

# BOLTON AND THE CINEMA: FROM MASS-OBSERVATION TO THE DIARIES OF A NOBODY.

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In this article I am looking at questions relating to popular culture and popular cinema by focusing on a particular case study: that of cinema-going in Bolton from the 1930s to the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> I draw on two texts which treat cinema-going in Bolton in the 1930s and 1940s. These are *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (1987), edited by Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan<sup>2</sup>, and Leslie Halliwell's *Seats in All Parts* (1985)<sup>3</sup>. *Mass-Observation at the Movies* contains a very substantial section devoted to the findings of a questionnaire organised by Mass-Observation in Bolton in 1938. The questionnaire was filled in by nearly 600 Bolton cinemagoers. *Seats in All Parts* is a nostalgic autobiographical memoir which charts Leslie Halliwell's own cinema-going activities, giving particular attention to the cinemas he attended in his home town of Bolton in the 1930s and 1940s. In the spirit of both *Mass-Observation* and Halliwell, I have had the no doubt foolish audacity to use my own diaries for the years 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1963 as a personal basis for understanding the nature of popular cinema-going in Bolton. In using these diaries I also had in mind the 'Motion Picture Autobiographies' submitted by readers of *Picturegoer* in the 1940s, which are to be found in J.P. Mayer's *British Cinemas and their Audiences* (1948).<sup>4</sup>

My diaries contain a more or less complete record of all the films I saw at the cinema during these years, together with details of which cinema I saw them at, what day I went to the cinema on, and also whom I went with. There are also comments about what I thought of the films. These remarks are, however, so rudimentary, and, in general, so universally laudatory that I shall not make any use of them. I trust my use of my personal diaries will not be taken as a desire for self-revelation (which is, in any case, very limited here), but simply as a wish to contribute, in however modest a way, to the understanding of British popular culture and British popular cinema-going. In stressing the local, the particular and the personal, I hope to be giving some social texture to the often general and abstract discussions of modern popular culture. In particular, in taking my own case of the cinema-going practices of a working-class adolescent male in Bolton in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I hope to be saying something of value about cinema-going in relation to age, class, gender, education, period and locality.

In my own particular case, a discussion of the cinema-going practices of my adolescence has to be understood with reference not only to the fact that I was born in 1945 into a working-class family (my father was a platelayer on the railways) and grew up in a Northern industrial town, but also with reference to the fact that I was a scholarship boy who, having attended a working-class primary school



*The Lido* (Bolton Evening News 19.10.89).

(Oxford Grove) until the age of eleven, then went on to a prestigious Direct Grant School (Bolton School) where I underwent a profound process of initiation into middle-class society and into traditional high culture, which was eventually to take me far away from the social milieu and the popular cultural practices of my childhood and adolescence.

My approach to the study of popular culture and popular cinema-going has been influenced not only by my own experience and by my reading of British sociologists of culture, but also by my reading of certain French cultural activists who worked in the popular education movement in France in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>5</sup> These activists were principally concerned with the difficulties encountered by working-class people in gaining access to high culture. They emphasised the gap between the cultural practices of those who had received higher education and those whose formal education had been limited to a relatively modest level. Consequently, they believed firmly in the existence of separate cultural 'circuits' (the popular and the educated/cultured). In this article I relate my changing cinema-going habits to my own educational development, as well as to the changing places at which I watched films. I also follow up the idea of a cultural 'circuit', by seeing a provincial town such as Bolton in the late 1950s and early 1960s as offering a bounded cultural horizon. In order to

do this satisfactorily one would, of course, have to set out all the educational, leisure and cultural options open to me as a working-class adolescent in Bolton in the late 1950s and early 1960s. What is more, if one truly wanted to understand the place of cinema-going within the full range of actual cultural practices, one would at least have to consider what one was reading, what one was listening to on the radio, watching on the television, as well as having to look at all the activities relating to family, school, church, youth club, street life, sport and so on and so forth. I am at least going to be modest enough not to attempt such a global investigation, and my account of my cinema-going will only touch here and there on some of these areas, although their existence is fundamental to my argument.

I have been encouraged (perhaps falsely) to think that it is worthwhile pursuing this personal approach to the study of popular cinema-going by a recent reading of D. Doherty, D. Morrison and M. Tracey, *The Last Picture Show? Britain's Changing Film Audiences* (1987)<sup>6</sup>, in which the authors set cinema-going as one leisure option within an overall context of everyday social existence. Two other texts which I have found relevant and stimulating, and which have contributed to my thinking about Bolton, popular culture and popular cinema are Peter Bailey's *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (1987 ed.)<sup>7</sup>, and Robert Poole's *Popular Leisure and the Music Hall in Nineteenth-Century Bolton* (1982).<sup>8</sup> Poole's exclusive concern is with leisure in nineteenth-century Bolton, and Bailey, in his study of rational recreation in mid-nineteenth century England, also focuses in particular on leisure and culture in Bolton. Both Bailey's and Poole's works encourage one to place one's thinking about cinema-going within a larger historical context of popular culture. They help one to see the leisure landscape of a town as something that is not a natural given, but as the creation of history and therefore as subject to constant change and transformation. They also remind one, however, that there are surprising continuities over time as well as obvious differences. Reading my own diaries, after having read Bailey and Poole, I could not fail but notice numerous such continuities in social and cultural experience between mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth

century Bolton: continuities of institutions and places (churches, parks, schools, streets, buildings...), continuities of leisure activities (games, hobbies, seasonal celebrations...), and, not least, continuities of language, social behaviour and social attitudes.

