



University  
of Glasgow

Goode, I. (2011) *Cinema in the country: the rural cinema scheme – Orkney (1946-67)*. *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, 30 (2).  
ISSN 0277-9897

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/54557/>

Deposited on: 13<sup>th</sup> February 2012

# CINEMA IN THE COUNTRY: THE RURAL CINEMA—ORKNEY (1946-67)

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The act of transporting cinema to and exhibiting films for the rural communities of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland has attracted a fair amount of press attention at home and abroad recently (“Box Office”). This is partly due to the events pioneered by the British actress Tilda Swinton and the writer and critic Mark Cousins. Beginning with the film festival *The Ballerina Ballroom Cinema of Dreams* held in Nairn on the north east coast of Scotland in 2008, followed a year later by *A Pilgrimage* which involved tugging a mobile cinema along an exhibition route from Fort Augustus to Nairn incorporating Loch Ness. These initiatives and less publicized others, such as *The Small Islands Film Festival* (2007-2009), are born of a passionate desire to not only take a preferred vision of cinema to selected areas of rural Scotland, but also, to offer potential audiences a different cinema going experience by challenging what might be considered the norms of film exhibition.

The vehicle for *A Pilgrimage* was the *Screen Machine*, a custom built articulated lorry that converts into a self contained one hundred and two seat cinema. This mobile cinema was painstakingly developed by Highlands and Islands Arts Ltd. in conjunction with CinÉmobile of France between 1994 and 2005 to negotiate the narrow and twisting road network of rural Scotland. *Screen Machine* is currently managed by Regional Screen Scotland and financially supported by a combination of Scottish Screen, Highlands and Islands Enterprise,

Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar (formerly the Western Isles Council), and North Ayrshire Council. The mobile cinema serves the communities of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and has also delivered cinema to UK troops during a four week visit to Bosnia in 2001 (“Screen Machine”).

The current impetus behind mobile cinema and other community orientated forms of film exhibition has been supported by the soon to be abolished—UK Film Council. In 2009 the Distribution and Exhibition department of the Council launched an initiative named the Rural Cinema Pilot Scheme designed to give “people in rural areas the opportunity to enjoy the communal experience of cinema” in England (“Rural Cinema”). This scheme was allocated £1.2 million of Lottery funding and the use of digital technology offers the possibility of extending the geographical reach of UK film exhibition (“Rural Cinema”). These recent developments in rural provision prompt the question: to what extent has that type of cinema which Barbara Klinger refers to as non-theatrical, and which I refer to here as rural, been written into film history? (Klinger 2008).

Rural cinema represents a relatively under-researched and developing area of film history in different national contexts (Maltby; Allen; Stokes 2008; Meers; Biltereyst; Van De Vijver 2009). This work is expanding the geography of historical research beyond the urban context of cinema. What I am interested in here is extending

this history of cinema and exhibition to Scotland, and specifically the remote location of Orkney—the collection of islands ten miles off the north eastern tip of the mainland - and in the policy directives and nature of the conditions under which organized rural cinema becomes possible. This in a period that begins with the formation of the Scottish Film Council in 1934 and in a country where over ninety per cent of the geography of its land mass is rural and historically depopulated (“The Scottish”).

## UK FILM INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

The 1930s represents a period of concern throughout the UK over the perceived effects of the commercial cinema on a growing audience. The 1932 report *The Film in National Life* was commissioned by the Commission of Educational and Cultural Films to investigate “the role of the cinema in education and social progress” (“History of the BFI”). The published report recommended the formation of a central film institute and argued for the “recognition of film as a powerful instrument for good or evil in national life” (Commission on Educational and Cultural Films 1932; Bolas 2009; Napper 2009). There is evidence here, in the emerging British film culture, that the national audience can be maneuvered away from the distraction that is the entertainment film, assuming as Jeffrey Richards has argued “an intelligent audience waiting to be discovered” (Richards 1984; Stead 1981).

It is against a background of institutions and individuals such as John Grierson seeking to instrumentally direct the use of film towards non-commercial and educational ends that the British Film Institute and its branch in Scotland, the Scottish Film Council, emerged.<sup>1</sup> The four panel structure of the Scottish Film Council consisted of Education, Entertainment, Amateur and Social Service. Concurrent with these institutional developments was the suggestion from the Social Service Panel “that a mobile cinema van should be purchased to tour rural areas

and to show films periodically in different villages” (1/1/249). The feasibility of this suggestion was strengthened by the financial support offered by the Carnegie Trust for 16mm projectors for use by rural community councils (GD281/82/74). The extension of the 16mm film distribution market beyond the home movie sector into education and other non-theatrical exhibition locations also develops during this decade (Lebas 1995). The institutional claim on this expansion of access is demonstrated by The Scottish Educational Film Association a body formed in 1935 to promote the use of the educational film and other visual aids in education (“Biography of”). C.M. Boyle declared that “in the years before the war, in the new field of non-theatrical cinema, or might we call it Social Cinema, Scotland has occupied a foremost position” (Boyle 65).

