



MANCHESTER & SALFORD
FILM SOCIETY | A SHORT HISTORY
IN 9 OBJECTS



Introduction

A Short History in 9 Objects, March 2023



It is not really about objects but the people, places, films and events that project and inspire our Community Cinema and make us proud to volunteer.

This short booklet is dedicated to the thousands of amazing volunteers from the pioneers to the present who have given their time (often lifetimes), determination, ingenuity and passion to support the Society, enabling it to survive through many changing and challenging times.

After 92 years it is impossible to name and thank everyone here, but a big tribute is due to all. We now volunteer as part of a continuous chain in an organisation run entirely by volunteers and resolutely not-for-profit for over 92 years, something of a record.

Included in this tribute, of course, are all our members, past and present, who have been with us on this journey sharing the films, discussions and socialising. We could not have continued for so long without you.





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Photograph of Reginald ‘Reg’ Cordwell

A Manchester and Salford Film Society Pioneer

The Salford Workers’ Film Society certainly arose from the grass roots in its own home town during the difficult economic times around 1930.

Discussions about the growth of film societies elsewhere had started as early as the autumn of 1929 at the new *Workers’ Arts Club* in Salford. Matters crystallised following an after-film street discussion between fellow working men on Cross Lane, Salford. The first film programme was shown at the Prince’s Cinema, Liverpool Street, Salford on 15th November 1930. Salford’s Mayor was present and commented: **‘A large number of adult picture goers are sick of the Hollywood sob-stuff and want something with more meat in it’.**

The reason we know so much

about these early days is due to the meticulous records and information kept by the prime organiser, Reginald ‘Reg’ Cordwell.

An experienced toolmaker, engineer and union man, Reg was born in Salford. He was not only one of our founding members but a great pioneer for community cinema and its issues. His lifelong involvement with cinema, he claimed, started in the womb: his pregnant mother was present at the first-ever film show in Manchester in 1896 at the Free Trade Hall (a Lumière Brothers presentation).

Reg remained at the centre of our operations for the rest of his active life. Reg’s short history explained as follows:

‘The Manchester and Salford Film Society (formerly the

Salford Workers’ Film Society) was founded by a small group of people inspired with the view of encouraging the most progressive elements in the cinema by exhibiting artistic, cultural and scientific films, particularly those dealing with economic and social questions. The idea originated from a street corner talk outside the Salford Palace Cinema, following a Trades Council meeting held on 23 February 1930, at which a documentary film (the Vienna Congress of International Youth) had been shown.’

By 20th May 1930, a provisional committee was formed and the Society inaugurated. Tom Cavanagh, Jack Brewin, Alf Williams, Tom Savage, with Reg and Sid Cordwell, our pioneers, had decided to find

ways and means of forming this progressive society. They needed an affordable venue, obtainable and affordable films, and to capture an audience. The Sunday cinema ban meant showings had to be squeezed into a late Saturday afternoon before the evening showings.

Despite the difficulties, the pioneers were ambitious and optimistic for the future, aiming high to have their own cinema and equipment to make films as well as projecting them. They were early to appreciate the importance and influence of film culture and education. Reg was realistic: **‘It was however not an easy task to tackle without funds or specialist knowledge and so began a host of difficulties which required much effort and patience to overcome’.**



Reg liked to say that he considered we were
*“the oldest continuing volunteer film society
 of its kind in the UK, if not the world!”*

Photo of Reginald Cordwell, MSFS Collection, WCML

During the first season the Manchester Guardian commented – **‘the belief that the intelligent film will one day prosper grows with each visit to the film society shows.’** Membership rose steadily but increasing liabilities were a growing concern.

Not content with just being part of the new film society movement, Reg and the others had progressive ideas about the place of cinema in society. They actively campaigned together not only to get film recognised as an art form, but also on many other issues.

Successful actions benefited finances. After a six year campaign Manchester removed the ban on private

Sunday showings (1936). Some exemption from Entertainment Tax was allowed based on a film’s merits.

The Society affiliated with others, including in 1932 the **British Federation of Film Societies** (BFFS) Welwyn. Our chair Jack Brewin, a.k.a. our representative in London, became BFFS Chair/Director (1935 – 1939).

New film societies were helped and speakers obtained. Collections were made for charities. The pioneers pushed to establish Regional Film Councils, Regional groups, an Equipment Fund and grant aid for elementary school equipment.

After 1945 Reg promoted his paper **Why not a Civic Film Centre?**

Reg was our Honorary Organiser from 1930 to 1937, Secretary from 1937 to 1946, and went on to become our Vice President. As Reg became more involved with regional matters, he was pleased that Tom and Marjorie Ainsworth took on more of the day-to-day work of the Society.

At the age of 93, Reg cut the cake and made a speech at the civic celebration in Salford to mark our 60th anniversary. There was another cake-cutting as Reg celebrated his 100th birthday at a Society event in 1996, as our last surviving original pioneer. Reg ensured we had a legacy to remember. He wrote about his life and a recording he made has now been digitalised.



Photo of Reginald Cordwell, MSFS Collection, WCML

Storm Over Asia Poster

27th June 1931, The Futurist Cinema, Manchester

The Society's choice of Vsevolod Pudovkin's 1928 *Storm Over Asia* to close its first season caused a storm. The film was banned by the Salford Watch Committee, which feared a riot. Described by the Society as 'the film that Salford must not see', the press blew it up into a 'Storm over Salford'.

Undeterred, the pioneers approached Manchester, where it was passed by the Watch Committee. This prompted the Society to expand its allegiance, becoming the **Manchester and Salford Workers' Film Society**. The showing at the Futurist Cinema, Strangeways, Manchester, proved beneficial. Controversy brought a large audience, all keen to see for themselves what the fuss was about. Ticket sales balanced negative accounts, paving the way for a second season.