Having been born in 1945, and having been accustomed, therefore, to considering myself as part of the modern postwar world — a member of one of the first generations of teenagers, one of the early consumers of material goods, television and rock 'n' roll etc. — it is no doubt salutary to become aware of how I was also embedded in an older world in which culture and leisure were still to a significant degree subject to the control, scrutiny and regulation of middle-class figures of authority, and still operated largely with reference to an institutional framework of church (Methodist) and school. Alongside this world of regulated recreation, however, there ran, of course, the exciting world of working-class street life, which was experienced as a relatively autonomous realm free from the control and scrutiny of family, school and church. On reading my diaries, it became all the more clear to me that going to the cinema for young working-class males was an extension of this street life. Just as the night-time world of the working-class street offered adolescents possibilities of risky social and sexual freedoms and transgressions, equally a visit to the cinema was expected to provide the promise of such heady pleasures.

My diaries show that from 1958 to 1960 (that is, from the age of 13 to 15) every time I went to the cinema I did so with one or more other adolescent boys, except on three occasions only when I went with a girl — obviously early instances of courting visits. In 1958 and 1959 virtually all my visits to the cinema were in the company of other working-class boys from the two working-class streets (Norwood Grove and Elmwood Grove) adjacent to my own (Russell Street). On one occasion during these two years, however, I went with two boys from my Direct Grant School. During 1958 and 1959, although I was attending this school, it is clear that I was still deeply enmeshed in my own working-class community, and still led a leisure life outside school based on street life and

*Author aged eight — fourth from left — with boys from Russell Street, Elmwood Grove and Norwood Grove, with whom he went to the cinema until late 1959 (Bolton Evening News, 2.2.85).*



working-class youth club (connected to Park Street Methodist Church). In 1958, at the age of 13, I went to the cinema ten times, mostly on Fridays (4 times), but also on Mondays (2), Thursdays (2), Tuesday (1), Wednesday (1). At this relatively early stage of my adolescence my friends and I went to watch a mixture of rock 'n' roll films, comedies, horrors, westerns, Tarzans and epics (Appendix 1). Most of these were American, but there were some British films among them (*Blue Murder at St. Trinian's*, *Dracula*...). The last entry in my 1958 diary notes two unnamed films, simply set down as "2 'X's", seen at my nearest fleapit the Royal on St. George's Road.<sup>9</sup> This obviously heralded the very distinct pattern of my cinema-going activities in 1959 when I turned 14, and when, to judge from my diary, I was undergoing the most intense period of involvement with other working-class boys on the look-out for exciting night-time leisure pursuits.

In this year (1959) I went to the cinema 24 times. A clear sign that going to the cinema was regarded by me at this precise period as a form of sexual exploration and initiation, as well as a mild form of social and moral transgression, is that in my diary I boldly, and no doubt proudly, attached the 'X' category where relevant to the films I had seen. And, indeed, it was in general very relevant, for out of 24 double bills, that is 48 films, I listed 27 as having 'X' ratings (Appendix 2). The list of 'X' films, and of the cinemas at which they were shown, reveals to what extent the local provincial cinema scene in 1959 (that is, town-centre as well as out-of-town cinemas) offered an intensive diet of sex and horror films, mostly but not exclusively of American origin.<sup>10</sup> One interesting feature of the list, however, is the presence of French films arriving at local cinemas in Bolton and providing enticing new exotic and erotic possibilities in the shape of Brigitte Bardot. In February 1959, for instance, I saw *Light Across the Street* at my local cinema the Royal. In April I saw *Heaven Fell that Night* at the same cinema, and four days later went to watch *Love is My Profession* at the Capitol, one of the most decent and upmarket town-centre cinemas. In 1959, out of the 24 visits to the cinema 10 were on a Saturday, the rest being spread irregularly over the other days: Thursday (5), Monday (4), Wednesday (2), Friday (2), Tuesday (1). This clearly reveals the pattern of the traditional Saturday night outing.

In 1960 at the age of 15 I seem no longer to have looked to the cinema as a form of social and sexual transgression. For one thing, I ceased to note in my diary which films carried an 'X' rating. I did not attend my rather disreputable local fleapit once, and the list of films I saw during the year demonstrates that I had obviously lost the urgent need or desire for films that were quite so lurid. One very significant reason for my no longer continuing with my adolescent cinema-going habits of 1959 was that I had ceased rather abruptly to be embedded in, and identified with, my local group of working-class male friends, with whom I had hitherto spent my childhood and adolescence. In August 1959, and some days after a last visit with these friends to see *Monster on the Campus*<sup>11</sup> and *Unearthly*, my diary shows that I had a momentous street fight with one of them which led to an absolute break. Such, no doubt, are the personal and violent dramas that lie behind the rites of passage from working-class to middle-class life.

I had obviously been undergoing over a long period of time a profound process of incorporation into middle-class life and culture, mainly through the agency of my school.



*The Queens in 1953 (Bolton Evening News, 29.8.86).*

A violent rupture with my working-class friends only served to make the growing differences absolutely clear. All the time that I had been living the working-class adolescent street life, and that I had been following working-class adolescent patterns of cinema-going, I had also been undergoing an intense experience of education in my Direct Grant School, with its public-school atmosphere and rituals, during which I had been becoming more and more involved with academic subjects and becoming increasingly initiated into traditional high culture.

My diaries for 1958 and 1959 are littered with all the signs of an old-style academic education: the catalogue of sensational horror films, in fact, occupies a minor place alongside termly timetables, vocabulary lists of French and German words, Latin verbs, algebraic formulae, end-of-term subject percentages and form positions. The diary for 1959 also records a list of books read, in which the presence of the one 'X' rated text by Hank Janson (*Hate*) — perhaps the only *literary* sign of popular taste in the diary — is outweighed by John Buchan, P.G. Wodehouse and Emily Bronte. More relevant to the present discussion is the fact that the 1958 and 1959 diaries reveal membership of the School Film Society at which I saw the following titles in those years: *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Great Expectations*, *Seven Days to Noon*, *Winchester 73*, *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Passport to Pimlico*, and *Morning Departure*. Apart from *Winchester 73* all these films are British and were obviously thought to be not only worthy examples of film art, but also appropriate viewing for adolescent schoolboys. One also assumes that they must have been deliberately chosen in order to counteract the influence of popular American films being shown on television and at local cinemas.