The beginning of the second world war in 1939 quickened the implementation of this policy, as the Scottish Film Council in conjunction with the Ministry of Information was directed to organize film shows for children evacuated to rural communities using the apparatus of mobile cinema.<sup>2</sup> The Evacuees Film Scheme delivered mobile cinema in vans to audiences in reception areas across the Scottish Lowlands and Highlands. More 16mm projectors were made available through the support of the Carnegie UK Trust and film programmes were transported to and exhibited in venues that included schools, halls and the kitchen of a private house.<sup>3</sup> The precedent of non-theatrical cinema schemes directed from institutional centers to geographical peripheries and organized under the duress of war was continued in the post-war period.

The Highlands and Islands Film Guild was formed in October 1946 following an Inverness conference involving public bodies with common interests in the area (Morris 269). Negotiations between local authorities, government departments, social organizations and headed by the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Limited led to the public announcement of the Guild’s formation. Press coverage of the event emphasizes

the defining functions of the organization and the necessity of aid for rural Scotland. The necessity of economic and cultural provision had assumed renewed significance as a means of countering isolation and depopulation as servicemen and women returned home after the second world war.

The functions of the new body were made public as follows:

- (a) improving the educational, cultural and recreational amenities available to rural communities in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland by exhibiting and organizing the exhibition of films on a non-profit-making basis;
- (b) in close association with education authorities and other statutory or voluntary bodies concerned with the welfare of rural communities in Scotland, advising, assisting and co-operating with local organisations, such as community associations, whose objects might include the use and development of films for the purposes of education and recreation, and to promoting and encouraging the formation of such organisations and associations in areas where they did not already exist;
- (c) assisting education authorities in furthering the educational use of films in rural schools and communities;
- (d) producing or encouraging the production of films which might become permanent records of Scottish life etc. (Film User 1956).

These functions make clear the institutional role of channeling culture in the form of cinema to the rural communities of the Highlands and Islands. The initial finance required to launch the Guild came from grants provided by the Scottish Education Department and the Carnegie Trust and aided by amendment of Entertainment Tax legislation pertaining to non-profit making bodies and educational purpose (GD281/92/8). The

provisional nature of non-theatrical cinema and the dependence on and involvement of the community in its transportation and operation are key factors in the identity and appeal of rural cinema in the post-war years (Morris 1955; Ross 1966; Cameron 1993).

The Guild began delivery of mobile cinema in 1947 with two units serving the areas of Shetland and Caithness and North Sutherland. In that year of operation 441 film shows were offered to 29,400 spectators (Ross 271). During the following year the Guild expanded its activities to fourteen mobile cinema units that covered the five crofter counties of Argyll, Inverness, Ross, Sutherland and Shetland, including the Hebrides. The geography of the Guild's exhibition areas omits the Border counties to the south and also the Orkney Isles to the north east. It is the development of the provision of rural cinema in Orkney which interests me here as a preliminary case study and precursor to a larger project on the history of rural cinema in Scotland. I select Orkney, because of its history of Nordic connections, and its geographical location and above all its decision to organize its own rural cinema scheme semi-independently of the Film Guild in 1946 (CO5/1/14).

The particular history of rural cinema in Orkney occurs from the social and cultural conjuncture of state concern with youth education and the geographical significance of the area's strategic role during the second world war. I want to outline the importance of these antecedents before plotting the growth and identifying the key characteristics of the exhibition of rural cinema in Orkney.

## ORKNEY AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The sheltered area of water to the south of the Orkney archipelago named Scapa Flow formed a key natural harbor for the Royal Navy during both world wars ("Welcome to"). The capacity of this area to function as a sheltered harbor meant that it assumed defensive importance. During the second world war there was an influx of

up to sixty thousand military and civilian personnel into Orkney and the creation and adaptation of buildings for residential and communal use to accommodate them (Wood 18). Purpose-built and pre-fabricated Nissen huts and other service buildings were generally of the type which prevailed elsewhere in wartime Britain. Included amongst the recreation facilities offered to the personnel of naval bases and army camps was cinema. Films were shown in buildings constructed from the same functional architecture as the rest of the bases (Wood 18).