However, censorship did not end with the move to Manchester, and very soon the Corporation banned two films. Then difficulties with The Watch Committee's

issues on short films resulted in the prosecution and fining of the Futurist Cinema manager, making the venue unavailable.

For nearly six months, several impromptu venues were adopted utilising 16mm projection, and the pioneers arranged lectures and a music concert with Edvard and Virginia Soermus. Eventually, a sympathetic manager at the Majestic (later Cornerhouse 1) agreed to host a showing.

The Society returned to cinema showings with a revised objective: 'to cater for those who are dissatisfied with the average productions of commercial cinema, with their shallowness and divorce from reality, and to offer in their stead films more closely in sympathy with the life and thought of this age'.

At a time of growing unemployment and political tensions, censorship was a sensitive topic. The early

Manchester & Salford Workers' Film Society.

PRESENT

PUDOVKIN'S

"STORM OVER ASIA"

The Film that Salford must NOT see.

FUTURIST CINEMA, Gt. Ducie St.,
Manchester, (opp. Assize Courts)

Saturday, June 27th, at 4-0 p.m.
1931.

JOIN THE SOCIETY.—SEE THE FILM.

COMMENTARIES

"A story which is a masterpiece of irony, and photography which ranges between realism and selective beauty."—
Manchester Guardian

"Bolshevik Propaganda"—"Rubbish"—*A Salford Alderman.*

Application Form, Monthly Member.

I apply for membership of the Manchester & Salford Workers' Film Society for the month of June, 1931, and enclose 1/2 for same.

Name

Address

All remittances to Secretary, 69 Liverpool St., Salford.

Egerton Printing Co., Bloom Street, Salford.

Storm Over Asia Poster, MSFS Collection, WCML

inventive Soviet masterpieces were regarded with particular suspicion in some quarters, both here and in London. Film Society officers had been ejected from their own private showing of Dovzhenko's **Earth** to the Salford Watch Committee. It even seems to have been suggested that showing a Jean Vigo film was controversial as it was a bit too realistic! Reg Cordwell was not going to let that be a deterrent.

Reviews of the Society's film shows listed in the Manchester Guardian and local press attracted larger audiences, with some people travelling from Lancashire and Cheshire. Alistair Cooke (later of Letter from America) joined, travelling over from Lytham to see films that were unavailable elsewhere. The Society had won the campaign for private Sunday showings in Manchester from 1936. Membership surged and car parking became a problem at events.

The Manchester and Salford Film Society dropped '*Workers*' from the title,

and in 1937 we became **Manchester and Salford Film Society** as the Society broadened its membership.

The new constitution adopted at the time gave the Society's aim as:

'to encourage the exhibition and production of artistic, cultural and scientific films of a progressive character'.

The Society was determined to provide opportunities for developing appreciation of such films.

In the heady days of the 1960s and onwards Tom Ainsworth programmed the new and sometimes controversial underground films that were subject to cultural debate. Showings of Andy Warhol's **Chelsea Girls** projected on to a double screen completely sold out. Censorship issues were no longer such a headache.

Storm over Asia, with its pivotal role in our history, was shown 75 years later in Salford. No riot ensued.

MANCHESTER & SALFORD FILM SOCIETY



89/90 Diamond Jubilee Season

The film was shown again as part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, with an introductory lecture to an appreciative audience at the third **Salford Film Festival** at the Red Cinema, The Quays, Salford, on 15 November 2005. It also featured in our 80th Exhibition at the Working Class Movement Library.

Guest Ticket

The Futurist Cinema, Strangeways,
Manchester 24th October 1931

Hot off the mark, the pioneers adventurously programmed Dziga Vertov's silent documentary, 'Man with a Movie Camera' (1929), at the Futurist Cinema, Strangeways.

A prescient choice of an influential film with techniques and ideas aeons ahead of its time and the top-rated documentary in Sight and Sound's 100 Greatest Films of All Time, 2022. The heartbeat of a great industrial city, with its residents at work and play interlinks to the revolving

bobbins, cogs and machinery of industry and film – very relevant images for industrial Salford and Manchester and unforgettable for at least one audience member.

The youthful Salford born activist Ewan MacColl was then experimenting in agitprop theatre. He was, of course, later to cofound the Theatre Workshop with Joan Littlewood and became a titan of folk music. He also rated cinema as an important artistic influence, attending many local picture houses for the staple Hollywood

fare up to 1929. He soon joined the Society.

Years later in the late 1980s, when looking back and writing his autobiography, he did not forget those early days in Salford, the Society, films and what it meant to

him. He particularly recalled seeing 'Man with a Movie Camera' as well as enjoying the exciting revelation of foreign films then contemporary, but now regarded as classics of international cinema.



Man with a Movie Camera Ticket, MSFS Collection, WCML

“When, in 1930, the Salford Workers’ Film Society was formed, I was among its foundation members... it presented the cream of the world’s best films.”

