

**ELSE-WHERE AND ELSE-WHEN: THE
FORMATION OF NEWSREEL MEMORY
AS A DISTINCTIVE TYPE OF POPULAR
CULTURAL MEMORY**

LOUISE ANDERSON

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ABSTRACT

ELSE-WHERE AND ELSE-WHEN: THE FORMATION OF NEWSREEL MEMORY AS A DISTINCTIVE TYPE OF POPULAR CULTURAL MEMORY

This thesis explores the formation of a distinctive type of popular cultural memory I have chosen to call newsreel memory, through a close analysis of oral testimonies provided by older residents of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and its districts. Focusing on the 1940s, this study demonstrates that although newsreel memories are anchored within the autobiographical, the interpretation of individual recollections can only be fully realised within wider cultural frames of meaning, significantly the familial, the generational, and the national. This thesis makes it clear that newsreels produced a unique viewing experience and one in which the pleasures associated with the spectacle of ‘actuality and knowledge’ were paramount. In addition, the gathered recollections themselves illustrate that in an important imaginative sense newsreel viewing brought historic news events, particularly during the Second World War, into existence and newsreel audiences into an imagined communion. Given the clustering of individual newsreel memories around an ultra-familiar canon of historic events, this study reveals the formative relationship between the historic events recorded by the newsreels and the personal expression of a particular popular wartime memory. Further, this thesis argues that one of the unique features of newsreel memory is its ‘entangledness’, that is, the way in which newsreel memories have been re-imagined and re-framed by the subsequent use of newsreel material in other cultural contexts. Finally, this study shows that, although the newsreel image derives its cultural authority from its perceived iconic status, what is in fact evoked is an imaginary witnessing of the pre-discursive news event. As a result, what is recalled in newsreel memory is an event that took place else-where and else-when. Thus, it is the role of newsreel viewing as an important form of secondary witnessing that is explored here: a complex process, which confirms newsreel memory as a unique expression of *both* popular cultural memory *and* history.

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PART ONE
OUTLINING THE
APPROACH

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

‘History in the making and current reports from all the world’ reviewed by Leslie Mitchell.

(British Movietone News Title Card)

This study seeks to establish how newsreels, as a unique cultural phenomenon, are remembered and, further, to reveal how newsreel memory, a distinct expression of cultural memory, is formed. Based in oral history, this study is not about recreating the historical moment of newsreel consumption itself, but instead focuses on memory, or rather the processes of remembering, newsreel audiences, and the complex interweaving of the two as what I propose to call newsreel memory. In this research the term ‘cultural memory’ defines the collective remembering of a specific culture, a memory that remains at once beyond the limits of formal historical discourse but that is simultaneously rich with cultural meaning. Further, this thesis explores the porous boundaries of personal memory, cultural memory and history (Sturken 1997: 43). Marita Sturken has indicated that ‘true distinctions between personal memory, cultural memory and history cannot be made’ (1997: 6), but that this does not lessen their importance or their cultural and historical value. As cultural historian Susannah Radstone has also argued, the complex processes of personal memory are ‘held in tension with an understanding of memory’s relation, however complex and mediated, with history’ (2000: 10). This thesis then, proposes that newsreel memory slips into a liminal space between the historical and the autobiographical, between the social and the individual. The collapsing of both cultural and social memory – people lived through the events they recall *and* have subsequently been repeatedly exposed to cultural representations of the period – reveals the unique status of newsreel memories.

Although the number of empirical research projects investigating the distant memories of the cinema audience is steadily increasing, thus far very little attention has been given to memories of the factual film form, despite the fact that the 1996 *International Newsfilm Conference* reminded its audience that ‘film is not only (nor even primarily) a medium of art and fiction’ (Jeavons 1998: 5).¹ In relation to news journalism, Stuart Allan (2004) has highlighted the lack of academic research undertaken into news audiences.² This is particularly true of the historical news audience, where there have been few dedicated research projects examining the newsreel audience.³ Based on the testimonies of older people gathered between June 2007 and October 2008, this thesis aims to address this deficit by establishing an approach to the study of audiences’ memories of newsreels as a distinctive

factual film form; and, in the process, rescue the newsreel audience from the margins of film history. In this regard it is important to acknowledge the newsreels' relationship to the real as engendering a specific type of cultural memory. Undoubtedly the pleasures afforded by newsreels, offering as they did the spectacle of knowledge and actuality, were numerous and are distinct from those described by other studies of cinema memory. Further, the newsreels' status as visual confirmation of the news leads to memories that slip between the boundaries of personal memory and history.

Despite the social impact of newsreel viewing in the period 1939-1955, beyond a passing acknowledgment that there were factual elements of the regular cinema programme, film histories pay little further attention either to the newsreels or their audiences. Film histories often describe a typical 1930s and 1940s cinema programme as consisting of A and B pictures, accompanied by a newsreel, and at least one additional short item which could include a travelogue, a comedy, a cartoon, a topical novelty, or a Government instructional film. However, beyond acknowledging their presence on the cinematic bill, histories rarely provide further information on these elements of the programme thus, an accurate picture of the cinematic experience is lost. To make matters worse, newsreels are virtually ignored in both histories of news journalism (e.g. Allan 2004, Conboy 2004, Harrison 2005), and even of factual film itself (e.g. Barsam 1992, and Guynn 1990). In addition cinema memory studies (Stacey 1994, Kuhn 2002, Moseley 2002) have, to date, decisively ignored factual film forms including the newsreels. Thus, this study seeks to address the deficit in the scholarship of three distinct areas of film studies: the historic news film audience; the historic cinema-going audience in general; and cinema memory studies. The period covered in this study, circa 1939-1955, has been chosen principally because the gathered newsreel memories concentrated around events from this period, particularly events that had taken place during the Second World War and the Coronation of Elizabeth II (1953). It is these most vividly remembered newsreel events on which much of the research is based. Furthermore, social historian Nicholas Hiley has noted that:

Contrary to many impressions given by historians, the heyday of the newsreels was not the period from 1929-1939, when cinema audiences were low. In terms of the number of people who encountered newsreels their heyday was probably the period from 1939-1955. (1998: 61)

Therefore a focus on this period is justified both in terms of its centrality within the gathered memories and its historical significance.

This thesis also examines the newsreel image's role in producing concepts of history and its role in the production of cultural memory. Marita Sturken uses the term 'cultural memory' to define memory that is 'entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning' (1997: 3). By using the term 'cultural memory', Sturken argues she is able to examine how popular culture has produced memory and how 'film and television images have moved between cultural memory and history' (1997: 3). Similarly, this thesis argues that newsreel memory has both historical and cultural meaning. Approaching newsreel memory as a type of cultural memory enables an examination of how newsreels, as a form of popular culture, have produced memory and of the ways in which newsreel images move between cultural memory and history itself. Whilst undoubtedly there remains a virtual 'newsreel blackout' in film histories, interest in the newsreels to date has been predominantly as a source of historical evidence or as a filmic 'kite-mark' of historic authenticity. In *Sight and Sound* magazine in the spring of 1967, an article contributed by critic Penelope Huston, in response to the emergence of the television history series, articulated a sense of the uneasy relationship between history and the 'newsfilm'.⁴ Huston acknowledged that, for most people, by 1967 newsreels existed only as the raw material of historical television programmes (2002: 290); in recent years this situation has only been exacerbated by the emergence of increasing numbers of cable and satellite history channels relying on newsreel footage. However, in his work on post-Holocaust media interpretations of Germany's past Wulf Kansteiner notes that memory studies

offers an opportunity to acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot be manipulated at will. (2006: 25)

In a sense, history, like memory, is unstable and always subject to change or revision: history is re-written and memories fade, and although the filmed newsreel image itself does not change, what does is both the context within which the image is viewed and the meanings that are derived in the ever changing present. As Walter Benjamin proposed; '[h]istory is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of now' (1999: 252). However, this instability does not invalidate history, nor does it invalidate memory, but instead highlights their relevance to the present. Geoffrey Cubitt's

observations on 'history's recent turn to memory' (2007: 2) help to clarify the relationship between history and memory. In his insightful work, Cubitt investigated why 'memory has become one of the central preoccupations of historical scholarship' (2007: 1), concluding that in fact history and memory are proximate concepts which connect and overlap. For Cubitt memory becomes:

A key term in the lexicon of historical study [...] where we once spoke of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even myth, we now employ memory as a metahistorical category that subsumes all these various terms. (2007: 2) ⁵

This recent growth in the popularity of memory studies as a research method is in part a result of the emergence of new approaches to historical study (e.g. oral/popular history) and partly a result of the way in which 'memory impinges on thinking about history itself, as a form of knowledge' (Cubitt, 2007: 4). Focusing on the processes of remembering through oral testimony, this thesis analyses the practices and processes of memory at the level of the individual, but perhaps more importantly how individual memory operates within society and culture. The focus is, then, the manifestation of social interactions and collective structures within the individual memories gathered for the research. The following pages investigate the extent to which newsreel memories at these different levels (the individual and the social) are interwoven. In analysing the memories of a specific cinematic form, the newsreel from the period 1939-1955, this thesis shows that these newsreel memories reveal the place where personal/individual and cultural/social memory meet.⁶ Further, this thesis should be regarded as a joint project, as its findings derive not only from scholarly analysis of the gathered memories, but from the participants' own vernacular reflections on why they watched the newsreels, what they valued, and why (McLaughlin 1996: 20).

As noted above, this thesis takes as its investigative starting point the memories of individuals and small groups of older people in an attempt to avoid a 'top down' model of ideological transmission. Beginning with the subjective, the familial, and the local, it explores the links between individual memory and the wider culture. In this regard, Susannah Radstone has usefully argued that both memory work's theoretical position and its objects of study are liminal. She writes that

Contemporary research on memory occupies a doubly liminal position. At the level of theory, it occupies the space between the extremes of post 1960s cultural theory and an unproblematic belief in the 'constituted'. Meanwhile memory work's object of study is constituted between the individual and the social; subjectivity and objectivity; the inner world and the outer world. (2000: 12)⁷

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, best known for his attempts to demonstrate the social frameworks within which memories occur, maintained there was a fundamental distinction between historical and autobiographical memory. We obtain the first through records like films, photography and newsreels; this historical memory is kept alive through commemoration and memorial. The second, autobiographical memory is composed only of those events we have experienced personally. However, this thesis contends that newsreel memory slips into a liminal space between the historical and the autobiographical, as participants lived through the events they recall and have encountered these same events in newsreel images.

Further, this study focuses on the analysis of the collective remembering of a particular mnemonic community, the war-time generation in Newcastle and its surrounding districts. For this group of individuals of varying class, political and familial backgrounds, the shared experience of having lived through 'the War' remains central to their sense of both cultural and personal identity, and crucially to their memory. As oral historian Luisa Passerini writes in relation to her own and others' memories of the political struggles in Italy during 1968, '[w]hat attracts me is memory's insistence on creating a history itself, which is much less and perhaps somewhat more than a social history' (1996: 23). Similarly, this thesis is less about social history and much more about the creation of a history of newsreel memory in which my participants, as representatives of the newsreel audience, become the central players.

Finally, this thesis explores the tensions between the definition of the newsreels as articulated by the newsreel companies themselves, which appears to hold great sway in popular memory, and the reality of much of the newsreels' coverage, which has by and large been forgotten. In this regard the thesis seeks to re-position the newsreels less as an important news source for contemporary audiences and more as an important source of visual confirmation of events already in the public domain. The official definition of a newsreel was discussed at the fourth meeting of the Council of the Newsreel Association of Great Britain

and Northern Ireland, Ltd, on 24 January 1938. In response to a request by the Board of Trade, the recorded minutes of the meeting pronounced that a newsreel was one of a series of films published not less than once weekly, compiled, produced or issued by a recognised Newsreel Company, and

- a) consisting wholly or mainly of photographs which, at the time when they were taken, were [a] means of communicating news.
- b) covering a current event of such importance as to warrant a special edition relating to that item only. (cited in Aldgate 1979: 26)

However, as this thesis reveals, the content of much of the newsreels' output was somewhat different.⁸ Historian Nicholas Pronay (1976) identifies the cinema's economic basis, its ability to produce mass entertainment relatively cheaply, as the feature that both defined and ultimately destroyed the newsreels. Pronay notes that the development of film journalism was inextricably linked to the development of film as an entertainment industry (1976: 96). All five of the British newsreels were produced and distributed by companies affiliated to successful American and British feature film companies, thus ensuring both distribution to the parent company's exhibition circuit and/or guaranteed financial backing.⁹ British newsreels, it seems, took up a precarious and not always successful position between light entertainment and serious news journalism; in essence they simply illustrated the news rather than attempting to analyse or interpret it. Throughout this study the uneasy tension between news and commerce is played out across the gathered newsreel memories.

1.1 THE MYTH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Although most of the newsreel memories collected here are of the events of the Second World War, the purpose of this study is not to debunk widely held myths about that conflict nor, more specifically, about the newsreels of the period.¹⁰ Despite attempts by revisionist historians, notably Clive Ponting (1990), to reveal the truth behind the mythology of the Second World War, popular memory remains intact, as the memories provided for this thesis attest. What is clear is that the memories gathered here are a negotiation between lived experience and the imagined and mythologised, and that these myths are integral to the creation and survival of national identity. Historian Malcolm Smith notes, '[a] social group, or a nation, becomes a social group, or a nation, only when it has a common mythology, and a common sense of the past is a very significant element in the collective identity of any

interpretative community' (2000: 2). Further, as historian Mark Connelly insists, '[m]yths, then, are not to be dismissed. They are important and contain truth' (2004: 5).¹¹ Thus, the memory of a widely held, and consensual myth, does not imply that it is false or even untrue.¹² For example, in his seminal work on the popular memory of the death of Luigi Trastulli, a young Italian steel worker, oral historian Alessandro Portelli acknowledges that the oral sources he uses are not always fully reliable but that '[r]ather than being a weakness, this is however, their strength: errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meaning' (1991: 2). Malcolm Smith notes, 'it matters what people believe happened in the past, no matter how they learned it' (2000: 6). As one of this study's participants, Walter Sinton, told me '[i]t doesn't make any difference if your memory serves you badly, it doesn't matter whether it's one hundred percent the truth, or not, because it is for you. Memories have a tendency to dim at times, but somewhere in your subconscious it's there' (NRM38).¹³

In his re-examination of the mythology surrounding the Second World War Mark Connelly writes

My contention is that the British people carry a peculiar and particular history and memory of the Second World War with them. It is an image built and maintained by elements of popular, national culture: books and newspapers, broadcasting and films, museums and education. It is also an image firmly connected with a certain perspective on British history; the Second World War is placed within the context of the governing principles of the supposed national story. Prized and valued in this interpretation are the moments when Britain stood alone and took it on the chin. (2004: 14)

Similarly, this research contends that these same myths exert enormous influence on newsreel memories. Individual newsreels often represent the 'pre-text' (Kuhn 2000: 188) not only for personal memories, but for the collective memory of an entire nation; that is, they apparently provide visual evidence of history and, thus, a prompt or pre-text for subsequent recollections. In other words, newsreels represent the common imaginings of a shared past.

In his seminal work *Theatres of Memory* (1994), Raphael Samuel castigates the academic history profession and pleads for a more inclusive understanding of historical knowledge. In particular he acknowledges 'the primacy of the visual [...] if memories [are] to be retained and retrieved: Something is not secure enough by hearing, but it is made firm by

seeing' (1994: viii). In terms of studying the processes of remembering, it is the unique ability of the image to close the gap between first-hand experience and secondary witnessing which is of greatest importance here. In this regard too, the complexity of newsreel memory begins to reveal itself. While the gathered testimonies are presented as memories of a first-hand viewing experience, they are also, at once, an example of secondary-witnessing. What is unique about newsreel memory talk is that, unlike most memory work, participants are invariably not talking about first hand experiences of the event they are recalling. The event, as witnessed in the newsreels, and recalled in memory, is already a mediated one, a trace, or even a substitute for the 'real thing' when the audience first encounters it. One might even suggest that the newsreel itself already represents a memory of an event, a recollection on film of an event witnessed else-where and else-when. And yet, despite the passage of time, the newsreels' depiction of historic events is powerful enough to evoke vivid memories. However, it is often the event unfolding on screen, rather than the viewing experience itself, that is remembered.¹⁴ While other writers have sought to examine how the myth of the Second World War was created, and has endured in popular memory, few have fully investigated the role of newsreels in the formation of popular memory, a neglect this thesis aims to address (Evans and Lunn, 1997).¹⁵

1.2 MEMORIES OF HISTORIC EVENTS

This study also examines the extent to which these memories reveal how shared experience of what we might describe as the historical or 'marker events' (Teer-Tomaselli, 2006) shown in the newsreels, tend towards the creation of an imagined nationhood, or in this case Britishness. Marita Sturken contends that it is 'those moments when people perceive of themselves as part of the nation' (1997: 13), or as participants in the nation, that are most often experienced through mediated representations. Building on Benedict Anderson's persuasive argument that print-languages formed the basis for national consciousness, 'the nation was conceived in language, not in blood' (1991: 145), this study explores the impact of a cinematic-language on the formation of a perceived nationhood. In the period 1939-1955 when Britons listened to, read about and eventually watched events of global significance unfolding before them, they regarded themselves as part of a national audience regardless of the regional, political, cultural or class differences between them. Nationhood was realised through engagement with a range of media, with the implicit understanding of sharing an historic experience with other users of radio, newspapers and newsreels. As explored further in the thesis, newsreel viewing is remembered as engendering a feeling of communion with

other cinema audiences and with the population as a whole. The gathered memories suggest, as Sturken asserts in relation to national television viewing, that, ‘viewers engage with, whether in agreement or resistance, a concept of nationhood and national meaning’ (1997: 24). Of course, the Second World War threw the definition of British national identity into stark relief and with it threatened traditional notions of ‘Britishness’. However, as Angus Calder (1997) has shown, the Second World War mobilised the whole nation in a particular nation-building exercise of phenomenal speed and reach, and within which regional difference was subsumed. That is not to suggest that a particular Northern sensibility is not detectable in the testimonies gathered here, but that national identity comes to the fore at this time, re-made as it is around the idea of Britain at war. Indeed, the experience of war cemented a generational perspective, particularly among the young. What makes the memories of this war-time generation valuable is that this period has become an integral part of the nation’s shared memory or history (Connelly, 2004). In focusing on a particular wartime generational memory, this thesis builds on Karl Mannheim’s pioneering essay ‘The Problem of Generations’ ([1928] 1959) in which, according to Barbara Misztal, he outlined how the specificity of each generation’s experience ‘results in the different character of their respective collective memories’ (2003: 85). Mannheim was clear that in order for a generation to unite, its members must share first-hand experience of a significant event, war or revolution. As becomes apparent throughout the gathered testimonies these so-called ‘marker events’ had a profound effect upon a generation’s experience of both their national and personal identity. This study explores the extent to which newsreel memories represent the intersection of personal memory and generational memory, that is, the extent to which the individual newsreel memories gathered here represent a manifestation of generational consciousness and myths about wartime experience (Connelly 2004, Smith 2000). The centrality of newsreel footage, as part of that remembered landscape, confirms the value of collecting and studying newsreel memories. We might regard the newsreels themselves as the embodiment of national memory and the newsreel archive, which the media and heritage industries continue to plunder for material, as the repository of national memory.

1.3 SCHOLARSHIP’S NEGLECT OF THE NEWSREELS

As mentioned above, despite increasing scholarly interest in cinema memory, recollections of factual film forms remain woefully under-researched, a neglect this thesis seeks to begin to redress. Before beginning this process, it is necessary to briefly examine why there appears to be a virtual ‘newsreel blackout’ within film history. In relation to British wartime cinema,

Jeffrey Richards (1986) points out that what critics and historians regard as either important or conversely unimportant – whether newsreel, instructional short, documentary or fiction feature – does not always correspond to the films that enjoyed popular box office success. As Richards notes, in order ‘[t]o restore perspective to the analysis of British war-time cinema, it is important to acknowledge that many of the critically most prized films were often box office failures’ (Aldgate and Richards, 1986: 139).¹⁶ Similarly, although newsreels have been largely overlooked by critics they were a popular feature of the cinematic programme, enjoyed by large audiences.

As early as 1930 influential film historian and documentary film maker Paul Rotha dismissed newsreels casting them into the outer darkness ‘as an elementary form of the cinema, without joy’ (cited in Pronay 1982: 173-4), a position with which, Pronay suggests, ‘many historians as intellectuals themselves were apt to agree’ (1982: 174). Twenty years later Rotha’s opinion had not changed: in 1949 he wrote, ‘of all the branches of cinema, the newsreels have perhaps been the least progressive since 1929’ (1960: 123). Despite the fact that the newsreels’ precursor, ‘actualities’, had been around since the birth of cinema itself, Pronay is convinced the reasons for their intellectual neglect have, at their core, the influence and dominance of the Documentary Film Movement in Britain.¹⁷ John Grierson regarded the newsreels as the ‘craven beginnings’ (1938: 142) of British realist cinema. Acknowledged as the father and founder of the Documentary Film Movement, Grierson launched a stinging attack on British newsreels:

From the beginning we have had newsreels, but dim records they seem now of only the evanescent and the essentially unreal, reflecting hardly anything worth preserving of the times recorded [...] Among the foundation stones, the pompous parades, the politicians on pavements, and even among the smoking ruins of mine disasters and the broken backs of distressed ships, it is difficult to think that any real picture of our troubled day has been recorded. The news-reel has gone dithering on, mistaking the phenomenon for the thing in itself, and ignoring everything that gave it the trouble of conscience and penetration and thought. (1938: 142-4)

More damning still, Grierson goes on to praise the arrival in Britain of the American newsreel *The March of Time* because ‘it gets behind the news, observes the factors of influence and gives a perspective to events’ (1938: 144), something he felt the British newsreels had

singularly failed to do.¹⁸ Grierson argued that although the newsreels may have contained news from around the world which undoubtedly broadened viewers' outlook, their lack of any in-depth analysis served only to distort the relative significance of each event for the people involved. As Pronay suggests, Grierson's influence on the attitude of film historians toward the newsreel should not be underestimated.

With regard to the work of the Ministry of Information (MoI), Pronay claims they have 'received more attention, so far, than those in charge of negative propaganda: censorship or 'control' (1982: 173). The reasons according to Pronay are clear: the 'tools of positive propaganda' (1982: 173) were designed for discussion within the public domain and have subsequently been collected by museums and archives. In stark contrast, news-control and censorship, as practised by the newsreels, was undertaken in an atmosphere of secrecy; according to Pronay, 'the better its work is done altogether the less it is noticed' (1982: 173). Addressing what he describes as the 'intellectual reasons' for the neglect of the 'newsfilm', Pronay juxtaposes the respective roles of newsreels and documentary film.¹⁹ He notes that the documentary film has always been regarded as 'part of the art of cinema [...] dealing with larger issues in a manner calculated to appeal to an educated audience' (1982: 173). In contrast, the newsreels

[D]ealt with day-to-day news, employed a style which was deliberately tailored to conveying news and views in the entertainment context of the popular cinema and on a level which was calculated to appeal to an audience which did not possess sophisticated literacy. (Pronay, 1982: 173)

Despite the widespread critical neglect of newsreels, film historian Rachael Low briefly considers their role in her seminal history of early British Cinema, *The History of the British Film 1896-1939* (1997). However, despite the generous length of Low's work, running to seven volumes, she devotes only one chapter of one slim volume to the newsreel. In *Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930s* (1979), Low paints a rather unflattering picture of what she also refers to as 'news film'. Describing the contents of selected *British Movietone* newsreels she writes, '[i]f this seems dull to read, it is a great deal duller to watch, and it is difficult to feel immersed in the events of the day as one so easily does when perusing old newspapers' (1979: 23). Despite claiming that, '[n]ewsreels continued the process begun by universal education and mass circulation newspapers which altered the ordinary person's

conception of the world' (1979: 33), Low complains that newsreels were rather less effective in their communication of international and political affairs. She writes:

Neither the newsreel companies nor their parent firms even wished to present an independent informed opinion on serious matters [...] they were part of the entertainment industry and did exactly what they set out to do, which was to present a light magazine about current events similar to the more popular papers, and to avoid antagonising anyone who might possibly demand that newsreels should be passed by a censor before exhibition. Editorial comment or a balanced picture of world events were somebody else's business. (1979: 43)²⁰

Thus, the critical view of the newsreels, following a distinguished lineage from Rotha and Grierson in the 1930s, through to Low in the 1970s, was unanimously disparaging. The newsreels, regarded as little more than light entertainment were, as a result, virtually excised from film history.

