Story’, to create an emotive and patriotic spectacle. John R. Poole had doubted his father’s wisdom and taste in turning tragedy into entertainment: yet the production proved a huge success and moved audiences to tears. The intermedial nature of diorama, with its ability to draw on a wide variety of audio-visual effects and techniques, even at this late date, triumphed over both lantern slide and film in its ability to recreate the event for audiences with authenticity and realism: the Torquay show promised a powerful and intensely dramatic series of tableaux showing the sequence of events as they have been built up from the evidence to hand. Practically every stage resource and device has been requisitioned in the effort to attain actuality. Scenic artist, carpenter and electrician have combined to produce beautiful models which are really the “Titanic” in miniature. To see her steaming along on the open sea, her sides gleaming with the lights of the saloons, masthead light gleaming, and the smoke coming from her funnels, is a masterpiece of realism. Each prominent incident is portrayed by these
and similar means and the tableaux follow each other with a coherent sequence that places the happenings of that awful night vividly before us.\textsuperscript{241}

The Titanic diorama dominated the overall spectacle, and combined with numerous variety acts to relegate film to the bottom of the bill.\textsuperscript{242} It marked a high-point for dioramic exhibition, with full houses locally giving an indication of the continuance of its strong contemporary position and popularity in the regional marketplace, despite the new and growing competition from cinemas. There is no local evidence to indicate a decline in the popularity of a traditional form of entertainment which had been visiting the region for decades. In the final tour before the war, John R. Poole brought “The Balkan Unrest” to Penzance and Barnstaple in his 1913 Myriorama in which, for the first time since their introduction, no films appeared. The Penzance press noted: “Although today there is doubtless not a town of any importance in England which is not provided with cinematograph shows, or other places of amusement, yet this fact does not seem to bear any great influence on the success of Poole’s myriorama.”\textsuperscript{243} In the years approaching 1914, a dozen or more cinemas arrived in these resorts, but yet there still remained a little space for touring showmen in general, and for Poole’s in particular.

These fledgling cinemas were as yet far from constituting a homogeneous group. As dedicated film venues they all shared some commonality of purpose: as spaces equipped with seating, lighting, screens, and the necessary machinery to project film, they all had some form of cinematographic entertainment as their aim. Yet the generic titles of “picture palaces” or “picture theatres” which grouped these sites of film exhibition together, concealed important underlying differences in the way each commodified film, which in turn contributed to the creation of locally variant forms of film culture. The advent of the picture houses in these resorts did not suddenly result in a standardisation or harmonisation in the way film was “packaged” for local audiences or how entertainment programmes were consumed. The continuing diversity of local practices evidenced a degree of autonomy amongst proprietors and managers, and the majority of provincial enterprises retained sufficient flexibility to be able to respond and adapt in a variety of ways to local circumstances and conditions. The years 1910-14 were thus characterised locally by a film culture which was shifting and evolving, a
crossover period which gradually took the exhibition of film away from the domain of the travelling showman and sifted it once again through traditional performance practices, before moving it on to a more organised phase of cinemas, circuits and conglomerates. In these four pre-war years, the form cinema took locally could still be the one best suited to local spectators. The diversity of local interpretations of cinema exhibition were such that nearly two decades after film’s arrival in the resorts, an experience defined as “cinema” in Penzance, still had a very different meaning in Barnstaple or Weston-Super-Mare, Torquay or Sidmouth.

3 “Cinematograph Shows,” Times, 30 November 1912.
4 “Cinematograph Shows”, Times, 30 November 1912.
5 Ibid.
6 Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 17.
7 Bioscope, 26 October, 1912, 251.
8 NDJ, 20 October 1910.
9 NDJ, 20 October 1910.
10 NDJ, 10 November 1910.
11 Ibid.
13 NDJ, 10 November 1910.
14 WM, 9 September 1911.
15 WG, 12 August 1911.
16 WM, 30 September 1911.
17 WM, 30 September 1911.
18 WG, 10 January 1912.
19 WG, 17 January 1912.
20 WM, 16 March 1912.
21 TDSDJ, 19 January 1910.
22 TDSDJ, 18 December 1912.
23 Ibid.
25 WG, 12 March 1910.
26 WG, 12 March 1910.
27 See Fig. 4.1., 4.2.
28 CM, 1 January 1910.
29 Ibid.
30 TDSDJ, 12 January 1910.
31 TDSDJ, 9 February 1912.
33 CM, 5 November 1911.
34 TDSDJ, 10 January 1912.
35 TDSDJ, 24 August 1910.
36 TDSDJ, 8 June 1910; TDSDJ, 10 May 1910; TDSDJ, 21 June 1911.
37 TDSDJ, 24 August 1910; TDSDJ, 12 October 1910; TDSDJ, 15 March 1911; TDSDJ, 7 June 1911; TDSDJ, 8 December 1911.
38 TDSDJ, 3 May 1910; TDSDJ, 10 May 1910; TT, 8 December 1911.
40 TDSDJ, 24 August 1910.
41 WG, 12 August 1911.
42 WM, 9 September 1911.
43 WG, 3 January 1912.
44 Ibid.
45 WG, 14 February 1912.
46 WG, 17 January 1912; WG, 7 February 1912.
54 Bioscope, “A Plea for the Long Film,” 12 October 1911, 69.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 251.
58 Bioscope, 15 February 1912.
59 Ibid.
60 TT, 26 January 1912.
61 TT, 26 January 1912; TDSDJ, 14 February 1912.
62 TT, 9 February 1912.
63 Ibid.
64 TT, 12 April 1912.
66 TT, 7 June 1912.
67 TT, 20 September 1912; TT, 18 October 1912; TT, 25 October 1912; TT, 8 November 1912.
68 TT, 21 June 1912.
69 TT, 15 November 1912.
70 TT, 14 February 1913.
71 Bioscope, 25 January 1912.
72 Bioscope, 1 May 1913.
73 TT, 9 May 1913.
74 TT, 6 December 1912.
75 Bioscope, 8 February 1912, 455.
76 Ibid.
77 Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 47.
"Important Film subjects of the Year," in Kinematograph Year Book 1914 (London: Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly Ltd., 1914, 1.