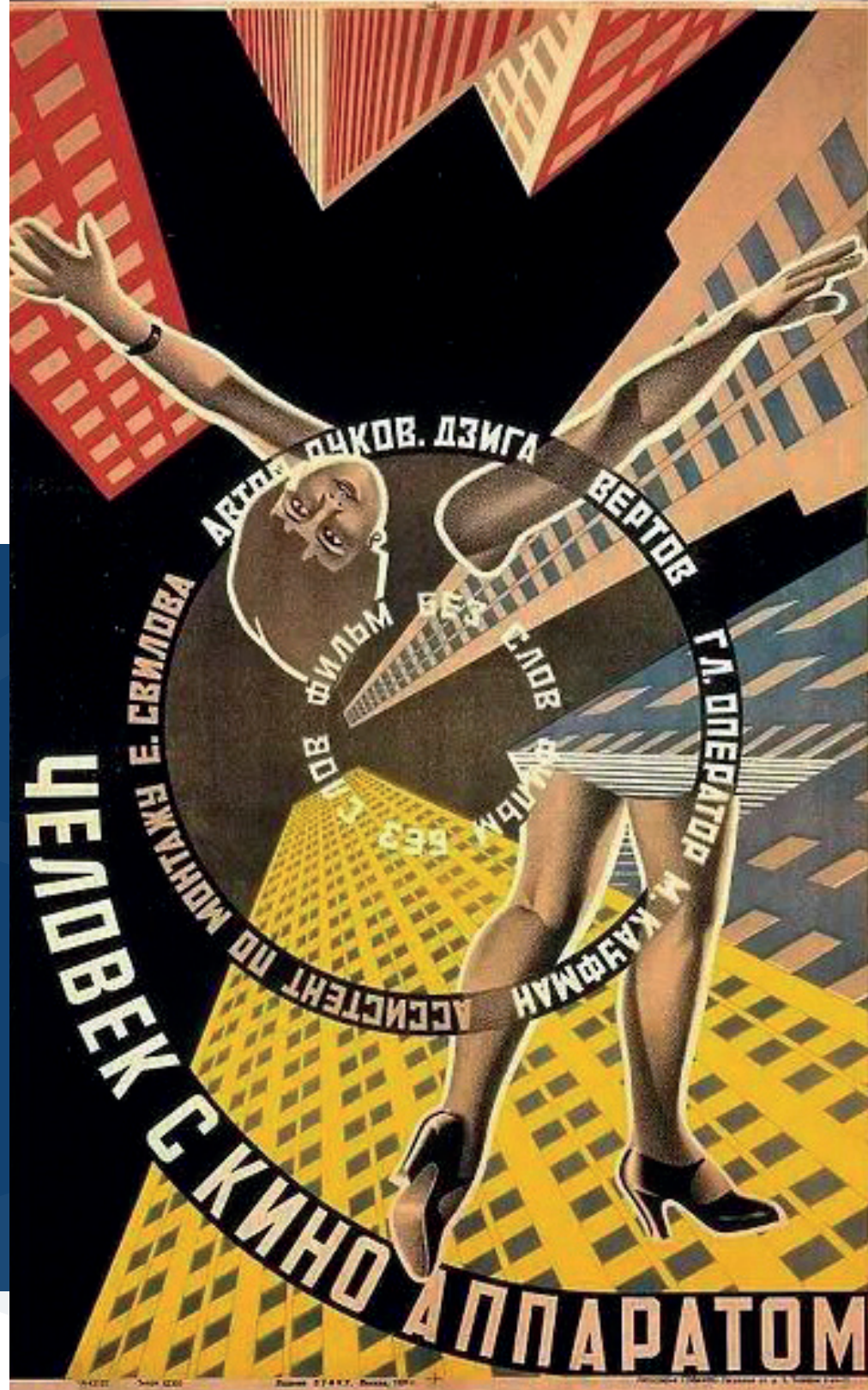
Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman* pp.xv-xvi

“The opportunity of seeing films of such stature compensated for some of the deprivation experienced by an ill-educated adolescent who faced the bleak prospect of trying to earn a living in the arid desert of 1930.” Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman*: pp. xv-xvi

We can return the compliment as his songs “*Dirty Old Town*”, “*Manchester Rambler*” and “*The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*” are also unforgettable.

Fast forward to November 2020 and our 90th anniversary, with a Covid lockdown and no opportunity to party. Since 2005 our extensive archive has been safely stored at the Working Class

Movement Library in Salford. Despite lockdown, the Library did us proud by producing an online article, ‘90 Not Out’, with curated artefacts from our archive. They also hosted with us an open shared Zoom film discussion all about ‘*Man with a Movie Camera*’ after an on-line viewing. We raised a toast to the Society and those intrepid pioneers. Dr John Mackay, Vertov’s biographer, not only zoomed in from Yale but mailed to say how pleased he was that the film had been chosen for our 90th. He was sure that Dziga Vertov would have been delighted too!



Man with a Movie Camera Film Poster, BFI Print Collection

Manchester & Salford Film Society Logo

Carved Woodblock, Circa 1930s

There are three well used wooden blocks in the archive for imprinting this 1930s logo. At the heart of the logo is the globe reflecting the pioneers' desire for internationalism and an international perspective. From the start they wanted to be able to see and show locally what was going on in the rest of the world.

The films included were not just the latest experimental and artistic gems of world cinema but also films from around the world about the latest scientific developments, social issues and films that dealt with issues for ordinary people.

Not everything screened was serious or international. Comedies could be included as well as documentaries and films for discussion that were seen as educational in a broad sense.

There was also a particular political dimension for many, unsurprising in the context of the politics of the 1930s. The pioneers did not want their own community in Salford, then Manchester and also then the Northwest, to miss out when these films, discussions and activities were taking place elsewhere. They had already read about the first film society in London (1925) and other workers' film groups in the Manchester Guardian, at their local library. Hollywood film was popular and easily available. They wanted to discover the non-commercial films they read about.

Organisers were unpaid pioneer volunteers who created this for themselves and for the benefit of their local community.

They campaigned against many restrictive issues and worked



Society Logo, 1930s, woodblock print, MSFS Collection, WCML

together not just to enable the Film Society to start and continue in what were challenging times, but also to help spread the movement.

Reg Cordwell served in the First World War, as did his friend Tom Cavanagh.

According to Reg they both decided that if they survived, they wanted to do something to promote peace and international understanding.