In 1960, after my brusque rupture with my male friends from my working-class neighbourhood, I went to the cinema 17 times (4 of these in France while on a school exchange in Clermont-Ferrand). Virtually all of these cinema attendances in 1960 were in the company of my middle-class male school friends. On the whole, the selection of films in this year reveals a set of rather jolly, humorous items, most of them British (Appendix 3). The social comedies, such as *Private's Progress* and *I'm All Right Jack* would have been seen at the time as highly relevant by grammar-school types, whilst the pert sexual comedies (*Pillow Talk*, *A French Mistress* and *The Millionairess*) would no doubt have seemed tasteful as well as mildly titillating. In any case, both categories would have supported bright grammar-school boys in their own sophisticated self-image. In this year (1960), out of 17 attendances I never went to a cinema from Monday to



Theatre Royal, Bolton.

Thursday except during holiday periods, and the distinct tendency developed to go on a Friday evening (7) and not on a Saturday (2). This was clearly related to the different opportunities that had opened up for Saturday night entertainment with increasing age and full entry into young middle-class social life (dances, parties at friends' houses...). Although there was considerable interaction with girls in this year, none of this activity turned into going to the cinema with them. On one occasion however, I went to the Bolton School Girls' Division Film Society to watch *Boy on the Bridge*.

The movement away from male working-class adolescent street life into exclusively middle-class leisure and cultural activities was also accompanied by a greatly intensified initiation into literary culture. It is striking that the films I saw in 1960 were of a frankly middlebrow kind, whereas the literature I was already reading was largely made up of what would readily be considered as belonging to high culture (Ibsen, Wilde, Chekhov, Zola, Joyce...). In the light of the fact that only a few years later I was going to go on to read modern languages and literature at Oxford (and then later to become a university lecturer in French), this may well seem unsurprising. But a point of more general interest is surely that even if I had wanted to push my knowledge of cinema further, there would simply not have been the significant opportunities to do so in a provincial town such as Bolton in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In any case, my cultural aspirations would hardly have been satisfied at this stage by an acquaintance with the popular cultural form of cinema, and no doubt true nobility would still have been considered as belonging to the traditional literary forms.

In 1961 at the age of 16 I had obviously reached the stage of 'steady' relationships with girls, for out of 24 attendances at the cinema in this year 19 of them were with one or other of two girlfriends (the other visits being with my brother or schoolfriends). The visits to the cinema at this time seem, therefore, to have been a function of courting rituals. This is not to say that the films themselves did not have their attraction, but the list of films seen in the year (Appendix 4) does appear to demonstrate a surprising variety in quality and taste, which perhaps suggests that the paramount consideration was somewhere to go with one's girlfriend rather than a desire to see a particular film. Most of the films in the 1961 list are American. There are the epics and spectaculars (*Ben Hur*, *Solomon and Sheba*), musicals (*Can-Can*), Westerns (*The Magnificent Seven*), cartoons (*One Hundred and One Dalmatians*). There are also two films that show a recognition of teenage culture (*Where the Boys Are* and *Wild in the Country*).

But without doubt the most significant aspect of the list of 1961 films is the presence of British films which introduce into the cinema a new intensity and realism in their portrait of the social problems besetting young working-class people in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s: *Spare the Rod*, *A Taste of Honey*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. For people of my generation and background these were obviously some of the first films to engage seriously with issues of working-class life and working-class identity. Not least, for Northerners some of these films and those in a similar genre that were soon to follow (*A Kind of Loving*, *This Sporting Life*, *Billy Liar*...) produced an image of Northernness with which it was possible to identify profoundly (which had of course not been at all possible with films of an older period starring such figures as George Formby and Gracie Fields).<sup>12</sup> One can also say with hindsight that such films clearly played a role in bringing out and accentuating one's identification with one's working-class origins, and served to make one's relations with the middle-class far more problematic, just at the time that one was objectively entering its ranks. This complication of the relationship between one's objective middle-class status and one's working-class origins was, of course, to be even further deepened during the highly politicised atmosphere of the later 1960s and early 1970s.

As a bright sixth-former intent on self-cultivation, 1961 was also the year that I was introduced by one of the French masters at school into the more select and recherché pleasures of European art cinema. In January 1961 I went to a showing of Cocteau's *Orphée* at the Bolton Civic Theatre, a cultural venue which in terms of the cultural life of a Northern industrial town like Bolton was as far away as was possible from the local flea-pit the Royal where in 1959 I had previously been consuming such double bills as *Tarantula* and *The Monolithic Monsters*. I also attended in March 1961 a talk on silent films given by my French teacher at the 'French Circle' held at the Civic Centre. When Mass-Observation went back to Bolton in 1960 to see how the social and cultural life of the town had changed since the late 1930s, one of the features that Tom Harrison chose to highlight as a sign of a new openness to high culture and the outside world was precisely this French Circle that I was attending at the time. I was, of course, unaware that I was part of 'the mass' being observed by metropolitan and Oxbridge intellectuals and academics.<sup>13</sup> But this experience of European art cinema was an almost unique occasion, although my list of television programmes seen in 1961 indicates that I watched *Ivan the Terrible* on two successive Friday evenings in November. For one keen to extend his cultural horizons, high cinema was obviously not the most accessible of cultural forms in a provincial town in the later 1950s and early 1960s.