79 TT, 24 January, 1912.
70 TT, 14 February 1913.
71 TT, 14 February 1913.
72 WG, 22 February 1913.
73 WG, 1 February 1913.
74 WG, 1 February 1913.
75 WG, 4 January 1913.
76 WG, 4 January 1913.
77 See Chapter Three, 192-5.
78 WG, 25 January 1913.
79 Ibid.
80 WG, 15 March 1913.
82 Turvey, “Ideological Contradictions,” 51.
83 WG, 22 March 1913.
84 WG, 22 March 1913.
85 WG, 19 April 1913.
86 WG, 19 April 1913; WG, 26 April 1913; WG, 24 May 1913; WG, 31 May 1913.
88 WG, 24 May 1913.
89 WG, 14 June and 21 June 1913.
90 WG, 22 March 1913.
91 Bioscope, 4 January 1912.
92 Stephen Bottomore, “’Have you seen the Gaekwar Bob?: Filming the 1911 Delhi Durbar,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 17, no.3 (1997): 337.
93 Bottomore, “Have you seen the Gaekwar Bob?,” 326.
94 TDSDI, 3 January 1912.
95 TT, 16 February 16 1912.
96 TT 5 January 1912.
97 “Delhi Durbar,” Bioscope, 21 December 1911.
98 Bioscope, January 4, 1912.
99 TT, 5 January, 1912.
100 TT, 12 January 1912.
101 TDSDI, 3 January 1912.
102 The Times, September 21 1911.
103 Higson, “Heritage Discourses,” 185.
104 TT, January 5 1912.
106 TT, 9 August 1912.
107 NDJ, 18 September 1913.
108 WM, 2 September 1911.
109 WM, 9 September 1911.
110 Ibid.
111 TT, 29 August 1913.
112 TT, 29 August 1913.
113 TT, 29 August 1913.
114 TT, 28 June 1912.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
ibid.

TT, 15 November 1912.

Bottomore, “From the Factory Gate,” 33.

NDJ, 22 February 1912.

NDJ, 2 January 1913.


TT, 4 October 1912.

Penny Illustrated Paper, 8 February 1913.


Bioscope, 10 July 1913.

NDJ, 15 May 1913.

WM, 16 March 1912.

WM, 16 March 1912.

WG, 4 May 1912; WG, 18 May 1912.

WG, 8 February 1913; Ibid; WG, 22 February 1913; WG, 24 May 1913; WG, 21 June 1913.

WG, 21 June 1913.

Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 47.

WG, 8 February 1913.


WG, 5 July 1913.

WG, 13 July 1912.

WM, 16 March 1912.

WG, 4 January 1913; WG, 5 July 1913.

WG, 22 March 1913.

WG, 15 March 1913.

WG, 15 March 1913.

WG, 14 June 1913.

WG, 30 August 1913.

Bioscope, 1 June 1911.

Bioscope, 12 October 1911.

NDJ, 19 October 1911.

NDJ, 25 January 1912; NDJ, 15 February 1912; NDJ, 16 May 1912.

NDJ, 11 April 1912.

NDJ, 10 October 1912.

NDJ, 7 November 1912; NDJ, 21 November 1912; NDJ, 23 December 1912.

NDJ, 6 February 1913; NDJ, 9 October 1913; NDJ, 13 November 1913.

Bioscope, 10 July 1913.

NDJ, 20 February 1913.

NDJ, 20 March 1913.


The only possible exception being Albany Ward’s Palace of Varieties in Weston-Super-Mare, see p. 288-9

Hudson John Powell, Poole’s Myrioramas, (Bradford-on-Avon: ELSP, 2002), 124.

Bioscope, 6 October 1910.

TDSDJ, 10 March 1911.

Hudson Powell, Poole’s Myrioramas, 122.

See Chapter Four, 222.

WM, 3 May 1902; CM, 8 August 1912.

WM, 11 February 1911.

WG, 22 October 1910.