Responsibility for the organized provision of cinema and entertainment for the forces fell to the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), which was formed in 1939. Basil Dean's account of ENSA highlights how the provision of relatively recent feature films on 16mm (sub-standard) had to be guaranteed with distributors before a cinema service for the forces could be started effectively:

distributors had not taken the sub-standard market very seriously; they had usually disposed of these rights in their films to film libraries for small lump sums after the other rights had been fully exploited, which meant that the films were several years out of date before they were shown in miniature. The sub-standard has certain physical advantages which made it the ideal solution to a large part of our problem. It is printed on non-inflammable stock, and can be shown over small projectors mounted in light vans and using the local electricity supply. Thus entertainment could be taken to men in the most lonely places, such as gun sites and small canvas camps, where the need was often greatest, without the necessity for heavy transport, motor generators and special fire precautions (Dean 51).

Michael Balcon assisted the cinema division of ENSA by obtaining a number of mobile cinema vans, equipped with 16mm projectors, from various organizations

that were accustomed to hire them out for electioneering purposes (Dean 51). The organized mobilization of cinema during the war created a legacy of provision that could be adapted to serve the rural communities of Scotland in the post-war period. This was particularly evident in Orkney where previous distribution arrangements and potential exhibition spaces could be adjusted to serve the local population during the immediate post-war years.

## YOUTH EDUCATION

The British government decided in 1939 that the Ministry of Education would "undertake direct responsibility for youth welfare" and require local authorities to appoint youth education officers (Percival 1951).<sup>5</sup> The 1944 Education Act is noted for extending the education process through the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen, increased further education provision and the prioritization of youth education (Tinkler 2001; Jones 2003; Barber 1994). Penny Tinkler suggests that the publication in 1946 of a Ministry of Education pamphlet called *Youth's Opportunity* represented an attempt to offer "some form of compensatory education" (Tinkler 79). Ken Jones also identifies in the Ministry of Education the view that the rapid industrialization of the previous century had delivered many benefits, but that this had come with consequences for the town and city life enjoyed by youngsters. These included a loss of community, reduced proximity to nature and increased complexity of social relationships (Jones 27). This antipathy towards the effects of industrialization was also shared by the Scottish Education Department who, in a 1947, report deplored the cultural life and linguistic habits of those areas where "language had degenerated into a worthless jumble of slipshod ungrammatical and vulgar tones, still further debased by the less desirable Americanisms of Hollywood" (Jones 34). These years are notable for an education policy that seeks to intervene in culture as part of an attempt to influence young people

"in order to further the progress of the young towards social selfhood" (Jones 34). The orientation of cinema towards education initiated in the 1930s corresponds with these developments in youth education.

Minutes of the Orkney Education Committee show local evidence of the national developments outlined above. In April 1946 reference is made to a directive from the Scottish Home Department and the Scottish Education Department that points to "the statutory duties of an Education Authority in regard to the provision not only of formal education facilities, but of facilities for physical and social welfare also" and calls for applications for "schemes to secure provision of voluntary leisure time occupation, in such organised cultural training and recreative activities as are suited to their requirements for persons over school age" (CO5/1/16). Grants were offered to support these initiatives and while there is no evidence to show that Orkney directly benefited in the way that the Guild had, it is the wartime provision of accommodation and entertainment and post-war education policy that assists the development of the rural cinema scheme in Orkney.

### THE ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY EXHIBITION

The Education Committee minutes indicate that Alex Doloughan was responsible for implementing the state policy directives in Orkney. Doloughan, formerly a school-teacher on Fair Isle, occupied the roles of County Youth Organiser, Assistant Director of Education and Director of Further Education throughout his career with the county; he went on later to act as election agent for the Liberal Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland, Jo Grimond.<sup>6</sup> The proposition that Orkney should have a Rural Cinema Service was concurrent with the beginning of the Highlands and Islands Film Guild. Doloughan attended the conference that agreed the establishment of the Guild

and subsequently indicated to the council "that a more satisfactory and more economical service could be provided in Orkney on an independent footing" (CO5/1/16). This early indication of independence can be contrasted with the decision of Zetland Education Authority (Shetland - a group of islands to the north of Orkney) to offer its own financial support to the Guild in exchange for it being included in the Guild's first planned exhibition routes (GD281/92/8).