1.4 NEWSREEL AUDIENCES

If there is limited scholarship dealing with the newsreels then there is virtually nothing dealing with the newsreel audience; although still within living memory, the newsreel audience's story remains completely undocumented. Low makes an important observation relevant to this study when she notes that studies of the impact of the newsreels by historians like Nicholas Pronay have routinely used quantitative methods as evidence of their (the newsreels') influence, a method she regards as providing an incomplete picture. According to Pronay there was widespread recognition by the news media in Britain that, 'newsreels could count on a regular audience of some 20 million people each week' (1982: 175), and of the five newsreel companies operating in the UK, even the smallest, *Universal (Talking) News*, reached an audience larger than the circulation of the largest daily, the *Daily Express*. Low, on the other hand, claims that it is the qualitative impact that is important. She writes '[t]he coverage of important issues [in newsreels] on a trivial level remains trivial, however often you do it' (1979: 43). More recently, Nicholas Hiley has also taken issue with the historian's quantitative approach to assess the impact of newsreels. The problem with numbers, Hiley points out, is that 'there are three principal ways of measuring the newsreel audience, according to how that audience is defined' (1998: 59). The first is 'very exclusive' measuring

the number of people who saw a single issue of a particular newsreel, or alternatively who regularly watched a particular newsreel. The second, that historians tend to favour, 'is rather broader, and includes all cinemagoers who went to the cinema with sufficient regularity to follow the news through the newsreels' (1998: 59). Finally, in the third Hiley describes an even broader category, including 'all those people who went to the cinema with *any* [my emphasis] sort of regularity' (1998: 60).

This poses the inevitable question, how *do* we define the newsreel audience, and is it useful or even possible to categorise newsreel viewers in the ways outlined above. Hiley has suggested that a useful benchmark should be a sufficient frequency of visits to make patrons 'regular followers of news in the newsreels' (1998: 60). However, even Hiley fails to make any distinction between the specialised news theatre audience and regular cinema audiences. Nevertheless, Hiley usefully sought to critically reassess the use of quantitative measures to determine the impact of the newsreels on audiences. Quoting figures from a 1927 survey of Odeon patrons he reveals that although an impressive majority of the audience may have responded positively when asked about newsreels, their length (typically six to ten minutes) and their position within the cinema programme (as a filler between the features) suggested something rather different; 'British cinemagoers wanted entertainment, not news' he writes (1998: 59). Hiley's conclusions about the size and importance of British newsreel audiences, between 1920 and 1955, help to identify some of the complex issues involved in an analysis. Firstly, he notes that single issues of newsreels had 'remarkably large audiences [...] the market leaders in the silent and sound period were able to achieve audiences of 3.5 million per issue' (1998: 60). This equated to the circulation of a popular daily newspaper but, as it could take up to a month for this figure to be achieved given the system of distribution, any impact on the audience would be far less than a daily paper. In addition, putting these figures into perspective, Hiley notes that even at these audience levels a single issue would only directly reach one in ten of the population. Secondly he points out that 'despite these large audiences for single issues, the number of people who could have followed the news through the British newsreels was remarkably small [...] perhaps one person in five' (1998: 60). Nevertheless, despite these issues the newsreels' recognition factor was undoubtedly high; newsreels and their particular style of reporting were familiar to most of the British population. By 1924 Hiley notes that 'the majority of British people must have encountered them [newsreels] at sometime or another' (1998: 61). It is this familiarity and their personal encounters with the newsreels that this study uses as its only criterion for participants' inclusion. Newsreels were designed for audiences who were familiar with their style, and

were shown to audiences who would have missed them if they had been dropped, but who would not tolerate them taking more than ten minutes out of the cinema programme (Hiley, 1998: 62).

The rationale for including this extended discussion of who the newsreel audience was, is to make the point that the difficulty of definition makes it all too easy to ignore or avoid the subject altogether; the lack of consensus has led to the newsreel audience simply disappearing from view. To make matters worse, there is little evidential material available in the archive, either nationally or locally, and, as already suggested, very little contemporary scholarship.²¹ It is the difficulty of determining exactly who the newsreel audience was, combined with a legacy of academic neglect, that kept the newsreel audience from view – that is until now.

1.5 NEWSREELS AND HISTORIANS

To date the newsreels have been studied principally as source material for twentieth century history. For the Inter-University History Film Consortium, a group of scholars loosely grouped around *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (founded in 1981) the priority was ‘for as many historians as possible to be given the opportunity of exploring their [films and sound recordings] nature and problems at first hand’ (Pronay, 1982: 2).²² As Pronay wrote, the Consortium provided the ‘financial and technical means by which historians can make studies of major topics of twentieth century history actually in the medium of film’ (1982: 2). Pronay and his colleagues were the first academics to confront and confound the dismissive attitudes of earlier generations of film historians towards the newsreels and to legitimise the use of film as evidence within historical enquiry at a time when ‘[f]ilms and sound-recordings as historical record material were [...] highly unfamiliar for historians’ (Pronay, 1982: 2). Given the Consortium’s stated aims, the role of the newsreels during wartime was of particular interest. In attempting to set out the various ways in which the history of wartime cinema has been studied, James Chapman (2000: 193) has identified three broad approaches: the old historians, the empiricists and the theorists. Within these Chapman categorises the Consortium as a ‘group of revisionist scholars who may be described collectively as the empiricist school’ (2000: 195). The Consortium’s research was based on an investigation of primary source materials including ‘government records, trade and critical journals, and contemporary research into film carried out by the social survey organisation Mass Observation’ (Chapman, 2000: 195). Using these sources, according to Chapman, the empiricists attempted to reconstruct the production processes and context of

wartime films, including their critical and popular reception. For example, using statistics from Mass Observation surveys conducted throughout the war, Pronay extrapolated figures for the newsreels from figures that measured general cinema-going audiences. As already argued, this leads to a rather misleading set of statistics which ignore the levels of interest or attention audiences' may have paid to the newsreels. As Hannah Craven noted, for many newsreels were 'an incidental feature' (2001: 248) of the cinema programme to which they paid little attention, nor would regular cinema-goers have described themselves as the newsreel audience. As the authors of a UNESCO report entitled 'Newsreels across the World' observed, 'in viewing newsreels, the public has no choice; newsreels are automatically shown to all those present in the cinema, few of whom come specifically to see them' (Baechlin and Muller-Strauss, 1952: 29). Nevertheless, Pronay in particular was instrumental in highlighting the important contribution newsreels made to the formation of a national, collective identity, and in focusing attention onto the newsreel audience itself. Unfortunately, Pronay never undertook the detailed newsreel audience study he advocated, and in recent years the vast majority of newsreel research has continued to focus on newsreel production and distribution.²³ As a result the analysis of, or research into, the historical newsreel audience remains at best sketchy, and as already noted, even less is known about the audiences for specialised news theatres.

However, the twenty-first century has undoubtedly begun to witness a resurgence of interest in the newsreel (or newsfilm as it is often called), including the opening of numerous on-line newsreel archives, including British Pathé and British Movietone, the Heritage Lottery funded project to restore the historic News Theatre building in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council's decision to fund this thesis; indeed this study forms part of this twenty-first century newsreel renaissance. The rationale for this interest has surely been the insights the newsreels bring to the history of the twentieth century and the exponential growth in the value and importance of archive film to the collective cultural heritage. In this respect the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) has undoubtedly taken the lead in reassessing the importance of British cinema newsreels. In 2002, Murray Weston, Chief Executive of the BUFVC, credited a group of young historians with establishing the Council's reputation in the early 1980s, a group that included Nicholas Pronay, Anthony Aldgate, Paul Smith, and Arthur Marwick. The Council's work in the field reached a high point in 2000 with the release of the *British Universities Newsreel on-line Database* (BUND). Today, the BUND, recently renamed the *News on Screen* archive, represents a key resource for newsreel study and research and includes an on-line database of

180,000 newsreel and cinemagazine stories (1910-1938) linked to production documents and newsfilms.²⁴

1.6 THE NARRATIVES OF MEMORY

Returning to the current study, the use of memory as historical evidence raises on-going epistemological concern amongst historians about their reliability and veracity (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett 2008). However, in this thesis there is an understanding that personal narrative cannot be taken as a transparent description of either history in general or an individual experience in particular. Memories express themselves in narrative form and as such, do not, as Marita Sturken has observed, represent ‘a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived’ (1997: 7). Similarly, Nicola King has described memory as ‘a text to be deciphered, not a lost reality to be discovered’ (2000: 62). Memory is not a way to access the past, nor a representation of the past ‘as it was’; as Sturken has noted, ‘the original experiences of memory are irretrievable’ (1997: 9). As a result this thesis acknowledges that the past is produced in the act of remembering, in the process of memory work and further, that the memories produced will inevitably be affected by present day attitudes, views and concerns, the intervening sixty-five years, repeated exposure over those years to archive newsreel material, and the specific research context within which participants are asked to recall their memories.²⁵ Historian Andreas Huyssen has written that there is inevitably a gap that opens up ‘between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation’ (1994: 2). It is this ‘gap’, and the resulting narrative, that the memories gathered here embody and which are analysed in detail in this study. Nevertheless, as made explicit in the work of oral historians Luisa Passerini (1987) and Alessandro Portelli (1991), it is their relation to lived historical experience that constitutes memories’ specificity, and we should not forget that the oral histories gathered for this research are embodied in a real person ‘with a real history and psychology, and living and changing through time’ (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008: 41).

As noted above, first and foremost the gathered oral histories are to be regarded as what Annette Kuhn describes as ‘memory texts’ (2002: 9) to be treated as both data *and* discourse for analysis. This study is also concerned as much with the how (discourse) as the what (content) of the gathered memories. In examining the gathered testimonies, the analysis, like Kuhn’s, is primarily based on the work of oral historians Luisa Passerini (1987), Michael Frisch (1990) and Alessandro Portelli (1991) who have been particularly influential in highlighting the need to interpret individual stories within a wider cultural framework, and to explore the complex ways in which meanings are negotiated between the individual and the

public consciousness. Portelli (1991), for example, distinguishes oral histories from their written counterparts, in that the former tend to reveal more about the meaning of events and rather less about the events themselves. Importantly, he maintains that ‘subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more “visible” facts’ (1991: 51). However, as Pierre Bourdieu argues, we cannot simply regard personal testimony as a *more* legitimate source of historical evidence. Bourdieu regards it as an ‘illusion to view individual biographical and autobiographical sources as in or of themselves, deeper, truer, or more authentic than accounts based on other sources, methodologies’ (cited in Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008: 41). Thus this study, based on the oral histories of older people, is not offered as a more, or less, authentic version of history, but as a valuable addition to the accounts of newsreel history already in circulation.

The newsreel memories explored in this study are the result of a process of reproduction. They are filtered through a series of cultural products, particularly factual television programmes and historical film. Marita Sturken refers to these cultural products as ‘technologies of memory’ (1997: 10); that is, the objects, images and representations, through which cultural memory is produced, shared and given meaning. Thus, cultural memory is articulated through these processes of representation. While memorials are the most traditional example of memory objects, this study is only concerned with cinematographic memorials, which increasingly represent a significant site or repository of cultural memory; images of the past, and particularly moving images of the past, are crucial to its interpretation. Ironically, perhaps, this is no less true for those who actually lived through the past. As Sturken has noted, and as is borne out in the gathered testimonies: ‘cinematic representations of the past have the capacity to entangle with personal and cultural memory’ (1997: 10). As the thesis reveals, time and again, participants were unable to locate their memories and unable to distinguish between their original encounters with specific newsreels and subsequent encounters on the small screen.

Although the practices of oral history have been utilised here to gather newsreel memories, an examination of participants’ life stories is not the primary purpose of this study.²⁶ The justification for this approach has been the desire to position the newsreel viewing experience back within the context of cinema-going and other life experiences more generally.²⁷ Newsreels were an integral part of virtually every cinema programme including, in some cases, children’s cinema clubs. We know much about these cinema-goers, and a number of authoritative studies have told us much about the habits and preferences of cinema

audiences during the 1940s.²⁸ However, we know virtually nothing about what these vast audiences thought of the newsreels.²⁹

Given this complexity of newsreel memory, the gathered testimonies are analysed with two distinct aims in mind. The first assesses the significance of the newsreels as a cultural form; as research participant John Charlewood recalled, ‘especially during the war it [the newsreel] was quite important. You know there wasn’t television’ (NRM03: 4).³⁰ When questioned about the impact or influence of the newsreels, participants were unanimous, despite the recognition in hindsight of bias or propaganda, that the newsreels were a significant cultural form. The thesis thus explores the ways in which many participants recall being able to resist what might be referred to as the dominant cultural and political discourses represented by the newsreels (they were critical of their perceived bias and propaganda), and yet at the same time recall the newsreels as an important source of news and information. In this way, time and again it is the perceived evidential status of the moving image that comes to the fore. As Samuel (1994) has noted, the visual has a unique capacity to bridge the gap between first-hand experience and secondary witnessing or vicarious experience. It was the opportunity to see moving images of news, of ‘marker events’, that undoubtedly gave the newsreels their significance as a form of cultural knowledge despite misgivings, either at the time or in hindsight, about the veracity or truthfulness of the images they contained. As research participant Tricia Charlewood aptly put it, ‘[m]omentous events, remember seeing them on the newsreels’ (NRM03: 5). These memories are, then, of the newsreel as historical chronicle and as a marker of historic events. It was the opportunity to see moving images of historic occasions, triumphs and tragedies that recalls the wonder of the earliest cinema-goers as they flocked to see moving pictures and begins to explain why participants appeared to contradict themselves. This is not to suggest that newsreel audiences, nor early cinema audiences, were naïve, but that there was and remains a fundamental fascination with the spectacle of the moving image. Without exception, all the participants, whether they expressed an interest in the newsreels or not, regarded the newsreel as an important cultural form.

The second aim is to analyse the gathered memories discursively, as texts providing insights into what I have called ‘newsreel memory’. In examining the gathered testimonies it has been necessary to investigate newsreel memory as referring to two distinct phenomena. Firstly, newsreel memory is explored as the memory of viewing newsreels and going to dedicated news theatres, as a popular cultural activity. Secondly, newsreel memory is analysed as the memory of historical events, so-called ‘marker events’ as witnessed in the

newsreels. This is perhaps the defining feature of newsreel memory; it refers to something other than itself. When asked to describe their newsreel memories, participants talk of the news event, referring to it as if they had witnessed it (the news event) first hand. Examining the experiences of secondary witnessing and the iterations of newsreel footage throughout the subsequent decades, leads to a better understanding of how newsreels have become part of a shared cultural history with resonance far beyond the generational cohort who first saw them.

1.7 NEWSREEL MEMORY TALK

As an approach to identifying the unique characteristic of newsreel memory, this study examines the gathered testimonies for unique tropes or distinctive ways of telling newsreel stories. Annette Kuhn's (2002) work on cinema memory, in which she reveals a series of identifiable discursive registers throughout her informants' cinema-going memories, informs this approach. In analysing the gathered testimonies collected for this study it becomes clear that despite their differences there are a number of recurring tropes, suggestive of a mnemonic register we could call 'newsreel memory talk'.³¹ Further, as outlined above, the thesis argues that these forms of expression are unique to a distinctive generational mnemonic community which appears to share broadly similar memories of the newsreels. Across all of these various registers, or tropes, this study explores the extent to which we might identify a generational unity. Usefully, these tropes tend to relate, rather neatly, to the two approaches outlined above, either the experience of newsreel watching itself or directly to actual news events. Of these recurring tropes the following are explored in some depth throughout the thesis:

- Shuttlework: comparing past and present:

A recurrent pattern throughout is the comparison between past and present, or 'shuttlework' as Alessandro Portelli described it (1991: 65), such as in the following, 'I now realise it was terrible propaganda but nevertheless then I thought they gave a true picture of what was going on' (Steve Whitley, NRM21: 4). In her thesis, Nancy Huggett argues that in oral history interviews older people negotiate between themselves as young cinema-goers (the narrated self) and the older adult speaking (the narrating self) (2002: 280). Participants reflect on their younger selves often with a mixture of nostalgia and amusement. In this regard, this thesis also shows how newsreel memories reveal what we might refer to as a 'retreat into nostalgia' (Radstone 2000: 8). For example, participant Rose Johnson recalled '[w]e went to see *Gone with the Wind* [...] That was a picture that. But today's pictures half of them I

don't understand [...] I don't know what they were about when they're finished' (NRM 40: 10).

- The 'I' in the picture: the anecdotal, first person narrator:

The extensive use of the anecdotal or first person narrative is a recurring feature of all the gathered memories. It is the strong, recurring personal narrative running through all the accounts, particularly in relation to the family and cinema-going more generally. It is a distinctive characteristic of newsreel memory that major historical events are anchored within the personal viewing experience. Each recollection is framed within the familiar context of habitual cinema-going activity as Henry Holden recalled, 'I remember going with me mother and father' (NRM17: 4). Around their newsreel memories older people reconstruct their past and reveal, at times, a very personal history.

- The vernacular theorist, or cultural commentator:

Somewhat at odds with this anchoring in the personal, is the trope of the vernacular theorist (McLaughlin, 1996), or the presentation of self as lay theorist, or perhaps more accurately in this context, as social or cultural commentator.

- The keepers of local histories:

Linked to the vernacular theorist is the trope of the vernacular historian. That is the presentation of self as keeper, and subsequently provider, of historical insight or knowledge. This historic knowledge is often, although not exclusively, locally based.

- The Quotidian: The everyday, the regular/routine(ness) of the commonplace:

A further identifiable and oft repeated trope is that of the quotidian, the regular or routine(ness) of what is remembered. The newsreels were regarded as simply a part of cinema-going and a part of the everyday, as in the following, '[i]t was simply part of the fabric of cinema-going' (Steve Whitley, NRM21: 9).

- The childhood voice:

And finally, yet another fascinating, and often endearing, characteristic trope of the gathered memories, is the recurrent habit of participants revisiting their childhood or youthful selves, as they voice the experiences of the child, youth or young adult. This type of discursive register returns to recount tales of fascination or boredom with, or even fear of, the newsreels. In her narrative, Cynthia Campbell's childhood self re-emerges in this excerpt, 'I used to think, "Oh, I know, I'm going to have to sit through it – so here it comes [...] even though the travelogues were in colour I used to *hate*

them, they were *so boring*' (NRM 02: 12). It is these oft recurring tropes, identified throughout the gathered testimonies that provide the threads of generational continuity, stitching the individual memories together and providing a unique expression of a distinctive wartime mnemonic community.

1.8 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into three main sections. The first section (Chapters One and Two) locate the research methodology in relation to the existing scholarship on film audiences. The focus then moves to the use of oral history and memory studies within film studies combined with a discussion of the theoretical approaches adopted in this thesis.

The second section (Chapters Three and Four) looks at contemporary attitudes to newsreels, with a particular focus on the wartime newsreel. Chapter Three examines the role of the news theatre and its audience, with a particular focus on Newcastle's News Theatre (now Tyneside Cinema). Just as newsreel memory appears to occupy a liminal space between individual and collective memory, this chapter argues that the news theatres created a liminal space in which a range of activities took place and not all of them associated with a desire to see the news on screen. Chapter Four explores wartime newsreels through an analysis of Mass Observation's investigation of the public's reactions to wartime newsreels and an examination of readers' letters published in *Picturegoer* magazine. Although not intended as a measure of the accuracy of newsreel memory, this section helps to reveal the extent to which the formation of newsreel memory is informed by popular memory, a certain nostalgia, and subsequent encounters with newsreel material.

Finally, after the research context has been firmly established, the third section comprises the main data analysis of the gathered oral histories (Chapters Five, Six and Seven). Chapter Five begins the process of examining the formation of newsreel memory within particular frameworks of memory, starting with newsreel memory's relation to three particular mnemonic communities: family, nation and generation. Firstly, the chapter reveals the important role the attitude participants' families played in their own interest in the news. Secondly, the chapter examines the importance of newsreel viewing in the construction of national identity, including the memories of newsreels of public events which brought forth the sense of a communal experience. Thirdly, the influence of generational identity on the formation of memory is explored, showing how a particular 'generational habitus' (Eyerman and Turner, 1998) has shaped subsequent memory. The final part of Chapter Five explores whether or not the gathered memories reveal a particular 'Northern sensibility'. Chapter Six

is devoted to an examination of the historic or ‘marker events’ around which newsreel memories cling or cluster. Finally, Chapter Seven focuses on the particular pleasures and responsibilities of the newsreel image as a form of visual evidence and as a spectacle of actuality. This chapter also examines the role of the newsreel archive as both virtual commemoration and memorial and briefly explores the legacy of the newsreels.

The aims of this study then, as stated above, are numerous and complex. The primary aim is to establish how newsreel memory is formed and, in the process, to begin to establish an approach to the study of memories of a factual cinematic form. Key to this thesis is the argument that, precisely because of its basis in a factual cinematic form, newsreel memory provides a unique insight into the extent of cultural memory’s entanglement with cultural production. In choosing to study the newsreel audience this research aims to redress a deficit in screen scholarship in which newsreels and their viewers routinely feature as no more than a footnote in histories of the documentary/non-fiction film or television news. As outlined above, sustained study of newsreels has traditionally been conducted as a branch of historical enquiry, and as such the newsreels are regarded simply as the medium rather than the message itself. Perhaps, because of this approach, the newsreel audience has been fairly comprehensively ignored. However, as this study demonstrates, these hitherto undocumented audience memories are crucial to a more complete understanding of the newsreels as a vital part of both the cultural expression of a particular generation and a shared cultural heritage. By recording the memories of the newsreel audiences, we begin to better understand the impact, and influence, moving images of historic events had on cinema audiences during the 1940s and early 1950s. We begin to unravel the complexities of a unique relationship between the cinemagoer and the newsreel, and further, identify the specific nature and formation of newsreel memories as a complex entanglement of personal and popular memory. As such, and as noted above, newsreel memory slips into a liminal space between the historical and the autobiographical, the shared and the individual. As the thesis argues, as memories of events witnessed else-where and else-when, newsreel memories present the researcher with a unique set of challenges and opportunities, working towards a better understanding of an important type of cultural memory.

¹ Thomas Austin (2005) has also identified the apparent lack of scholarly interest in audience perspectives on screen documentary.

² Although the Glasgow Media Group (e.g. 1976, 1982, 1990, 1995) has produced important work on the audience for television news it has discussed only the short term retention of news content in its research.

³ Nicholas Pronay's two short essays 'British Newsreels in the 1930s: 1. Audiences and Producers' (2002) and 'British Newsreels in the 1930s: 2. Their Policies and Impact' (2002), first published in 1971 and 1972 respectively, represent the key texts on the subject of newsreel audiences.

⁴ Huston is referring to the BBC documentary *The Great War* (1964).

⁵ See also Kerwin Lee Klein (2000: 127- 150).

⁶ I utilise all these terms, collective, popular, mass and shared memory because at different times newsreel memory embodies the relationship between the individual and each of these groups. I identify and explain the particular term used as and when necessary.

⁷ In this specific context Radstone's phrase 'an unproblematic belief in the "constituted"' is taken to refer to an essentialist approach which regards memory as either the direct expression of the self who existed in the past, or the recovery of past events as they really happened. Interestingly Radstone goes on to identify a further sense in which memory work could be understood as liminal – the belief in the relationship between remembering and transformation (2000: 12).

⁸ According to *World Film News* (July, 1936: 31) the newsreels existed on a regular diet of three 'stock subjects', sport, royalty and the military, which it describes as an 'extremely limited range of material' (ibid.). Similarly, in an article which examines the attitudes expressed by the non-fiction films of the 1930s towards the events that led to the Second World War, Jonathan Lewis discusses the editorial policy of the newsreels, he writes:

They were a commercial operation, acutely dependent on the continuance of their contracts with the exhibitors, which in turn depended on the happiness of the cinemagoers [...] but since there were only two issues from each company a week little of the content could be fully up to date. Thus the newsreels were in no sense a real precursor of *News at Ten*, and there is no use in accusing them of failure to be. Their political material was greatly outweighed by footage of sports, Royalty, children, animals, catastrophes, hat fashions and comic sketches (1977: 70).

⁹ The report of The Arts Enquiry, *The Factual Film* (1947), listed the five companies producing and distributing British newsreels as the subsidiaries of feature film companies:

British Movietone News, Twentieth Century Fox (US);

British Paramount News, Paramount Pictures Inc. (US);

Gaumont-British News, Gaumont-British Picture Corporation Ltd. (British);

Pathé News, Associated British and Warner Brothers (British – US);

Universal News, British Pictorial Productions Ltd. (British);

It was the financial relationship between the newsreel subsidiaries and their parent companies that both guaranteed the newsreels' place in the larger cinema circuits and dictated their style and content. For example, the Arts Enquiry revealed that 'Gaumont-British and Twentieth Century Fox are related through the Metropolitan and Bradford Trust, which gives Movietone an entry into Gaumont-British cinemas' (1947: 137).

¹⁰ As Mark Connelly notes at the beginning of his book '[T]here are actually many myths contributing to the one, great overarching myth of the war. This central British myth of the Second World War defies precise definition' (2004: 1). He goes on in a single page of text to outline the central and necessarily simplified myths of the Second World War, suggesting

that they centre round the triptych of events from 1940 - Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the Blitz and the entire nation's response to almost certain defeat (2004: 55). See also Clive Ponting's (1990) *1940: Myth and Reality*. Connelly refers to Ponting as a 'sensational revisionist' (Connelly 2004: 9).

¹¹ Connelly is one of the few authors to examine the role of newsreels in the generation of the popular mythology of the Second World War.

¹² See Angus Calder's careful analysis in *The Myth of the Blitz* (1992) which refuses the simplistic divisions between reality and myth.

¹³ Each participant has been assigned a research coding reference (NRM). See Appendix 2

¹⁴ The exception to this is the remembered trips to the news theatres, in which the viewing experience in the news theatre environment comes to the fore.

¹⁵ Evans and Lunn (1997) go some way to addressing this neglect.