307
WM, 11 March 1911.
WM, 11 March 1911.
WM, 11 March 1911.
WM, 1 July 1911.
WM, 19 August 1911.
WG, 3 January 1912.
TT, 24 May 1912.
TT, 21 August 1914.
TT, 21 August 1914; TT, 13 November 1914.
TT, 9 October 1914.
Ibid.
Ibid.
TT, 10 January 1913.
CM, 5 December 1912.
CM, 15 May 1913.
CM, 28 September 1912; 7 August 1913.
CM, 20 November 1913; CM, 29 November 1913.
CM, 13 December 1913.
CM, 15 May 1913.
SO, 3 September 1913.
SO, 12 March 1913.
SO, 21 February 1912.
“Children at the Sidmouth Cinema,” SO, 6 March 1912.
SO, 20 November 1912.
SO, 14 August 1912.
SO, 14 August 1912.
SO, 27 November 1912.
Bioscope, 27 February 1913.
Bioscope, 20 February 1913.
Bioscope, 20 February 1913.
SO, 3 September 1913.
Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 184.
SO, 3 September 1913.
Ibid.
Ibid.
“Quo Vadis?,” SO, 10 September 1913.
Gunning, “Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity,” 60.
SO, 3 December 1913.
Low, The History of British Film 1906-1914, 198.
“Enterprise at the Cinema,” SO, 5 November 1913.
SO, 5 November 1913.
TDSDJ, 22 November 1911.
Hudson Powell, Poole’s Myrioramas, 141.
WG, 2 February 1910.
WG, 2 February 1910.
CM, 9 September 1911; TT, 8 November 1911; WG, 31 January 1912.
31 CM, 9 September 1911.
32 WG, 3 February 1912.
33 TDSDJ, 8 November 1911.
34 Bottomore, “Have you Seen the Gaekwar Bob?,” 328.
36 TT, 10 May 1912.
37 NDJ, 14 November 1912.
38 CM, 21 September 1912.
39 NDJ, 14 November 1912.
40 Hudson Powell, Poole’s Myrioramas, 142-3.
41 TT, 8 November 1912.
42 CM, 21 September 1912.
43 CM, 2 October 1913.
Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have presented an overview of the social and cultural background of the coastal resorts of Sidmouth, Torquay, Penzance, Barnstaple and Weston-Super-Mare, mapped in detail projected and moving image entertainments, and provided an in-depth analysis of the events and developments in local popular entertainment and visual media in these resorts for the period 1880-1914. The close study of the five locations chosen as the focus of this thesis reveals that the many similarities they shared as coastal resorts on the same South-West peninsula are at least equalled if not outweighed by the breadth of the cultural diversity they displayed and by the consequent variety of responses to technological and social developments exhibited throughout the period in question. These years, furthermore, have proved themselves to be a key period of social, cultural, and technological change locally, as nationally, a time of transition when trends towards a greater democratisation of leisure coincided with the invention of new visual technologies and film, and led ultimately towards the establishment of cinemas and cinema-going as a popular leisure pursuit here.

My principal aim in this study has been to explore the interface between the arrival of the new medium of film and its related technologies, and the five South West coastal communities in question. I have mapped in detail the cultural background of two of these, in order to examine the social tensions and conflicts arising from the presence of the pleasure crowds who frequented varying seaside resorts. I have also examined the significance of the role of the magic lantern in the everyday life of these provincial communities and identified both its multiple contexts and the range of cultural functions it served, offering an assessment of its contribution to contemporary local visual culture. I have traced developments in cinema from 1896 and the advent of film through to the emergence of permanent picture houses, detailing the local contexts and patterns for early film exhibition, and identifying the trends which led to fixed-site exhibition locally. This study has also investigated the construction of the new cinemas locally and the companies which owned and managed them, examining their sources of investment and funding and demonstrating the range of business models encountered. It also presents a detailed account of exhibition strategies in these resorts and the modifications to practices and programmes which local exhibitors adopted.
Finally, I have examined the wider social implications of these new cinemas within the context of these communities and have analysed their impact on local culture and patterns of leisure.

During this period, hegemonic groups in all these locations endeavoured to maintain social control through the exercise of their authoritative powers and to impose codes of behaviour in public which sought to uphold the gentility of these resorts. My investigation of the pleasure crowds of Weston-Super-Mare and the Regatta fairs of Torquay in Chapter One has revealed the surprisingly deep social and cultural divisions which cut across these resorts and which impacted forcefully on the provision, distribution and consumption of entertainments throughout this time. The controlling hierarchies which prevailed here, evident to some degree in all five resorts, have revealed themselves to be powerful, vociferous and dominant, striving to dictate leisure, and thus entertainment, along class lines, and openly disdaining the mass popular amusements of the pier and the fair. By the beginning of this period, longer holidays and rising wages, together with improvements in public transport and infrastructure, had already begun to empower greater numbers of the middle and working classes and thus to fuel a growing demand for leisure. Tensions between diverse social groups with their varying needs and local authorities seeking to control and regulate leisure surfaced inevitably in situations where all competed for dominance of the same public recreational space. This chapter has shown that locally, as nationally, these flashpoints occurred at times when would-be social controllers felt their prevailing order to be most threatened, by crowds at the seaside or at the fair. Research has shown also how alliances of ruling authorities used the press to promote both anti-fair and anti-tripper discourses, which in their assertion of the alterity of the crowds and the shows exacerbated tensions through hyperbole and supposition and deliberately created anxieties amongst its readership. It has demonstrated too how such authorities – councillors, police and magistrates – used regulations both to maintain order and to restrict and control the duration and location of these popular amusements.