Existing cinema provision on Mainland Orkney was provided by the Albert Kinema in the main town of Kirkwall. The Albert was destroyed by a fire in 1947 and replaced by the Temperance Hall, which had operated as a Royal Navy cinema during the war until the new cinema opened in 1955, appropriately named *The Phoenix* (Crisp 1994). The Naval Cinema Service continued to operate at the Naval Base on the South Mainland after the war, but these facilities remained a considerable distance from the people on the edges of the Mainland and particularly for the communities resident on the numerous islands that surrounded the Orkney Mainland.<sup>7</sup>

Another key factor in the feasibility of the scheme was the support available to the village halls and the recognition of the role of these venues to the cultural life of rural communities. Jeremy Burchardt shows that the social and economic welfare of the rural communities had been an area of concern for the National Council of Social Service (UK) since the 1920s (Burchardt 1994 and 2006; National Council of Social Service 1945). Once the war was over, the Scottish Council of Social Service continued its support for the facilities that could be offered by Village Halls as meeting places and centers for the cultural life of the community (CO5/1/14). The combination of existing halls and the hastily-erected architecture of the war meant that the sum of these spaces could now support the comprehensive ambitions of community schemes - such as rural cinema ("NCVO").

Capital expenditure of approximately £800 on the necessary equipment for the

establishment of the Rural Cinema Service in Orkney was approved in 1946 (CO5/1/14). The initial exhibition route for the scheme would take in the isles of Rousay, Shapinsay, Eday, Stronsay, Sanday, and Westray with the subsequent addition of the most distant northern islands of North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray. Within two years of operation the scheme covered all of the occupied islands. The scheme would be non-profit making but also aim to minimize annual deficits with a capital outlay of £1,217, and estimated annual running costs of £1,207. The admission charge was initially set at 1 shilling and 6 pence (d) for adults and 9d for children (CO5/1/15). This tariff was in line with the average price for a cinema ticket in the rest of the UK ("Cinema Average"). The early organization of the scheme signals the desire for a relatively autonomous service: at this point, however, Orkney is still a member of the Film Guild (then in Edinburgh) and dependent on them for the booking and distribution of films to Orkney, and for the servicing of equipment. Equipment provision and the organization of exhibition would be carried out by Doloughan and the first operator recruited to work for the service, Sandy Wylie (CO5/1/15).

### EXHIBITION JOURNEYS AND COMMUNITY AUDIENCES

Rural Cinema Service screenings began in January 1948 with initial attendances exceeding previous estimates. The audience addressed by the scheme consisted of adults and children with the first thirty shows attracting an aggregate audience of 2,531 adults and 996 children—3,527 persons, with an average of 117 persons per show (CO5/1/15). At this point the service was delivered personally by a single operator—Sandy Wylie, who traveled to the islands with projector, screen, speaker, transformer, gramophone, records, sundry cables and spares—as well as films (Cameron 25). Given that the venues for exhibition were local halls and huts projection was only possible if generators were available to provide the

necessary electricity. The operator depended on the voluntary contributions of the community to assist with the transportation of equipment to and from the island venues. At this point the cinema is conditional because it is subject to the operator negotiating difficult weather and seas, and often precarious landing conditions, and then converting the venues into temporary cinemas (Cameron 25).<sup>8</sup>

The journeys undertaken during the winter to reach the exhibition locations were inevitably subject to adverse weather conditions: the island of North Ronaldsay proved the most distant and difficult location to reach. The report on the service for November 1948 describes a crossing to this island when

the sea was so rough that the operator's suitcase was washed overboard. It contained his personal luggage for the trip including a camera valued at £49, a large collection of photographs, the proceeds of the show held at Dounby on October 26 (about £8). The case sank before it could be retrieved. The operator was stormstayed on North Ronaldsay until October 31st (CO5/1/15).

In order to reduce the threat of the cinema service not reaching the outer islands, the journeys undertaken in the early entirely mobile stage of the scheme were later reduced. North Ronaldsay was given its own projection facilities, a local operator was recruited and the island became a "static unit" with the films distributed by post (CO5/1/16).<sup>9</sup>

The reporting of the progress of the scheme to the monthly meetings of the Education Committee reveals the priority given to regular delivery of pre-selected film programmes to the isles. Attendance and a breakdown of revenue and costs for the exhibition routes are reported along with related issues of shows lost, equipment maintenance and purchase, staff illness and recruitment. The council meeting minutes indicate that the consistent transporting of the apparatus of cinema to rural communities to provide a

reliable exhibition service took priority over the films that the audiences were seeing.

Attendances continued to increase in the islands through 1948, in line with cinema attendance elsewhere in the UK: the scheme was extended to Orkney Mainland in 1949, beginning with fortnightly visits to five dispersed centers: Finstown, Stenness, Harray, Dounby and Holm ("British Film").