¹⁶ Richards makes particular reference to the 1941 drama *Ships with Wings* (d. Sergei Nolbandov) regarded favourably on its release by contemporary audiences and the popular press and derided by the 'high brow press' (1986: 132).

¹⁷ Pronay also blames newsreel neglect on historians' continued fascination with those divisions of the Ministry of Information (MOI) engaged in positive propaganda during the Second World.

¹⁸ Two years later a review in *Documentary News Letter* (Dec, 1940) echoed Grierson's criticisms: it read, 'British newsreels are not noted for their progressive thinking nor their progressive film technique [...] Compared with the imagination of the French and German newsreels, and the showmanship of the Americans, the British newsreel compares unfavourably' (1940: 5). While some of this criticism may be justified it should be noted that unlike the British newsreels, *March of Time* for example, was subject to the British Board of Film Censorship regulations and, as a result of its often controversial content, frequently banned, (Taylor, 1999: 96). As explored in more depth in Chapter 4, British newsreels studiously avoided any controversy in order to avoid unnecessary delays and bans.

¹⁹ Newsreels are often referred to in academic contexts as newsfilms. The term 'newsfilm' or 'news film' is used here only in direct quotations.

²⁰ Rachel Low's words seem to echo the opinion of a short editorial piece in *World Film News* which began, '[a] kick to all reels for staggering mishandling of the bus strike' (June 1937: 30). In a stinging attack the paper accused the newsreels of being afraid to tackle the dispute head-on. 'What a dramatic story had the case been fairly presented for both sides! What a chance missed!' (*ibid.*)

²¹ This thesis was partially funded by Tyneside Cinema (Newcastle) one of just a handful of former news theatres still operating as cinemas. Despite having the cinema's archives at my disposal, today they consist principally of material relating to the post-1968 period when the cinema had ceased to operate as a news theatre.

²² The Inter-University History Film Consortium comprised the history departments of the Universities of Leeds, Nottingham, Reading, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Sussex, Wales, Queen Mary College, London and London School of Economics and Political Science. See 'Film and the Historian' section of the BUFVC's News on Screen website <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/filmandthehistorian>.

²³ See, for example, the newsreel research conducted at the British Universities Film and Video Council website <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen>.

²⁴ The BUFVC's archive also contains the entire surviving paper collection for the British Pathé newsreel and cinemagazines including *Pathé Gazette*, *Pathé News*, and *Pathé Pictorial*. The collection includes issue sheets and commentary scripts. <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk>.

²⁵ I discuss the challenges of an oral history approach in Chapter 2.

²⁶ Although the life story is not the focus of this research, much of the recorded material deals with aspects other than newsreel viewing and provides a valuable resource for further research.

²⁷ While it is of course important to acknowledge that there were a number of dedicated news theatres in major towns and cities across England and Scotland, their limited seating capacity and relatively small number tend to distort the bigger picture. That is, most people encountered newsreels as part of their regular cinema-going experiences.

²⁸ For example, see Box and Moss (1943); Box (1946); Mayer (1948).

²⁹ Mass Observation produced a number of reports on newsreel audiences during 1940. I will return to a discussion of these records in Chapter 3.

³⁰ Throughout the thesis quotes from participants' interviews are referenced by their research coding (an NRM number) followed by the page reference from the interview transcription.

³¹ One of the main problems with written transcriptions of aural material is that all the nuance of the spoken word is drained from the speakers' utterances. Only the faintest traces of the person remain in the words on the page. This is particularly true with a larger than life character like research participant Frank Knaggs. I would urge the reader to listen to the archived recordings to experience the 'full-bodied' Frank.

CHAPTER 2 - FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY

This chapter explores the complexities of undertaking an interdisciplinary research project using film and cultural studies and social science-based approaches both to gather and analyse research data. This approach necessarily includes the use of multiple sources of information including contemporary records and ethnographic-style inquiries amongst surviving cinema-goers. This chapter examines the methodological problems of this type of ethnographic historical (ethnohistoric) enquiry, with its struggle to refine both a focus for the research and to find a workable theoretical approach to analysis. In essence here I recount the story of collecting the research material, coming to terms with that material, and understanding both its potential and its limitations. As a result, this chapter addresses questions that arose repeatedly throughout both the data gathering and analysis processes. Despite the original research proposal including clear aims and objectives, at various points in the study these aims and objectives seemed anything but achievable. The original research proposal identified oral history as the principal participant data gathering technique and focused on the relationship between cultural consumption and identity formation.¹ However, once the data had been collected, the complexity and specificity of newsreel memory led to a refocusing of the project away from the cultural significance of the newsreel encounter and onto the problematic nature of the formation of newsreel memory. While newsreel viewing was the theme that connected the oral histories, the formation of newsreel memory was the issue that linked the recollections of personal and social identities. Thus, the focus of the research became the process of newsreel memory formation itself. In this regard the research adopts the pragmatic stance that all memory processes are to some extent reconstructive, that is memories change and adapt over time most often in response to present circumstances. As noted in the introduction, Susannah Radstone writes about memory work as occupying liminal spaces, in that ‘the object of study lies uneasily between the individual and the social’ (2000: 12), and as such, ‘work that occupies liminal spaces – demands liminal practices’ (2000: 13). It is the liminal practices of this research that are explored in this chapter, as it becomes clear that newsreel memory work takes place in the spaces between a number of disciplines and methodologies.

This study then, takes an interdisciplinary approach spanning both the social sciences and the humanities but nevertheless remains firmly located within the related fields of film studies, cultural studies, visual culture, media studies and communication.² As interest in the historic audience increases within film studies, memory reclamation has become an important

research method, as Jackie Stacey notes ‘memory has to be a central consideration’ (1994: 63). While early examples in the field *Enter the Dream House* (O’Brien and Eyles, 1993) and *Seeing in the Dark* (Breakwell and Hammond, 1990) simply recorded previously undocumented memories, recent large scale research projects have sought to analyse and interpret the gathered memories. Indeed it is Annette Kuhn’s (2002) ambitious project examining cinema and cultural memory that provided the first principles for this research. But, as indicated above, this research is not simply based on the practices of film studies, the newsreels as a form of film journalism mitigated against such a straightforward approach. In order to fully explore the specificities of newsreel memory it has been necessary to employ a range of approaches from a variety of related disciplines, notably cultural studies, visual culture, media studies and communication. As Marita Sturken notes in the inaugural edition of the journal *Memory Studies*, within these fields memory has been studied in a variety of ways including memory practices, technologies of memory and mediation (2008: 74). Within cultural studies for example, scholarship has focused principally on the practices of memory as a part of a wider process of cultural negotiation

a dynamic process that is the result of the practices of individuals and groups [...] This defines memories as narratives, as fluid and mediated cultural and personal traces of the past. A practice of memory is an activity that engages with, produces, reproduces and invests meaning in memories, whether personal, cultural or collective. (Sturken, 2008: 74)

In this regard I consider briefly the efficacy of the popular memory approach as outlined by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. In contrast within visual culture and media studies the study of memory has often focused on technologies of memory ‘in which memories are experienced and produced through technologies [...] increasingly [the] visual technologies of mass and mediated forms’ (Sturken, 2008: 75). Thus the question of mediation is central to the study of memory in cultural studies, visual culture and media studies. As this study reveals the question of mediation is also central to the study of newsreel memories.

Studies of cultural memory engage theories of social remembering located within the social sciences. As a result, where it has proved fruitful, I have turned to the grand theories of collective and generational memory as outlined by Halbwachs and Mannheim respectively.

Much recent reception and memory-focused research is based on the communal nature of reception practices and in this research, although based principally on individual narrative, communities of memory emerge strongly. This interdisciplinary approach is not antithetical to the purpose of the research which examines the relationship between the social and the individual. Here too, oral history scholarship provided a useful counter balance focusing as it does on the personal and autobiographical. Further, in this regard, it proved necessary to refer briefly to psychological theories of memory, as outlined by Jeffrey Prager (1998) in particular, in an attempt to better explain the complex relationship between individual consciousness and the collective consciousness of which it forms an integral part. Indeed this research engages briefly with the cognitive psychology of flashbulb memories – associated with an event that provokes an emotional response and elicits vivid mental images. With such an interdisciplinary approach in mind, Andrew Hoskins argues that given our increasingly mediated and mediatised environments an interdisciplinary study of flashbulb memory is overdue. Hoskins notes that the psychology of flashbulb memories measures truth and falsity to ‘the exclusion of consideration of the broader, social, cultural and political impacts of the very phenomenon under investigation’ (2009: 147). He concludes that meaningful interdisciplinary headway is to be made between media communication and psychology scholars.³ This study likewise adopts an interdisciplinary approach to interpret a type of cultural memory I have described as liminal. It should be emphasised that the assignment of liminal status is not in order to avoid the strictures of any one academic discipline but in order to fully engage with the specificity of newsreel memory which refuses to be contained within existing approaches to cultural memory.

The explication in this chapter is informed by Jackie Stacey’s (1994), Joke Hermes’ (1995) and Martin Barker and Kate Brooks’ (1998) revealing insights into their respective audience research experiences. As with Stacey, ultimately the aim of this study is to provide a ‘retrospective interpretation of the meaning of baffling evidence’ (1994: 51) and this chapter explores how this was achieved – eventually. Given its relatively small sample of participants (77 in total), this study does not claim to be representative of the totality of a generation of Tynesiders.⁴ Although the modest size of the sample would urge a cautious approach to the emerging trends, the study does begin to provide a valuable insight into the processes of newsreel memory formation. In her examination of the accounts of Audrey Hepburn fans, Rachel Moseley notes that ‘the value of small scale qualitative research is that it can contribute to the overall identity of a culture, or a practice, rather than speaking for the collective’ (2002: 27). From the outset of the research, the data set was deliberately limited in

keeping with the oral history based approach and in order to facilitate detailed analysis of the gathered material. As a result, the richly detailed data set represents one of the study's unique strengths and provides useful observations for further comparative research. As a regional case study this research builds on and compliments both other local cinema memory studies (Janovich, Faire and Stubbings, 2003; Richards, 2004; Miskell, 2006) and those national studies conducted by Stacey (1994) and Kuhn (2002).

The research still addresses the issue of the relationship between cultural consumption and identity formation, as outlined in the original proposal, but it evolved into a focused examination of how a specific type of cultural memory – newsreel memory – is formed and expresses itself. Given that this research is based on the principles of historic ethnography, the accuracy with which the newsreel viewing experience is remembered in the collected narratives remains something of a mystery. As outlined in the previous chapter, over the course of the research, the focus on a historically accurate reconstruction of the ‘moment [...] of the reception and consumption of films’ (Kuhn 2002: 3) became of secondary importance. Nor is the aim of a project such as this to examine the fallibility of memory, or to pass judgement on memory's lack or incompleteness in terms of historical accuracy. As David Morley observes, without having access to direct participant observation

I am left only with the stories respondents chose to tell me. These stories are themselves both limited by, and indexical of, the cultural and linguistic frames of reference which respondents have available to them, through which to articulate their responses. (1986: 24)

Below I discuss in some detail the available ‘frames of reference’ in relation to the formation of memory itself; later chapters are structured around these frames of reference.

In common with much recent audience/reception research (e.g. Staiger 1992, Stacey 1994, Barker and Brooks 1998, Kuhn 2002, and Janovich, Faire and Stubbings 2003), this research required a plurality of methods in order to produce a fully rounded analysis. For example, in their account of both historic and contemporary cinema-going in Nottingham, Janovich *et al.*, (2003) join a growing movement within film reception studies towards an examination of the places and practices of consumption within social and cultural histories of film. In their study they utilise a variety of source material including interviews with cinema-goers, contemporary records, press reports and local histories. This research also confirmed Janet Staiger's assessment that the historical audience presents the researcher with a

particular set of problems in terms of the status of extant material from the period itself, and how it might be interpreted (1992: 138). Likewise Jackie Stacey writes in relation to female cinema-goers from the 1940s and 1950s:

[I]nvestigation of the historical spectator presents the film researcher with a whole series of complex methodological and theoretical questions: what status do audience's accounts of films have; how are these to be found; and which interpretative frameworks might be useful in analysing such accounts? (1994: 50)

In *Star Gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship* (1994), Stacey seeks to challenge the predominant feminist agenda within film spectatorship theories. Rejecting the textual determinism of psychoanalytic work on female audiences, she begins her own analysis with real women in the cinema audience. Stacey rejects the universalism of psychoanalytic theories of gendered spectatorship by, amongst others, Mulvey (1975), Doane (1982) and Bruno (1989), by examining the relationship between female stars and female spectators in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. Exploring the problems of ethnographic study, Stacey addresses the particular methodological complexity of investigating the historical audience. Mapping her own search for material/data, she stresses the rather haphazard and, at times, arbitrary nature of the research process. As a practical research model Stacey's work provides useful insights into the 'messy' process behind the published results. Stacey is open about the dilemmas, questions and problems she found herself confronted with, particularly issues of memory and using testimony as texts for interpretation (1994: 74).

Thus, as Stacey notes, in relation to the historic realm there are important questions that must be asked about what counts as data, the status of available data and how the data, once captured, should be analysed. This is particularly the case in respect of an historic audience as undefined and un-researched as 'the newsreel audience'. As Stacey points out 'finding material in the first place is difficult' (1994: 50) and further, as Sarah Street notes (2000: 7), we must be constantly aware of the institutional forces and pressures that come to bear on any extant documentation.⁵ As Stacey explains, with reference to readers' letters to *Picturegoer* magazine in the 1940s and 1950s, what is published is 'informed by the institutional discourses and editorial policies during the period' (1994: 62). Similarly, Mass Observation (referred to in detail in Chapter Four), the only contemporary social survey to refer to newsreel viewers in any detail, had its own agenda, its own set of institutional aims

and objectives to satisfy and its own questions to answer. What becomes problematic in a contemporary research context is that these questions do not necessarily match one's own. Nevertheless, despite these issues, my interpretative framework includes reference to the historically contemporary discursive surround as a vital part of understanding the newsreels, as a way of accounting for the inconsistencies in participants' memories, and adding to the rich texture of the study.

A study published almost a decade after Stacey's, Annette Kuhn's *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2002), set a scholarly benchmark for subsequent research on the social history of the film audience and began to address the paucity of material on the ordinary cinema-going experience within film studies. Kuhn begins by revealing her keenness to get to know the real people behind the statistics. Her erudite approach and genuine affection for her subjects provided a useful preliminary template for my own research methodology. Her task, at first glance, seemed deceptively similar to my own, to record first-hand experiences of cinema-going (in the 1930s), and from these testimonies reconstruct the position of cinema-going in everyday life (2002: 3). Kuhn frames her discussion by considering the limitations of previous film audience studies, which regard the spectator as constructed by the film text itself, and have nothing to do with 'how the people watching a film might respond to it' (2002: 4). In order to remedy this oversight, Kuhn suggests an interdisciplinary methodology using film studies and social science-based approaches to come to an understanding of how cinema works historically, culturally and experientially. Her innovative approach within film studies necessarily utilises multiple sources of information including contemporary records, ethnographic-style inquiries amongst surviving cinema-goers, and readings of selected films; an inclusive approach that adds to the richness and complexity of her work. Building on the limited amount of work in the field, Kuhn extends the work of Janet Staiger, with reference to the use of contemporary historical records, and the work of Helen Taylor (1989) and Jackie Stacey (1994), in terms of their ethnohistorical approach to female film fans, by favouring more direct engagement with informants through extended face to face interviews.

Kuhn's work was a useful reference for this study because it is as much about the formation of cinema memory as about historic film consumption, and, as such, Kuhn readily acknowledges the problematic evidential nature of accounts that rely on acts of remembering staged for the sake of research. However, rising to the challenge, she demonstrates the value of memory work to this area of film studies. Kuhn makes clear that her research interpretations (based almost entirely on the ethnohistorical enquiry Kuhn and her team

undertook over a period of ten years) were determined by the gathered material, rather than according to any pre-existing hypothesis, while simultaneously demonstrating how a skilfully managed triangulated approach allows for a rich exploration of the historical contexts of cinema viewing. Undoubtedly Kuhn's innovative methodological framework provided an invaluable resource for my own ethnohistorical enquiry. However, in the end, my research became more firmly focused on the formation of newsreel memory. As a result, unlike Kuhn, I chose to concentrate my research on two specific resources, the testimonies gathered from my participants and, despite the problems outlined by Street, contextualising documentation from the period. This two-pronged attack offered the possibility of assessing a range of factors that may have contributed in the intervening years to shape newsreel memory.

As all historical audience research acknowledges, what audiences tell researchers is shaped by many factors, all of which are formed, to some degree, by memory itself. As Jackie Stacey notes, the investigative focus on the audience 'leads to theoretical questions about subjectivity and meaning' (1994: 50) in terms of the status and reliability of the collected data. In her own research, Stacey acknowledges that its status is that of

[R]etrospective reconstructions of the past in the light of the present [that] have been shaped by the popular versions of the 1940s and 1950s which have become cultural currency in the intervening years. (1994: 63)

An integral part of studying the past is the role that both the mythologizing of popular memory and the specificity of private narrative play in the formation of memory. As Ien Ang has argued, it is misguided to regard the personal accounts of participants as 'direct and unproblematic reflection' (1985: 11). It became clear throughout the course of the research that memories are formed within the constraints of particular cultural conventions, discourses, nostalgias and mythologies about the past, even for those who lived through it. Although inevitably there is the question of the reliability of memory, this research project is concerned with the ethnohistory of a particular cinema audience at a particular moment in history, and as such, it required an extended engagement with the processes of memory. If, as Stacey writes, 'film history is to engage with ethnographic methods of audience analysis [...] then memory has to be a central consideration' (1994: 63). Thus, over the course of the interviews I would discover they revealed less about the relationship between audiences and newsreels and far more about the way in which a particular type of cinematic memory is formed. In this regard the interviews, letters and emails gathered for this research are

regarded as texts for interpretation. Paradoxically, this interpretative approach is somewhat at odds with the basic premise of the oral history approach I used. Although my intention may have been to let the audience speak for themselves, as Jackie Stacey again points out, ‘some kind of interpretative framework is inevitable in academic research’ (1994: 72). Indeed, as Hamilton and Shopes note, there is a growing recognition that ‘oral history always operates as an act of interpretation’ (2008: viii).

In the end, like Kuhn (2002), the critical framework within which I worked was shaped by the gathered material and differed in some important respects from the initial research proposal with its focus on the act of historical cultural consumption. The memories gathered here are situated, whenever possible, within a critical discussion of their production, whether personal, public or institutional. Thus, the eventual choice of theoretical frameworks was appropriate to the material gathered and not vice versa; this is an important point which should not be under-estimated. The research project became, far more than anticipated, about responding directly to the gathered materials and then, and only then, searching for the appropriate tools for analysis.

2.1 STAGE ONE – FOCUS GROUPS (JANUARY 2007)

The first stage of the data gathering process was a series of meetings with pilot focus groups in collaboration with the Tyneside Cinema’s staff and accessing the material the cinema had gathered in work it had previously conducted. These groups consisted of individuals (some in couples and ranging in age from their late 50s to late 70s) who shared a common interest in film and who regularly attended the Tyneside Cinema’s Silver Screen programme for the over 60s.⁶ The main aim of these focus groups was to find out what participants could remember about newsreels when they were invited to talk freely about them and to map out the general characteristics and natural vocabulary of newsreel memory talk. What became clear, even at this early stage, was the extent to which, despite age, class and sub-regional differences, there was considerable similarity between the memories that participants shared; the ways in which they articulated their memories showed a remarkable degree of consistency and consensus. A characteristic that emerged strongly at this point was the influence of familial background: as children, participants were taken to the news theatres by their parents with whom they began to share an interest in the news. Thus, as noted in the introduction, childhood memories emerged as one of the characteristic tropes of the newsreel memories gathered.

The original research proposal had included a commitment by the collaborative non-academic funding partner, Tyneside Cinema, to provide access to material the cinema had gathered as part of a Heritage Lottery funded project titled Picture Palace. However, in the end this planned resource remained elusive.⁷ Thus, although eight of the cinema's stalwart heritage participants were recruited to the research, this was too small a sample on which to base any useful investigation of newsreel memory. In order to recruit more participants, in April 2007, articles about the research appeared in the local press and the cinema's bi-monthly programme material which included a request for participants with 'newsreel memories' to contact me directly.

Although the collaboration with the cinema worked well there is, inevitably perhaps, a tension in collaborative research projects between the aims and objectives of the academic institution and the non-academic organisation; as a result research students find themselves occupying a (liminal) position somewhere between these competing commitments. For example, the cinema's desire to uncritically promote the cultural significance of the newsreels was in many ways not in keeping with the interests of best practice within an academic research project. In addition, the research project formed only a small part of a raft of education and outreach activity the cinema had planned, which in turned formed part of the cinema's Picture Palace project, an ambitious scheme to restore and refurbish the cinema (see figure 1). In the end my major contribution to the cinema involved collaboration on their newsreel exhibition display, and in the process I unwittingly contributed to the popular mythologizing of the newsreels.⁸

Given the specificity of the call for memories of newsreels, the pool of willing local participants turned out to be fairly limited, and only thirty individuals contacted me as a result of the press coverage. Included in this cohort was the small number of participants I would regard, to varying degrees, as the vernacular theorists described in Chapter One. The resulting phone conversations, letters, email and personal interviews form the substantive basis of my thesis. Interestingly, like Jackie Stacey's fans, I found the individuals who responded to the press call recognised themselves as a distinct group with a particular kind of knowledge and/or authority based on a particular generational identity and an enduring interest in the news.

In June 2007, the interview process began. It perhaps goes without saying that research participants tend not to respond as expected (or even hoped). Although not the case for all the participants, at certain points throughout the interview process it seemed rather unreasonable to confront elderly interviewees with detailed questions about their newsreel

memories; they had, after all, prior to the interview, given very little, if any thought to articulating the import, meaning or point of the newsreels.



Figure 1: Tyneside Cinema on Pilgrim Street, Newcastle 2008 following restoration.

The idea of actually studying cinema, and newsreels in particular, was extremely puzzling to many of my participants and I was asked on numerous occasions what *exactly* the research was for. This question was often swiftly followed by a rather apologetic, ‘well there’s not really that much to say about newsreels’. In the following chapters I analyse why there is often a lot to gain from analysing both what is remembered and forgotten. However, at this juncture, and with regard to the response of my participants to requests for their memories, it is important to note that this wartime generation regarded cinema as entertainment, as a means of escapist fantasy. I had the distinct impression a number of my participants were simply humouring me in my rather odd, self-indulgent pursuit. As ninety-six year old Rose Johnson remarked with regard to my pursuit of newsreel memories, ‘[y]ou’ll have to come with another subject about the past and then we’ll tell you all sorts of things’ (NRM40: 10). Rose’s remark sums up rather neatly an early stage in the research process when I too felt that newsreel memory began to seem a rather unpromising subject for academic research.

2.2 POPULAR MEMORY

Of course despite Rose's dismissal, newsreels remain an important feature of both personal and popular memory of the 1940s and 1950s. According to Michel Foucault, popular memory is a form of collective knowledge possessed by people who, although

[B]arred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts – these people nevertheless do have a way of recording history, of remembering or of keeping it fresh and using it. (cited in Pearson 1999: 179)

Following Foucault's lead in terms of concepts of popular and counter-memory, and later the work of British cultural studies, theories of popular memory have attached themselves to a particular political orthodoxy. The popular memory approach assumes that our recollections of the past are influenced by our present interests, and that the politics of memory is conflictual. Popular memory is, then, opposed to dominant memory and regarded as a political tool, a force of resistance for those marginalised by dominant discourses. Popular memory, as Foucault imagines it, assumes a connection between memory and popular resistance (Pearson, 1999). However, his assertion that ideological power plays the dominant role in the construction of memories leads him to the pessimistic conclusion that people are unable to liberate themselves from oppressive power (Foucault, 1980: 91).

Critics of Foucault's approach to popular memory have highlighted his inability to account for the dialectic relationship between popular memory and dominant discourse (Boomes and Wright 1982, Harper 1997, Pearson 1999), leading to studies which 'attempted to analyse the content and precise location of alternative memories that exist beneath the dominant discourse' (Miszta, 2003: 63). One such attempt in the early 1980s (the Popular Memory Group, PMG) was established at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham in response to growing concern about the extent to which public notions of history are manipulated by the dominant sectors of society (including the mass media) and as an attempt to further the appeal of the popular memory approach. In its major publication *Making Histories* (1982), the Group stressed the dialectic relationship between 'popular' and 'hegemonic' discourses and between private and public memory. They argued that when they referred to 'dominant memory' they did not intend to imply 'that conceptions of the past that acquire a dominance in the field of public representations are either monolithically installed or everywhere believed' (PMG, 1982: 207). They defined popular

memory as a 'dimension of political practice' (PMG, 1982: 205) and saw it as a composite construct of various traces, influences and layers. Thus, their aim was to consider the ways in which a sense of the past is produced both through public representations and through private memory. More recently in a useful essay on film and popular memory, Sue Harper (1997) criticises popular memory as a 'fuzzy concept', frequently giving rise to sentimentality. Harper reminds the reader that popular memory is just one part 'of wider patterns of social remembering' (1997: 164). Harper's essay raises concerns about the dangers of canonising the popular and the problems of popular memory's overly deterministic politics.