Reg and Tom, working as pioneers, made it plain that a film society was part of that

MANCHESTER & SALFORD FILM SOCIETY

objective. Reg was not just active in promoting lectures and debates and regional film groups, he also made contact with international film groups.

When writing about the Society after 30 years, he particularly commented on its impact:

‘The Society brought to Manchester and district the early Soviet masterpieces which indifference or intolerance barred from the commercial cinema, and it also presented remarkable foreign productions which laid the foundation of support for a continental cinema in the city’.

Interest in international film embedded in the Society is clearly visible from the programmes and extensive notes in the archive, revealing

a canon of world cinema, adventurously programmed.

The Special Days, Triple Programmes and Film Weekends often highlighted a particular topic, country or a director’s work – not just from Europe but farther afield from Africa, Asia, South America, and more – taking us to new worlds and perspectives. Shared discussion, lectures and notes were all part of the package, but English-language films, including examples from the USA and Australia, were also not ignored.

We continue to enjoy international sub-titled films. In recent seasons we have regularly continued the extra benefit of specialist lecturers introducing French, Spanish and Japanese films followed by some informal after-film discussions. In-house introductions are given for other films and film notes prepared for every film.

In 2015 the Society arranged a twinned showing of the film *‘The Lunchbox’* (India, 2013), with a small film club in Xativa, Valencia. It was linked

into *Scalarama*, an annual festival connecting film-venues around the UK. Three members of the Society self-funded a trip to Spain. One even gave an introduction about our Society in Spanish which was well received. This generated publicity in the local newspapers in both Spain and the UK, benefiting the Societies. Both venues featured Indian snacks and shared feedback about the film. A good time was had by all, particularly the three members who enjoyed a short holiday with this international connection!

Programme



Marjorie makes the impossible choice of nine films and events, one for each decade out of the thousands of films shown from hundreds of countries.

In our first 21 years, 600 significant films from over 20 countries were shown. Now in our 92nd year, our back catalogue is huge.

This is our President's personal pick of memorable films and events from each decade. It was not unusual, up to the late 1990s, to have themed events and up to three linked films or more, even in one session. We have accordingly taken the liberty of including an event as one film.

Society Programme, 1930, MSFS Collection, WCML

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 15th 1930	Salford Workers' Film Society Princes Cinema, Liverpool Street, Salford.	FIRST PERFORMANCE
PROGRAMME.		
1. "Water and Waves"	(German)	
A short film made by the German Workers' Film Movement.		
2. "The Thames"	(British)	
A series of views of the river from Teddington to Southend including "shots" of the various types of shipping.		
3. "The First Time in History"	(Russian)	
Directed by Constantin Gerasimov, this is the first film dealing with the Five Year Plan of socialist construction in Soviet Russia to be shown in Salford. For the first time in history the workers of a great country are carrying out planned production. Special interest attaches to the section of the film dealing with collective farming.		
4. "The Music Blasters"	(American)	
A comedy featuring Stan, Laurel and Oliver Hardy. The droll humour of Stan, Laurel is one of the best things in contemporary screen comedy.		
5. "Two Days"	(Russian)	
Directed by George Stalwood. An enthralling human drama—the conflict of loyalties between "Reds" and "Whites" in South Russia. The Father—a faithful servant of an old Russian family; and the Son—leader of the revolutionary troops.		
The second performance of the Society will be on Saturday, Dec. 13th, Princes' Cinema, Liverpool St., Salford, 2-45 p.m.		
"Turksib" will positively be shown.		
Hon. Secretary: T. Cavanagh. Hon. Organiser: R. Oordwall.		

*La Bataille du
rail, 1946, Dir,
René Clément*

Society Poster, 1947, MSFS Collection, WCML

MANCHESTER & SALFORD FILM SOCIETY present ANOTHER SEASON of FILM SHOWS	
AT THE RIVOLI CINEMA, Rusholme	
SHOWS TO BE HELD ON SUNDAYS AT 2-30 P.M. ON THE FOLLOWING DATES:—	
AUTUMN SESSION, '47: OCT. 19, NOV. 16, DEC. 14	
SPRING SESSION, '48: JAN. 18, FEB. 15, MAR. 28	
Tickets — FULL SEASON 12s. — EITHER SESSION 6s. 6d.	
Films already booked:—	
MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS (U.S.A.)	
MONSIEUR LE SOURIS (France)	
TURNING POINT (U.S.S.R.)	
LA FIN DU JOUR (France)	
CHILDHOOD OF GORKI (U.S.S.R.)	
Others to be chosen from:—	
STOLEN FRONTIERS	Le GRAND JEU
MEN WITHOUT WINGS	and OUTSTANDING
SHORTS	SHORTS
NONE OF THESE SHOWS CLASHES WITH HALLÉ CONCERTS	
ADMISSION IS FOR MEMBERS ONLY. Apply to: Miss H. M. Bates, Hon. Treas., Manchester & Salford Film Society, 17 George Avenue, Salford. (Tel. LON 3323).	
AGENTS: Collier, Gibb & Progress Bookshops, Lewis's Ltd. and Foyrth Bros.	

1930s

1940s

1950s

Marjorie first visited the Society April 2nd 1939, and she is hooked by the variety on offer. This is no ordinary cinematic experience. There are eclectic shorts from the abstract master, Len Lye; fairy-tale silhouette animation snipped by Lotte Reiniger, creator of the first full-length animated film; a Polish documentary, *Peasant Polka*; and Ivor Montagu's 1938 documentary about Spanish education in wartime, *Spanish ABC*.

During the interval a collection is made to support refugees. Then *Ship of the Ether*, a comedy short from the Netherlands made by the famous Hungarian animator, George Pal. The main feature is a Czech film, *Janosik* (1936), directed by Martin Fric, telling the tales of a true life Czech Robin Hood and favourably reviewed by the Vienna correspondent of *The Times*.