The mainland service also extended to the tuberculosis ward of the hospital with films projected from the main corridor into the ward (CO5/1/16, Cameron 24).

The following report for the year of 1953-54 details the geography of exhibition for the scheme and the recorded attendances:

### ORKNEY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

#### Rural Cinema Scheme

Unit	Center	No. of shows	Average audience: Adult	Average audience: Children	Total
I	Flotta	26	29	22	51 (50)
	Graemsay	26	21	3	24 (27)
	Hoy	25	16	6	22 (27)
	Burray	26	55	37	92 (103)
	Eday	25	42	19	61 (70)
	Papa Westray	25	25	10	35 (31)
	Sanday	26	85	31	116 (107)
	Westray	26	60	21	81 (58)
	Stronsay	26	70	26	96 (98)
	Shapinsay	25	69	13	82 (84)
		<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>		
II	Deerness	39	68	28	96 (116)
	Dounby	38	117	50	167 (189)
	Rendall	26	42	22	64 (74)
	Stenness	26	56	34	90 (87)
	St. Andrews	26	45	18	63 (82)
	Holm	26	53	30	83 (65)
	Orphir	25	41	23	64 (65)
	Harray	24	48	28	76 (81)
	Quoyloo	26	43	30	73 (79)
	Evie	25	61	35	96 (92)
		Finstown	26	39	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>			

Static Units	Wyre	24	17	7	24 (28)
	Rousay	25	50	17	67 (59)
	Egilsay	23	17	4	21 (23)
	N. Ronaldsay	25	28	7	35 (44)
Extra	Rockworks	1	26	26	52
	<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>			
Hospital	Eastbank	29	15	-	15
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>690</b>			

No. of shows lost -	Weather	7 (5)
	Illness of operator	- (1)
	Mechanical Trouble	2 (2)
	Holidays and Local Functions	7 (5)
	Other causes outwith control	2(0)

18(13)

Note: Figures within brackets are for the previous year.

**Table 1.** Orkney Education Committee Audience Attendance Report, 1953-54.

This table was accompanied by a financial statement for the same period which showed an overall deficit and a written account of the year with a list of costs that reveals the highest outlay to be the hire of films (CO5/1/18).

The initiation of the Rural Cinema Scheme was assisted by government policy on youth education. This table offers no conclusive evidence that teenagers formed a significant part of the audience in 1953-54. The evening film programmes were attended by audiences of adults and children with adults in the majority at all venues. The attendance figures also reveal how important the scheme was to the smaller islands such as Shapinsay, Stronsay and Sanday as these locations provide some of the highest audience numbers and revenue. The static units operated more economically by local people do not appear to suffer in attendance by not having the films delivered by the travelling operators.

Audiences grew during the first ten years of the scheme and began to decline

towards the end of the 1950s. The first record of concern occurs in December 1957 with "figures showing a steep decline in attendance at Evie Drill Hall, a privately owned hall which was the most uncomfortable to which the Service went" (CO5/1/20). There were attempts to reduce costs through negotiations with hall committees as deficits increased and the scale of the scheme was reduced with shows cancelled first on the mainland (ED30/24).

### CONDITIONS OF EXHIBITION

The impediments to transporting films and equipment to the islands and the architectural particularities of the non-theatrical exhibition spaces were key characteristics of 16mm cinema in rural Scotland. The conditions of exhibition dictated by the local halls and huts of Orkney are recalled here by the operator Ian Cameron:

Monday, Rendall was the first hall visited on the Mainland. It was a pre-fab[ricated] concrete type of building. It could be very cold

and had very bad acoustics. After several visits I persuaded the hall committee to cut a six inch square hole in the wall of a small room at the end of the main hall, thus the projector could be set up outside the hall proper and this greatly improved the sound quality.

Tuesday was the turn of Stenness. The hall was an ex-army hut and this type of wooden building always gave a good sound reproduction since the rafters helped to soften any echoes there might be (Cameron 26).

Operators such as Cameron were trained by Wylie in the use of projection equipment and learnt about the steps required to offer a cinema experience to an audience accommodated in a utilitarian space.<sup>10</sup> This professional exhibition in what might be called amateur spaces demonstrates how the improvised, and home made qualities of rural cinema exhibition define the experience of rural cinema-going for local communities. It is a cinema that was made possible by the journeys; transportation of the



Typical exhibition conditions at the local village hall on the island of Stronsay as an audience enjoy a screening of an Abbott and Costello film, Christmas 1950s (© National Museum of Scotland).