However, the list of the films I saw in 1962 at the age of 17, when I was preparing 'A' levels, shows that I was able to have a rich cinematic experience within the relatively limited range of available choices (Appendix 5). In this year, apart from on a very few occasions, I always went to the cinema with the same girlfriend. As in the 1961 list, there is still quite a variation in the type of films seen in 1962, but there is little doubt that, in general, the list demonstrates a more even quality and points to a more selective approach.

In 1963 I was preparing for Oxford entrance, and indeed I went up to Oxford in October of 1963. Before going to University I attended the cinema 23 times (Appendix 6).



*The Capitol in 1957, later the ABC. (Bolton Evening News, 8.5.90).*

On almost every occasion I was with one girlfriend. Most attendances were at the weekend, or during the week in holiday periods. There were still the American epics (*Exodus*, *Spartacus*), the odd teen movie (*Summer Holiday*), even a horror film (while on a French exchange), but the main genre I watched at Bolton cinemas in this year was serious adult drama (*Billy Budd*, *The Password is Courage*, *The Miracle Worker...*). However, my listing of films seen on television in 1963 shows that I was gaining access through this medium to different possibilities. In January I watched the Wajda trilogy *A Generation*, *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds*. In February I watched Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

In October when I went up to Oxford, I discovered the art cinema the Scala, joined the University Film Society and immediately became familiar with films by directors such as De Sica and Bergman. It is interesting to note that at the very time of my full initiation into high cinema in Oxford, I ceased to keep a record of my cinema-going activities. However, I can say that from this time access to a full range of films was always possible. I still continued to see a large number of popular mainstream movies, but these took their place alongside an equally large, if not larger, number of art-house films. Five years of going to the Scala in Oxford were followed by a year in Paris (1968-9) where I discovered the enormous range of Parisian cinemas as well as the Cinémathèque. At this point one feels one had developed cinema-going habits as remote as possible from those of a young working-class male attending the local fleapit in a Lancashire industrial town in 1959 and watching *Passport to Shame* and *Horrors of the Black Museum*. It is not only a question of the quality of films seen. It is also a question of the conditions, patterns, meanings and uses of the cinemagoing practice. I was no longer part of the working-class neighbourhood in which I was born, no longer accompanied by the male working-class friends I had known from birth, no longer attending the cinema five minutes down the road within the boundaries of my working-class territory, no longer making cinema an extension of adolescent street life, and, given the relative freedom of university research, I was no longer bound by disciplines and rhythms which tended to limit cinema attendances to weekends and holidays. I had now become part of a growing international group of educated seekers-out of art film experiences: a mobile, shifting class of students and young liberal professionals who watched films wherever they happened to be travelling and wherever they happened to be living.

I now want to turn to Richards and Sheridan's *Mass-Observation at the Movies* to make some connections between my diary records and the Mass-Observation material. Firstly, I have to admit to experiencing a personal fascination with the material compiled by these earnest intellectuals who came to Bolton in the late 1930s to see how the natives lived. What they found so strange as alien observers was, of course, simply the ordinary life of Northern working-class people, but this was obviously strange enough to make it incomprehensible to members of the southern educated and cultivated middle class. It is, however, true that the Mass-Observation material remains an impressive testimony to the sincere democratic sympathies of that extensive group of intellectuals, academics, writers, artists, photographers and filmmakers<sup>14</sup> who carried through the work of patiently observing and recording numerous aspects of working-class life in Bolton at that time. It is also true that, although the Mass-Observation project tried to rely exclusively on meticulous, objective documentation, it did, in fact, go some way towards legitimating the life and culture of the Lancashire working class, if only by the very willingness to accord this life and culture such a degree of patient attention. This having been said, however, one still has to admit that much of the Mass-Observation material on Bolton leaves one with a prevailing sense of the distance that separated the observers from the people whom they were observing. It is not that the Mass-Observation observers showed attitudes of condescension. On the contrary, they were resolutely populist in their attitudes to the working class. What they did, nevertheless, fail to conceal was their utter astonishment at the differences and gaps between themselves and those they had come to inspect. The fascination of the Mass-Observation material for me lies, therefore, in the incomprehension of middle-class, intellectual and academic observers in the face of what was, in reality, ordinary and everyday life.

The fascination for me also lies in the fact that the Bolton people who responded to the 1938 cinema questionnaire bore names still familiar to any Boltonian ear, and inhabited working-class streets which are indelibly printed in the mind of anyone brought up in the town before the large projects of street clearance and redevelopment. There is, in any case, something admittedly deeply satisfying, as well as totally unexpected, in finding the hidden streets of one's own working-class Lancashire childhood brought to light and set out in the pages of



Theatre Royal, St. George's Road in the 1950s. (Bolton Evening News, 19.10.89).

Richards and Sheridan's edited collection of Mass-Observation material. It is as if the most private and anonymous parts of one's own past had been allowed to enter into legitimate and scholarly culture! To my distress, my own street, Russell Street, does not occur in the answers to the questionnaire, but the adjoining street — Norwood Grove — (in which the friends with whom I was brought up and with whom I went to the cinema in 1958-9 mainly lived) is given its due mention.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, it is not so surprising that the particular streets of my own neighbourhood did not figure so evidently in the 1938 questionnaire, because none of the three cinemas chosen as the basis of the questionnaire was located in my precise neighbourhood. Two of them (the Palladium and the Crompton), although not very far away, were nevertheless beyond the boundaries of the area, that is to say those boundaries perceived by the inhabitants themselves as constituting the limits of their own territory. The third cinema included in the questionnaire was the prestigious town-centre Odeon, and the results of the questionnaire show to what degree this cinema drew on people from all areas of the town. An examination of a street map of Bolton shows that the vast majority of those attending the Crompton and the Palladium came from the streets either adjoining the cinema or within a five or ten-minute walk. My own diaries confirm this, in that they show quite decisively that there were, in general, only two kinds of cinema I attended in Bolton during my adolescence: either town-centre cinemas (Odeon, Lido, Capitol, Queen's and Theatre Royal), or my own local fleapit, the Royal. On one occasion only I went to the Rialto which was itself on the outermost boundary between my local neighbourhood and the town centre. (On two occasions between 1958 and 1961 I also went to the cinema in Manchester, and while away on holiday I went to cinemas in other towns.) The relationship between cinema and immediate locality, which is so strikingly evident in the Mass-Observation questionnaire findings, seems to have still been present in the no doubt vestigial patterns of my own adolescent working-class cinema-going in the late 1950s.