*Diary of a Country
Priest, 1951,
Dir, Robert Bresson*

MANCHESTER & SALFORD FILM SOCIETY SPRING 1951 <i>Season - 21st Season</i>	
JAN 21st	LE GRAND JEU (FEYDER - FRANCE)
FEB 18th	MICHURIN (DOVZINKO - U.S.S.R.)
MAR 18th	CRIME & PUNISHMENT (SWEDEN)
APR 15th	LOUISIANA STORY & DOWN WENT M'GINTY
PRIVATE FILM SHOWS ON SUNDAYS AT 2-15 PM AT THE GROSVENOR CINEMA - ALL SAINTS	

Society Programme, 1951, MSFS Collection, WCML

Marjorie Ainsworth's Programme: A Film a Decade

Hiroshima mon amour,
1959, Dir, Alan Resnais

Spirit of the Beehive,
1973, Dir, Victor Erice

Shortcuts, 1993,
Dir, Robert Altman

Day for Night, 1973, Dir, Francois Truffant

Inauguration of **The Tom
Ainsworth Student Short
Film Competition**, 2012

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

The Maxim Gorky Trilogy, Dir.
Mark Donskoy:
The Children of Maxim Gorky, 1936
My Apprentice, 1938
My Universities, 1940

A Jean Renoir Trilogy:
La Grande illusion, 1937
La Bête humaine, 1938
La Caporal épinglé, 1962

**Special Heritage Event, 2022: Projecting the
Past – People, Places and Picture Palaces.**

A celebration on reaching our 92nd season reflecting the locality, with a brief introduction to the history of the Society, an exhibition, and curated archive short films from the **North West Film Archive** e.g. looking at Sunday Cinema in Manchester, excerpts from **A City Speaks**, 1947, directed by Paul Rotha, previously shown in full for the Society's 80th anniversary at the Cornerhouse, Manchester, and excerpts from **Mancunia**, 2020, by the filmmaker Steve Hawley.

Notice of Postponement

MSFS Programme, 1939-1940

Before war broke out in 1939 the Film Society was fully established with 1,400 members. The film programme had been published but then a postponement notice had to be prepared and issued in response to the conflict.

Marjorie Ainsworth recalls that awful time:

“War broke out on 3rd September 1939 and, because there was an air raid warning in London on that date, everyone was expecting to be bombed every night. So, it was not just the Film Society that suspended their autumn programme – everything was suspended.

Entertainment was the last thing on anybody’s mind. We all had to sit in the dark every night until we were able to provide ourselves with blackout curtains.

We had to wait until we were all issued with gasmasks, identity-cards and ration-books before we thought of anything else. When no bombs were dropped during the autumn of 1939 things began to be opened up, and the Society decided to resume shows in the spring of 1940. They did what we did after Covid and showed the films booked for autumn of 1939 in the autumn session of 1940. Serious night bombing of all major cities began in the autumn of 1940 but because we showed on Sunday afternoons, we bravely carried on. Members were kept in touch during the suspension by post; there was no other way available at that time.”

Marjorie also remembers attending Film Society events during the war.

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD



FILM
SOCIETY

PROSPECTUS

SEASON 1939-40

SUSPENSION OF ACTIVITIES.

In view of the national situation, arrangements for the season have had to be cancelled, and the societies activities suspended until further notice. As this Prospectus was ready for mailing on September 1st, it is sent for your interest.

A NON-PROFIT MAKING SOCIETY

PRESENTING PROGRESSIVE and CULTURAL FILMS, LECTURES and DISCUSSIONS

FILM SHOWS AT THE RIVOLI CINEMA, CHORLTON.

The local paper commented: “You couldn’t expect one of our most progressive organisations to let the war put it out of its stride for long.”

Undeterred, the pioneers just continued to plan activities, dealing with the new difficulties of wartime. Reg Cordwell recorded:

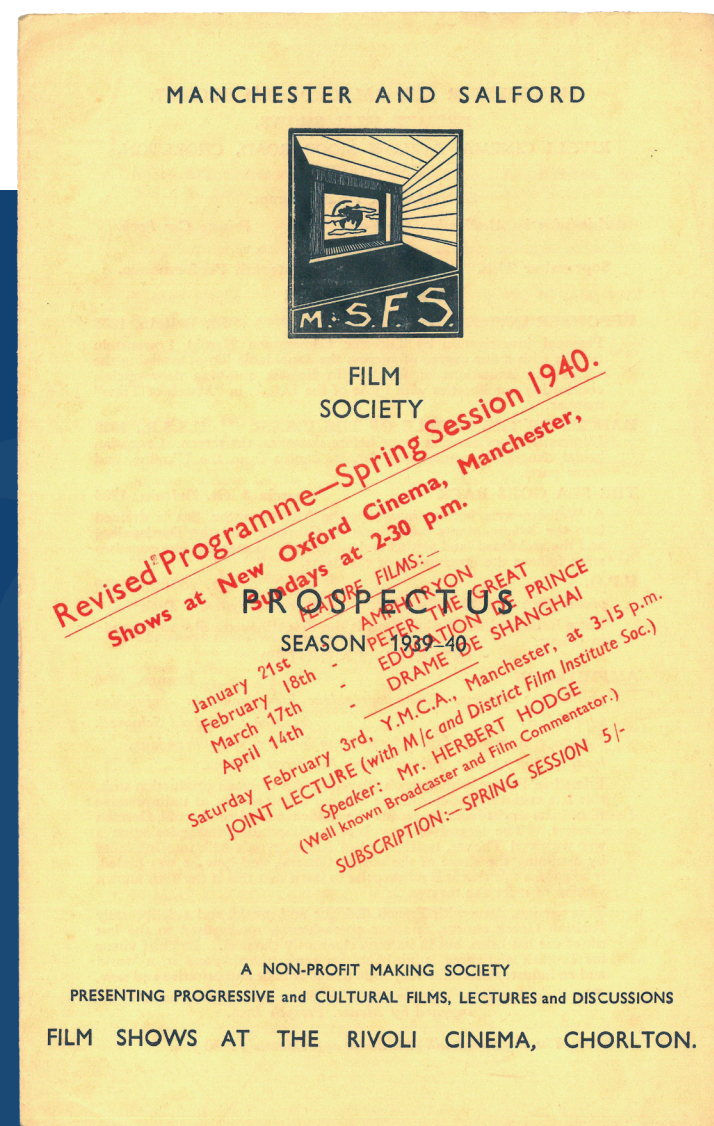
“The advent however of Sunday opening of cinemas, together with blackout conditions, increased costs, abnormal transport and the absence of many members raised new problems, and these were partly overcome by arranging temporary joint activities with the Manchester Film Institute Society. During the war, special film displays and lectures were also organised for various refugee groups and other bodies (in association with the British Council) and considerable funds raised.”