16mm apparatus also depended upon the assistance of the local communities and offered the possibility of involvement in its regular assembly, operation and disassembly.

## PROGRAMMING

A typical programme for the Rural Cinema Scheme would comprise a Pathé newsreel, followed by a cartoon or travel film, a preview of coming attractions and finally the main feature (Cameron 24). This extract from a list of the films offered to audiences during 1954 give an indication of the type of main features shown; it also illustrates how the films shown were up to three years old (Cameron):

Date	Film	Date	Film
7 <sup>th</sup> May	<i>Singin' in the Rain</i>	7 <sup>th</sup> June	<i>Derby Day</i> (1952)
13 <sup>th</sup> May	<i>Deadline</i> (1952)	17 <sup>th</sup> June	<i>Blackbeard the Pirate</i> (1952)
14 <sup>th</sup> May	<i>Cry Danger</i> (1951)	1 <sup>st</sup> July	<i>The Shows of Kilimanjaro</i> (1952)
20 <sup>th</sup> May	<i>The World in his Arms</i> (1952)	15 <sup>th</sup> July	<i>Folly to be Wise</i> (1953)
27 <sup>th</sup> May	<i>Treasure of the Golden Condor</i> (1953)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug.	<i>Pat and Mike</i> (1952)

Table 2. A typical programme for the Orkney Rural Cinema Scheme.

The composition of programmes addressed a family audience, with popular Hollywood genre films such as westerns, war films (particularly those involving naval conflicts) and musicals - as well as British/Scottish films - gaining approval with the audience. This policy meant that when the restricted X certificate was introduced in 1951, films carrying this rating were not normally included in the programmes. Audiences were able to comment on the programmes provided for them by completing an annual questionnaire issued by the operators. Annual reports on the scheme summarized the feedback of audiences gathered from the annual questionnaires. This is an extract from the report for 1953-54:

The most popular films *The Cruel Sea* [Frend 1953], *Johnny Belinda* [Negulesco 1948], and *Appointment with Venus* [Thomas

1951]. The most popular stars Gregory Peck and Jack Hawkins, Glynis Johns and Jane Wyman, while nobody had a good word to say for Orson Welles' classic film *Citizen Kane* [1941] (CO5/1/18).

This is not directive programming designed to enhance film appreciation in the way of the growing film societies movement, but it aims instead to attract and retain rural audiences in non-theatrical exhibition spaces (Macdonald 2009). The most popular film for this year was the Rank Studio produced documentary film of the Coronation of Elizabeth II, *A Queen is Crowned* (Fry 1953). The annual report claims that this film was seen in Orkney before other parts of the country:

the highlight in our programmes for the year was unquestionably the screening of the Coronation Film which brought out our largest audiences in every centre. Through the co-operation of the renters we were able to screen the black and white newsreel of the Coronation before the end of Coronation Week, and the memorable *A Queen is Crowned* was on our screens earlier than in most other parts of the country (CO5/1/18)<sup>11</sup>

The rhetoric of this extract indicates that Doloughan was aware of the audience appetite for the Coronation film, and in the years before the widespread take up of television, this was an example of the Rural Cinema Scheme exploiting the opportunity of the pre-television audience, with recorded coverage of national events on 16mm film.

The evidence of programming suggests that the young are seen as part of a family audience for feature films with the regular presence of cartoons in the programme representing a more explicit acknowledgement of their needs. The inclusion of films in programmes of the 1960s such as *Rock around the Clock* (Sears 1956) *Carry on Sergeant* (Thomas 1958), and *Carry on Teacher* (Thomas 1959) indicate shifting cultural values and a more direct address to youth, while rising costs and the specter of "that devilish little

screen" (ED30/24) reveal that the need to appeal to audiences now took priority over any education-based policies designed to foster their improvement (Meason).

The growth of film culture in the Orkney area was supplemented by the formation of the Kirkwall 16mm Film Society in 1953. This extension of provision was supported by the eighty members who had already enrolled and expanded to Stromness on the West mainland. The society programme is described as "experimental" and clearly differs from the Rural Cinema Scheme (CO5/1/17; CO5/1/18). For the Education Committee these developments increase the level of provision in the county, but they also illustrate how, in remote areas such as Orkney, there is a clear center and peripheries: the experimentalism of the film society located in the two key areas of the Mainland, remains separate from the popular cinema of the more geographically extensive - Rural Cinema Scheme.