In this study I utilised only certain aspects of popular memory theory, and with caution, precisely because of its over-determinism; however, an understanding of the broader notion of a popular memory becomes important in discussions of the role newsreel images played in the formation of both a British national identity and the popular, and very often nostalgic, conception of a shared past. There are occasions in which the notion of popular memory, as envisaged by Foucault, is useful in interpreting particular personal memories. In addition, popular memory theory provides a convenient starting point for a consideration of those participants identified as keepers of hidden histories. Foucault has written about what he refers to as 'popular knowledge (*le savoir gens*)' or 'naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (1980: 82). What is interesting, in the context of this regionally focused research, is the fact that Foucault goes on to describe this popular knowledge as 'a particular, local, regional knowledge' (1980: 82). More recently, Thomas McLaughlin (1996) has taken up Foucault's observations to write about what he calls vernacular theorists:

[I]ndividuals who do not come out of a tradition of philosophical critique [yet] are capable of raising questions about the dominant cultural assumptions [...] the fact that vernacular theories [...] do not completely transcend ideologies does not make them different in kind from academic theories. They manage in spite of their complicity to ask fundamental questions. (1996: 5)⁹

McLaughlin uses the term 'vernacular' to refer to the 'practices of those who lack cultural power' (1996: 5), noting that it is, in fact, the theoretical contributions of these practices that make them so valuable. From some (though by no means all) of the newsreel memories gathered here, there springs a variety of vernacular theorising offering valuable insights into

the newsreel audience. It is to the subject of the interviewees and the interview encounter that I now turn.

2.3 THE INTERVIEWER/INTERVIEWEE RELATIONSHIP

In their useful analysis of the interviewer/interviewee relationship, in their work on the use of personal narratives in the social sciences and history, Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce and Barbara Laslett refer to the ‘interpersonal relationship’ (2008: 98) within the interview encounter, noting that it is the hierarchy of knowledges within this relationship which implicitly structures the entire encounter. Indeed, the interview is a complex process of revealing, sharing and sometimes withholding knowledge. Paradoxically even as one’s own historical knowledge and understanding grows within the interview encounter, as the interviewer, one has to remain the uninitiated, the novice, waiting to be informed and enlightened by the keeper of a particularly valuable, historical knowledge. From first to last the revelation of any knowledge or insight I had gained had to remain hidden only to be revealed in the rarefied context of academic supervisions, conferences, journals and finally, here in the thesis itself.

Inevitably the decision to base academic research on the history of cinematic audiences immediately confers the subject with academic importance. As Jackie Stacey notes of her work on female spectators of Hollywood cinema, ‘my request for information served as a validation of the importance of their memories’ (1994: 69). She goes on to acknowledge the importance of cinema-going in the lives of these women. However, such academic validation makes it extremely difficult to assess exactly how important a cultural form like the newsreels were in everyday life, and while not wanting to demote the importance or significance of the newsreels, I detected a tendency to exaggerate their importance in recollection.¹⁰ This tendency was, without doubt, the result of a desire and sense of responsibility on the part of the interviewee to produce a coherent, entertaining and accurate narrative (Borland, 2006). The request from a respected academic institution (Newcastle University) for lay histories also risked the inevitable desire on the part of participants to meet imagined academic expectations. That is to say, the desire to elevate the significance of newsreels was perhaps overwhelming for participants. Referring to the interpersonal encounter, Maynes, Pierce and Laslett (2008) advise careful attention to the relationship between interviewer and interviewee ‘because it inevitably shapes the form and content of personal narratives and their analysis’ (2008: 99). Thus, the dynamics of the interviewer/interviewee relationship not only influence the memories, but the production of

new knowledge. In addition, the remembering done in the presence of a researcher/oral historian asking questions designed to answer her own research questions will shape interviewees' responses. Oral historian Katharine Borland considers the contribution of both interviewer and interviewee to the interview process a 'dynamic interaction' between the subject and the narrated event itself and the subject and the act of narration (2006: 310). Alessandro Portelli, too, regards the oral history testimony as the result of a 'shared project' (1991: 54), the result of the questions asked and the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. He notes that oral testimony is only a potential resource until the researcher 'calls it into existence' (1991: 54).

The era within which the newsreels reached the height of their popularity (1939-55) meant that the majority of participants were children or young adults at the time they were being asked to recall. The original research proposal had indicated a particular focus on children and their engagement with the news media, but in practice asking for childhood memories about 'the news' is a process fraught with epistemological problems. In his authoritative study of children and the news media, David Buckingham (2000) reports that young people frequently complained that, in general, television news was repetitive and lacking in entertainment value (2000: 65). Of course as an educationalist, Buckingham's aims were radically different to my own: his interest was fuelled by the increasing anxiety that young people are growing steadily less interested in news and politics. However, while Buckingham's research findings reflect the newsreel memory talk of some of my participants, he observes – 'children frequently express indifference, or even considerable dislike, towards the news' (2000: 9) – many of his findings do not. How might we account for this? Commenting on the declining numbers of young people who watch the news Buckingham provides a possible explanation for this historical discrepancy:

Of course, young people have always been consistently less interested in news than their elders; yet as this research suggests, the generation gap between them is growing steadily wider. (2000: 1)

However, this is rather good news for my research, as Buckingham suggests the decline is a late twentieth century phenomenon (2000: 1). Put another way, sixty years ago children appeared to be far more engaged in news and politics than subsequent generations, something a number of the participants' recollections appeared to suggest. Having struggled with the potential problems of children's relationship with news media at an early stage, it quickly

became clear that, despite their age, the events participants were remembering most vividly (and of course the subsequent newsreel footage) had, by and large, taken place during the Second World War. As a consequence, these are the memories on which the research is based. I will return to the question of childhood memory later in this chapter, but first I want to consider the issues of analysing the collected memories.

2.4 ANALYSIS

I had presumed that the material I gathered would be precise, answer my research questions and that there would be vast quantities of it; the reality however was somewhat different. Joke Hermes (1995) recalls a similar frustration in relation to her research into women's magazine readers, while Annette Kuhn's understated acknowledgement of the problem, 'anecdotal memories of early cinema-going are few and far between' (2002: 58), perfectly sums up the situation I faced. Of course one common factor of many cinema audience studies is that they focus on fans of a particular star or genre (Taylor 1989; Stacey 1994; Lewis 1992; Barker and Brooks 1998; Fiske 2000) allowing scope for participants to recall their own special, 'treasured' cinematic memories, moments invested with personal meaning and importance. Commenting on her participants' ability to talk at length about their cinema memories, Jackie Stacey writes, 'the ability to recollect in such detail might be considered evidence of devotion to favourite stars' (1994: 69). Although my research subjects were not fans in the same sense, most admired the newsreels and wanted to share their newsreel viewing experiences. However, as their testimonies reveal, newsreel viewing engendered a unique viewing experience, and one in which the mundanity and repetitiveness of so much newsreel content must be acknowledged. Given the over-determination of theories of fandom and active audiences, Joke Hermes warns that we ignore 'theorizing the mundaneness of everyday media use' (1995: 16). Undoubtedly for many viewers there was a mundanity about the newsreel viewing experience that renders it indistinct in memory. Nicholas Pronay writes, '[t]he newsreels....dealt with day-to-day news' (1982: 173), thus focusing our attention on the routine-ness or the un-remarkableness of much newsreel content, and the reality that a story may be news one day and forgotten the next. Here newsreel viewing and memory occupy a liminal position, lingering between the full and rapt attention fans afforded their favourite stars and the-less-than full attention given to topical newsreel items.

Perhaps unsurprisingly part of the pleasure associated with newsreel viewing was its reassuring character, its oft repeated format, familiar title music and well-loved commentators. Further, the experience of actually seeing the news, of which most viewers

would already be well aware from newspapers and radio coverage, was remembered as one of the distinct pleasures of the newsreel viewing experience. In terms of these distinctive pleasures, film historian Elizabeth Cowie (1999) examines the interrelationship between the development of the cinematographic desire for reality both as knowledge and spectacle. Cowie's analysis of what she describes as the 'spectacle of actuality' (in relation to Pathé's 1918 documentary *War Neuroses*) unexpectedly helps us to account for the popularity of the newsreels and may account for some, if not all, the memories contained here. Newsreels, like the documentary films Cowie analyses, appear to provide evidence of the real and in doing so present a particular cinematic discourse of knowledge and information exchange. Cowie's fascinating re-working of Tom Gunning's seminal account of the 'cinema of attractions' (1990) is enormously useful in understanding the attraction of the newsreels themselves and the distinct pleasures they offered audiences.¹¹ *War Neuroses*, according to Cowie, was made as visible evidence, 'as a spectacle of knowledge' (1999: 21) which was intended to be viewed on the cinema screen. Cowie notes that 'the film (also) offers an array of visual "pleasures," both visual "attractions" and visual knowing' (1999: 21). Cowie's essay provides an exciting and useful approach that enabled me to account for the apparent contradictions of newsreel memory and the tropes of newsreel memory talk. Therefore I will return to her notion of the 'spectacle of actuality' and its relation to reality as both knowledge and spectacle in Chapter Seven.

In attempting to account for the vagaries of newsreel memory, one has to acknowledge that some cinema-goers found no pleasures of any description in the newsreels, like Rose Johnson who told me categorically and repeatedly, 'I don't ever remember being interested in them' (NRM40: 11). And, for some, the pleasure involved in newsreel screenings was the opportunity it gave them to take their attention off the screen and on to their companion, as Ted Moralee told me, 'they were cuddling when the newsreels came on' (NRM40: 11). Often, as David Morley (1986) observes in his work on television audiences, viewing is a secondary activity, and as Hermes notes of her research findings, 'magazines may be opened or leafed through, television sets may be on, but that is hardly an indication that they are 'read' consciously, seriously or with animation' (1995: 15). A similar type of inattention, undoubtedly practiced by viewers like Ted and Rose above, may explain the vagueness of some newsreel memories. However, other interviewees, for example Jean Murray and Henry Holden, claimed they took newsreel viewing extremely seriously. Somewhere in the space between these two extremes are the newsreel memories of momentous historic events, of which even the most disinterested audience did take notice.

Given the range of remembering, it becomes clear that the interpretation of newsreel viewing and its manifestation in memory requires a complex set of theoretical and interpretative tools.

Newsreel memories most often take on the character of a fondly remembered, reassuringly un-challenging view of the world. Because of the familiarity of the newsreel encounter, its ubiquity renders its memory often in the vaguest of terms. Newsreel viewing was recalled by many participants as a secondary activity, a precursor to the main activity of the cinematic experience, that is, the feature film they had gone to watch or the cartoons they had been promised by their parents. Thus, the presence of the newsreel in the cinema programme becomes just one small part of the cinema-going routine. According to Hermann Bausinger (1984), everyday life consists of just such a series of ritualised structures of perceptions and expectations, composed as it is of routines and habit. Bausinger's examination of the habits of everyday life and what he calls 'media rituals' (1984: 344), includes the ways in which newspaper readers engage with newspapers. It is the ritualistic aspect of reading the newspaper that Bausinger argues is important and would be missed, rather than the news content itself (1984: 344). Similarly, Nicholas Hiley (1998) notes that most cinema-goers would have missed the newsreels if they had not been there; they were undoubtedly an integral part of the cinema-going ritual, but that the news content itself was of secondary importance. Seen in this context, newsreel viewing simply becomes part of the familiar routine of cinema-going, and further, because the substantive content of the newsreels was topical rather than 'hard' news, it demanded minimal attention. Utilising Bausinger's analysis of television news viewing, Stuart Allan (2004) highlights the need to situate such activity within the domestic routine in order to understand how it is negotiated by viewers on an everyday basis. Similarly, in this research, given the specificity of the newsreel audience and the distinctive articulation of newsreel memory, it became necessary to situate newsreel viewing both within the context of cinema-going more generally and in relation to the various daily routines and rituals of which newsreel viewing formed a part (as discussed in Chapters Three and Four). Thus far, I have established that to describe what news viewing means or meant is extremely problematic. In addition, to recollect in substantive detail a routine and often uninspiring experience from sixty years ago is equally challenging as one works at the limits of living memory.¹²

2.5 STAGE TWO – ORAL HISTORY (APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2007)

As already indicated, the original research proposal had identified oral history as the principal data-gathering method. However, while acquiring the principles and techniques of oral

history interviews is straightforward, putting these techniques into practice is somewhat more challenging. Having analysed the focus group interviews, the schedule of questions I chose to pursue in individual interviews broke down as follows: family history and background; cinema-going generally; newsreels and news theatres; views of the news in general and other sources of news; travelogues, short films, documentaries, cartoons; Tyneside cinema and its Coffee Rooms.¹³ These broad areas for investigation remained fairly intact through the interview process, although naturally my phrasing and emphasis evolved over the course of the individual interviews.¹⁴

Oral history's rise to prominence, in the wake of what could be described as a democratisation of history in the 1960s, led to the assertion that its importance as a method lay in its ability to uncover previously untold, even deliberately repressed, histories. The rhetorical framework used to support the value of oral history stressed the evidential status of the stories uncovered. Oral history testimony produces a particular type of evidence and one that perhaps does not sit comfortably with the originally proposed portrait of the historic audience. In recent years Luisa Passerini (1987), Michael Frisch (1990), Alessandro Portelli (1991) and Paul Thompson (2000) have all made particularly important contributions to re-focusing oral historians' attention from the *what* to the *why*, that is *why* people remember certain individuals, emotions, events and episodes and the meaning of their memories. Passerini, Frisch, Portelli and Thompson are concerned to interpret individual stories within wider cultural frameworks, exploring the complex ways in which meanings are negotiated between the individual and the public consciousness. According to oral historian Robert Perks, the epistemological value of oral history is its ability to provide a corrective to orthodox histories and to

[E]mpower individuals or under represented social groups through the process of remembering and reinterpreting the past, with an emphasis on the value of the process of remembering as much as the historical product itself.
(2006: x)

In his influential book, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (1991), Alessandro Portelli has written at length about the specificity of oral sources, not least their orality and their status as *narrative*. Linking oral sources to the traditions of folk narrative, Portelli explains, there are no 'formal oral genres specifically designed to transmit oral information; historical, poetical and legendary narratives become

inextricably mixed up' (1991: 49). The result in individual oral sources, he maintains, is that what happens inside the narrator (to the individual) and what happens outside (to the group) may become so difficult to distinguish that 'personal "truth" may coincide with shared "imagination"' (1991: 49).

As noted in the previous chapter, Portelli distinguishes oral histories from their written counterparts in their tendency to reveal more about the meaning of events and rather less about the events themselves. In addition, he suggests that oral history reveals much about the speaker's subjectivity, about their relationship to their history/story and how they affected a particular group of people:

[W]hat is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active source for the creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. (Portelli, 1991: 52)

Portelli also discusses what he calls the 'phonology of time' (1991: 69). Using a structuralist paradigm, he defines three broad categories to distinguish how an individual chooses to relate the story of their life, or of an event, revealing that individuals will prioritise one of the following: the *Institutional*, the sphere of politics, government, parties, unions, elections within the national and international historical context and ideology; the *Collective*, the life of the community, the neighbourhood, and the workplace; or the *Personal*, private and family life and personal involvement in the other two levels (1991: 70). Portelli's approach is outlined in detail as it proved extremely useful in understanding the focus of participants' memories which appeared to correspond to the collective and personal paradigms outlined above.

Having embarked upon my own oral history project I conducted over thirty lengthy 'conversational interviews' (Hermes 1995: 11) over a three month period. Although I had intended to conduct the interviews with minimal prompting or intervention, in practice this approach did not prove satisfactory for me or my participants. I needed to interact more with my interviewees, and it became clear that a lack of detailed responses would require more prompting from me; participants needed to understand the 'why' and 'what for' of my research as much as I did. Given the need to often coax distant memories from participants, my encounters became interpersonal dialogues. Almost all the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and the interviews were punctuated by tea and biscuits and being

shown pictures of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I was warmly welcomed into all these elderly people's homes; I met some fascinating people, I learnt a lot about their lives, both past and present, and over the course of these lengthy interviews I began to learn more about the newsreels.

Katharine Boland (2006) points out that the way the interviewer determines and shapes both the interview encounter itself and the resulting material, emphasizing particular features and contextualising it within wider cultural discourses, may differ markedly from the narrator's original intention. This process of constant framing and reframing of the gathered narratives confers a particular ethical responsibility on to the interviewer.¹⁵ This responsibility is particularly pressing when interviewing elderly people, where interviews need to be negotiated carefully with due respect and careful regard. Everyone interviewed on a one-to-one basis was most forthcoming about their family history, and I was able to build up a detailed picture of each participant's background, not only in terms of class but also the extent to which knowledge of, and interest in, news and current affairs were regarded as important within their family. In this respect I was rather surprised at the level of intimacy with which the participants recounted their life stories. The subconscious rationale behind this intimacy may be linked to what Alessandro Portelli describes as the immortality oral histories confer on the teller themselves:

To tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. The telling of the story preserves the teller from oblivion; the story builds the identity of the teller and the legacy which she or he leaves for the future. (1991: 59)

Portelli's observations are interesting in light of the fact that a number of my participants revealed they had not told their stories to anyone else, including their families. Further, no-one refused consent to use any of the material I recorded in the interviews, although often intimate details of family life were revealed.¹⁶ This may have been because the purpose for this research, the desire to understand more about a particular type of cultural memory, differed from the purpose of those doing the remembering. For participants this was not a process of discovering aspects of their distant past, but a process of *re*-discovering, and perhaps an opportunity to participate in the formation of the memory archive to be passed on to future generations, thus ensuring 'collective immortality' for their particular generational cohort (Kuhn 2000: 193).

The interviews were long – on average 90 minutes of material was recorded and the transcribed interviews fill hundreds of pages of text.¹⁷ However, if I were to use only the material relating directly to the newsreels, I would be using only a fraction of the gathered material, an important point to acknowledge (particularly in light of the responses I received later in my research) to avoid appearing to suggest that newsreels were a significant news source. To reiterate a crucial point, newsreels served a specific purpose: they were not primarily a news source (a role reserved for newspapers and radio news coverage), but provided moving images of news and events already in the public domain.¹⁸ In addition, they did not provide in-depth comment and analysis; they provided informative entertainment. In light of these facts, I faced a dilemma since to take the relatively small amount of memory text relating to the newsreels would somewhat distort their position and significance. In fact, a number of my participants had much more to say about cinema-going in general, which was talked about with greater enthusiasm and in greater depth. I found a resolution to this potential imbalance in the access the oral history approach gave me to participants' life stories. Without understanding something of the totality of individuals' everyday lives there was a real danger of affording the newsreels more importance than they warranted. This contextualisation was vital to give as clear and honest a picture of the newsreels as possible, even if their importance appeared to wane as a result. Thus, it became possible for the participants, and for me, to more accurately judge the impact of newsreels, and to be transparent about their role in their lives. An important aim, then, of the interviews was to find out as much as possible of the personal history of the participants and the everyday context within which they viewed news(reels).

2.6 STAGE THREE – REVIEWING PROGRESS (SEPTEMBER 2007 – JULY 2008)

The interviews took place from 20 June until 21 September 2007; at the end of this period I had amassed over 40 hours of interview material. In her semi-autobiographical work on the political upheaval in Italy in 1968, Luisa Passerini comments on the memories she gathered: '[t]hose memories contain contradictions, slips and lacunae of great interest, and of difficult interpretation' (1996: 136). It is the contradictions, slips and lacunae that add to the interest of the narratives gathered here. The extent to which the gathered testimonies were personalised, as participants recalled their individual stories weaving their memories together to make them meaningful, needed thoughtful analysis as Passerini herself notes:

[T]he filter of the individual biography transforms and directs the influences received from the family, from the environment, from circumstances. No single one of the cultural and social conditions is determinative. (1996: 137)

Noting the positivist tendency for scholars in the social sciences to regard oral histories as impossibly subjective, Maynes, Pierce and Laslett maintain that it is precisely this characteristic ‘that has opened up space for new understandings of the relationship between the individual and the social’ (2008: 6). It was the centrality of the relationship between the individual and the social which began to emerge here and subsequently laid the foundations of the theoretical approach, which acknowledged the dynamic relationship between individual and social memory.

Interpreting the gathered material presented enormous challenges and served in many ways to remind me how far my research project was shifting from the original research proposal. What also came through strongly in reviewing the interviews was the extent to which newsreel memories have been framed by the subsequent use of newsreel material in other contexts and that popular conceptions of newsreels and news theatres undoubtedly influenced the memories gathered for the research. In her excellent interdisciplinary account of the ways in which American culture remembers, memorialises and even re-enacts traumatic events, cultural historian Marita Sturken (1997) focuses on two of the most contested events in recent American history, the Vietnam War and the AIDS epidemic. Sturken’s work is particularly useful because she considers how television images of traumatic events not only feed into official histories, but also play an important role in the production of cultural memory. She writes that ‘true distinctions between personal memory, cultural memory and history cannot be made’ (1997: 6). What Sturken’s work offers this project is an approach to cultural memory that acknowledges and embraces, rather than fears, its complexity. However, it is Sturken’s examination of what she refers to – following Foucault – as ‘technologies of memory’ (1997: 9) that proved most valuable to my research. For Sturken, ‘technologies of memory’ are the objects, images and representations through which cultural memory is produced. Of course the newsreel memories explored in this research are filtered through a series of cultural products, particularly the overexposure of newsreel footage in a variety of media forms, including television documentary and historical re-enactment. As Sturken notes, ‘cinematic representations of the past have the capacity to entangle with personal and cultural memory’ (1997: 11). Fortunately I had resolved early on in the design of the interviews not to include material to prompt memory, as an *aide*

mémoire.¹⁹ One of the unique features of newsreel memory is its complete ‘entangledness’; with very few exceptions it is almost impossible to verify the origin of the remembered experience, an issue some of the participants themselves identified. Sturken’s authoritative work also proved enormously useful as she explores how the shared experience of traumatic national events, often broadcast live, represent significant moments in which individuals perceive of themselves as part of the nation, or as she phrases it, ‘participants in the nation’ (1997: 13). Although Sturken has a clear political agenda, is dealing with relatively contemporary memory, and does not engage in detailed discussions with audiences, her examination of the role of over-exposed and mythologised media representations within American popular culture provided me with a rich source of thought provoking and challenging material and informed much of my approach to the complexity of newsreel memory.

2.7 STAGE FOUR - TURNING TO THEORIES OF MEMORY (JULY 2008)

It became clear from studying my data that what I was actually examining was the formation of a particular type of cultural memory – newsreel memory – and that rather than imposing a theory of memory on the gathered testimonies, I should work back from the recollections themselves. In their work Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes note that the focus of memory studies, unlike oral history, has largely been concerned with the memory of groups rather than individuals, often referring to social, cultural, public or collective memory, and exploring how ‘cultural memory is created, circulated, mediated and received’ (2008: x). The origins of memory studies are usually traced to sociologists Emile Durkheim and his student Maurice Halbwachs, who set out to de-individualise the study of memory. Halbwachs’ *On Collective Memory* ([1926] 1992) is among the first published works exploring how group memory functions as a central element of a group’s identity. According to Halbwachs, the individual and the collective are inseparable: ‘[t]he individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory’ (1992: 182). In his book outlining the major theories of memory, Michael Rossington (2007) points out that contemporary memory studies’ pre-occupation with the relationship between the cultural and the individual is founded, in part, on Halbwachs’ analysis of social memory:

[W]ays of remembering and giving significance to what is remembered are [...] seen to be fostered by family, religion, class, the media and other sources

of the creation of group identities, referred to by Pierre Bourdieu as 'habitus' or systems of dispositions. (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007: 134)

However, more recently theorists have called into question Halbwachs' conception of collective memory. Wulf Kansteiner, for example, highlights what he claims is one of the 'foundational myths of memory studies' (2002: 193), a rarely acknowledged desire for cultural homogeneity, consistency and predictability. He asserts that it is often assumed that people who have had a particular experience will have largely 'similar perceptions of the event in question and form a stable interpretative community' (2002: 193). Challenging this assumption, he goes on to describe how the readers of a particular book or viewers of a particular programme often 'do not form a cohesive interpretative community' (2002: 193). Likewise, it does not follow that the collective experience of watching national events in the newsreels will inevitably lead to viewers sharing a similar or singular interpretation.

Hamilton and Shopes note that memory scholarship focuses on the broader social and cultural processes framing memory and as a result it loses sight of lived experience (2008: xi) However, conversely and equally problematically, oral history often tends to overlook these same social and cultural processes that shape individual subjectivity. As Barbara Misztal argues, 'in order for the notion of memory to be a useful analytical concept we need to retain a sense of both its individual and collective dimensions' (2003: 6). What became apparent in this study, even in very early analysis of the interview transcripts, was the extent to which major historical events, whether triumphs or tragedies, are anchored within the personal and the autobiographical; each recollection is framed within a familiar context of habitual cinema-going activity. Thus, this research is an examination of the links between personal and social memory. After all, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1977) has shown, individual memories are always produced in relation to the cultural milieu and individual habits.

In developing useful frames of reference within which to analyse the collected personal narratives, it became clear that participants were members of a number of what Annette Kuhn refers to as 'memory communities' (1995) or 'mnemonic communities' as Wulf Kansteiner (2002) calls them. These are the groups, to several of which all of us as individuals belong, which frame our memories. These mnemonic, or memory, communities exist as 'families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations' (Kansteiner, 2002: 188) and provide a context within which individual memories are formed and in which recollection takes place.