Mapping this cultural background and observing the conflicting forces which lay beneath contributes to a better understanding of the status and significance of popular and visual entertainments in these resorts. Such deeply-
entrenched cultural divides resulted not only in constraints imposed upon popular amusements and mass participation in leisure activities, but conversely also in the dominance by a cultural elite of the entertainment in these locations. Importantly for this consideration of contexts for optical entertainments and early film, these resorts strove to maintain a refined cultural provision of high-class concerts, theatrical productions and shows, which equally importantly demanded the construction of suitably well-appointed and strategically-sited luxurious concert halls, pavilions and theatres. As my research has demonstrated, it was these venues and the respectable shows they housed that formed the first sites for film exhibition. Larger resorts such as Weston, Torquay, and Penzance favoured the continued use of public money or private investment to continue to construct and operate large and lavish buildings which suited the minority needs of high-class entertainment, a trend which, persisting until the eve of war, was exemplified by the construction of a new pier or pavilion in all these sites. Of significance to the move towards permanent exhibition in these resorts, such buildings set a standard for quality and luxury against which the architecture and interiors of the contemporary new cinema buildings in their neighbourhood could be measured. In turn, the creation of semi-permanent and permanent venues for film exhibition coincided with this trend and made a welcome contribution in many of these resorts to the local architecture. Most critically, as Chapters Four and Five have identified in their interrogation of local business models for early cinema and film programmes respectively, although not intended for the purpose, pavilions in particular proved a venue for film to rival the best of the cinemas which introduced a further element of competition into the economically challenging pre-war environment for film exhibition.

Whilst popular amusements and large holiday crowds could be of huge economic benefit to local traders and businesses, fear of their appearance, of their occupation of public space, and most of all of their potential for transgression, caused them to be disliked and discouraged by many. The morality of fairgoers and holiday crowds – their indulgence in pleasure, the mixing of sexes, the activities they enjoyed - was repeatedly questioned in the local press, as evidence has shown. John Walton has remarked how when “mutually incompatible modes of recreation and enjoyment” were brought together at the seaside, Victorian
arguments “about the proper relationship between leisure, class, religion and morality” were rehearsed.¹ Such evidence, in my view, also illuminates our understanding of the controversies over the morality of cinema which arose here and highlights the similarities and continuities between these debates. Cinema, too, challenged this equation: the same four factors of “leisure, class, religion and morality” all had their part to play in its developing culture. At a community level this was exemplified by the conflict in Sidmouth between the Church and the local cinema, where the accusations of immorality expressed by the local vicar have an obvious resonance with the discourses on the fair and pier in the Torquay or Weston press. Understanding the existence of the social and cultural hierarchies, therefore, which have been mapped out in this first chapter, helps not only to contextualise this and other conflicts, but also better to comprehend attitudes to entertainments and the ordering of leisure and space in these coastal communities. The fact, for example, that the authorities did not demonize cinemas as they had other mass popular entertainments may at first sight appear surprising. Whereas attacks on the morality of cinema appeared regularly in the daily press, as noted previously, they occurred infrequently in these resorts. Even in areas such as Weston and Torquay, where disapproval of popular entertainments resurfaced regularly, there seemed to be little open opposition to cinemas. There are several possible reasons for this. Most importantly, cinemas were much-needed centres of entertainment where amusements were few, and quickly embedded themselves in their communities with whom they fostered close relationships. This was beneficial when conflicts did arise, as has been shown in the case of Sidmouth, and where such managerial relationships flourished, cinemas enjoyed strong support from the local people and press. In cases where managers had emerged from within the community and were already well-known and trusted, such bonds were further strengthened. Furthermore, though still a relatively new phenomenon, cinemas had rapidly been able to establish themselves in all these resorts as legitimate and respectable places of entertainment because of the programmes of films they selected, by association with the refinement of the buildings which housed them, and because of the reputable status which film had previously acquired when screened as part of touring shows.
Resorts such as Torquay were keen to distance themselves from places where the morality of cinema had been publicly scrutinised such as Liverpool, feeling that this in some way cast doubt on the reputation of the town as a whole, as one commentator in the *Torquay Times* suggested: “Torquay must not be compared with Liverpool. At Liverpool, there are probably dozens of these places of amusement, and the class of films exhibited is in accordance with the environment in which the picture-houses are situated.” Authorities in both Weston and Torquay expressed confidence both in their own ability to regulate cinemas and in the management of their local cinemas to act responsibly, for as the same commentator explained: “In Torquay, there are three highly respectable picture-houses, and the introduction of anything questionable would do them infinite harm.” In some areas of opinion, cinemas here were viewed as a force for good or as having an educative role to play. Some believed in the positive effect cinema’s might have on the morality of young people:

It would be perfectly safe to say that never has a story film been shown in the Borough which did not convey a good moral lesson – in which virtue did not triumph over wrong-doing. Is it not infinitely better that that the young people should spend a couple of hours after work watching these pictures, than that they should wander about in the daytime with their eyes glued to the pages of some trashy or blood-curdling penny novel?

The magic lantern, by now serving a wide range of cultural functions in all of these resorts, was a medium which could transcend most social divides. Mapping its many appearances throughout this period reveals its diversity and flexibility, and the way in which lanterns were used at all levels in these local communities to entertain, amuse and instruct. The dominant form of representation here for decades, the lantern was equally useful in large institutionalised contexts or in the home, in the lecture hall or temperance meeting, workhouse or church. At one level, its affordability and simplicity made it an ideal medium to reach right into the community, where it could be taken to the smallest venues and operated with relative ease. At yet another, lanterns were a sophisticated technical instrument, with multiple functions to serve scientists, geologists, and those simply curious about the world. Across all these locations, where numerous social and benevolent societies operated amongst the young, the
poor, and the intemperate, evidence points to the extensive use made of lantern slides to preach moral or religious messages, to enliven meetings or to entertain members at an annual Christmas tea. Equally, for the elite audiences in Torquay, enjoying lectures in the Bath Saloons from celebrities, experts and travellers, or the weekly talks at the Natural History Society, experiment and illustration by lantern slide was both a regular and anticipated occurrence, which complemented scientific discourse and served to educate and instruct. Research has uncovered the vital role played by local lanternists, their names well-known in the community and press, who not only tirelessly worked the lantern at local events, but who also often demonstrated a high degree of skill and expertise when manipulating slides for the most illustrious of visiting speakers.