## LOCAL PROGRAMMING

The thirst for films about the monarchy was further underlined by the inclusion in the programme of a local amateur film documenting the Queen Mother's visit to Kirkwall in 1956. This attracted record attendances all around Orkney. Almost 2,500 people had seen the film, roughly 1,000 more than turned out for the average programme (CO5/1/19). Doloughan reasoned that this represented a strong argument for the inclusion in future programmes of locally produced films of local interest. These could be provided by amateur film makers and this initiative would be promoted in a local monthly magazine of films, *The Orkney Magazine*. This initiative was authorized for one experimental programme (CO5/1/19; Crisp 94).

The most ambitious example of local filmmaking contributing to the Rural Cinema Scheme was provided by the local filmmaker Margaret Tait with her film, *The Drift Back* about a family deciding to return to the northern isles of Orkney (Neeley 2009). Owing to costs this experiment was not con-

tinued; it represents the extent of the ambition of the scheme to combine film exhibition with support for local production. Whilst this particular initiative was not continued, Doloughan did continue to support the notion that local amateur films should be part of the programmes offered by the scheme (CO5/1/20).<sup>12</sup>

### INDEPENDENCE, FILM DISTRIBUTION AND THE END OF AUSTERITY

The aptitude of Doloughan for minimizing the costs and increasing the independence of the Orkney scheme is highlighted by decisions taken regarding the supply of films. Recognizing that it might be possible to secure a preferable rate for film hire, Doloughan contacted the film renters in order to compare rates with the latest reduced rate offered by the Highland and Islands Film Guild (CO5/1/17).

Doloughan negotiated terms that compared favorably with those offered by the Film Guild including a course of training for the first operator Sandy Wylie in servicing the equipment. Gaumont would also provide the tools and equipment for Wylie to perform the functions normally carried out by the visiting Guild engineer. Wylie's operating duties would be reduced, allowing him to work on equipment maintenance in Kirkwall. This was the decisive step that would enable the independence of the Orkney scheme to be fully realized, giving it full responsibility for film programming, booking and equipment maintenance; the latter being increasingly important as the demands on the ageing projectors had increased as the scheme had expanded. Despite this dilution of the relationship with the Film Guild, correspondence between Doloughan and Tom Morris the secretary of the Guild, indicates that a supportive and co-operative relationship was maintained (ED30/24).

The success of the scheme was made possible by the availability of 16mm films, projection equipment and an exhibition route of makeshift locations. In the early post-war

years of austerity audiences were willing to watch a film in an under-heated hall, but as this moment of community cinema was curtailed by the arrival of television and other forms of organized leisure in Orkney during the 1960s, efforts were made to ensure that the contribution of film to rural life is partially maintained in education - the sphere that first gave rise to the scheme's institutional formation.

As early as 1949 it was reported that "the static unit on the island of Rousay had given two general interest shows which had been much appreciated, and that the headmaster was preparing to use the cinema in school as an adjunct to geography teaching" (CO5/1/16). In 1956 the Orkney Education Committee established an experimental scheme with Zetland (Shetland) County Library whereby filmstrips were supplied to schools by either of the county libraries. This was followed by the establishment of a Central Library of Film Strips, and a projector for use in small rural schools. The filmstrips were also used in churches and youth fellowship groups (CO5/1/19). It is important to recognize that the presence of the 16mm film apparatus in Orkney enabled film to enter school classrooms as well as community halls.

In 1967 the mobile and static services ceased in Orkney; this was followed three years later by the end of the Film Guild. The end of organized rural cinema in Scotland in the post-war years is explained by the National Archive of Scotland catalogue as follows: "with the advent of mass-media communication the size of the audiences gradually dwindled until it was no longer practical to continue film shows. The Guild was eventually wound up in 1970" ([www.nas.gov.uk/onlineCatalogue](http://www.nas.gov.uk/onlineCatalogue)). The ability of television to transcend geography through transmission meant that the geographical isolation that demanded rural cinema in the early post-war years is diminished by the new domestic medium.