The most obvious difference between cinema-going in the 1930s and in the late 1950s is clearly shown by the Mass-Observation material, namely the extent to which people went more regularly to the cinema in the earlier period. Even my highest adolescent rate of three times a month in 1962 is well below the average levels as shown by the Mass-Observation questionnaire. My cinema-going activities took place in a period of a most dramatic decline in British cinema audiences.<sup>16</sup> And indeed, although one's memory is of relatively full town-centre houses (particularly at the weekend at the Odeon, Capitol and Lido),<sup>17</sup> one remembers the local cinema — despite the Royal's claim to be Bolton's 'Luxury Suburban Cinema'<sup>18</sup> — as a beleaguered, decaying auditorium where a few restless adolescents sat thinly scattered around, hoping for thrills and excitement. The Mass-Observation material also reveals the extent to which the working-class film audiences in the 1930s were made up

of boys and girls, and men and women of all ages. There was obviously more of a family atmosphere and the tastes revealed in the survey were clearly consensual and conformist. My own experience of adolescent working-class cinema-going in the late 1950s reveals, however, a desire for a cinematic experience that was more sensational and even frankly pornographic. It can be safely said that by the late 1950s the local cinema, and also those town-centre cinemas down on their luck (Theatre Royal, Queen's) had given up the aim of offering decent family entertainment and were desperately trying to attract adolescent working-class male customers by putting on enticing bills of sexual promise and bad taste.

According to *Britain Revisited* (the record of the Mass-Observation return to Bolton in 1960) the cinema in Bolton was in desperate decline at this precise time. Tom Harrison noted that only a dozen cinemas survived.<sup>19</sup> Leslie Halliwell tells us that the situation was already dire in 1949,<sup>20</sup> whereas only some ten or fifteen years earlier no fewer than 47 cinemas could be reached easily from the town centre. Halliwell was of course, to become a most celebrated compiler of guides to the cinema,<sup>21</sup> as well as the highly influential buyer of films for ITV and Channel 4. After his recent premature death, Channel 4 ran a special season of his favourite popular films in early 1989, and, prior to this season, Sir Denis Forman delivered a tribute to Halliwell's life and work:

*Over the years Leslie Halliwell probably had more influence over what we saw on our TV screens than any other single person, and this is because from 1968 until recently he chose all the feature films for ITV and later for Channel 4. At a rough estimate this means that he was responsible for over 22,000 hours of television entertainment. Buying films for television was his profession. But films meant much more to him than that. As well as being his business, they were his recreation, his constant study, his love and his life. But never his obsession. When it came to making a decision, Leslie was both cool and canny. He never paid more for a film than he had to, and to my knowledge he never put a film in the wrong place on the schedule. He knew when his taste was personal and when it coincided with the taste of the great film public. And luckily the overlap was something like 95 per cent. He was no movie snob. Nor was his attitude purely commercial. He loved the best — from Laurel and Hardy, Hitchcock, John Ford and the great golden years of Hollywood right up to Crocodile Dundee. He loved films of all kinds and of all periods and he once told me that he had 210 films that he would like to put in his Top Ten. Leslie's knowledge of films was deep and wide, and he extended the horizons of film knowledge. In particular, by producing his classic reference book, the Film Guide. He became a great scholar in a new field and deserves as an epitaph lines written for another great scholar who died a hundred years before him, Professor Jowett. It goes as follows: 'Professor Jowett is the master of this college. What he doesn't know isn't knowledge.' There was nothing that Leslie, the master of the film buff's college, didn't know about films. And if there was, it wasn't true. And so it's a great treat to be offered a season of Leslie's favourite films. For if they were his favourites, they must be the world's best.'*<sup>22</sup>

From this tribute it is clear that Halliwell was deemed not

only to have been highly knowledgeable about films, but also to have been profoundly in touch with popular taste. Who better, therefore, than Halliwell, one might think, to tell us about popular cinema-going? If, however, one compares his account of Bolton cinema-going with the results of the Mass-Observation questionnaire and also with my humble diaries, one finds that it differs in quite striking ways.

For me, personally, Halliwell's memoir not only has the nostalgic interest of being a very informative and evocative account of Bolton and its cinemas, but it also has the added interest of being about a working-class scholarship boy who not that long before me — Halliwell was born in 1929 — went from his working-class Bolton primary school to Bolton School and then to Oxbridge. What is, however, clear is that, on the evidence of *Seats in All Parts*, Halliwell did not identify closely with working-class life, either during his childhood and adolescence or in later life. In his retrospective account of Bolton's cinemas, in fact, he openly displayed his conviction that life in Bolton was on the whole grim and miserable, and, as he remarks, 'no backdrop for an aesthete'.<sup>23</sup> This explains his underlying view throughout *Seats in All Parts* that popular cinema was predominantly and even exclusively a form of compensation and a way of escape for working-class Boltonians forced to live out their hard, bleak existences in what he calls 'our damp and sooty town'.<sup>24</sup>