This study has revealed the numerous visits to the region of a wide range of lecturers bringing slides to accompany their talks. The multiplicity of functions which such illustrations served here has been a surprising find of this research, which has identified celebrities such as Sir Winston Churchill and explorers such as Roald Amundsen and Captain Scott, travellers and missionaries, scientists and war artists, all utilising the lantern for their individual needs. Local press reports and reviews have indicated the subtleties of the relationship between the lecturer and his illustrative material, the importance of the visual to local audiences, and the differing ways in which lecturers exploited their slides. Visiting travellers, explorers, and correspondents sought to impress these audiences with photographic material which authenticated their experiences and offered an apparently truthful representation of places and battles seen. Local audiences were repeatedly reported as being appreciative of original or unique visual material, which often accompanied such highly personalised narratives. Others knowingly exploited the lantern images to reinforce stereotypes or carry racial messages, to accentuate the dangers of their journeys, or to convey to regional audiences images of other cultures paradoxically reassuring in their alterity. At a simple level, lantern slides made travellers of these local spectators, taking them visually to distant places which they might otherwise never have seen.

Research in all these resorts reveals that unlike the more socially diverse groups of spectators attracted by cinemas, audiences for lantern exhibitions were often more uniform and more readily identifiable because they belonged to the
same interest group, club or institution. Unlike cinemas too, with their range of prices and seats, lantern shows charged a fixed price which varied according to the type of show on offer, from an expensive four shillings for a high-class lecture, to free entrance for a temperance talk, which also helped to define its audiences. Whilst some shows and lectures aimed to be broadly inclusive, such as in small communities like Sidmouth where entertainment was scarce, others charged high prices, took place in the afternoon, and clearly catered for the elite. Research here has also established the gradual increase in the number of shows throughout the first years of this period, culminating in the years 1903-4, when lantern exhibition was at its height in these resorts. It has evidenced, too, a steady decline by the end of this period when challenged in some of its more traditional roles by film which had begun to take over some of these functions such as illustration for travel lectures, charity events or missionary talks. There are also some examples of collaboration between the two media, where film and lantern worked together in one show. In these regional locations, where change was slow, the lantern also endured in those contexts which film served less well, and since already well-woven into the fabric of everyday life, continued in these communities until the end of this period.

This survey of lantern exhibition, which establishes the extent and importance of optical entertainments, can be used as a benchmark against which to measure the impact of cinema in these locations. Film, upon its arrival in these resorts in the autumn of 1896, did not find a home in the music hall or variety theatre as it had done in London and other cities, but appeared within the context of various travelling shows which first brought it to the region. Mapping the shows which hosted film in these early years has revealed that film’s ability to reach local audiences depended on its inclusion by the relatively small number of touring companies who visited these resorts during this period, and has demonstrated that they furnished local people with only irregular and infrequent opportunities to experience it. Research has shown that during the first five years of film, even the select resort of Torquay or the popular resort of Weston could only expect three or four entertainments each year which featured it; in smaller towns such as Sidmouth or more remote centres such as Penzance and Barnstaple, there were less still. The well-embedded visual culture based on the lantern and
the diorama, which had prefigured film’s arrival here, continued to flourish: my research has demonstrated that in all these resorts the number of entertainments involving the magic lantern, even in quieter places such as Sidmouth, greatly outweighed and surpassed those involving film throughout this time. Locally organised events for charities, church or social groups, continued to depend on the lantern for illustration; lecturers in the main, both amateur and professional, preferred the use of slides.

In the era of early film exhibition in these resorts it was the magic lantern, not film, which proved to be the medium of the democracy. Evidence from the first years after film’s arrival, also outlined in Chapter Three, clearly establishes a paradigm for local exhibition which locates film firmly and predominantly within the finest venues each resort could offer, in the refined and respectable context of shows such as Poole’s or Devant’s. The deeply-rooted social and cultural hierarchies which prevailed at this time, mapped in detail in Torquay and Weston-Super-Mare in Chapter One, strongly influenced the selection of venues first to house film here. In the absence of the music halls or variety theatres which first hosted film in metropolitan areas or other more urban locations in the South West such as Plymouth or Bristol, these resorts first screened film in the traditional, elite surroundings of the opera house, the assembly rooms, the theatre or the concert hall. Fearing any association with music halls, or openly rejecting them as Barnstaple and Torquay had done, these resorts were still genteel places, seeking to uphold the social tone, maintaining their elite entertainments and continuing to invest in buildings of distinction which they believed contributed to the select profile of the resort. Mapping such shows develops our understanding of the early audiences who viewed them, and demonstrates that they were drawn initially from the better-off, leisured or wealthy residents and visitors, those who frequented high-class entertainments and habitually patronised the dioramas, musical concerts, or spectacles of magic and mystery which constituted refined recreation here. Research into ticket prices reveals the relatively high prices demanded and received by virtually all the touring companies visiting these South West resorts, where sixpence was the lowest priced ticket in the vast majority of venues. It also points to the exclusivity of many screenings before the era of fixed venue cinema and an imbalance in the
early institutionalised consumption of film, which was weighted towards respectable shows and their well-off patrons.