Finally, then, as a result of the painstaking process of sifting through memory studies texts, a number of useful frameworks began to emerge. Outlined below are the approaches that offer a valuable insight into the material and which were subsequently used to analyse the testimonies. However, in the end, I found it was necessary to adopt a hybridised version of all of these approaches in order to account for the complexities of my gathered memories. My particular research subject (newsreel memory) required an interpretative strategy that was able to cope with a specifically non-fiction medium, which could acknowledge the unique nature of newsreel memories, and could recognise the inadequacy of any one theory of memory to account for the particular processes of newsreel memory formation.

2.8 A DYNAMIC APPROACH TO MEMORY

As has already been suggested, while considering the merits of using popular memory as a useful analytical framework, it became clear that this approach was too deterministic to account for the vagaries and consistencies that emerged throughout the gathered testimony. As outlined above, I am not alone in recognising the need for a more moderate approach than the dominant ideology of popular memory allows. A recent response to the determinism of much popular memory studies has been the recognition that what all theories of social remembering have neglected to consider to any great extent is the ‘interpreting self’ (Prager, 1998: 70), which Prager argues ‘is driven by internal pressures to remember the past in idiosyncratic ways’ (1998: 70). Furthermore, social theories of remembering have failed to take full account of the context within which remembering takes place ‘which is generative and constitutive of what we experience as memories’ (Miszta 2003: 74). Critics of Maurice Halbwachs’ approach to collective memory, in which he claimed that the individual and the collective were inseparable, note that he overlooked the important question of how individual consciousness might relate to the collective consciousness of which it forms a part (Fentress and Wickham 1992: ix). Referring to their own research into the collective political and societal memories of different age cohorts, Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott point out that the term ‘collective memory’ itself, while appearing straightforward, is in fact difficult to define clearly.²⁰ The results of their study suggest two meanings of the term ‘collective memory’:

[W]hen large parts of the population appear to remember a common object, this can be thought of as a form of collective memory. However, it may be a

rather superficial form, especially when on closer examination the memories turn out to be quite personal and particular. (Schuman and Scott 1989: 378)²¹

They refer to the fact that on closer inspection memories of the Second World War, for example, turn out to be less about the collectively conceptualised event and much more about the personal circumstances surrounding, or feelings about, a particular wartime event. They distinguish this manifestation of ‘collective memory’ from the more general sense of memories being ‘collectively created and collectively held’ (1989: 378). Thus, as revealed in the recollections gathered for this research, the relationship between private and public memory is an immensely complex and dynamic one. For example, as Karl Mannheim noted, there are important differences between appropriated memories and those acquired personally (1959: 296), just as there are between what we might refer to as vicarious memories (e.g. those experienced through the media) and memories of lived experiences. While much of what we assume to be personal memory is not acquired personally, so too the memories of when and how participants engaged with a particular newsreel are often confused.

As outlined above, the research material demanded a dynamic approach to the complex entanglement of individual and social memory as a way of revealing how ‘individual experience is always structured and understood through cultural narratives’ (Misztal 2003: 74). Furthermore, given the initial analysis of the gathered transcripts, this approach recognised the importance of various social and cultural frameworks in producing newsreel memories. In his book *Presenting the Past*, psychoanalyst Jeffrey Prager (1998) explores the complicated relationship between the individual and the collective and the ways in which ‘the cultural interpenetrates the most individual of pursuits, memory and self-constitution’ (1998: 14). Prager’s contribution to the field is important as he introduces a third decisive factor into any consideration of memory – that is, (as noted above) the interactive self – capable of understanding and resisting the influence of dominant ways of thinking. He concludes that in order to fully understand the process of remembering we cannot overlook the notion of the self. Memory ‘is embedded’ he writes, ‘because the self is a “socially constructed” or “socially constituted” entity’ (1998: 71).²² Prager’s theory is central to the notion of autobiographical memories which are, according to Craig Barclay, ‘reconstructions of past events that are driven by highly developed self-schemata’ (1995: 92). Barclay claims that memories of even the most everyday events and activities are transformed, forgotten or changed as we, as individuals, change over time. We can conclude then, that memory is a reconstruction not a reproduction of the past, and that

‘autobiographical recollections are not necessarily accurate, nor should they be; they are, however, most congruent with one’s self-knowledge, life themes, or sense of self’ (Barclay and DeCook, 1995: 92).

The notion of interpretative frames of meaning derives from anthropologist Erving Goffman’s frame analysis (1997), in which he identifies what he calls ‘frames of meaning’ to describe the way in which we chose to interpret our lives (including our past). Goffman suggests that the ways in which we view the past, are generated in the present and usually affirm a collective view of the world, while satisfying our desire to organise our lived experiences into meaningful activities. Goffman’s approach is useful in that it insists that individuals will, within their individual frames of reference, interpret the past in different ways. This approach is particularly useful in this research in order to account for both the recurring traits and the individual inconsistencies that arose across the gathered memories. In identifying the particular frames of reference used by participants it became clear that membership of a particular generational cohort was of particular importance.

2.9 GENERATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Here the concept of a generation derives in part from sociological theory (Mannheim, 1959 and Eyerman and Turner, 1998) and looks beyond biological age towards a set of self-defining conditions. Within these conditions collective memory, the discourse of the wartime generation and individuals’ identification with this iconic generational cohort are perhaps the most important. Thus, in the gathered talk of the participants, we discover a consciousness of their generational membership which is articulated in their stories belonging to a particular time and place. According to Molly Andrews it is ‘through these stories that individuals, as members of a generation, locate themselves in the historical process’ (2002: 85). The collected memories are the stories of a particular generation as well as the life stories of the individuals who recounted them.

The main point of reference for all recent contributions to the debates surrounding the notion of generation is Karl Mannheim’s essay ‘The Problem of Generations’ ([1928] 1959) in which he articulated an alternative to Marxist theories of social change, outlining the way in which the specificity of each generation’s experience results in the different character of their respective collective memories. Of particular relevance to this study’s findings Mannheim himself supported the ‘conceptualisation of generations as something more than merely collections of age cohorts’ (Miztal, 1985: 84). Although acknowledging that generations were based on the structuring factor of biological age, Mannheim was clear that

‘to be *based* on a factor does not necessarily mean to be *deducible* from it or to be implied by it’ (1959: 290-1, emphasis in original). Indeed, his work revealed that traditional notions of generations, as thirty year intervals of genealogical time, were, at best, problematic. In terms of the constitution of generational identity Mannheim was clear that ‘mere contemporaneity [sic] becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and sociological circumstances’ (1959: 298) which he referred to as ‘generation location’. More recently Ron Eyerman has observed that ‘[date] of birth is not the central aspect in the articulation of generation’ but that it is a *generational consciousness* that forms a generation (2002: 52). It is evidence of a wartime generational consciousness that becomes manifest throughout many of the narratives gathered for this study. Mannheim himself was unequivocal that ‘a feeling for the unity of a generation is consciously developed’ (1959: 288) between members of a generational cohort who are ‘undoubtedly bound together in certain ways’ (1959: 289). However, he was somewhat circumspect about when individuals become aware of their generational affiliation or at what age the development of generational consciousness occurs. He wrote:

It is a matter for historical and sociological research to discover at what stage in its development, and under what conditions [...] individual members of a generation become conscious of their common situation and make this consciousness the basis of their group solidarity. (1959: 290)²³

Of those who lived through the Second World War biological age, it seems, is less determinative of generational identity than the fact of having lived through it as a child or young adult however young they may have been at the time. Analysis of participants’ birth dates reveals that the majority were between the ages of five and thirteen during the war years (1939-45). Indeed, the gathered recollections reveal that the impact of war on their experiences as young children continues to have significance because it both represents an on-going influence in who they perceive themselves to be and locates them historically.

Mannheim, it is widely acknowledged, identified the period from late adolescence to early adulthood as critical in terms of distinctive memory formation and personal outlook. However, although he determined that late adolescence was a time of consolidation of the ability to reflect and respond to earlier experiences he was explicit about the importance of decisive childhood experiences as the bedrock of individual consciousness:

The human consciousness, structurally speaking, is characterized by a particular inner 'dialectic'. It is of considerable importance for the formation of the consciousness which experiences happen to make those all-important 'first impressions', '*childhood experiences*' [my emphasis] – and which follow to form the second, third, and other 'strata'. Conversely, in estimating the biographical significance of a particular experience, it is important to know whether it is undergone by an individual as a *decisive childhood experience* [my emphasis], or later in life, superimposed upon other basic impressions. Early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* [emphasis in original] of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set. (1959: 298)

The narratives gathered for this study appear to confirm that it is the experiences and early impressions laid down in this oldest stratum of consciousness, beginning in early childhood, that continue to influence individual and consequently generational identity. Having lived through and subsequently being able to recall wartime events participants have, through a reflexive process of self identification, constituted themselves as members of the war time generation or what Mannheim refers to as 'association groups' (1959: 288).²⁴ Interestingly Mannheim went on to stress the difference between appropriated and personally acquired memories, the latter being those that form the basis of our generational identity and bind us to a particular generational cohort:

It makes a great difference whether I acquire memories for myself in the process of personal development, or whether I simply take them over from someone else. I only really possess those 'memories' which I have created directly for myself, only that 'knowledge' I have personally gained in real situations. This is the only sort of knowledge which really 'sticks' and it alone has real binding power. (1959: 296)

However, as already noted, today the process of generational identity is perhaps more complicated. As Ron Eyerman explains 'the role of the mass media in producing and reinforcing generational identity is a much more central question in the current age than in Mannheim's' (2002: 62). Of course while the newsreels were experienced personally by participants, the majority had no first-hand experience of witnessing the events they actually

saw on screen. However, for each individual from this particular generational cohort, the Second World War as a lived experience, of whatever kind, was a shared reality. Newsreel memories then slip into a complex liminal space between the appropriated and the lived experience. Schuman's and Scott's description of what they refer to as 'real time' experience is useful here, that is the period in which events happened, even if they are not directly experienced, may evoke autobiographical memories (1989: 371), and, as revealed by the gathered recollections, evoke the sense of a particular generational affiliation. The majority of my participants both lived through the events of the Second World War and have subsequently been repeatedly exposed to the mythology surrounding that period. Their memories are then a negotiation between lived-experience and the imagined and mythologised (as noted in Chapter One). The same mythology appears to influence participants' retrospective self-assignment of generational affiliation and provide further evidence of what Mannheim described as a 'feeling for the unity of a generation' or even the desire to belong to an iconic wartime generation. Today the continuing historic discourse about the wartime generation and the accompanying mythology helps to create and sustain a common generational experience/consciousness; a trait detectable throughout the gathered memories.

As outlined above, and building on the broad framework of Mannheim's approach then, this study utilises a notion of a generational memory that stems both from early childhood experiences of significant historic events and subsequent encounters with these same events in memory and the media. These individual experiences are subsequently consolidated in subjective conceptions of generational membership or generational consciousness which are detectable throughout the gathered narratives. The war and wartime newsreels provide what might be described as a common frame of reference for the majority of participants, while their memories articulate a particular generational identity.²⁵

In terms of analysing the gathered testimonies further verification of the usefulness of generational memory and Mannheim's notion of 'generational location' came in the form of Ron Eyerman's and Bryan Turner's study, 'Outline of a Theory of Generations' (1998) in which they conclude that generational identifications are constructed out of collective cultural experiences, providing frameworks within which the individual situates him/herself. Here they introduce Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' as a way to account for the uniqueness of a given generational memory. Bourdieu conceived of habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions to act which are produced by objective structures and conditions but are also capable of producing and reproducing those structures' (1977: 72). Further, he

suggested habitus organises the way in which individuals experience the world and act in it. Interestingly, Bourdieu identified regular consumption of the mass media as a key characteristic of the habitus of the post-war generation. Indeed cinema-going, and the inclusive activity of newsreel viewing, in the period 1939-1955 represents a social experience which provides a framework of memory within which the individual situates him/herself. Thus, generational habitus is the foundation of generational memory and identity.

Central to the notion of habitus is the dialectic between the subject and the frames of reference within which the subject operates which are at once historical, social and individual. Thus, within these internalised structures, or habitus, people are still capable of creativity. However, as Eyerman and Turner point out, Bourdieu was referring to the structuring system of class hierarchy within modern society. Nevertheless, by employing Mannheim's concept of the generation as their starting point and applying Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', they successfully refine Mannheim's definition, suggesting a generation is 'a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus' (1998: 93). Eventually it became clear that the historical, social and individual memories offered by my participants were formed out of a unique generational habitus.

As outlined above, Mannheim's work revealed that attempts to define a generational cohort as thirty year intervals of genealogical time prove inadequate. Recent interest in generational memory has sought to re-address the problem of how to define a concrete generation, an interest generated by the rapid acceleration in the speed of change within society and the spread of democracy. According to Howard Schuman and Amy Corning (2000), new research into the collective memories of generations 'starts with memories and works backwards rather than forwards from generations' (2000: 915). As noted above, this is how I approached my research, starting with the memories and working backwards towards a dynamic mosaic of memory theories which enabled me to fully analyse the gathered memories.

2.10 STAGE FIVE - BACK TO THE REAL WORLD (SEPTEMBER 2008)

In September 2008, having reviewed both the one-to-one interviews and the initial focus group encounters, I decided to undertake further investigative research with focus groups of older elderly people (75 years +) who would have been young adults in the 1940s. In September 2008 I began to work with Age Concern Newcastle's organised lunch clubs in the east and west ends of the city. Work with much older people addressed some of the remaining doubts I had about childhood memories of the news. In addition, I had approached

these older people, who had agreed to talk to me, but crucially had not identified themselves as newsreel viewers.²⁶ There was also the question of working with groups rather than individuals, a method I hoped would stimulate conversation and memories. In relation to this subject, Martin Barker and Kate Brooks describe what they call the ‘dream-focus group scenario’:

[I]t should be of a high level of group interactive discussion on a researcher-given topic, focused yet casual, moderated by the researcher who guides but does not lead, controls but does not inhibit the conversation, and who (among other things) ensures everyone has equal opportunity to express their natural vocabulary: in short, the researcher is a perfect combination of ‘understanding empathy’ and ‘disciplined detachment’ while the ‘respondents’ are orderly, natural, interactive, and utterly self-revealing. In other words impossible. (1998: 24)

This is, of course, exactly what I found. As Barker and Brooks also note, no researcher can expect to be ‘neutral’, something I had already discovered during the one-to-one interviews. Further, I would suggest, based on my experience of working with older focus groups, they can present a particular challenge to the researcher. Often slightly unruly, very elderly people seem less inclined to listen to each other than their younger (60-70 years) counterparts. Given the inevitable problems with hearing impairment, it is often difficult to control or focus the direction of the conversation.²⁷ As Barker and Brooks point out, the rationale for focus groups in social sciences is to facilitate group interaction. However, an interesting and rather unexpected consequence of my focus group interviews was the way in which participants appeared to re-inforce each other’s inability to remember anything. This is not to dismiss working with focus groups of very elderly people, but to recognise that it requires a commitment in terms of time and engagement, two commodities that I lacked at this later stage in my research. As a result I had very little time to develop a relationship with these groups, while arriving into a ready-formed group, in which relations are already fixed, can be problematic. The first group I encountered, in a church in Byker in the east end of Newcastle, consisted of four elderly women and two elderly men who engaged in lively exchanges each week. In this group there was one dominant and very elderly woman (Rose) who told me in no uncertain terms that she was not interested in newsreels and never had been. Although this turned out not to be strictly true, this was the first encounter in which a participant had

‘confessed’ in this way, or had expressed anything other than admiration for the newsreels. Her dominance, and initial negativity towards the research, made it difficult to manage the group or to move the conversation forward. In practical terms this meant analysing the recording of the group interview, identifying individuals within the group to interview in more depth, and going back to interview these individuals again. Something of this scenario was repeated in the other five Age Concern groups I visited.

Yet, despite the frustrations, working with these groups was enormously rewarding, and the occasionally rather negative responses provided an important element to the research – that is a balance of opinion – in that they represent a proportion of the historic cinema-going audience. All of the focus groups were able to talk at length about their youthful cinema going experiences, but often newsreels just did not figure in any significant way in their memories. A question which had emerged from my analysis of the previous round of interviews was to ask the participants why they thought newsreels were forgettable. Their answers are interesting; for example, Harry Lenthall’s answer, ‘[i]t was just something that was topical at the time’ (NRM40: 11), takes us back to the everydayness, the routine and ritual of much media use, and consequently, its often limited impact on distant memory.

In hindsight the outcomes I expected from working with groups of older, elderly people did not materialise. Nevertheless, as indicated, these groups provide an important representative balance to the study of newsreel memory and, paradoxically, although this was not my intention, begin to make sense of contradictory evidence. Further, my decision to investigate beyond the initial self-identified participants had confirmed that they were not representative of all newsreel audiences. The later focus groups’ lack of engagement, or utter bewilderment, is an indication that my research sample was, after including them, rather more representative of the population as a whole than when it had begun. In the end it was, paradoxically, the one-to-one interviews which provided the most compelling evidence of the power of popular shared generational memory, as participants recalled, within their often very personal frames of reference, similar newsreel memories.

2.11 STAGE SIX - MOVING AHEAD TO THE DATA CHAPTERS (NOVEMBER 2008)

At the end of more than two years of research I had amassed hours of recordings and hundreds of pages of transcripts. I had acquired a comprehensive understanding of both oral history and memory studies, and the real job of analysis was yet to begin. As outlined above, the strategies, approaches and methodologies I chose to use at various stages of the research process were employed as a direct response to the revelation of yet another important

characteristic of newsreel memory. To return to a point raised at the beginning of this chapter, Susannah Radstone writes about memory work as occupying liminal spaces and, as such, demanding liminal practices (2000: 13). In this chapter I have attempted to chart the strategies and sources I used to deal with the liminality of both the newsreels and newsreel memory that are at once neither fact nor fiction, neither vividly remembered nor completely forgotten. The liminal practices of the research explored in this chapter recognise the necessity of weaving together useful methodological and analytical frameworks within which to undertake a rich investigation of newsreel memory and last, but by no means least, the importance of 'listening' to the gathered data. Having discussed the importance of context in the formation of newsreel memories, it is to an examination of the newsreel viewing environment and the space of the news theatre in particular that I turn next.

¹ See Appendix 1 for the full text of the original Newcastle University and Tyneside Cinema research proposal entitled ‘Newsreel Memories: audiences, consumption and cultural identity in 1940s and 1950s Tyneside’.

² As a postscript to the study of newsreel memory outlined here - in its inaugural issue the editors of *Memory Studies* acknowledge the ‘daunting range of disciplines’ involved in memory research and set out their statement of intent towards a collaborative understanding of memory. ‘How do we realize calls for “interdisciplinarity” and also move beyond them towards a systematic set of conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools for the investigation of social and individual memory, of people and their groups?’ (2008: 5).

³ For an example of the interdisciplinary approach Hoskins advocates see Jerome Bourdon’s article on the influence of television on memory ‘Some Sense of Time: Remembering Television’ (2003).

⁴ Of the 77 individuals who took part in the research 48 were female and 29 male. However, of those who agreed to speak to me on a one-to-one basis 22 were female and 26 male.

⁵ Sarah Street’s book *British Cinema in Documents* (2000) provides a comprehensive examination of this topic.

⁶ Silver Screen is the Tyneside Cinema’s daytime film club for the over 60s, screening a wide range of titles from the cinema’s main programme.

⁷ The cinema did, however, supply the contact details of numerous willing participants.

⁸ In 2008 the Chief Executive and the board of Tyneside Cinema achieved their ambition to reinvent the historic News Theatre building – in which the cinema is based - as a working monument to its past as Newcastle’s premiere newsreel theatre by celebrating the story of the newsreels in an interpretative exhibition over two floors of the building and restoring the foyer and main auditorium to their original 1937 design. The exhibition was designed to fit into the space of a successful independent cinema – the cinema is at pains to point out that it is *not* a museum – and as such the exhibit was designed to engage and inform both cinema patrons and visitors to the historic building. It was also meticulously branded to conform to rest of the building’s interior design and forms an important part of the cinema’s total leisure offer, which includes bars, cafes and screening facilities. A carefully assembled display of objects tells the ‘story of the newsreels’, detailing the news gathering, production and exhibition processes. The larger-than-life characters of the newsreel cameramen, or the ‘newsreel boys’ as they were more popularly known, play an important role in determining the story on offer here, as does the presence of eye-catching newsreel camera, editing and projection equipment. Thus, this collection of artefacts imposes a very particular narrative on to newsreel history, organised, as it is, to communicate the central role in that history of technology and personality. However, the absence of any contextualising information about alternative news sources distorts the significance of the newsreels, and the popular mythology remains intact. Yet, given the exhibition’s interpretative remit to appeal to a broad and eclectic public and the constraints of budget, time and space, perhaps this kind of reductionism is unavoidable. (See also Michael Chaplin’s history of the Tyneside Cinema building, *Come and See*, 2011). A small, and much less spectacular, part of the exhibition recognises the importance of the newsreel audience. An interactive display of filmed extracts of audiences’ personal testimonies literally frames the central display cabinet and the newsreel narrative. The inclusion of audience memories here is enormously important, providing something of a contextualising counter-balance to the over-deterministic emphasis on the newsreels’ form and hardware. Of course, both the cinema’s screening programme and the heritage exhibition play an important pedagogic role. The Tyneside Cinema’s Learning, Engagement and Development Programme and the post of Heritage Engagement Officer are indicative of the ways in which the cinema utilises the newsreels in a variety of complex

ways to provide collective remembering, to construct history, to educate and facilitate learning, to entertain, and to validate personal memory. For example, the cinema's 'News Real' project enables Key Stage 2 pupils (7-11 year olds) and their teachers to work with professional filmmakers to produce their own newsreels based on a curriculum topic. The resulting films are screened at the cinema.

⁹ Thomas McLaughlin notes that the term 'vernacular theory' was coined by Houston Baker in his book, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, to describe 'the strategies for understanding the African American experience that the blues provide' (1996: 5).

¹⁰ In analysis of the gathered memories what becomes manifest, is the acceptance by all participants that news, in whatever format, is important. However, none of my participants ventured why they felt news might be important; it is simply a given throughout the testimonies that it is.

¹¹ In his article (first published in 1986) Tom Gunning coined the phrase the 'cinema of attractions' as a way to describe pre-1907 cinema. He wrote 'the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle' (1990: 58).

¹² Some of my participants were well in to their 90s at the time of interview.

¹³ The Coffee Rooms were one of the main attractions of the News Theatre and remembered with great affection.

¹⁴ See Appendix 3 for the different iterations of the interview questions.

¹⁵ Borland argues that we should be concerned about 'the potential emotional effect alternative readings of personal narratives may have on our living subjects' (2006: 317). However, she is quite clear that this does not mean the interpretation must be validated by the subject. Nevertheless, these personal narratives constitute the individuals' understanding of both their lives and identity and could, if not handled sensitively, be perceived as a personal attack.

¹⁶ A number of the participants asked for more copies of their recorded interview to give to their families. Secondly, although participants revealed intimate details these were not confessional interviews revealing past trauma.

¹⁷ See volume 2 for transcriptions of the interviews.

¹⁸ In an article from *World Film News* in September 1936, A.W.F. Sinclair, editor of the *Daily Sketch*, described the newsreels thus:

You mustn't think of the newsreel as a rival to the newspaper [...] the paper gives its reader up-to-the-minute news and pictures, and then he goes to the cinema to see what he has read about in animated form. (Myers, 1936: 31)

Sinclair goes on to speak of a, 'triumvirate of technology' (*ibid.*) in which radio, the newspaper press, and the newsreels work in harmony to bring the news to the public, each performing a specific, yet inter-related function, 'the newspaper reflects life, the radio gives it atmosphere, and the newsreel gives it animation' (*ibid.*).

¹⁹ I had used newsreel footage at one of the first focus groups and found that participants simply talked about what they had just seen rather than what they remembered.

²⁰ Schuman's and Scott's (1989) research was conducted using a national sample of adult Americans who they asked to report the national or world event over the past 50 years (the research was conducted in 1985) that seemed to them especially important and then to explain the reasons for their choice. Schuman and Scott used the interpretative content of the memories of different generations as evidence of generational difference.

²¹ For example, in his work on Abraham Lincoln and the formation of national memory sociologist Barry Schwartz contends that ‘collective memory [...] cannot be reduced to an aggregate of individual memories’ (2000: 9).

²² Prager (1998) argues, in relation to ‘false memory syndrome’, that recovering the past is a process which involves both memory’s embeddedness, the influence of the present on the moment of remembering, and embodiedness, the feelings and sensations generated in the past determine how we subsequently interpret it.

²³ In a footnote Mannheim noted that ‘it is difficult to decide just at what point this process is complete in an individual – at what point this unconscious vital inventory [...] is stabilized’ (1952: 299).

²⁴ Those participants not yet born or too young to recall the Second World War articulated what could be described as a post-war generational consciousness. They recalled newsreel events from their childhood between ages of 5-12. This slightly younger cohort born between 1941 and 1948 recalled Coronation (1953), Everest (1953), Hungarian Revolution (1956), Newcastle United FA Cup victories (1950s). These recollections appear to support the contention that early childhood memories are important for the constitution of generational identity.