Eighty years later, we were equally determined to continue things through the Covid lockdown. Communications were by internet and, later, committee-meetings continued safely by Zoom. We did not want to lose contact with our members and decided to continue what activities we could for them. We wanted

them to know that we were not giving up on the Society, but plans continued as the situation allowed.

In lockdown at home, we tried to enjoy some form of basic film-sharing. Each month a film of the month that was free, available to members on an accessible TV channel and for a reasonable time ‘on demand’ was picked by the Committee to share at home. A deadline was given to watch and for the audience to return their feedback. Film notes were provided as usual with a Mailchimp notification – subsequently feedback was collected and circulated. Some extensive film comments were made.

Each month our resident Quiz Master, Mike, prepared a film quiz for members to enjoy with answers to follow. It kept us going, in contact – and the positive feedback was reassuring. It was a treat to get back to the big screen in 2022 with an audience, when we could also show a selection of the films that had been postponed from the previous season.



Revised Society Prospectus, 1940, MSFS Collection, WCML

The Roebuck Cup

Tom Ainsworth and Marjorie Ainsworth

The Roebuck Cup is the ultimate award recognising individuals and their long-standing contributions to the Community Cinema movement as a whole.

Tom Ainsworth joined Manchester and Salford Film Society at the age of 16 in 1938. In 1939, he took his 17-year-old girlfriend, Marjorie, to the Society. Not only did their relationship blossom (they were married in 1942), but they both started a lifelong involvement and commitment to the Society.

Marjorie at some stage took on every role apart from projectionist. Tom also took on every role, including projectionist! They helped and supported many local film groups in starting new film clubs. They presented not only the cream of international and classic cinema but also

special films, events and, in collaboration with other local groups, fascinating residential film weekends. It was a film education by stealth in a very sociable setting.

Tom was always up to date with new films and opportunities. Generously he both prepared programme film notes and gave tips on interesting films that were available elsewhere – even on TV!

Tom was Chair of the North West branch of the **British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS)** from 1963 and **Film Officer of the Manchester Institute of Contemporary Arts** from 1960 to 1970.

Tom organised the **Manchester Area Youth Film Council** between 1952 and 1962 and the **Scientific Film Society** for school sixth former students from 1958 to 1989.



Tom presented Roebuck Cup by Tony Curtis, 1984, Cinema For All Archive

Promoting the social side of the society, Marjorie often prepared a national dish to accompany a special showing, for example borscht at the showing of the Polish **Andrzej Wajda Trilogy**.

Each year there was a buffet shared at the end of the season and there was always a warm welcome for members and guests.

When it became difficult for Tom to project on 16 mm film, Marjorie and Tom personally donated the latest digital equipment and cinema-screen

to enable showings to continue at the then new venue in Altrincham.

At the time membership was low and, without the new equipment, the Society might have come to an end. It is true to say they have supported the Society through thick and thin. Tom was determined the show must go on. He often carried out an afternoon and evening projection on a Saturday and then drove the film over the Pennines on a Sunday morning to make it available for a Yorkshire group showing.

Awards Won by the Society

- 1985** Winner of the *Monday Movie Quiz*, BBC Radio 2
- 1989** Award from the British Federation of Film Societies
- 2006** Special 60th Award from the British Federation of Film Societies

In 1984 Tom, expecting business as usual, was invited to a special BFI event in London. Imagine his surprise when Tony Curtis suddenly appeared to present him with the Roebuck Cup for his contributions to the Film Society movement.

After Tom's death in 2007, Marjorie continued her active involvement with the Film Society, hosting committee meetings at home. Since Covid, like the other committee members, she now links in to Zoom meetings. She has taken pleasure in presenting the Student Short Film Prize awarded by the Society in Tom's name to film students from Manchester Metropolitan University or Salford University.

Amazingly, Marjorie continues to be an active President at the age of 101 and beyond, breaking all records for longevity and

for active service, which now stands at over 80 years. She remains not only our star, but also a continuing inspiration to us all.

In 2016, 32 years after Tom's award, Marjorie also had the surprise of being awarded the Roebuck Cup in her own right to a standing ovation at the Cinema For All Conference in Sheffield. Marjorie, wielding the Cup, commented that night that it was good to bring the Cup back to the Society. She added that being involved in the Society and film kept her in the zeitgeist and prevented a mouldy old age! (YouTube interview).

The Society has won other awards over the years, but the award of the Roebuck Cup to the husband-and-wife team who ran the Society for over 50 years is something extra special.