What is also clear is that his own personal experience of working-class life, and in particular his own cinema-going habits, seem to have fallen well outside normal working-

class patterns. He describes himself as a timid boy who hated roughness. Indeed, he mentions no experiences of street life spent in the company of other working-class boys.<sup>25</sup> He had an intensely intimate relationship with his mother, and it was with her that, as a child, he used to go so regularly and even frenetically to the cinema in Bolton. As an adolescent, after he was too old to go with his mother, he used almost always to go alone. These may well have been fertile conditions in which to become an obsessional and erudite film fan, but they indicate quite clearly that Halliwell's habits of going to the cinema differed considerably from popular routines of cinemagoing. One of the other principal ways in which his cinemagoing habits were different from those of the mass of people as revealed in the 1938 Mass-Observation questionnaire was the fact that he was willing to travel far beyond his own local cinemas and sample the wares at all the other 47 cinemas in the town. Or rather 46, since Halliwell admits to never having managed to get to one of these — the Gem in Shepherd Cross Street.<sup>26</sup> The fact that Halliwell constantly embarked on epic pilgrimages into unknown and alien tracts of his own town reveals the invincible eagerness of the fan and future buff, an attitude which seems remote from the more casual and utilitarian approach of the ordinary cinemagoer, for whom going to the cinema seems to have been an essentially sociable and communal habit practised within a very circumscribed local circuit of cinemas, a habit controlled in the short term by such considerations as the rhythms of the week, and in the longer term by changing personal circumstances of age, courtship, marriage and social and educational development.

#### Appendix 1. Films seen in 1958 at age 13.

27 March (Thursday)	<i>Jailhouse Rock</i>	Capitol
8 April (Tuesday)	<i>Blue Murder at St. Trinians's</i>	Odeon
21 July (Monday)	<i>The Sheepman</i>	Capitol
	<i>Cry Terror</i>	
21 August (Thursday)	<i>Home and Away</i>	Cinema in Dunstable
	<i>Smiley Gets a Gun</i>	
22 August (Friday)	<i>Tarzan and the Lost Safari</i>	Capitol
	<i>The Law and Jake Wade</i>	
19 September (Friday)	<i>Witness for the Prosecution</i>	Royal
	<i>Gun Duel at Durango</i>	
24 September (Wednesday)	<i>Ten Commandments</i>	Odeon
31 October (Friday)	<i>Dracula</i>	Theatre Royal
	<i>Wakamba</i>	
7 November (Friday)	<i>King Creole</i>	Odeon
	<i>Country Music Holiday</i>	
15 December (Monday)	<i>Frankenstein</i>	Royal
	<i>Son of Dracula</i>	

#### Appendix 2. Films seen in 1959 at age 14.

20 January (Tuesday)	<i>Fiend Who Walked the West 'X'</i>	Queen's
	<i>Boomerang</i>	
29 January (Thursday)	<i>Teenage Werewolf 'X'</i>	Royal
	<i>Dragstrip Girl</i>	
7 February (Saturday)	<i>The Moon is Blue 'X'</i>	Queen's
	<i>The Fantastic Disappearing Man 'X'</i>	
21 February (Saturday)	<i>I Bury the Living 'X'</i>	Queen's
	<i>The Dalton Girls</i>	
26 February (Thursday)	<i>Light Across the Street 'X'</i>	Royal
	<i>Isle of Levant 'X'</i>	
18 March (Wednesday)	<i>The Monster that Changed the World 'X'</i>	Royal
	<i>The Vampire 'X'</i>	
21 March (Saturday)	<i>Screaming Skull 'X'</i>	Theatre Royal
	<i>Cage of Doom 'X'</i>	

30 March (Monday)	<i>The Young Have No Time 'X'</i> <i>Public Enemy Number One</i>	Theatre Royal
6 April (Monday)	<i>Red Inn 'X'</i> <i>When the Devil Drives 'X'</i>	Theatre Royal
9 April (Thursday)	<i>Heaven Fell that Night 'X'</i> <i>Snorkel</i>	Royal
13 April (Monday)	<i>Love is My Profession 'X'</i> <i>Blood of the Vampire 'X'</i>	Capitol
22 April (Wednesday)	<i>Frankenstein 1970 'X'</i> <i>The Come On</i>	Rialto
25 April (Saturday)	<i>Anna Lucasta</i> <i>Great Van Robbery</i>	Queen's
2 May (Saturday)	<i>Girls on the Loose 'X'</i> <i>The Thing that Couldn't Die 'X'</i>	Theatre Royal
9 May (Saturday)	<i>Rally Round the Flag Boys</i> <i>Alaska Passage</i>	Lido
16 May (Saturday)	<i>Too Many Crooks</i> <i>Above Us the Waves</i>	Lido
4 June (Thursday)	<i>Tarantula 'X'</i> <i>The Monolithic Monsters 'X'</i>	Royal
6 June (Saturday)	<i>The One that Got Away</i> <i>Behind the Headlines</i>	Royal
9 July (Thursday)	<i>No Name on the Bullet</i> <i>Never Steal Anything Small</i>	Lido
18 July (Friday)	<i>Bandit of Zhobe</i> <i>Good Day for a Hanging</i>	Lido
25 July (Saturday)	<i>Passport to Shame 'X'</i> <i>Horrors of the Black Museum 'X'</i>	Capitol
10 August (Monday)	<i>Monster on the Campus 'X'</i> <i>Unearthly 'X'</i>	Theatre Royal
14 November (Saturday)	<i>A Private Affair</i> <i>Mecheta</i>	Lido
4 December (Friday)	<i>Blue Jeans 'X'</i> <i>Gunfighters of Abilene</i>	Odeon