²⁵ According to Robert Wohl a generation need not be united by age but must be united by ‘a common frame of reference that provides a sense of rupture with the past and that will later distinguish the members of a generation from those who follow them’ (cited in Hepworth 2002: 138).

²⁶ In the year since the first round of interviews the Tyneside Cinema had opened (May 2008) and yet another series of events and articles had covered the News Theatre. Given the saturation of the local press with newsreel related articles yet another call for newsreel memories would have been out of the question.

²⁷ A further distraction for these Age Concern participants was their weekly game of bingo, an institution with which no researcher would dare interfere.

PART TWO

THE HISTORICAL

DISCURSIVE SURROUND

CHAPTER 3 - NEWS AND SPECIALISED THEATRES

Just as newsreel memory appears to occupy a liminal space between the highly personal and the generational collective, the newsreels too remain precariously posed between serious news journalism and light entertainment. As we shall see the news theatres dedicated as they were to a programme of newsreels, interest films and cartoons, created an unpredictable space in which a range of activities took place, not all of them associated with a desire to see what was on screen. As a result the news theatre audience, as opposed to the regular cinema audience, remains rather indeterminate; that is, from within the perpetual darkness of the news theatre auditorium, a variety of distinct audiences begin to emerge. This chapter maps out the space of the news theatre as the scene of a particular type of cultural memory, newsreel memory, and the 'industry's front page' (Brown, 1939). This section deals, then, with a distinct form of topographical memory talk. As Annette Kuhn writes:

Memory, too, is a *topos* in its own right: it is a place we revisit, or to which we are transported; it is the road we travel along and also the destination of our memory-journey. To this extent memory not only has a topography, it *is* a topography. (2002: 16)

As becomes evident, place and movement within and between places and spaces, is extraordinarily important in memory. As Kuhn (2002) and Jancovich *et al.* (2003) discover to varying degrees in their own research, interviewees located both the memory stories of their lives and, within them, the stories of their cinema-going experiences, topographically. Similarly in this study, utilising this process of topographical contextualization, participants located and recalled their memories within the space of the news theatre. Annette Kuhn describes going to the pictures as a 'comfortable and unthreatening early venture into the public domain' (2002: 17) and, as explored in more depth in the next chapter, early memories of trips to the news theatre recall the presence of close family members, most frequently mothers. In addition, going to the news theatre, it seems, provided a gateway to filmic ventures of an entirely different order. The experience of watching the news theatre programme, consisting as it did of newsreels, cinemagazines, travelogues, documentary, and interest films, suggests audiences experienced a distinctive type of cinematic pleasure centred around both the 'spectacle of actuality' (Cowie, 1999: 19) and the entertaining exchange of knowledge and information. While the 'picture palaces' may have been regarded by some as

a form of plebeian popular culture with which they would not engage, the news theatres' programme was one in which high culture comfortably co-existed alongside popular culture and offered an experience that undoubtedly guaranteed something for everyone. Guiliana Bruno (1993) argues that the cinema is a democratising space; it seems, however, that it was the news theatre that truly attracted all classes of the urban population, albeit, as discussed below, for a variety of different reasons. Within these relatively small urban spaces, the audience gathered in the news theatre represented a diverse social configuration, ranging from the intelligentsia to the urban unemployed.

3.1 THE SPACE OF THE NEWS THEATRE

In his vast seven volume work *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984; 1986; 1993), Pierre Nora catalogues what he called 'places of memory' which, he argues, form the basis of French social memory (See Carrier, 2000: 37-57). Exploring the links between nation, identity and memory, Nora produces a catalogue of mnemonic symbols of French cultural identity from which, he argues, French national identities are forged. We might regard those news theatre and cinema buildings that remain standing today, although often transformed, as just such mnemonic symbols from which a peculiarly British cultural identity and memory is shaped.

This section, however, deals with the place of the news theatre, its topographical location and its interior space, both as rediscovered through the historical record and as remembered by participants. In his otherwise useful work on the 'newsfilm' audience, Nicholas Hiley (1998) makes no mention of the specialised news theatre audience; indeed there is little mention anywhere of the news theatre audience as distinct from the newsreel viewing public in the regular cinema. Thus, the process of uncovering exactly who the news theatre audience actually were becomes a work of archaeological excavation, a process of piecing together what material and memory remains. From the extant material relating to the news theatres, we begin to glimpse the variety of audiences within.

Writing in the *Cine-Technician* in 1939, J. Neill Brown describes the news theatres as film journalism's equivalent of the front page – its showcase. If the newsreels took up a precarious position between light entertainment and serious news journalism, the news theatres, according to journalist Peter Le Neve Foster, often failed to satisfy audiences, showing too much news for some and too much light entertainment for others (1937: 35). However, the arrival of both sound newsreels and news theatres in Britain had been greeted with great optimism.¹ Writing about the news theatre business, journalist Cy Young describes how news theatres 'defined the urban landscape' with their neon signs and electric billboards

they were the epitome of the modern (2005: 227). According to historian Linda Kaye the '[n]ewsreel theatres not only showed you the modern world, they created it for you' (2010). Kaye points out that in 1931, the Trans-Lux newsreel theatres in New York and the Cinéacs (a combination of cinema and actualité) theatres in Paris were regarded as the height of modernity, using innovative design approaches to facilitate the 'different way in which the audience interacted with the news' (2010). In these purpose-built newsreel theatres, form followed function, and a stream-lined, modernist aesthetic prevailed. Kaye notes that Adrienne Gorska and Pierre de Montaut, the visionary architects of the first Cinéacs at Montmartre, employed an innovative use of neon lighting for both directing audiences in and out of the news theatre and for advertising. In Newcastle, the News Theatre on Pilgrim Street boasted a large cantilevered neon billboard standing at right angles to the facade of the building, visible from the top of the city's main thoroughfare, Northumberland Street. The sign not only advertised the News Theatre's programme, but pin-pointed its exact location.²

In 1931 C.A. Lejeune of the *Observer* welcomed the arrival in Britain of specialist cinemas designed for the exhibition of newsreels as

[O]ne of the most hopeful signs for the future of cinema [...] It shows that the industry has grasped, at last, the overwhelming force of the movie as a modern narrator and propagandist [...] In a good newsreel there is always a something to touch one's personal experience, some point of contact with individual occupation, some special answer to a special curiosity. (2002: 84)

Lejeune appealed for newsreels with different styles and characteristics, more akin to the newspapers, and news theatres that were dedicated to showing particular newsreels aimed at particular audiences. In 1932, *The Film in National Life*, a major survey conducted by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, noted that 'news-reel cinemas' had emerged, as the 'news picture' itself had been given a new lease of life, with the introduction of sound: '[T]he introduction of sound has given entirely new value to the news picture. The "Gazette" was an old friend of many, but had neither the variety nor the extent of the sound news reel' (1932: 81). In an article in *Documentary News Letter*, D.M. Vaughan, General Secretary of the Association of News and Specialised Theatres, focuses her attention on a group of cinemas which she argues could 'claim to have an influence on national life differing fundamentally in quality from the general influence of the film' (1940: 10). These cinemas, she goes on, had deliberately moved away from screening films of universal appeal, and

‘have deliberately set out to satisfy the special demands of sections of the community’ (1940: 10). Miss Vaughan divided these cinemas into three distinct groups: news theatres; theatres for foreign films; and repertory cinemas, all of which were represented by the Association. She wrote:

The history of these three types of specialised theatre is a story of fifteen years of courageous experiment by isolated individuals, culminating in the formation, last year, of an Association to forward common aims and ideals. (1940: 10)

The Association was first established on 27th May 1938 in Manchester and was called The National News Theatre Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.³ Within a year (March 1939) the Association had moved from its Manchester headquarters to Piccadilly in central London, and subsequently changed its name to The News and Specialised Theatre Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.⁴ Although minor, the name change is significant, given the extremely small number of theatres screening specialised programmes. In an article which appeared in *Documentary News Letter*, C.E. Atkinson outlined the variety of cinema programmes available to audiences:

To-day [...] the public is offered many varieties of cinema entertainment, and there are many different types of programmes which it may enjoy. There are the super cinemas with their two big films and a stage show; the average release house showing two features; the specialised hall with its continental film seasons; the repertory cinema offering its own particular policy of one outstanding feature and a selection of documentary, and interest shorts, and finally, News Theatres. (1940: 17)⁵

With the success of specialised news theatres in the US, and the public demand for topical films, the arrival of the phenomenon in Britain began with the first ever news-only British Movietone screening at the Avenue Pavilion on Shaftsbury Avenue on 18 August 1930. Within a year the Pavilion had been renamed the GB Movietone News Theatre (acknowledging the collaboration of Gaumont British in the venture), and had adopted the policy slogan, ‘[i]f the nations of the world could see and speak to each other there would be no more war’ (Young, 2005: 228). According to Cy Young, although the possibility of

newsreels influencing world leaders now seems hopelessly naïve, ‘Movietone’s noble campaign caught the public imagination and pacifist mood’ (2005: 228).⁶ With the Movietone Theatre’s audience figures reaching one million in its first year of operation, it was clear there was ‘a genuine appetite for information about the foreign and domestic issues of the day’ (Young, 2005: 229). Indeed, those film industry sceptics who had regarded news theatres as a passing craze or fad were, it seemed, proved wrong. Buoyed by the success of the London operation, Movietone opened the first regional news theatre at the Oxford Cinema in Birmingham in 1932. However, as Young indicates, within just three years, it was becoming clear that news theatre programmes were moving away from their principled beginnings by including cartoons in an effort to attract customers. As early as 1934, *Kinematograph Weekly* suggested news theatres could be more accurately described as ‘interested theatres’, such was the variety of material now included in their programmes (cited in Young, 2005: 229). Similarly, film historian Rachael Low remarks that ‘[a]lthough they were called news theatres they were in fact an outlet for short films rather than news films’ (1979: 15).

Although many of the regional news theatres proved successful, as Young identifies, ‘it was in the nation’s capital that maximum potential existed’ (2005: 229). In 1939 J. N. Brown indicated that there were twenty-two news theatres throughout Britain and of those sixteen were in London. In this initially lucrative market, Movietone’s two major rivals, Capital and Provincial News Theatres and the Monseigneur News Theatres Circuit, rapidly came to dominate the rest of the market. According to James Ballantyne (1983: 84) by 1943 Capital and Provincial had opened six news theatres across the capital and one each in Liverpool and Southampton;⁷ while the Monseigneur Circuit had seven news theatres in London and one in Edinburgh.⁸ Although the precise number of news theatres is rather unclear, what is without doubt is their small number when compared to the total number of cinemas. In 1946, there were approximately 4,800 cinemas in Britain and Northern Ireland; of these just over one-fifth were owned by the three giant cinema circuits ABC, Gaumont and Odeon, and according to the News and Specialised Theatre Association, there were just thirty-two news and specialised theatres.⁹ In Newcastle, for example, according to *The Kinematograph Year Book 1946*, there were two news theatres and forty-one regular cinemas. Further, a glance at the list of members of the News and Specialised Theatre Association reveals that Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds were the only regional cities to have more than one news theatre.¹⁰ However, it was not only in busy city centres that news theatres appeared. Cy Young points out an

[I]ngenious development at Victoria railway station. Here, passengers who were at a loose end between train connections made the ideal target audience for a cinema programme which ran short items on a rotating basis, allowing patrons to come and go throughout the afternoon and evening. (2005: 229)

Capital and Provincial News Theatres Limited came to dominate the news theatre market ‘on sites close to main line railway stations or near the busiest junctions on the London Underground System’ (Young, 2005: 230).¹¹ For example, the Topical News Theatre was built inside the tube station at Baker Street, with access through one of the booking halls inside the station. However, not everyone thought the idea of news theatres based in railway stations was a good one. J. Neill Brown took issue with the common assumption that news theatres based in railway stations were a viable proposition; he suggested that ‘[t]he folks who stand about the stations, however, are not there individually for long enough to make it worth while to spend an hour in the cinema’ (1939: 200). Brown backed-up his claim by quoting trading figures from Capital and Provincial News Theatres Ltd., the parent company of the news theatres at Victoria and Waterloo stations, revealing that they were both running at a significant loss.

According to Cy Young, when war broke out in 1939, there was little discernable effect on the news theatre business: ‘[l]ike the cinemas of pure entertainment, they were recognised as good for morale and so allowed to remain open’ (2005: 236). In an article from *The Cinema (Today’s Cinema)* Mr R. Story, manager of the News Theatre Newcastle, revealed ‘it is a fact that we [the News Theatre] are doing just as well as before the war, if not better’ (1940: 25). In another article published in *Documentary News Letter*, entitled ‘News Theatres in War-Time’, Corry W. Fennell, owner of Chester (Times) Theatres Ltd. predicted that ‘with Britain at war News Theatre service will develop in technique and grow in utility’ (1940: 16).¹² Fennell expressed the view that during war, the public appreciated the public service offered by the news theatres even more. C. E. Atkinson noted that ‘of course, [news theatres] are finding an ever increasing popularity with the public, particularly under present conditions’ (1940: 17). Inevitably during the war the public’s desire to be kept informed increased exponentially and the news theatres appeared to satisfy this increased demand. According to the annual returns of the News and Specialised Theatres Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, membership peaked in 1940-1, when it had thirty-six members; of this total, half were in London.¹³ It is important to remember that the Association’s

membership included specialist and repertory cinemas, as well as news theatres, thus the total number of news theatres is unclear, but certainly less than the Association's total membership.

As if to confirm Corry Fennell's sense of the public service he offered the public, D.M. Vaughan had noted that 'the owners of specialised cinemas take a serious view of their social responsibilities' (1940: 11). She went on to suggest that the specialised theatres should try to present their audiences with more than simply one point of view and should not hesitate to show controversial material. In a piece featured in the trade paper, *The Cinema (Today's Cinema)*, two of Newcastle's cinema entrepreneurs (E.J. Hinge and Dixon Scott), both of whom owned a news theatre in the city centre, gave their opinion on the state of the wartime newsreel and the expectations of their audiences:¹⁴

Mr E.J. Hinge stated that he had received letters from both sides, and the bulk, were in favour of the present type of newsreel. "Those in favour have adopted that attitude, not because they like to see gruesomeness, but because these films reveal the truth about German militarism," he said. Mr Dixon Scott, proprietor of the News Theatre Newcastle, said that the News Theatre Association was working in close conjunction with the Ministry of Information, which was greatly concerned in giving the public news in true perspective. "There is a class of people who are trying to defeat the object of the Ministry by preventing the public, as far as they possibly could, realising what war was like" he added. (*The Cinema*, June 1940: 25)¹⁵

In 1942, Herbert Cohen, Manager of The Tatler in Chester, owned by Chester (Times) Theatres Ltd., was asked to contribute a piece to *Sight and Sound* magazine detailing how a specialised repertory cinema was run. The resulting article reveals the extent to which, even at a grassroots level, film was felt to impact on the general public. Cohen, illustrating Vaughan's point above, reveals that he took his responsibilities extremely seriously. He wrote:

The first thing that strikes me in attempting to carry out this request is that my opinions must inevitably be extremely controversial, but that very fact is all to the good, for it demonstrates the enormous task that lies before those responsible for the film public's entertainment and instruction, having as they do to satisfy such a variety of tastes and prejudices – I say satisfy

deliberately because I think most people like those things only which are likened to their own beliefs or emotions. (Cohen, 1942: 9)

Cohen's remarks reflect the remarkable degree to which those responsible for running news and specialised theatres regarded their role as primarily an educative one; he goes on to suggest that films should be distributed to particular cinemas depending on their content and their suitability for a particular audience: '[m]y observation leads me to think that a really scientific distribution of films would necessitate the regrading of all cinemas in the country into groups' (1942: 10). Cohen's suggestions introduce two important tendencies in relation to films and audiences in this period; the first, the desire for a 'scientific' understanding of the relationship between films and audiences, in particular films' effects were of keen interest to officialdom; the second, the subtle suggestion of a hierarchy of audiences, that is, that particular films would suit particular audiences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his role, Cohen suggested that independent specialist cinema managers were best placed to undertake this type of selection, as they were able to choose their films according to their audience's taste.

Although undoubtedly the war revived the fortunes of the news theatres, as Rachel Low notes, the initial enthusiasm for news theatres was short-lived, and by the end of the 1930s expansion had virtually ground to a halt, despite the life-line offered by the potential to screen television coverage of news and events, or 'public diffusion' as Low describes it (1979: 15).¹⁶

3.2 NEWS THEATRES IN NEWCASTLE

As North-East based architectural historian Frank Manders notes (2005: 103), the news theatre phenomenon arrived relatively late to Newcastle, but when it did arrive in 1937 no less than three news theatres opened in the city within the space of a year: the News Theatre,¹⁷ the Tatler and the Grainger.¹⁸ However, despite the functional similarity of their programmes each venue had a unique identity, responding to the needs of quite distinctive audiences.¹⁹ Just as repertory cinema manager Herbert Cohen had suggested, Newcastle's news theatres offered very different programmes catering for different audiences. The smallest of the original three, the News Theatre, focused on news and serious documentary, while the Tatler, at the other end of the city's main thoroughfare, Northumberland Street, offered a more light-hearted, variety programme (see figures 2 and 3). News Theatre usherette Molly Alexander described the Tatler as 'frivolous' (NRM13: 11), while Christopher Beadle compared Newcastle's two news theatres in the following terms:

[W]e went to both. I don't know why we picked one rather than t'other. I think we preferred the top of Pilgrim Street one. The Tatler was a slightly more down market programme I think [...] and the other one, the top of Pilgrim Street, yes that had more sort of interesting documentaries. You know it had, one might call, a more cultured programme, whereas the Tatler was basically entertainment. (NRM35: 3)



Figure 2: The Tatler on Northumberland Street, Newcastle. (1938)

Christopher and his family regarded the 'top of Pilgrim Street' News Theatre's 'cultured programme' as superior to the Tatler's, which he describes as 'basically entertainment'. Similarly Henry Holden describes the Tatler as rather ordinary in comparison to the News Theatre:

The Tatler was nothing special really I don't think. I ca'nt really remember anything outstanding. Just remember going in and erm, it wasn't that big or anything like that. Further up the road at the Tyneside Cinema that was something that, it seems like something special what can I say. (NRM17: 10)

In a short piece about the News Theatre's opening on 1st February 1937, Newcastle's *Evening Chronicle* reported the Lord Mayor's (Alderman J. Grantham) comments that the News Theatre 'would fill a long-left want in the city' (1937: 7). As noted above, Newcastle was one of the last provincial cities to open a news theatre. The article continues:

The cinema, the first of its kind in the North-East, is of modern design and seats 410. It is the fourth theatre to be built by the contractors [Thomas Clements and Sons] for Mr Scott's firm [Haridrix Ltd.]²⁰ in the past three years and the fifth to be designed for the firm by Mr. [George] Bell. Its equipment includes provision for the expected transmission by the B.B.C. shortly of television programmes to theatres.²¹ (1937: 7)



Figure 3: The News Theatre on Pilgrim Street, Newcastle. (c. 1938).

In the same piece, Dixon Scott (the News Theatre's proprietor) revealed that, as early as 1911, he had attempted to establish a news cinema in the city; the article reads, '[he] had offered £1,000 a year for a site at the Central Station, but had been refused'.²² This revelation

is rather extraordinary, given the fact that Scott's application to build came a full eighteen years before the first news theatre was opened in the United States. But then Dixon Scott was no ordinary cinema-man; starting his own cinema business on South Tyneside at the age of twenty-four, Scott aimed to provide his audience with 'high-class entertainment' (1910: 11). However, he was also aware of the spectacular and educational possibilities of news and topical interest films. In a commemorative booklet to mark the opening of his Kino cinema in Hebburn (South Tyneside) Scott wrote:

What newspaper description [...] could bring home to us the majesty and pathos of the funeral procession of our late beloved majesty king Edward VII so well as do the pictures that were shewn [sic] at The Royal Kino, Hebburn? [...] Kino pictures are the greatest force of enlightenment and education of the present day. Of course there are halls which profess to scorn educational pictures, but by doing so they lower their own prestige, and miss a splendid opportunity of doing public good. (1910: 7)

The following day (2 February 1937) the opening was reported by *The Newcastle Journal*. It noted that due to appalling weather conditions, the contractors had had to work through a blizzard to complete the building on time, for which Dixon Scott expressed his gratitude. *The Journal* article describes the opening programme in terms of a 'bright and informative blend' of comedy, news and interest films aimed to appeal to an eclectic audience:

The picture programme runs for 75 minutes and in a very bright and informative blend of good things – on the comedy side, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Co. in "Moving Day" by Walter Disney, and on the news side by the latest Gaumont-British, Fox Movietone, and Universal can give. Very interesting is the historical film 'Gentlemen in Top Hats and Gentlemen in Crowns' which shows the change that has come over Europe since pre-war days and gives glimpses of the crowned heads in those days [...] Good fun are the 'Audioscopes' which give stereoscopic value to the films shown with startling effect. (February, 2, 1937: 4)²³

The News Theatre's opening was also reported in the cinema trade-paper, *Kinematograph Weekly*, on 28 January 1937 in an article which reflected the optimism and continued growth

of specialist cinema exhibition.²⁴ The following week's issue of *Kinematograph Weekly* included a report on the opening ceremony, under the title, 'Newcastle's First News Theatre: Dixon Scott's Enterprise' (February, 4, 1937: 26). The article noted that a large crowd began forming long before the arrival of the expected dignitaries, who were greeted at midday with a trumpet fanfare. Acknowledging Scott's contribution, both to the exhibition sector and the city itself, *Kinematograph Weekly* reported that the Lord Mayor had observed that Newcastle had long waited for someone with sufficient enterprise to build a news theatre and the city warmly welcomed Scott's latest venture. The paper quoted the Mayor:

I have been connected with the kinematography Industry for more than 35 years, and I know what the public want [...] Years ago I had an idea to build a small theatre like this, and I intended to call it 'The Talking Newspaper'. It has been left to Dixon Scott to build it, and I am convinced that he will meet with the rich success he deserves for having done so. (February, 4, 1937: 26)

The News Theatre's design was brilliant, and something of a contrast to the starkly functional, modernist aesthetic of many other purpose-built news theatres. Scott had a passion for travel, North Africa and Turkey in particular were favourite destinations. Inspired by an ornate, pseudo-Persian-Art-Deco fusion style, ('ornate art-deco sort of stuff', according to Henry Holden), he imbued his news theatre with flourishes of Middle-Eastern exoticism. The elegant mosaic and terrazzo flooring, the highly coloured decorative plaster work and the gold coloured filigree work swirling at either side of the screen gave the News Theatre an air of elegant, far away places. As research participant Cynthia Campbell recalled:

Oh, it *was exotic*. But the whole place was, the whole cinema was an exotic place to go in, that was all patterns, and the floor was patterned, the ceiling, the sort of trellis work – so it was a very different place to go and um. It was a much more exotic place than, I think, I'd ever been in; in that, the other cinemas had a kind of similarity, whereas this was different. (NRM02: 11)

Dixon Scott's great sense of adventure and love of travel – his obituary in the *Newcastle Journal* lists his travel destinations as, 'Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, France, North Africa, the Sudan, Bermuda, Russia, Greece and Italy' (February 4, 1939: 4) –

manifested itself in his cinema programming, in which travelogues featured prominently.²⁵ Scott's obituary goes on to note that he was 'a student of certain aspects of Eastern philosophy' (1939: 4). This sense of the exotic, of travel, and of sophistication was further enhanced by a giant plaster-of-paris globe which stood on the News Theatre's first floor landing which was recalled by many participants, and mysteriously 'disappeared' when the News Theatre closed in 1968.

3.3 NEWS THEATRE AUDIENCES

In 1939 film editor J. Neill Brown, writing about the patrons of specialised news theatres, wondered why people chose to see newsreels in a specialised news theatre when they could see exactly the same material in a conventional cinema along with a couple of features. Answering his own question, Brown wrote 'it so happens that there still is a small percentage of people in this country who do not like the pictures' (1939: 199). As early as 1932 the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films' report *The Film in Public Life* had indicated that the news theatres' distinctive programme attracted its own special audience, those who did not as a rule go to the cinema, but wanted to see the news:

This audience is notably quiet and well-behaved, and, we are informed, quick to form and anxious to express an opinion on the pictures shown, by interview or letter to the Manager. It consists partly of passers-by with an hour to spare who want to see what a news-reel programme is like and are prepared to risk a shilling (its highest charge) or sixpence; partly of girls and young men from offices in the neighbourhood who go each week in the luncheon hour; and partly of people who do not, as a rule, go to the cinema, but like the news. School children and their teachers also go; the newsreel has great educational possibilities. (1932: 81-2)

Although not explicitly addressing social class, J. N. Brown went on to identify a particular 'class' (as in 'type') of news theatre-goer in whom the news cinema manager took pride:

Not for them the ordinary sensation seeker of the west end, but rather the thoughtful, 'man-in-the-street', the artisan who takes an interest in public affairs, the educated man who wants to get an even broader outlook on

current affairs than he can get from the daily papers. It is in the main news without comment'. (Brown, 1939: 199)

What is clear from this discussion is that a complex hierarchy of cinema audiences has begun to emerge, quite apart from the familiar picture palace/flea-pit dichotomy familiar in so many cinema-going histories (Kuhn 2002, Miskell 2006). Instead, what emerges is a hierarchy that runs from Brown's news theatre artisan to Cohen's independent specialist audience to the great mass of ordinary sensation seekers going to 'the pictures'. Brown notes that '[t]he manager [at the G.B. Movietone Theatre], tells me he has the best and most intelligent audience in all London' (1939: 200). Similarly, it seems, many other news theatre managers appeared to take special pride in their audiences. However, the reality of the news theatre audience may have been somewhat different, although news theatre managers may have wished, or believed, their audiences to be 'the most intelligent', providing for them a programme of carefully chosen, intellectually stimulating material; what the audience chose to do in the darkness of the auditoria is quite another matter.