One of the most significant findings of this study has been the surprisingly wide diversity of shows which included early film: touring companies which incorporated it, though few in number, were varied in type. In Chapter Three I have sought to argue that an alternative framework was needed to categorise these shows, one which facilitated their closer analysis and which classified them according to the model they exemplified. Previous analyses of touring shows from Colonel Bromhead onwards have focused on location, dividing shows up broadly according to the showmen and the type of venues they played. In these small provincial centres, which had only a limited number of entertainment venues, the same public hall could host many shows: T.J. West’s, Dyson’s, and Mr. Dunscombe from Bristol, for example, all screened film in the Bath Saloons in Torquay, yet this knowledge alone adds little to our understanding of their exhibition practices or business models. Using a framework for analysis which also focuses on the performance practices in conjunction with the traditions and history which underpinned each show helps to accentuate the marked contrasts and sheer complexity of this provision. I have therefore identified five models for the appropriation of film, each of which brought film successfully to these regional resorts at an early stage. Large-scale enterprises with well-established reputations which paid long visits were found to be of special significance to all of these resorts, with the exception of Sidmouth, and essential in providing regular opportunities to view film sited in high-quality shows. Of these the most enduring was Poole’s, whose repeated visits and coverage of the region made it the foremost provider of visual entertainment at this time. Smaller scale shows which also made regular visits and were well-known locally were found to have been equally vital in boosting the number of times film was screened in these resorts. Moreover, companies such as the Walfords, since more modest in size, brought film to smaller places and offered rural and remote coastal communities the chance to participate in the experience. In the first years of film here, few amateurs seem to have engaged with film: shows were thus operated by local professional performers, such as the Andrés, who made many regular visits to regional venues, thus widening participation in
the experience of film. Research has revealed, too, the significant presence in these resorts of shows which had a connection to celebrated London institutions such as the London Polytechnic or the Egyptian Hall and the importance of this reputation in marketing such entertainments locally. Finally, it has emerged that some companies were set up simply to market the new medium, and devised shows with the express purpose of taking film on tour to the regions.

Not only has research evidenced the variety of business models encompassed by the term “touring company”, it has also uncovered a wealth of detail about the nature of such shows and the multiple variations in scale, status, exhibition practices and programmes which they collectively manifest. Whilst many shows which incorporated film alongside other acts into their traditional or newly-devised programmes fall under the heading of variety, evidence from this study has highlighted the unexpectedly wide variations and differences between them. The desire or perceived need to appropriate film acted as a stimulus to which responses were almost as numerous as the individuals and companies concerned. Thus films of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, for example, were contextualised in shows as contrasting as Dyson’s dioramas and gypsy choirs, Poole’s myrioramas, or Devant’s regional touring programme. Profiling these local shows has revealed that films were sited in magic and mind-reading shows and dioramic spectacles, amidst vocal, orchestral and musical items or alongside soldiers and celebrities, and appeared with variety turns of all kinds from ventriloquists to acrobats. Equally importantly, this study has identified a range of functions which film fulfilled in these very early years, from breaking the tension during a performance of magic and mystery, to providing an alternative mode of representation in a multimedial visual spectacle, or to become another novelty in a show of multiple turns. For showmen operating within a variety format, therefore, film could often be commodified with ease.

Whilst Chapter Three has mapped out these very early uses for film, it has also demonstrated the continuities which existed between them and the performance practices in the later period of 1902-1909, where traditional contexts and formats remained popular and widespread. The heterogeneity of touring shows persisted, and film remained a guest of these throughout this time. Whilst new models of variety show evolved, they remained founded on established
practices and paradigms, providing stability and reassurance for local audiences. This study has also highlighted important later developments in practices which led to film gradually becoming a more significant part of the programme. Companies such as T.J. West’s and A.J. West’s were among the first to feature film and make it central to their performances in these resorts. Viewed in the light of the prevailing practices of the previous six or seven years, T.J. West’s programming was innovative and original and added a new dimension to film exhibition locally. West set new standards for film exhibition here: his ability to construct a quality variety entertainment almost exclusively from films was unprecedented in Torquay; his use of coloured films was novel; his scheduling, with its longer stays and changes of programme, was ground-breaking. The arrival of A.J. West’s “Our Navy” in 1904 was also part of this growing trend for film-centred entertainments, with “Edison’s Animated Pictures” and similar film shows beginning to appear sporadically across the region. Evidence from these resorts, therefore, points to this time as being one of both change and continuity, where traditional practices continued side by side with the new, a time when developing technologies, experimental programming, and exhibitors’ flair and ingenuity combined to influence the face of cinema locally.

In the transition to permanent cinemas, a pivotal role was played not only by the touring companies and travelling shows who first introduced film in these resorts, but by local entrepreneurs with a knowledge of their community and an already vested interest in the business. Research from resorts such as Sidmouth and Torquay has traced the developments which culminated in the creation of fixed-venue film exhibition and identified key individuals in the community who used skill and determination to secure their own cinemas. In 1909, for example, William Mellor’s achievement in opening the Picturedrome in Torquay was considerable. Despite the limitations to the size of potential audiences, in the final years of the decade Ellis laid the groundwork for the establishment of his own, very successful, cinema in Sidmouth. At a time of some uncertainty in the fledgling cinema business, evidence points to more than one local businessman capitalising on his understanding of and position within the community who was prepared to take a risk and invest in film. These findings are endorsed by those of Jon Burrows and Richard Brown, who have suggested that the importance of
“very small players in the field” has been overlooked by both contemporary commentators and later historians, and who conclude: “It now becomes apparent that cinema was transformed into a medium of entertainment available on every high street and accessible to a constituency of millions at a time when the trade was overwhelmingly dominated by small-time business persons.”5