### Appendix 3. Films seen in 1960 at age 15.

1 January (Friday)	<i>The Night We Dropped a Clanger</i> <i>Fireman Save My Child</i>	Lido
12 February (Friday)	<i>Five Pennies</i> <i>The Ama Girls</i>	Odeon
11 March (Friday)	<i>Private's Progress</i> <i>I'm All Right Jack</i>	Queen's
4 April (Monday)	<i>Normandie-Niemen</i>	
6 April (Wednesday)	<i>Les Héritiers</i>	
12 April (Tuesday)	<i>Les Cavaliers</i>	
15 April (Friday)	<i>Le Trou</i>	All at cinemas in Clermont-Ferrand
18 April (Monday)	<i>Please Turn Over</i> <i>Desperate Man</i>	Cinema in Manchester
13 May (Friday)	<i>Pillow Talk</i> <i>Silent Stray</i>	Lido
5 July (Tuesday)	<i>Two Way Stretch</i> <i>Naked Fury</i>	Queen's
18 August (Thursday)	<i>Sands of the Desert</i>	Cinema in Colwyn Bay
27 August (Saturday)	<i>Hercules Unchained</i>	Capitol
23 September (Friday)	<i>Peeping Tom</i> <i>Pay Off</i>	Capitol
31 October (Monday)	<i>Psycho</i>	Lido
25 November (Friday)	<i>French Mistress</i>	Capitol
9 December (Friday)	<i>Ocean's 11</i>	Capitol
31 December (Saturday)	<i>The Millionairess</i>	Odeon

### Appendix 4. Films seen in 1961 at age 16.

21 January (Saturday)	<i>Bulldog Breed</i>	Odeon
4 February (Saturday)	<i>Solomon and Sheba</i>	Odeon
11 March (Saturday)	<i>Saturday Night and Sunday Morning</i>	Capitol
17 March (Friday)	<i>Pure Hell of St. Trinian's</i> <i>Ski Attack</i>	Odeon

6 April (Thursday)	<i>La Princesse de Clèves</i>	Cinema in Angoulême
11 April (Tuesday)	<i>Cette Nuit ou jamais</i>	
19 May (Friday)	<i>Ben Hur</i>	Cinema in Manchester
20 May (Saturday)	<i>No Love for Johnny</i>	Odeon
27 May (Saturday)	<i>Mr. Topaze</i>	Odeon
17 June (Saturday)	<i>Fall of the House of Usher</i>	Capitol
26 June (Monday)	<i>Three Worlds of Gulliver</i>	Cinema in Tenby
	<i>Seven Ways from Sundown</i>	
8 July (Saturday)	<i>Very Important Person</i>	Lido
13 July (Thursday)	<i>Magnificent Seven</i>	Queen's
14 July (Friday)	<i>Strangers on a Train</i>	Capitol
22 July (Saturday)	<i>Can-Can</i>	Odeon
27 July (Thursday)	<i>The Defiant Ones</i>	Queen's
	<i>Run Silent Run Deep</i>	
5 August (Saturday)	<i>Where the Boys Are</i>	Capitol
9 August (Wednesday)	<i>One Hundred and One Dalmations</i>	Odeon
18 August (Friday)	<i>Spare the Rod</i>	Odeon
6 September (Wednesday)	<i>The Young Lions</i>	Lido
30 September (Saturday)	<i>Wild in the Country</i>	Odeon
21 October (Saturday)	<i>Hoodlum Priest</i>	Queen's
2 December (Saturday)	<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	Odeon
26 December (Tuesday)	<i>Polyanna</i>	Queen's

#### Appendix 5. Films seen in 1962 at age 17

5 January (Friday)	<i>Gigi</i>	Capitol
20 January (Saturday)	<i>On Friday at 11</i>	Capitol
27 January (Saturday)	<i>Room at the Top</i>	Lido
	<i>The Kitchen</i>	
3 February (Saturday)	<i>The Innocents</i>	Odeon
16 February (Friday)	<i>The Hustler</i>	Lido
3 March (Saturday)	<i>Best of Enemies</i>	Odeon
10 March (Saturday)	<i>Magnificent Seven</i>	Queen's
24 March (Saturday)	<i>On the Waterfront</i>	Queen's
31 March (Saturday)	<i>Fanny</i>	Capitol
7 April (Saturday)	<i>The Young Ones</i>	Capitol
20 April (Friday)	<i>Lover Come Back</i>	Odeon
5 May (Saturday)	<i>Only Two Can Play</i>	Capitol
25 May (Friday)	<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	Lido
2 June (Saturday)	<i>Splendour in the Grass</i>	Capitol
9 June (Saturday)	<i>Guns of Navarone</i>	Queen's
16 June (Saturday)	<i>Seven Brides for Seven Brothers</i>	Lido
26 June (Tuesday)	<i>Waltz of the Toreadors</i>	Odeon
29 June (Friday)	<i>The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone</i>	Capitol
17 July (Tuesday)	<i>A Kind of Loving</i>	Capitol
30 July (Monday)	<i>State Fair</i>	Odeon
9 August (Thursday)	<i>It's Great to be Young</i>	Queen's
14 August (Tuesday)	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	
16 August (Thursday)	<i>El Cid</i>	
21 August (Tuesday)	<i>The Pride and the Passion</i>	All at cinemas in Toulouse
5 September (Wednesday)	<i>Rear Window</i>	Queen's
	<i>Jayhawkers</i>	
15 September (Saturday)	<i>Summer and Smoke</i>	Capitol
20 September (Thursday)	<i>All Fall Down</i>	Capitol
22 September (Saturday)	<i>Seven Year Itch</i>	Queen's
28 September (Friday)	<i>Boys' Night Out</i>	Capitol
12 October (Friday)	<i>Loudest Whisper</i>	Odeon
29 October (Monday)	<i>Dr. No</i>	Odeon
10 November (Saturday)	<i>Les Liaisons dangereuses</i>	Lido
24 November (Saturday)	<i>La Vérité</i>	Lido
1 December (Saturday)	<i>El Cid</i>	Odeon
13 December (Thursday)	<i>Live Now Pay Later</i>	Cinema in Oxford
19 December (Wednesday)	<i>Notorious Landlady</i>	Odeon

In 1962 I also saw *Follow that Dream*, but I do not have a record of where and when I saw it.