In his 1937 *Kinematograph Weekly* article, 'If I Ran a News Theatre: Some Ideas for Introducing a New Appeal', Peter Le Neve Foster introduced the concept of the 'floating' public to describe the news theatre audience; he wrote, 'everyone is agreed that news theatres at present cater for a floating public of casual 'droppers in'' (1937: 35). Two years later J.N. Brown adopted the metaphor again:

This type of cinema [news theatre] is only really suited to the metropolis. The experience of London halls does tend to show that a very large floating public is necessary before even small numbers that go to the news theatre can be collected. (1939: 200)

The metaphor of a 'floating public' is a useful one, given the nature of both the news theatre programme, and the potential audience. Taking up the notion of the floating public, yet again, Corry W. Fennell noted that, although coronations, jubilees and boat races were good for packing in audiences, they were not what the regular news theatre patron demands: 'the regular visitor comes for a service of actualities, pleasant or unpleasant', he wrote (1940: 16). Fennell found the whole notion of the floating, or 'time-wasting', audience dispiriting:

A more demoralising reason for existence has never worked out than that news theatres are planned for “the man with an hour to spare”. For those seeking evidence in support of this time-wasting idea there is, it is true, an occasional small theatre to be found running short programmes, featuring news supported by old pictures of little entertainment or other value. (1940: 16)

For Fennell, like many who wrote about the news theatres, the idea of just ‘dropping-in’ to the news theatre, as recalled by a number of my participants, was highly unsatisfactory. No doubt he would have been taken aback by participant Walter Sinton’s summation of the news theatres, ‘if I had to sum up news theatres in one word, it would be convenience’ (NRM38: 1) and would have balked at John Lee’s recollection:

I’ll put it quite bluntly it [going to the news theatre] was to fill in time – that’s what it was really, to fill in time, and I got to the fact where I liked filling in time at the News Theatre, I found it quite good. (NRM15: 10)

To return briefly to the notion of the floating public, we might describe some of those who found themselves in the news theatres as nomadic or drifting; we might also regard the space of the news theatre itself as a space of flux, a transient space, and a space of easy access. The travel metaphor is a useful way to describe the news theatre building, its programme and the audience. To many patrons the news theatre building seemed to be open at all hours and cheap entry made it affordable and accessible; as audiences came, and went, freely.²⁶ The news theatre, thus, represented the very essence of a truly accessible social space. Continuous programming meant that audiences moved in and out of the auditorium constantly, silently coming and going, their composition continually reframing (as people moved seats) and reforming (as new patrons appeared) as they briefly shared the same space before moving out into the city streets. Of course, the newsreels, interest films and travelogues screened depicted travel, touring, and distant lands, and the speed of delivery – a feature of the newsreels in terms of both commentary and visual style – meant the pace never slackened; items stayed on the screen often for less than a minute. Here Henry Holden recalls just such a delivery:

H.H. Didn’t linger. Didn’t linger. No they went [thumps desk] it was movement, it was movement. I remember newsreels was

movement, things moving all the time, they didn't linger on a grave or anything like that, things were happening. It was fast paced and it was interesting.

L.A. So how long would they last for? I mean a newsreel programme.

H.H. I really think fifteen minutes, fifteen to twenty minutes [...] I don't know how long, how many minutes they would have on a reel. But anyway not very long, but fast, lot in it. It wasn't boring it was exciting to watch. (NRM17: 12)

In her work on the city films of Elvira Notari, Guiliana Bruno produces what she describes as 'a mobile theory of spectatorship to embrace the spectatorial pleasures of traveloguing' (1993: 6). While Bruno utilises spectatorship theory, nonetheless, her sense of a mobile approach to the viewing experience is a useful one in the current context. Employing Bruno's skilful use of metaphor, we could regard the news theatre programme as housed in the 'architecture of transit' (1993:7). Quite literally, as we have seen, news theatres were built predominantly in or near railway stations or in the bustling heart of city centres. They represent an exclusively urban phenomenon, located only in sizeable town and city centres; unlike the regular cinemas, they were not located in the suburbs. Moreover, beyond London, the majority of news theatres were built in the Northern, industrial city centres. In the following extract participant Christopher Beadle positions both of Newcastle's news theatres on the A1, the major thoroughfare linking the North and the South:

C.B. You know because both the Tatler and the Pilgrim Street News Theatre were on the A1.

L.A. Oh right I didn't realise that was the main...

C.B. There was no Tyne Tunnel and no Western by-pass obviously, so that was the A1 until the Tyne Tunnel was built. Then that became the A1 and then [the] by-pass was built but they changed it to that. (NRM35: 4)

Nevertheless, despite this transient (floating) or nomadic audience, News Theatre usherette Molly Alexander recalled the same people coming back again: '[y]ou knew them all you know' (NRM13: 17) she told me. Thus, perhaps for a section of the audience, as Molly's remembered familiarity with some audience members suggests, a visit to the news theatre

was a regular part of their routine, an everyday ritual. And of course, for the exhibitors themselves, this was exactly the type of regular patronage they strove toward. As Peter Le Neve Foster (1937) pointed out, news theatres needed to specialise their programmes to attract a regular clientele:

At present most of the so-called news theatres seem to fall between two stools, because they run too much news to please half their audience, and too many travel and sports reels for the other half [...] in trying to cater for everybody [the news theatres], end up pleasing no one, *except* the people who have an odd hour to waste and don't care where or how they waste it. (1937: 35)²⁷

3.4 THE EVERYDAY REALITIES OF THE NEWS THEATRES

What becomes manifest from both the historical record and the gathered testimony, is the variety of modes of attendance displayed by the news theatre audience. Although, as illustrated above, much was made of news theatres as places for sharing knowledge and information, a democratising space in Bruno's terms, the news theatres also appear to have served a much more utilitarian, though no less important, function in the everyday routines and rituals of the city and the surrounding districts. This section traces some of the different remembered audience experiences, revealing in the process, a variety of diverse news theatre audiences.

Undoubtedly trips to the news theatre became part of an everyday routine both for shoppers (as explored further in Chapter 5) and for those working in the city. For participants Frank and Marjorie Knaggs a visit to the news theatre became a habitual part of their Saturday trips into Newcastle, 'When we used to go together (to the news theatre) it was a part of the Saturday [...] it was well, we were creatures of habit really' (NRM07: 16). During the working week however, Newcastle's news theatres were frequented by city centre office workers and college students with a lunch hour to fill in a space which afforded the trappings of modernity to these thoroughly modern young men and women. However, as noted above, the news theatres also appear to have served an important social function as a place for those with time to kill or simply nowhere else to go. As Le Neve Foster (1937) points out, news theatres tended to please only those who had an odd hour to spare and did not much care how they spent it. As participant Henry Holden noted that the news theatre was a place of refuge from the elements. Given that many audience members' home lives were extremely austere,

perhaps the news theatres also provided a more comfortable space in which to pass the time. In June 1939, Hugh Le Mounier wrote in Newcastle's *Essoldo Cinema Magazine* that '[i]n winter few homes can offer so comfortable a warmth, free from draughts' (cited in Manders, 2005: 89). Le Mounier, the cinema's manager, was of course referring to the Essoldo, one of the city's super cinemas, however, his observations could equally apply to Dixon Scott's News Theatre, which Henry Holden described as warm and friendly. Until the mid 1930s, and the appearance of the super cinemas which forced improvements throughout the sector, many of the older suburban cinemas were cold, drafty, and still had wooden benches (Manders, 2005: 93). Henry Holden's memories of the news theatres' cheap, and therefore affordable, ticket price seems to confirm the relative accessibility of the news theatre space as a refuge:

The beauty about news theatres was – they were open from nine, ten o'clock in the morning. It was handy in bad weather, wintertime to pop in and a lot of people in the winter spent all day there. Because it was warm, friendly, they could take their flask in, sandwiches in. Once you get in, once you paid your, whatever it was, it wasn't very much, coppers to get in [...] once you got in you could spend all day there or a lot of hours, especially if you had a lot of time to kill. (NRM17: 3-4)

Henry's recollections are typical of many respondents' memories of the Pilgrim Street News Theatre. In the following extract he raises three important points. Firstly, the auditorium was dark most of the time, the rolling programme of news, short interest films, documentaries and cartoons ran continuously all day. Secondly, he remembers the auditorium as 'pretty full', a description echoed by many participants. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, he describes the interior as 'cosy and nobody bothered you'.

They were all dark you see the only thing is they didn't lighten up because it was dark all the time, right. But yet what there was it was friendly, it was warm, it was cosy and er nobody bothered you. So it was a place welcoming really, you went in no problem getting in but you didn't actually see the interior because it was always showing films all the time. It was always dark. (NRM17: 4)

When asked to describe the News Theatre the word participants most often used was ‘cosy’. There is a sense in which, as described by participants, the News Theatre represented a warm, ‘cosy’ place of refuge from the bustle of life on the streets of Newcastle. Likewise, participant Jean Murray recalled Newcastle’s other news theatre, the Tatler, as having similar qualities:

While I was at college I used to call in there every Friday afternoon and you could sit all day if you wanted. In fact it was well known up at the Tatler, wagon drivers who’d been driving all night would go in there and go to sleep, have a few hours sleep. (NRM09: 7)

The sense of refuge, or safe escape, from the everyday was reflected in some, though admittedly not all, of the short films, travelogues and cartoons screened as part of the programme, which transported the audience away to exotic locales or entertained them with surreal slapstick comedies. The fact that Henry recalled that ‘nobody bothered you’, suggests a particular kind of anonymity within the newsreel theatre. His recollections introduce an important feature of the news theatre programme and, as a consequence, the space of the news theatre auditorium itself. As a result of the continuous programme, the auditorium, the very heart of the news theatre, was shrouded in a perpetual darkness. It was the darkness of the news theatre that welcomed its audience, ensured its anonymity, and which attracted many.

Describing the news theatres as ‘cosy’ or ‘comfie’ is perhaps apt, when one considers they were much smaller than the average cinema. Newcastle’s giant Paramount cinema, which opened in September 1931 and boasted 2602 seats, was housed in an opulent interior unlike anything Tynesiders had seen before. According to *Kinematograph Year Book 1937*, the auditorium’s proscenium arch was 54ft wide, its stage was 21ft deep and its facilities included seven dressing rooms.²⁸ The News Theatre, situated directly opposite the Paramount on Pilgrim Street, had a rather more modest 402 seats.²⁹ This relative smallness is an important characteristic of the news theatre, compact in both its size and programme; the average cinema programme would last three hours and the news theatre programme between seventy-five and ninety minutes. When the 733-seat Grainger Cinema in Newcastle converted to a news theatre in 1937, it survived for less than four months. Perhaps the cavernous expanse of the Grainger’s interior overwhelmed the scenes of real life unfolding on screen – glamour was what this interior cried out for; perhaps, more prosaically, the city’s rather modest population of around 330,000 just could not sustain three news theatres with a

combined seating capacity of 1623 seats; or perhaps, patrons were simply unwilling to pay the Grainger's inflated ticket prices. Nevertheless, the Pilgrim Street News Theatre is remembered with a particular affection as a comforting, reassuring place in which to pass the time. However, in the following extract from Henry Holden, we can see the contradiction of the news theatre space, at once associated with the metropolis, transit and modernity, and yet a place where people slept, where they came to rest, where they could idle away the day. However, this was an idleness or inactivity not of the *flâneur*, or the idle rich, but, one might surmise, the inactivity of the old or unemployed. Thus the news theatre was not the space of 'twilight reverie' (cited in Bruno, 1993: 48), suggested by Roland Barthes, but of an altogether more mundane, urban reality. As Henry Holden again explained:

Basically if you wanted to get out of the elements or if you were waiting for somebody. If you had two or three hours to kill [...] and they seemed to be open more or less all the time. I can never, ever remember going and it wasn't open [...] I remember them sleeping [snores], having a good sleep. So I think they'd sometimes, maybe go em, and they just had nowhere else to go. I think maybe a lot of people were in transit or waiting or spent time there. I remember people didn't chat. You go to cinemas now a lot of chatting and stuff, but in those days when you went to the cinema it was more courteous there wasn't any talking. (NRM17: 15)³⁰

Henry's comments about the News Theatre appearing to be welcoming and open all the time suggest an all embracing space within which world news was made safe and palatable. However, there is also a sense in which the News Theatre represented a destination for people with nowhere else to go. Henry's testimony is notable for the characteristic memory trope of nostalgia for a by-gone age, as he recalls that 'in those days' cinema audiences were more courteous and respectful. Another participant, Charlie Hall, suggests why the News Theatre was so 'comfie':

Oh, the thing about the News Theatre, the seats were much better. They were like, you know, seating on these seats [Charlie indicates the armchairs we are both sitting in]. You could go to sleep in the News Theatre you know [snores] it was so *comfie* [...] I've got a suspicion that the Tatler they had one or two of these seats and they were just made for couples or for old folks

who liked to sit next door to each other and this sort of thing but....

(NRM16: 15)

These double seats were an unusual feature a number of participants recalled, usually in relation to visits to both the Tatler and the News Theatre with their latest 'squeeze'. Joyce Ketchen, for example, recalled one date with her first boyfriend was a trip to the News Theatre, one afternoon when, for the first and last time, she played 'hooky' from secretarial college in the city. Joyce's memories underline both the impression the space had on her, and the fact that she and her boyfriend felt this was a safe place to retreat to, somewhere they would neither be discovered nor disturbed:

J.K. When I got in it, I never forgot what it looked like – ahh, art deco. Oh, the red, and the lights [...] I can remember it all you know, everything about it, and then that Gerard. Were there ever seats made for two?

L.A. Yes, at the back.

J.K. Well, I must have been sitting there [...] I'd forgotten that bit, mind I don't know what happened [laughs]. (NRM10: 2-3)

Thus, the public space of the news theatre also offered patrons the opportunity to indulge in the most private of pleasures. Usherette, Molly Alexander, remembers 'sweethearts' spending a lot of time in the double seats at the back of the stalls: 'A lot of people just went to sort of be together for a while, they didn't care we [staff] knew, they were all the same, they used to come in every week you see' (NRM13: 11). Molly recalls that she, and the other usherettes, their eyes accustomed to the perpetual darkness, saw everything that went on in the forbidden spaces of the auditorium. The News Theatre then, shrouded in darkness, becomes the public site of illicit sexual encounters.. However Molly went further, recalling the transgressive sexual behaviour of a particular 'type' of audience member:

There was the type of man you've heard about it before, they come in and they change their seat, they sit beside the girl and then start fiddling about and er. You had to watch for that. Cos we had, we could pinpoint when they came in and they used to get thrown out you see. They weren't allowed in again. (NRM13: 18)

Interestingly, other elderly female participants mentioned the presence of the lone man in the news theatre audience whom, they all agreed, it was best to avoid. Thus, the news theatre space reveals itself as the site of a wide range of audience activities; all of which were observed by Molly and her young female colleagues (see Figure 4).

Unfortunately, in terms of detailing the News Theatre's patrons, any remaining records appear to be missing, and daily box office figures would not reveal personal responses to the News Theatre programme, although, of course, the research participants and their memories begin to fill in some of this missing detail. However, a recurring problem emerges in this regard; my participants were, by and large, children or young adults during the 1940s, and we should keep in mind that this fact may inflect their memories, as in this recollection from Henry Holden: 'I think maybe a lot of pensioners or people who had a lot of time to fill in them days, and they would go' (NRM17: 5). Both Henry and Molly's recollections describe the News Theatre as a place for sharing knowledge and information, a space of refuge for the old, lonely and unemployed, a space of rest for commuters and shoppers, and occasionally an illicit space for sweethearts' trysts. What begins to emerge from the perpetual darkness of the news theatre auditorium is the distinction between the individuals who found themselves in this space and for a variety of different reasons. Thus, recollections of visits to the news theatre range from Cynthia Campbell for whom a trip to the News Theatre was a 'special occasion':

C.C. And on very special occasions we'd go to the News Theatre.

L.A. Right, so that was a special treat?

C.C. [I]f there'd been a special occasion that we wanted to see, then we would go and see it on the news, because there was no other opportunity of seeing what was happening. We had the radio but we didn't have television. (NRM02: 2)

To participant George Henderson who described the News Theatre as simply 'somewhere to get out of the rain'.



Figure 4: News Theatre Usherettes – Stella, Margaret, Molly Alexander (née Hutton) and Norah circa 1938.

3.5 THE NEWS THEATRE PROGRAMME

Although relatively little is known about the news theatres' audiences much more is known about the news theatre programme. The typical programme was enormously varied and one in which high and low culture comfortably co-existed. The following extract from an interview with Frank and Marjorie Knaggs wonderfully illustrates the diversity of the typical news theatre programme:

F.K. In the '50s we had, there was always, with the newsreel, there was always em, a *Pete Smith Specialty*, they were great. [...] And Pete Smith was the original sort of Joe McDokes who got into trouble [...] Each episode was about you know his mishaps [...] all of them were American, this was all American. And they always had a *Tom and Jerry* always. That's how I got to know Tom and Jerry – not personally of course. We had *Heckel and Jeckel*, talking magpies

were they, yes magpies oh yes. They spoke in a sort of public school accent.

L.A. So you'd sit through this whole [inaudible]?

M.K. Well, it was continuous as well.

F.K. Well, I told you [addressed to Marjorie] the story about Massine [...] I passed the News Theatre, and er, I heard music. "Aha, music's familiar" and it was Rimsky Korsakov *Spanish Caprice* [...] So I went, so I found my way through the dark - and lo and behold it was a film of the ballet adapted from *Spanish Caprice* and Leonide Massine of the Ballets Russes, and they were under Diaghilev, and I thought "wow this is, this is something great". (NRM07: 22-23)

From Frank's vivid recollections, then, we can begin to see the extent to which the News Theatre programme aimed to attract a wide and diverse clientele with items ranging from cartoons to classical ballet.

Writing in 1940 the secretary of the Association of News and Specialised Cinema D. M. Vaughan noted that following the newsreels' coverage of the Coronation and the Royal Tour of Canada and the US there was an 'increased appetite for screen news' (1940: 10). Vaughan also highlighted the problems of trying to keep hold of these new audiences when such 'rich material' was exhausted. This is an important point. The news and specialised theatres could not rely on the latest blockbuster, star name, Hollywood gimmick or publicity stunt to pull in the crowds; they had to give skilled attention to the selection of films and 'building of programmes in direct relation to audience taste' (Vaughan, 1940: 10).³¹ According to Vaughan, given that there was fierce competition between the newsreel companies (often exclusive rights to film a nationally significant event were given to just one company) and each newsreel had a discernible character, this resulted in news theatres 'showing four or even all five of the reels [giving them] a comprehensive and varied picture of current events, which could not be seen elsewhere, and which maintained their attendances' (1940: 10). During the Second World War, however, when the newsreel companies were forced to pool their material, content was often duplicated across all five titles. This was not a problem for regular cinemas that screened only one complete newsreel edition, but it was a serious problem for news theatre owners. According to D. M. Vaughan:

It has forced the news theatres to seek new films for their programmes. Thus the French newsreels are doubly welcome. There has been a tendency to increased bookings of series like the *March of Time* and *Point of View* which already had an important place in the programmes. The *March of Time*, with its considerable presentation of a topical issue [...] and *Point of View* with its debates on controversial subjects such as betting and the nationalisation of the railways, have a particular appeal to the news theatre audiences. (1940: 10)³²

Vaughan notes that of almost equal importance to the news in the news theatres' programmes were the short films – travelogues, comedies and cartoons – ‘as well as films of social problems’ (1940:10).³³ As noted above, as early as 1934, one contemporary trade paper observed that only a third of the average programme was made up of current news, the rest being animated cartoons, two-reel comedies and travelogues’ (Young, 2005: 229). In 1936, Andrew Broom revealed that programmers from the news theatres had quickly learned from experience that ‘six or seven reels of various subjects was the programme preferred’ (1936: 7); variety, it seems, was the key to the news theatre programme. In 1939, J. Neill Brown described the varying characteristics of individual news theatres within London and the programmes they screened, observing that the G.B. Movietone Theatre screened nothing but news at that time, unlike its competitors who screened a mixed programme. Of course, the programme of every news theatre was so much more than simply newsreels, which would fill a mere ten minutes or so, of a seventy-five minute programme. Writing about the summer of 1952 in which he moved to London to begin his career as a reviewer at *Picturegoer* magazine, Leslie Halliwell recalled his visits to the news cinema

[A]t which the newsreel was always the least important item. The programme might well include a revived Laurel and Hardy, a Leon Errol, or an Edgar Kennedy; there could also be on offer a *Pete Smith Speciality* or a *James A. Fitzpatrick Traveltalk*. But the bulk of the hour would be filled with the wild animated adventures of *Tom and Jerry*, *Bugs Bunny*, or *Tweetie Pie and Sylvester*, all of whom were then at the peak of their form. (1985: 158)

One hears echoes of Halliwell's description of a typical news theatre programme in the memories of my participants. Henry Holden, for example, recalled the news theatre programme:

That's the thing about the theatres you were never quite sure what they were going to put on. And there were little cartoons, little features, quirky things, the word is 'quirky' or 'exotic', because when you went in you didn't know what you were going to see, not like the films [...] So you saw the bits of news, saw a film from other countries their news, presidents and all that you'd never seen before. And em, and then they would have the travelogue stuff on, exotic. (NRM17: 6)

Despite Henry's childhood memory, there was a daily listing of the News Theatre's programme published in the local press. However, as Henry suggests, there would not be the high profile publicity available for the news theatres' programmes as there would be for regular cinemas. As Henry describes, there would inevitably be an element of surprise which characterised the news theatre-going experience; you never quite knew what you were going to see. Frank Knaggs recalled how the newsreels became, in his opinion, increasingly 'quirky':

The newsreels became a kind of entertainment in those days because they also used to do a little sort of thing in the newsreel itself they always had, and they always had an animal in it you know. Oh, so and so, the em, em, panda had a, found a mate, or something like that. They used to do something like that which was intended to relieve the tension you know. (NRM07: 18)

Molly Alexander remembers, '[t]hen you got the society weddings and all that you know, and the news thrown in with all the rest' (NRM13: 11). Molly's memories suggest a programme literally thrown together. However, nothing, it would seem, could be further from the truth. Newcastle's News Theatre, for example, subscribed to all five newsreel titles, and twice a week Dixon Scott Jnr. and the cinema's managers viewed them all, meticulously selecting the 'best bits' from the five, which were subsequently spliced together by the projectionists for

screening. Former News Theatre projectionist Sydney Stoker revealed the precision with which the Newcastle News Theatre's programme was planned by proprietor Dixon Scott Jnr:

S.S. I waxed them and handed them up upstairs.³⁴ The two managers were sitting, because they decided who er had covered certain events, er you know there's a list of events that were covered year after year, a stock list of er and each.

L.A. So these managers had to look at?

S.S. They had, they had to well, er, with a clipboard and the er name of the newsreel [...] And er, which country, and the list of the stories, which stories had been covered, because none of them covered every sto...

L.A. And who were the managers?

S.S. Mr Clitheroe and Mr Hall. [...] And on a Monday morning and a Thursd' mornin' because the news only ran for three days and then they were changed you see and had to do the same thing you see.

[Sydney was instructed precisely where to cut the films by Dixon Scott Jnr.]

S.S. It'd clip some of the opening, m'be's the first few words of a, and that's sloppy editin'. I mean that was Mr Scott he'slef he was er, heck of an editor. He was the owner – he decided everything that went on the screen. (NRM34: 3)

Although it appears no extant records of Newcastle's News Theatre programme survive, a sense of the type of programme screened each week, as noted above, can be gleaned from listings in the local press.³⁵ The *Newcastle Journal*, in particular, provides a useful source, listing the News Theatre's programme by subject (as well as title), for example, 'royalty', 'home', 'in colour', 'for cyclists', 'nature', 'Disney cartoons'; what quickly becomes clear is that a typical News Theatre programme during the 1940s offered its audience an extremely diverse programme of expertly assembled newsreel compilations, documentary, short interest and information films, cinemagazines *March of Time* and *Point of View*, classic comedies, and of course cartoons (see figure 5). This diverse programme clearly catered to the ever-shifting and diverse news theatre audience itself.