Marjorie with the Roebuck Cup, 2016, Cinema For All Archive

It recognises two inspirational individuals who have generously done so much for so long for

the Society, sharing their time, efforts and knowledge, as well as injecting joy and conviviality.

Papercut by Lotte Reiniger

This prized papercut was given to Marjorie Ainsworth by the director Lotte Reiniger after they met at a special weekend event organised by the Society. This object reflects meetings, special occasions and celebrity that the Society has brought to us.

To mark our many milestones, there have been special shows, meals and public buffet receptions in Salford, Manchester, and recently Altrincham. As Marjorie said in 2000:

'We've had a lot of fun with the Society, met many interesting people. We had a curry with Mike Leigh and his wife a while ago. It has been good, very good'.

Many influential figures in the film world have visited the Society over the years to share their

knowledge. These are just a few of the special visitors: the Scottish pioneer John Grierson, often considered the father of British and Canadian documentary film; Ivor Montagu, the director and co-founder of The London Film Society; Stephen Dwoskin, the boundary-pushing experimental film artist and co-founder of the London Filmmakers' Co-op, who introduced his films over a weekend; John Halas, the influential animator who co-founded Hungary's first animation studio and later in the UK, with his wife Joy, founded Halas and Batchelor, introduced his animated shorts and *Animal Farm*; Cosgrave Hall Productions discussed their animation and brought maquettes from *The Wind in the Willows*; and the multitalented Brazilian Alberto

Cavalcanti, best known here for his influence on the documentary movement in the 1930s and Ealing films in the 1940s, was an early visitor.

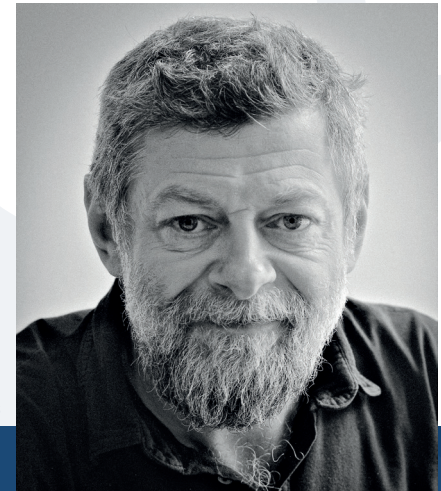
Our previous Presidents have included Leslie Halliwell, Michael Parkinson and the Hon. Gerald Kaufman (then Minister of Culture).

When the creative staff at Granada TV, based in the city from 1956, wanted to have a film club they turned for help to the Society, as did many local groups. They didn't have projection equipment. It was Marjorie and Tom who took our equipment to the studios and projected for their showings. A relationship with the 'Granada set' developed; they often attended the Society's events.





Andy Serkis, Society Patron, ©Andy Serkis



Later Granada TV provided a very warm welcome to the Society and the British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS) by starting a film viewing weekend with a buffet, a special tour of Granada studios, sets and costume departments, followed by screenings of the latest dramas and work from World in Action.

In 1963 the Society started residential film weekends jointly with the North West branch of the BFFS and other local North West groups. Not only did they expand our film knowledge and horizons, they were also highly sociable events. Marjorie reflects:

'One of the weekends which I vividly remember was at Lyme Hall, 1966. It was just when there were new ways of looking at films.'

We had a 'teach-in', which was all the rage in the sixties. I remember Bill Grundy (a journalist from Granada TV) and Denis Mitchell (a renowned TV documentary filmmaker) and various others coming to this wonderful weekend – it was most exciting.

We also had people from London who came up – Philip Crick (the critic) and people like that, and we had quite an argument about the merits of the 'B' features that were being promulgated as being artistically worth while. They were always well attended by people from all over the country'.

Dilys Powell, doyenne of British film critics and reviewer for the Sunday Times for 55 years,

attended one such event. At another the director Peter Watkins came to talk about The War Game.

The Society organised Manchester's first Jazz Film Festival in 1964. With Tom Ainsworth at the helm there was so much different film activity on offer that he and the Society were well respected in the local film scene.

Andy Serkis became our Patron in 2019. He did not forget our recent 90th Anniversary, sending us a special message:

'I am proud to be the patron of such a long standing and important film society for the community and wish them success in their 90th year'.

The Little Theatre

'...this was a mini Cinema Paradiso all of its own... Saturday nights with the Manchester and Salford Film Society are more than just film screenings, they are a complete night out.' Number 9...Reviewing the Arts UK-wide, 2019

During the 69th Season in 1998 the Club Theatre, now Altrincham Little Theatre, became our home, and has been a warm and welcoming venue for us ever since.

Originally built as a chapel in 1875, it was converted to a bijou theatre in 1962. There, a Theatre group presents regular productions in a tradition going back to 1896. It is ideal for film and social events and has even been used as a filming location. Plush velvet seats, a raked classical auditorium with proscenium arch, and the delights of a cosy serviced bar for socialising before and after the film and for special events make it ideal.

In contrast, at our previous venue, volunteers had selflessly put out and then stacked chairs and equipment for sessions, Refreshments had to be brought and laid out: hot drinks were dispensed from an old hot water cylinder. Complaints arose that 'Arctic conditions' there reduced membership. Then a fire at the premises

caused by vandals (not us!) had to be cleared by Marjorie. The Society only just voted by a miniscule margin at a special meeting to continue activities.

Introducing film to the new venue, we opened optimistically with a feel-good Japanese film with international appeal - *Shall We Dance* (1997) directed by Masayuki Sudo. It reflected Tom's comments:

'We think that the history of film is just as important as any other art form, and we are concerned to present contemporary films from all over the world – films seldom reaching commercial screens or television.'