Financial backing for local cinemas, as an examination of the local press, trade journals and company records has strongly evidenced, was by no means confined to one type of group or individual: instead, a much more nuanced picture has emerged, which also challenges our previous understanding of most cinema investors as outsiders. The number, diversity and complexity of partnerships or individuals involved in investment in the nascent cinema industry locally is a key finding of this research, which has uncovered a variety of sources involved in the financial backing for cinemas: collaborative partnerships and wealthy individuals; local funds and London money; small private companies and large business concerns. Evidence has clearly demonstrated that cinemas here might depend for investment on the director of a London company, the local architect, or a partnership between both. Tracking film through the touring shows of the previous decade furthermore reveals the continuities which existed between some early exhibitors of film and the new cinemas. Enterprising showmen or individuals at the forefront of film exhibition such as the Walfords, Albany Ward or Leon Vint exploited their knowledge of the business and went on to found cinemas themselves, thus constituting yet another discrete group of investors in local cinema. Cinemas across the larger resorts such as Torquay, Weston and Penzance thus displayed a “hotch-potch” of ownership, ranging from the local individual to the large company. Despite this diversity, or possibly as a result of it, research has shown, rather remarkably, that all these cinemas continued in existence until the end of this period at least.

The extent to which cinema rapidly became embedded in local culture has been revealed by this study: by 1913, even the smallest of these locations benefited from at least one picture theatre, and weekly advertising and reporting of films in the press had already begun to encourage communities to adopt regular cinema-going practices. My research has established the special significance of cinema’s contribution to these provincial communities, which found themselves
physically, culturally and technologically distant from metropolitan ideas and trends. First and foremost, cinemas had a visible new presence in the high street and were buildings in which communities, in particular those with few other entertainment venues, could take pride. Reports and correspondence in the press all evidence the enthusiasm which greeted their arrival, which brought well-lit facades, luxurious interiors and a taste of technology to even the smallest communities such as Sidmouth, who openly delighted in their ownership of it. Cinemas changed townscapes and transformed space, and put local communities in touch with the outside modern world, not only culturally, but technologically, bringing the wonders of electricity into the heart of the high street.

Most importantly, cinemas became culturally rooted in these local communities, democratising leisure in an unprecedented way. As Chapter Three has outlined, early film exhibition was centred on the touring shows in high-class venues with ticket prices of a minimum of 6d; cinemas, on the other hand, with their 2d or 3d. seats, cut-price coupons and children’s matinees, offered affordable entertainment to a wide array of local people, allowing them choice and a new way to spend free time. Picture theatres provided a unique social space, less constrained than the halls, clubs or churches with which they were more familiar, where spectators could enjoy the shared experience of cinema. To all resorts they brought a novel experience, and for those especially who had hitherto had little entertainment available, the presence of a cinema effected a cultural transformation, and offered regular and affordable opportunities for leisure to a wide section of the community.

The significance of the relationships which existed between some cinema managers and their communities has also been highlighted by this study. Many managers actively fostered good relations with local benevolent groups, charities, children and the Church. They strove to attract new audiences through special promotions, events or competitions and sought to maintain existing custom through special inducements and unique rituals which offered their spectators a sense of belonging. Astute local managers perceived cinema as a flexible commodity, responding to the needs of their customers by tailoring their provision to suit local circumstances, working patterns, or seasonal audiences. These modifications evidently resulted in differing practices and schedules from
one location to another, and at a local level gave cinema varied and individual profiles. Moreover, as this thesis has demonstrated, cinemas in these resorts enjoyed very positive and mutually beneficial relationships with their local newspapers, which further reinforced their position in the community. The gradual emergence of a popular film discourse in the press has been identified by this study, which has shown how the regular reporting of film developed in tandem with the growth in permanent cinemas, encouraging readers to become spectators, and audiences to read about film. Synopses and reviews formed interesting material which enlivened the local press columns and were in themselves entertaining. Such mutually supportive relationships enabled cinemas to be in touch with the communities they served and functioned to raise the importance of their status in their locality.

The adaptations and modifications to exhibition practices which this research has highlighted is nowhere more apparent than in the diversity of film programmes and performance schedule which these locations display. From the opening of the first cinema in 1909 to the end of this period, no single model of exhibition was adopted by all cinemas here. Whilst metropolitan and urban audiences adapted themselves to continuous shows and the film-only venue, spectators in these resorts still showed a marked preference for the variety model and the separate performance, with new buildings in the region still catering for the needs of performers and acts, as well as film. My research has shown that variety here persisted in some venues until the First World War and beyond, with the balance between films and other acts varying greatly from one cinema to another. The combination of film screen and skating rink was especially popular here, with rinking continuing in resorts such as Weston long after its decline elsewhere. This study has highlighted how the changing technologies such as the long film, which brought new developments to the region, posed a challenge to these local cine-variety programmes which habitually consisted of numerous shorts. It has evidenced the variety of responses from local exhibitors, and the wide range of factors from customer needs to rival competition which influenced their decisions. This research has also identified the range of benefits which long films could deliver and shown how some local managers exploited them with skill to distinguish themselves from their competitors or to attract a particular clientele.
Investigating the cost of the longer film to local exhibitors has revealed that it was not a strategy without risk, since such films, especially on release, could prove costly, especially to the smaller exhibitor. Moreover, whilst the race to screen the new long films could end in triumph for those who secured films first, in the restricted local markets it could spell financial disaster for those who arrived in second place.