The Rural Cinema Scheme in Orkney emerged out of the youth-orientated and paternalistic initiatives of state education policy

and the cultural legacies of world war II that were especially significant in Orkney due to the strategic role of Scapa Flow. Further confirmation of education policy attempting to intervene in leisure is highlighted in this circular from the Ministry of Education of 1944:

Experience has shown that men and women do not make best use of their leisure if the only facilities available outside the home are those provided by commercial enterprise...[W]e are of opinion that the provision of communal facilities for the rational and enjoyable use of leisure, wherever this may be needed, is a necessary part of the country's education system (Ministry of Education 3/4)

Rural cinema in Scotland exploits this motivation of national government to rationalize popular culture on behalf of young people. The Orkney Rural Cinema Scheme took advantage of the support for non-commercial initiatives that appear to meet this aim, while increasingly in practice ensuring that programming offered the pleasures of entertainment made available by popular commercial cinema to rural audiences and became, through the life of the scheme, much less prescriptive than the authors of the circular above might have envisaged. This "Useful Cinema" as Charles Acland describes it, is part of a broader movement across Europe, North America and beyond that makes it possible to direct the use of film as an educational and cultural instrument, but also as a source of entertainment and pleasure (Acland 2009; Film User 1956). It is made possible by the industrial expansion of the 16mm apparatus and this is confirmed by the greater presence in recent film history of the smaller gauge and non-theatrical cinema.

The traditional and communitarian space of the village hall and the regimental space of the army/youth that created the exhibition conditions for the eager consumption of British and, predominantly, American feature films defines rural cinema in Orkney during this period. The geography of Scotland in general and Orkney in particular demands rural cinema, and despite the

competition of television and related media, continues to do so. The 2009 *A Pilgrimage* event, Regional Screen Scotland via the Screen Machine and the growth of community cinema ensure the continuity of mobile cinema exhibition and non-theatrical cinema in rural areas ("The Rise"). That Orkney was able to initiate and maintain its own Rural Cinema Scheme relatively independently of the wider Scottish Guild is testament to an ongoing desire of the Orcadian population not to rely on mainland Scotland, as well as an astute awareness of the implications and possibilities of its geographical location. It is aided by the commitment to the community of its organizer and operators, and the support offered voluntarily by the communities. The organizing figure of Doloughan occupies a mediating role between the top down educationalist cinema of improvement cultivated by institutional policy and a locally addressed programme of provision that necessarily included entertainment and pleasure. He also recognized the feasibility and benefits of independence for the Orkney scheme. This pursuit of independence is not born of a political creed but is based upon the prospect of delivering cultural facilities and social benefits for geographically marginal communities who might not have normally expected to receive them.

The relative independence of Orkney's Rural Cinema Scheme underlines its particular geographical location as a set of islands off the north east coast of Scotland that is also connected historically to Norway. This region is resistant to being interpolated into the entity of the Highlands and Islands in preference for an autonomy that, this small history (and others) suggests, has worked to the cultural and economic advantage of the area, rather than towards its marginalization.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The figure of John Grierson and his promotion of the documentary film movement in Britain in opposition to the commercial and fictional cinema is key during this period.

<sup>2</sup>*The Scotsman*, 21/10/39.

<sup>3</sup>*The Scotsman*, 9/11/39.

<sup>4</sup>*Glasgow Herald*, 7/10/46.

<sup>5</sup>Percival's work predates the teenager of the 1950s and traces the beginnings of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) back to the nineteenth century demonstrating how the history of British paternalism towards the young precedes the twentieth century.

<sup>6</sup>Obituary. *The Orcadian*, 6/8/87.

<sup>7</sup>The minutes of show that the Naval Cinema Service continued operating in Lyness until March 1957. (CO5/1/21)

<sup>8</sup>The role of volunteering in postwar culture in rural Scotland is confirmed by the minutes of April 1952 noting how youngsters from schools helped out with the potato crop. (CO5/1/17).

<sup>9</sup>The suggestion that the geographical isolation of North Ronaldsay on the outer limits of Orkney has a bearing in programming decisions is indicated in feedback contained in questionnaires for the year 1953-54: "we know there are pictures made which are not worth showing, but why send them all to North Ronaldsay!" (Cameron 25).

<sup>10</sup>Amateur Cinema Journals encouraged the construction of home cinema exhibition using 8mm and 16mm equipment. For example: Bromley, A.J. 'Sitting Room Cinema', *Amateur Cine World*, 5.10 January (1939), 'Film Shows by the Fireside', *Amateur Cine World*, 8.20 September (1956), Living room into Cinema', *Amateur Movie Maker*, 2.3 March (1959): 131.

<sup>11</sup>Correspondence between Doloughan and the secretary of the Film Guild in Inverness highlights the popularity of a lesser known British and Norwegian co-production *Suicide Mission* (Michael Forlong, 1954) which was based on the resistance operation between Shetland and occupied Norway during the second world war and adapted from David Howarth's book *Shetland Bus*.

<sup>12</sup>*The Drift Back* was shown as part of a programme of Scottish films on an American television service and a rental of £3.10s paid for its use (CO5/1/20).

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