John Grieve, a Society member already involved with the Theatre and living locally, had suggested the new venue. It meant, after 65 years, a move from the City of Manchester to Greater Manchester. We headed for pastures new, invested in a new screen and later, with a kind donation from Tom and Marjorie, our first new projector was purchased enabling us to move to video and DVD screening.

Despite the new theatre's attractions, membership was precariously low. We reduced to one show, on a Saturday night. Not all previous members followed us, we

were unknown in a new area and Tom's health was poor. John Grieve joined the committee, becoming Secretary, and used his local knowledge to build up support for the Society, improve publicity (particularly in the local press), as well as taking on projection. He also set up a more comprehensive members' film ballot and instigated, with the Committee's full support, the Tom Ainsworth Student Short Film Competition benefiting student filmmakers in Manchester and Salford, while also respecting and celebrating Tom's huge lifetime contribution.

Year by year our membership gradually reached a sustainable figure, with the majority of members and committee members now from the immediate locality. John's work over 10 years as our Secretary really helped the Society to survive and he was made, and remains, an honorary life member.

The Society had to restrict its activities during the Covid pandemic. We continued to plan, and promote for members the communal viewing of films on TV while setting a monthly quiz. We returned to the big screen after restrictions eased in early 2022, screening a selection of films that had been missed from the 2019/20 programme.

We now appreciate the pleasures of the Theatre even more, but especially the support of our members who have stayed with us and re-joined. Starting the 2022-23 season with our special Heritage 92nd anniversary event, we enjoyed appropriately a Sunday afternoon film celebration with tea and cake at Altrincham Little Theatre. It helped compensate for the fact that our 90th anniversary fell during Covid lockdown.

Like many other film societies, we have experienced a nomadic existence in the past to survive with many reasons for our change of venue, e.g. price, prosecution, censorship, facilities – even defective building materials with a wall cracking and flaking during the actual film projection, resulting in no injuries but the subsequent demolition of the building! There is never a dull moment in the world of community cinema.

We have a long past to celebrate, but we are not finished yet and very much look forward to the future to enjoy more films, talks, socials and milestone events together.



The Altrincham Little Theatre and left, John Grieve, former Society Secretary

The Previous Venues of the Society

- ✱ Prince's Cinema, Salford
- ✱ Futurist Cinema, Strangeways, Manchester
- ✱ Majestic Cinema (was Cornerhouse 1), Manchester
- ✱ Scala Cinema, Pendleton, Salford
- ✱ Palace (Regent) Cinema, Salford
- ✱ Royal Cinema, Pendleton, Salford
- ✱ Rivoli Cinema, Rusholme, Manchester
- ✱ Rivoli Cinema, Chorlton, Manchester
- ✱ New Oxford Cinema, Manchester
- ✱ Grosvenor Cinema, All Saints, Manchester
- ✱ Gas Showroom Theatre, Manchester
- ✱ Central Library Theatre, Manchester
- ✱ British Council Rooms, Manchester
- ✱ YMCA, Manchester
- ✱ Midland Hotel Theatre, Manchester
- ✱ Hyndman Hall, Salford
- ✱ Hope Street Chapel, Salford
- ✱ Memorial Hall, Manchester
- ✱ International Club, Manchester
- ✱ United States Information Service, Manchester
- ✱ Regal Cinema, Manchester
- ✱ Greenroom Theatre, Manchester
- ✱ Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, Manchester
- ✱ Platt Chapel, Fallowfield, Manchester

A Message from Our President

I joined the Society in 1939 when I was seventeen, persuaded by my boyfriend, Tom Ainsworth, who joined in 1938. I am now 101 so my involvement in the society's activities goes back a long way, for 84 years in fact.

My memory bank, therefore, is filled with images of film past, and it is difficult to sort out the trivial ones from the significant, but there is no doubt that my adult life has been greatly enriched by my experience as an active participant in its long life, assisting Tom, who took over the reins sometime in the 1950s.

What has the society given me? Well, I know I have been able to see most of the worthwhile films from the world over, met many interesting people including film directors, critics, stars, and academic film buffs. This is because our society was a member of the **British Federation of Film Societies (now Cinema For All)**,

so we became part of a national group of like-minded people able to attend viewing sessions of new films, enjoying film weekends in all parts of the country, where all aspects of cinema-going were discussed. I have been educated, entertained and been given much lasting food for thought.

I have had plenty of hands-on experience in the society: committee member, treasurer, film note writer, refreshment provider, celluloid splicer, typist, archive collector. My present role as President of the oldest continuously running film society in the country makes me very proud. I can no longer read print or subtitles because of my failing eyesight, but my interest in film, and our Society, has not waned.

Good luck to the present and future volunteer officers and committee members who will keep the torch alive for the next ninety-something years.



Acknowledgements

First, we would like to say a BIG thank you to **Cinema For All** and its team particularly **Ellie Ragdale** and **Abi Standish**, for their very positive support, advice and encouragement with this project. We certainly appreciated the Zoom conferences. We would not have been able to turn our dream into reality and create this booklet without their help.

We are particularly grateful for help with funding and especially wish to thank the **BFI** and its grant support, enabling us to record and remember some key aspects of our history in a booklet, and to inspire us for the future.

Particular thanks are also due to **Steven Peachey** who has very patiently dealt with our queries and by design transformed what were blocks of text into a visual booklet of ***The 9 Objects***.

Thanks, are also due to the **Working Class Movement Library** in Salford and its staff, who have not only provided images from the archive for the booklet but also ensured that we could easily access the archive on site when needed.

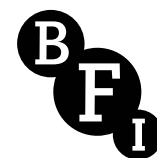


Top: The Committee in 2019. Below: The Society represented at the BFFS meeting in 1932

Proud to be members of:

**CINEMA
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MANCHESTER & SALFORD
FILM SOCIETY



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