## Appendix 6. Films seen in 1963 at age 18.

2 January (Wednesday)	<i>Billy Budd</i>	Odeon
4 January (Friday)	<i>Password is Courage</i>	Capitol
19 January (Saturday)	<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	Queen's
9 February (Saturday)	<i>Lolita</i>	Capitol
19 February (Tuesday)	<i>The Manchurian Candidate</i>	Odeon
20 March (Wednesday)	<i>Nine Hours to Rama</i>	Cinema in Oxford
26 March (Tuesday)	<i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i>	Odeon
29 March (Friday)	<i>Summer Holiday</i>	Capitol
1 April (Monday)	<i>The Vikings</i>	Queen's
10 April (Wednesday)	<i>King and I</i>	Queen's
18 April (Thursday)	<i>Spartacus</i>	Queen's
22 April (Monday)	<i>Phaedra</i>	Odeon
18 May (Saturday)	<i>Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?</i>	Capitol
24 May (Friday)	<i>This Sporting Life</i>	Odeon
15 June (Saturday)	<i>Two for the Seesaw</i>	Odeon
22 June (Saturday)	<i>Five Miles to Midnight</i>	Odeon
25 June (Wednesday)	<i>The Very Edge</i>	Odeon
3 July (Wednesday)	<i>7 Heures a la Frontière</i>	
4 July (Thursday)	<i>Dracula</i>	
9 July (Tuesday)	<i>Exodus</i>	All at cinemas in Toulouse
16 July (Tuesday)	<i>Sparrows Can't Sing</i>	Capitol
2 August (Friday)	<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Capitol
24 August (Saturday)	<i>The Mind Benders</i>	Odeon

## NOTES

- 1 An earlier version was given as a paper at the 'Popular European Cinema' conference, held at the University of Warwick in September 1989.
- 2 J. Richards and D. Sheridan (eds), *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, (London, 1987)
- 3 L. Halliwell, *Seats In All Parts* (London, 1985)
- 4 J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences* (London, 1948)
- 5 I have looked in detail at these activists in my book, *Popular Culture in Modern France* (London, 1991)
- 6 D. Doherty, D. Morrison and M. Tracey, *The Last Picture Show? Britain's Changing Film Audiences* (London, 1987)
- 7 P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England. Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London, 1987)
- 8 R. Poole, *Popular Leisure and the Music Hall in 19th Century Bolton*, Lancaster, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, 1982.
- 9 Halliwell's description of the situation of the Royal is very misleading since he suggests it was in an exclusively 'upper-class' area, which was far from the case: 'North-west of Bolton, where the upper classes resided, there were no cinemas save the Royal, a funny little place close in to town, just before the tram stopped at the Crofter's Inn. It had a fine mock-Tudor facade, but the interior was very seedy indeed, and the projection so appalling that on my only pre-war visit I, who had paid for my seat, actually walked out half way through the show, without having the nerve to demand my money back. (*Seats in All Parts*, pp.72-3). The Royal was just round the corner from Davenport Street where the Mass-Observation team had their headquarters.
- 10 On this new market for teenage sensational movies, see T. Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics. The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston, 1988)
- 11 The cover illustration of Doherty's *Teenagers and Teenpics* features the poster for this film.
- 12 *Sing As We Go* (1934) starring Gracie Fields was set in the mills of Bolton, and was described as 'Bolton's own film' (*Seats in All Parts*, p.8)
- 13 *Britain Revisited*, ed. T. Harrison et al., (London, 1961) p.30.
- 14 Humphrey Jennings was a key figure in Mass-Observation.
- 15 *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, p.47.
- 16 For precise statistics, see D. Doherty, D. Morrison and M. Tracey, *The Last Picture Show? Britain's Changing Film Audiences*, (1987)
- 17 It was no doubt an exceptional occasion, but my diary entry for Saturday, March 11, 1961, notes that we queued for two hours to get into the Capitol to see *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. On Saturday, April 7, 1962, we also queued for 1 3/4 hours to see *The Young Ones*.
- 18 See for example, the advertisement for the Royal in *Bolton Evening News*, 28 February 1958.
- 19 *Britain Revisited*, (1961) p.53.
- 20 *Seats in All Parts*, p.130.
- 21 See in particular the numerous editions of his *Film Guide* and his *Filmgoer's Companion*.
- 22 Channel 4, 21 April 1989.
- 23 *Seats in All Parts*, p.27.
- 24 *Seats in All Parts*, p.13.
- 25 'I was the sort of small boy who loathes rough games; and being the youngest in the family (by thirteen years) I could hardly fail to concern myself chiefly with adult interests, since I had no contemporaries. So the cheap westerns, the serials, and the "U" certificate Saturday matinees, with their noisy orange-eating crowds of smelly kids, were not for me.' *Seats in All Parts*, p.10.
- 26 It is a matter of some private pleasure to me, therefore, that the Gem was, in fact, my earliest local cinema — the one nearest to my primary school (Oxford Grove) and the one at which I attended children's Saturday matinees in the regrettably unrecorded prehistory of my own childhood cinemagoing habits in the very early fifties, and even late 1940s. Halliwell was, by the way, quite wrong to say it cannot have been a real fleapit because it was too near 'snooty' Church Road (*Seats in All Parts*, p.14). In fact, it was not strictly in the Church Road area, but was firmly situated in the middle of such decidedly humble working-class streets as Darley Street and Cellini Street. Halliwell's grasp of the social topography of Bolton is a little shaky at this point.