The popularity of topical films in these regional locations was at least partly attributable to the local interest displayed in national and public events and to the sense of immediacy which such films, screened just days or hours after filming, seemed to give local audiences. Evidence has shown that these influenced both programmes and schedules in a significant way, impacting on the number of performances each day or each week, and creating a sense of anticipation in audiences eagerly awaiting their arrival. The local film too, whose popularity in these resorts endured until the end of this period, offered the same sense of immediacy, when time-sensitive footage of sports’ matches and fairs was screened within hours of being taken, or simultaneously with the event, as exemplified by film made of the Barnstaple fair. Local films, too, could foster a sense of pride in a community, locality or environment, and their attraction to audiences brought obvious economic benefits to the cinemas who screened them. Clever managers marketed these with skill and enticed audiences with an appeal to “come and see themselves”; others shot these films themselves, realising the value of a unique product.

The variety of venues which called themselves cinemas and which successfully engaged in the commercial exploitation of film during this pre-war period is one of the most significant findings of this study. Not only did the scale and style of these cinemas differ, but so did their programmes and the role film played within them. Scheduling practices still covered a wide spectrum from continuous programmes to sporadic performances. In addition, cinemas in Weston, Torquay and Penzance had to compete with the film shows provided by the local pavilion, which in the case of the latter, proved more successful in securing the important films of the day than the cinemas themselves. At the other end of the scale, as my research into Sidmouth has shown, whilst audiences were by definition modest in size, the manager nevertheless successfully procured films.
of prestige to rival the largest picture theatres elsewhere and brought a surprising array of films to audiences in such a small cinema. Far from forming a unified group, new cinemas here exhibited differences in their size, organisation, management and programming, yet they all, as my research has shown in this study, enjoyed success and some prosperity, and were welcomed in the communities which they served.

2 *TT*, 21 November 1913.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Date est.</th>
<th>Capacity/other details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnstaple</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnstaple Assembly Rooms¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Hall²</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renamed Albert Hall³</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Royal⁴</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picturedrome⁵</td>
<td>6th October 1910</td>
<td>Opened in Barnstaple Theatre Royal. Managing Director, Lionel Prichard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion Palace Theatre (also known as Lion Palace of Varieties)⁶</td>
<td>24th October 1910</td>
<td>Silver Street, formerly the Lion Iron Works. Owned by G. and L. Bliss brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penzance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s Hall⁷</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>850 seats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penzance Palace and Skating Rink⁸ (also known as Penzance Picture Theatre)</td>
<td>December 1909</td>
<td>New Street. Penzance Palace and Skating Rink Ltd. managed by Keith Prowse Ltd., London. Local manager Robert Thomas. Burnt down 17 April 1914.⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picturedrome¹⁰</td>
<td>15th December 1910</td>
<td>Opened in Central Hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penzance Pavilion¹¹</td>
<td>August 1912</td>
<td>1,000 seats. Pavilion Pictures operated here by Cornish Riviera Entertainments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cinema¹²</td>
<td>29th November 1912</td>
<td>Causewayhead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Establishment</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sidmouth</strong></td>
<td>Manor Hall</td>
<td>1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Sidmouth Cinema, the Drill Hall</td>
<td>January 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Sidmouth Cinema (converted from Belle Vue Restaurant)</td>
<td>February 1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Torquay</strong></td>
<td>Bath Saloons, Marine Spa</td>
<td>1870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Museum of Natural History Society</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Torquay Theatre Royal</td>
<td>1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picturedrome</td>
<td>December 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electric Theatre</td>
<td>December 1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ellacombe Empire</td>
<td>May 1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pavilion</td>
<td>August 1912</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Weston-Super-Mare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knightstone Pavilion</td>
<td>May 1902</td>
<td>2,000 seats</td>
<td>Baring Brothers, Cheltenham to provide entertainments. Publicly funded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Pier and Pavilion</td>
<td>June 1904</td>
<td>2,000 seats</td>
<td>Weston-Super-Mare Grand Pier Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Hall</td>
<td>January 1910</td>
<td></td>
<td>Converted to Cinematographic Room and Skating Rink by Shanly’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Hall</td>
<td>March 1912</td>
<td></td>
<td>Converted to Albany Ward’s New Palace of Varieties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regent Street Picture Palace</td>
<td>March 1913</td>
<td>1,500 seats</td>
<td>Weston-Super-Mare Picture House Ltd.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2. *NDJ*, 16 November 1905.
3. Ibid.
11. Board of Trade Company Registration Files, National Archives, Kew: BT31/32107/117848, Cornish Riviera Entertainments, Penzance.
SO, 5 February 1913.

*Kelly’s Directory of Devon, 1910, 744.*

*Kelly’s Directory of Devon, 1910, 744.*

*Kelly’s Directory of Devon, 1910, 744.*

TDSDJ, 8 December 1909.

TT, 15 December 1911; 22 December 1911.

TT, 9 May 1913.

TT, 24 October 1913.

TDSDJ, 23 August 1912.

WM, 26 April 1902.

WM, 15 June 1904.

WG, 1 January 1910.

WM, 16 March 1912.

WM, 5 August 1912.

WG, 22 March 1913.
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