This chapter has explored the viewing environment within which participants' newsreel memories first began to form. It has revealed that the newsreel memories that emerge from the remembered space of the news theatre have resonance far beyond those of the regular cinema-going experience. As such, the topography of the news theatre is of enormous importance to the gathered recollections. In mapping this memorably accessible, and, for some, unpredictable space, we have seen how Newcastle's news theatres occupied a transitional space between the public and private realms, and between the sanctioned and illicit, even transgressive, activities of audiences within that space. We have also seen how the circumstances particular to the news theatre viewing experience evoked a particular type of recollection. Although the news theatre is remembered predominantly as the site of moving news images, a place, as Cowie puts it, to experience the pleasure of the 'spectacle of actuality' (1999: 19), other marginal experiences and viewing positions are revealed as distinctive news theatre audiences begin to emerge from memory. Just as newsreel memory occupies a liminal space between the individual and the collective, the liminality of news theatre memory is revealed in the recollection of the space itself as both a safe haven, within which the news was made palatable, and occasionally as a rather uncomfortable and threatening space for young women. Having examined the topographical circumstances within which the gathered newsreel memories began to emerge, let us now turn to another quite different set of circumstances from which, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most frequently and vividly recalled newsreel memories emerge – the Second World War.

NEWCASTLE'S NEWS THEATRE.

ALL PROGRAMMES ARE SUBJECT TO ALTERATION OWING TO THE VARYING LENGTHS OF THE NEWS ITEMS.

At every performance:
THE GAUMONT-BRITISH NEWS
THE BRITISH MOVIE-TONE NEWS
THE PATHE GAZETTE
THE PARAMOUNT NEWS

All the Week commencing December 19th.

"WILD WINGS"

An extraordinary variety of sea-birds in their mating and nesting season, on a little-known Island in Mid-Atlantic.

"NEW ZEALAND"

Beautiful scenery, including Milford Sound, and a journey across the Franz Joseph Glacier.

"WOMEN ATHLETES"

Champions of many sports.



"SPORTING DOGS"

Hunting the fox in North Carolina and shooting duck and quail: some excellent pictures of dogs retrieving game.

TWO DISNEY
CARTOONS

"MODERN INVENTIONS"
"TOBY TORTOISE RETURNS"

All the Week commencing Boxing Day.

"ROPING 'EM ALIVE"

The Trapping of Giant Snakes, and other animals, for Zoological Gardens.



"TORADYA LAND"

The life of Troadjan natives of Macassar, also of the Dyaks of Borneo.

"SURF LIFE-GUARDS"

Work done by life-guards in patrolling many miles of beach.

"SPORT STAMINA"

How athletes increase "staying power."

TWO DISNEY
CARTOONS.

"THE WHALERS"
"MICKEY'S ELEPHANT"

All the Week commencing January 2nd.

BENCHLEY describes — "AN EVENING ALONE"

"SCOTTISH SPORT"

The various sports and pastimes above the border.



"ALASKA"

Glaciers, hot springs, and blizzards.

COLOURED CARTOON. "HUNKY AND SPUNKY"

Two comic donkeys in the prairie!

All the Week commencing January 9th.

For TAILWAGGERS — "MANNERS MAKETH DOG"

The sensible training of dogs.

COLOURED SPECIALITY —

"ROMANCE OF LOUISIANA"

Adventure in the history of this State of the U.S.A.



IN COLOUR -

"MECHANICS ILLUSTRATED"

A scientific trifle; the processes of paint manufacture; the ultra-violet ray, the potentialities of liquid air, and the efficiency of a modern railway kitchen.

COLOURED CARTOON -

"LITTLE BANTAM WEIGHT"

"Little Cheeser" again!

Figure 5: A typical News Theatre Programme. (December 1938).

¹ The first sound newsreel to be distributed in Britain was *British Movietone News* launched on 9 June 1929, swiftly followed by *Gaumont Sound News* in November 1929 and *Pathé Super Sound Gazette* in June 1930.

² The original entrance to the building was set back from the main street and thus hidden from view. In the recent restoration of the Tyneside Cinema building a digital version of the original neon sign has been erected.

³ In the Association's registration documents (November 1939) members were defined as Proprietors (not being Corporations) operating Cinematograph Theatres and other places of amusement or Public service including television and other exhibitions of Public service or instruction in which the programme consists mainly of films or television pictures where it is established to the satisfaction of the Council, in the light of the evidence before it, that the policy of the Theatre is to give regular exhibitions which are predominant in news or special interest and the Proprietors of any Theatre or place, as before described, may qualify if the Council are satisfied that, such exhibition or service is not regularly provided for by the majority of theatres or other places of instruction or entertainment existent.

The document makes clear membership was open to individuals and not news theatre circuits, of which, there were two, the Monseigneur and Capital and Provincial News Theatres. Original documents accessed at The National Archive, Kew on 22 July 2008.

⁴ The name change occurred on 27th November 1939. The objects of the Association were clear and included:

- a) To ensure that the Members shall maintain their contact with and service to the public and others on the highest possible plane that the facilities of the time permit and the minimum standard required in this direction shall be as set by the Council from time to time.
- d) To take every possible lawful step to secure complete News Films for presentation to the Public free from Censorship, political bias or propaganda having in mind that at times of extreme National crisis Censorship from within or outside the Industry may be recognized as in the interest of the State.
- e) To encourage the production and circulation of short British and Foreign picture production having Entertainment, Instructional and/or Educational value. (News and Specialised Theatre Association registration documents).

The Association's membership peaked in 1940 at thirty-six, stabilized during the war years at around thirty-two, and showed a marked and steady decline from 1947 onwards; the Association was finally dissolved on 3 December 1956. Newcastle's News Theatre's Dixon Scott, son of the late Dixon Scott, the News Theatre's founder, was Chair of the Association in 1947, and Treasurer from 1948-50.

⁵ The lack of good quality short film material became a serious problem for the membership. However, according to D.M. Vaughan, members of the Association pooled reviews of short films and produced a monthly *Short Film Review* which was circulated amongst members (1940: 10).

⁶ To celebrate the success of their news theatres Movietone made a documentary revealing the workings of newsreel production entitled 'News Theatre Guide'. Story no. 6492. Movietone on-line archive.

⁷ Ballantyne notes this figure had risen to 21 by 1949.

⁸ According to Cy Young in 1935 the Monseigneur Circuit opened a news theatre in Edinburgh.

⁹ ABC cinemas (owned by MGM, Warners and Associated British Pictures) screened Pathé newsreels (a subsidiary of Associated British and Warner Brothers); Gaumont cinema (owned by Gaumont-British Picture Corporation) screened Gaumont newsreels. The independent Granada and Odeon chains took various newsreel titles.

¹⁰ We might speculate why these cities might have had more than one news theatre – they were after all busy metropolitan centres with large numbers of cinemas.

¹¹ The first news theatre to be built in a railway station was at the Gare St Lazare, Paris, designed by architects Adrienne Gorska and Pierre de Montaut.

¹² According to David A. Ellis and Steve Howe, Chester (Times) Theatres Ltd. also ran cinemas in Manchester and Leeds.

¹³ See also *The Kinematograph Year Book*'s listing of Trade Organisations (1941: 110).

¹⁴ E.J. (Teddy) Hinge (1888-1961). Originally general manager of Stanley Rogers Cinemas (Newcastle), Hinge took over management of the company in the early 1930s and eventually changed the company name to Hinge Circuit Cinemas.

¹⁵ It should be noted here that this is Dixon Scott Junior, Dixon Scott Senior died in 1939.

¹⁶ On opening in 1937 Newcastle's first news theatre boasted equipment that included provision for the anticipated television transmissions from the BBC.

¹⁷ Throughout the thesis I refer to the news theatres in general but refer to the Pilgrim Street news theatre (now Tyneside Cinema) as the News Theatre.

¹⁸ The News Theatre on Pilgrim Street opened on 1 February 1937; the Grainger News Theatre on Grainger Street opened on 2 December, 1937; and the Tatler on Northumberland Street opened on 16 December, 1937. The Grainger cinema operated as a regular cinema until July 1936 when it was closed and refurbished re-opening as a news theatre. However, the venture was very short lived; it remained open for less than four months, closing in March 1938, the victim, according to Frank Manders, of over-capacity, 'perhaps it was found that 733 seats was too large for a news theatre' (2005: 105).

¹⁹ Of course a number of participants recalled frequenting both the *Tatler* and the *News Theatre*.

²⁰ In 1937 the directorate of Haridix Ltd included Dixon Scott, chairman and managing director; Virginia B. Scott (his wife), Dixon Scott Junior, resident manager of the News Theatre; Ridley Scott; and R.H.F. Scott. Haridix was a composite word which included the first two letters of Scott's sons Harry and Ridley, and the first three letters of his own name and his other son, also called Dixon (*Kinematograph Weekly*, February 4 1937. p. 26).

²¹ Scopphony was the name given to the pioneering video relay system capable of presenting live television transmissions on large screens. The first cine-televised, or tele-projected, programme in a London venue was at the opening of the Monseigneur, near Marble Arch, on 23 Feb 1939. However, the world's first public demonstration of television in a theatre had taken place nearly ten years earlier, in July 1930, at the London Coliseum, when John Logie Baird presented Baird television.

²² Interestingly newsreels were screened on the Kings Cross to Edinburgh train service via Leeds and Newcastle from 1936. An article in *World Film News*, May 1936 reported the phenomenon:

The long narrow van, taking its shape from that of the train, is reminiscent of the early nickleodeons. About 50 people can be seated...The programme, consisting of Pathé newsreel items, one-reeler interest films, and comedy shorts, is changed every week...An L.N.E.R. cinema official told W.F.N. that the travelling public is enthusiastic. 25,000 people have already visited the film shows since they started on May 27th last year. The best proof of success is that a regular public has been created. The same official keeps a

diary in which he enters the public's reaction to each programme. From this he has found "the perfect programme", a cartoon, a comedy, a newsreel and, particularly popular, a travel film' (1936: 6).

See also *News in a Nutshell*, Pathé Gazette, issue 36/20, issue date 09.03.1936. Film ID. 855.16. In which the Lord Mayor of Leeds can be seen inaugurating the extension of the LNER cinema car service. View at British Pathé's on-line.

²³ Audioscopes were short films produced in 3D by MGM in the 1930s.

²⁴ The piece about the News Theatre appeared in *Kinematograph Weekly* in a piece entitled, 'Another Wave of Openings:

No respite in Building Boom'. The article noted. 'Kinema (sic) building activities are proceeding at a rapid pace, and within the next four or five weeks a number of new schemes will be completed and ready for opening.' The article goes on to mention eight new build cinemas opening across the country, including the News Theatre, Newcastle. (January 8 1937: 5).

²⁵ Scott died aged 54 on 12th February 1939 in Cairo, his obituary in the *Newcastle Journal* read, 'A leading figure in the Northern Cinema World, Mr Dixon Scott...died in the Anglo-American hospital, Cairo, early on Sunday morning' (14 February 1939: 4).

²⁶ In fact the news theatres were not open at all hours. Cinemas in Newcastle city centre were not permitted to show films on a Sunday until April 1953. By this time Newcastle was the only significant regional city without Sunday opening. Frank Manders notes that there was considerable concern about juvenile delinquency both from church groups and some of the smaller cinemas and objections from smaller independent cinemas who would have to employ additional staff for Sunday opening. The matter was eventually put to a public vote on 30 October 1952 with the result that twice as many people voted in favour of Sunday opening than against (Manders 2005: 153-4).

²⁷ Le Neve Foster also encourages the production and exhibition of 'local topicals', films that would 'cash in on and exploiting an appeal to local patriotism' (1937: 35).

²⁸ The so-called 'super cinemas' programmes often included live stage shows.

²⁹ According to Frank Manders, the News Theatre had 402 seats (2005: 103) while the *Evening Chronicle* (1 February 1937) reported the number of seats was 410.

³⁰ Frank Manders notes that some of Newcastle's cinemas revealed a 'seamier side', in which rowdy and disruptive audiences were the norm (2005: 99).

³¹ Vaughan makes the insightful point that producers would be well advised to utilize the wealth of expertise accumulated by specialized theatre programmers (1940: 11).

³² By 1940 the English version of *Journal de Guerre*, the official French war newsreel, could be seen in approximately forty news and specialised theatres across Great Britain. *The March of Time* (1935-1951) was, according to Crosby and Kaye:

an American news magazine that was released in Britain and had an associated British film unit. It was founded in 1935 by Louis de Rochemont as an adjunct to *Time* magazine, though *The March of Time* had existed as a CBS radio series since 1931. The radio programme specialized in using actors to give voice to statements made by leading figures of the day, and this combination of dramatization and documentary was incorporated in the film version. Critics praised its dynamic nature and its engagement with controversies of the day, frequently contrasting its approach with that of the conventional newsreels' (2008: 165).

Point of View (1939-1941) was a monthly cinemagazine that, according to Crosby and Kaye, 'aimed to counter what its producers perceived as being the "propaganda" bias of the

documentary film by presenting pro[s] and cons of social and political issues of the day' (2008: 174).

³³ In her article on News and Specialised Theatres (1940: 10) D.M. Vaughan noted that one cinema, although she does not say which one, analysed the films it screened over the course of a year. The results, Vaughan suggested, 'provide a typical example of a news theatre programme'. The films were classified under nine main headings and the percentage of each shown was as follows:

News	18
Cartoon	17
Industrial	15
Social Study (including films of a controversial nature)	9
Travel	9
News (<i>March of Time</i>)	6
Entertainment	6
Comedy	5
Sport	5

³⁴ Sydney had to wax the edges of the films with candle wax to ensure they ran through the projectors as silently as possible.

³⁵ Despite the fact that no official documentation appears to remain research participant Sydney Stoker kept a personal record of all the News Theatre programmes that were shown during his time as a projectionist there from 4 April 1955 to 3 June 1963.

CHAPTER 4 - WARTIME NEWSREELS: PROPAGANDA AND MEMORY

Of all the newsreels recalled by the research participants, it was the wartime newsreels that featured most prominently. As one participant, Harold Kemp, suggested, 'I think during the war was the best for the newsreels 'cos there was more to deal with' (NRM46: 4). However, just as inconsistencies and contradictions arise in newsreel memory, so too, it appears conflicting views were already being expressed about newsreels during the 1940s, particularly during the Second World War. Although fondly remembered today, between 1939 and 1945 newsreels become the focus of considerable debate in terms of their usefulness as vehicles for wartime propaganda and their morale value. Indeed some of the contemporary views do not support the popular, nostalgic memory of the wartime newsreel as expressed by many research participants. This chapter explores something of the context within which the newsreels were received, examining in detail contemporary audience responses to newsreels in an attempt to better understand the contradictory role of newsreels within society, particularly in relation to the question of how to reconcile their role as *both* morale boosting entertainment and the bearer of bad news. Increasingly audiences became dissatisfied with newsreel content during the war, a trend revealed in two very different contexts; firstly, readers' letters sent to *Picturegoer* magazine concerning wartime newsreels; and secondly, Mass Observation's investigation of wartime newsreels and the public's reaction to them throughout 1940. The final part of this chapter focuses on setting these historic accounts alongside an exploration of older people's recollections of wartime newsreels and their role as propaganda. While newsreels were situated, particularly during the war, in a liminal space between official discourse and popular entertainment, newsreel memories are positioned at the four-way intersection between official and popular memory, and individual and shared memory. Thus, the gathered newsreel memories represent a complex articulation of both dominant social and cultural narratives and their internalisation and expression in personal narrative. While examining these tensions, as revealed in the gathered narratives, newsreel memory begins to emerge as a peculiarly liminal example of cultural memory, occupying a space between an imposed historical understanding of the role of the wartime newsreels and the possibility that the lived experiences and subsequent memory of newsreel viewing could be altogether different.

Just as total war impacted on everyday life, so it affected both newsreel content and audiences' responses. As has been well documented elsewhere, newsreels took on a special significance for audiences and for Government alike in the period leading up to and including

the Second World War.¹ However, the expectations of the war-time newsreels from audiences and Government were often quite different and, in some respects, even at odds. In an article written for *The Cine-Technician* as the prospect of war in Europe increased, George H. Elvin, General Secretary of the Association of Cine Technicians (A.C.T.), wrote:

[t]he newsreel companies should remember they are *news* and not propaganda sheets. They should provide news to appeal to their patrons as a whole and not let their reels be determined by the private interests of their owners or the feelings of officialdom. (Jan-Feb 1939: 145)

Elvin noted that the majority of the newsreels' executives were government supporters, and he felt their newsreels reflected this fact. Later during the war itself the newsreels assumed a particular political role, aimed at improving and sustaining home front and Allied morale. Despite remaining institutionally independent of government, they nevertheless promoted the official view of events and became a vital part of the rhetoric of total war. Their role was to persuade the British public that they were fighting a just war, attempt to allay fears of aerial bombardment and invasion, and ultimately the possibility of defeat (Fox, 2007: 7). Even the newsreels' propensity toward light entertainment was used in the service of home front morale, providing welcome light relief for war-weary audiences, although, as discussed later, their role as both propaganda vehicle and light entertainment were heavily criticised by audiences during the War (see figure 6). Nevertheless, the availability of (extant) material relating to the wartime newsreels is due, in no small part, to the fact that both officialdom and audiences began to take notice of them. It was their unique ability to capture wartime action and relay it swiftly to the cinema-going public that held out so much promise. However, this optimism quickly vanished, as the War appeared to throw many of the newsreels' inadequacies into sharp relief, and commentators and public alike expressed their dissatisfaction with the newsreels' style, content, presentation and, crucially, their lack of interpretation or analysis.



Figure 6: ‘Very Tasteful, Very Neat’ *Pathé Gazette* June 1949.
The commentary begins, ‘[I]n spite of the war the bathing season has come round again’.

4.1 NEWSREEL PROPAGANDA AND AUDIENCE MORALE

Questions relating to propaganda and morale were the subject of controversy and debate throughout the war, particularly regarding the role of propaganda in a democracy.² As a result, the newsreels were the site of considerable discussion about their use as propaganda, viewed by many as avowedly undemocratic and certainly un-British. If the authorities viewed the opportunity to use the newsreels in the service of propaganda as irresistible, the ‘Great British public’ felt somewhat differently and was disturbed by the prospect. For example, Ralph Denton, author of the *Picturegoer*’s weekly ‘Filmgoer’s Diary’, summed up the reaction of many ordinary filmgoers: ‘[t]here is [...] a natural aversion to propaganda films in this country. Particularly pro-British propaganda. It produces embarrassment, goose-pimples and such-like’ (1940: 16). The newsreels’ audience was familiar with a format that had been devoid of controversial or challenging material. Newsreels had, on the whole, presented a frothy mix of sport, society events, and ship launches, even managing to present bad news in an entertaining, upbeat manner. As a result, according to historian Philip M. Taylor, the newsreels played a significant role in achieving a sense of national unity (1999: 112).

As has already been noted, the newsreels placed a premium on entertainment; their self-appointed role was to inform the viewer while simultaneously mediating potential risks and dangers and, when necessary, providing patriotic reassurance in the face of fears, worries and anxieties. Just like the tabloid press, the newsreels were reassuring in their regularity and familiarity.³ Rachael Low maintains that the newsreels continued to play safe almost until war actually broke out ‘pretend[ing] that all was well [and continuing to] treat the events which led to War with the same bland avuncular commentary as items on beauty queens’ (1979: 40).

During the war, news output, which included the newsreels, the press, and radio (BBC), became the responsibility of the Ministry of Information’s Press and Censorship Division. According to historian Jo Fox, in order to calm nerves and steel the nation, it was the Ministry’s task ‘to persuade [the British] people that their worries were unfounded, that their sacrifices would be needed and that victory was assured’ (2007: 20). Thus, in order to guarantee their support, the Ministry had to convince the British people that the war was both necessary and justified. In the first few disastrous weeks and months of the British propaganda war, the Ministry appeared to struggle to gain the public’s support and trust due in no small part to the fact that the Ministry itself was unclear about whether it was to be a source of information or propaganda. According to James Chapman, the Ministry’s initial mishandling of news and information ‘quickly alienated both press and public’ alike (2000: 19). The ill-conceived official control order issued on 10 September 1939 banning all photography of military subjects inevitably led to rumour and suspicion and in turn had a profoundly negative effect on civilian morale. Interestingly, none of my elderly participants mentioned this censorship during the early months of conflict, perhaps because subsequent events overwhelmed this initially ill-judged approach to the wartime news media.

Undoubtedly during the war the newsreels had an unenviable job, as Nicholas Pronay points out ‘people hate bad news, and the bearer of bad news is never popular’ (1982: 203). Surveying the role of the news media throughout the war, Pronay highlights the fact that newsreels were poorly understood beyond those who produced them (1982: 184). As a result, no official thought had been given to the role of newsreels or, for that matter, films of any description during the war, principally because it was assumed cinemas would be forced to close as a consequence of aerial bombardment. The initial decision to close the cinemas during the first two weeks of the war was a deeply unpopular one, and when the anticipated onslaught failed to materialise, cinemas rapidly began to return to business as usual.⁴ Not until John Reith, former director-general of the BBC, was appointed Minister of Information

in January 1940, was the significant contribution the independently produced newsreels could make to the war effort finally recognised. Reith understood the importance of the news media in war and was explicit about the role of news in the propaganda war: 'news is the shock troops of propaganda' he wrote (cited in Pronay, 1982: 174). Thus, by the summer of 1940 the newsreels were 'left alone by the Films Division of the Ministry, to carry the main burden of the propaganda war' (Pronay 1982: 188). It was vital for Britain's reputation abroad, and morale on the home front, that all of the news media were seen as a credible source of war news; the point of propaganda and censorship was to create the impression of balance and integrity. As civilian morale came to be regarded as crucial to the outcome of war, there was an acknowledgement by government that the newsreels were of the utmost importance, regarded as they were as providing an immediate channel of communication with the public. Although throughout the war the newsreels were subject to censorship, by the summer of 1940 the nature of government intervention had changed considerably, and newsreels became subject to both, pre- and post- production censorship (see Pronay 1982: 192-7). On the whole, like the voluntary code of conduct undertaken by the newsreel companies in peacetime, there was a 'remarkable degree of harmony and understanding between the companies and the Ministry and between the censors and the newsreel men' (Pronay, 1982: 198). Although remaining officially independent, the newsreels were always careful not to openly criticise government policies, remaining, on the whole, supportive. Although the newsreels continued to protest their impartiality (Taylor, 1999: 195), during the War they became a government mouthpiece with inevitable consequences as 'news values were replaced by propaganda values' (Pronay, 1982: 200). Pronay contends that because of the weight of wartime bureaucracy and government intervention the newsreels lost 'something of their common touch' (1982: 204). Indeed, there was a growing and palpable disquiet amongst cinema audiences in response to wartime newsreels, manifested as widespread dismay at the prospect that the newsreels had become agents of government propaganda. In an article for *Documentary Newsletter* Mass-Observation's Tom Harrison discussed the apparent failure of the newsreels to engage the wartime cinema audience in similar terms:

[W]e found repeated cases where the newsreels alienated people by their political bias, by their treatment of emotional topics, by the commentaries (which are often unsympathetic to ordinary people), and have shown by numerous indications that they are sometimes out of touch with the feeling of the moment. (1940b: 10)

Harrison's statement gives an insight into the contemporary criticisms of the newsreels' coverage of events during the war and the disparity between newsreel producers and their audience. Indeed many respected commentators were uneasy at the prospect of the newsreels being utilised in the service of propaganda. By 1942, however, audience reactions to the newsreels had shifted from disquiet to indifference as they became bored and restless with seemingly endless images of war. Here, Herbert Cohen, Manager of The Tatler news theatre in Chester, bases his assessment on his audience's reactions to wartime newsreels:

With regard to the news reels I am very strongly of the opinion that there has been a continual falling off in the interest shown by audiences during the past year [...] the reason being the similarity between them all. I think people are a little tired of seeing tanks and aeroplanes without apparent end. (1942: 10)

Understandably, Cohen was keen to address the obvious lack of interest his audience displayed in relation to matters of national significance, which he put down to a 'surfeit of war items' (1942: 10). Importantly, however, Cohen's remarks reveal a disparity between the memories gathered for this research and his own contemporary observations. It would appear the nostalgia of wartime generational memory, and the popular mythology surrounding the newsreel phenomenon, contribute to this discrepancy; while of course, we must acknowledge a lack of detailed memory may simply reflect widespread war weariness. Historian Anthony Aldgate claims that audiences, comparing their own experience of events with those portrayed in the newsreels, found the cinematic representation lacking; the newsreels, it seems, were not keeping pace with public opinion. In his analysis of British newsreels and war, Aldgate has noted that the newsreels suffered a 'sharp decline in credibility' (1979: 62) from the outset of the Second World War. Here, it is useful to consider the views expressed by contemporary audiences themselves. In outlining the thoughts and feelings of the historic newsreel audience we begin to lay the foundations for later comparisons with the newsreel memories gathered for this research. From observation of the historic newsreel audience, the extent to which popular memory and mythology influence personal memory begins to become apparent. In addition, given the lack of investigative effort spent on the newsreels, the desire of the research participants to give newsreels significance far beyond what many cinema-goers felt at the time begins to emerge. In addition, any study of the historic newsreel audience necessitates an account of contemporary opinion, and so the pages below include an examination of Mass Observation's surveys of cinema audiences in 1940, the only cinema

survey to examine audiences' responses to newsreels in detail.⁵ What becomes manifest remarkably quickly when studying the historic newsreel audience is the scant availability of useful documentation – a lack which provides important clues about the contemporary status of newsreels.

4.2 PICTUREGOER MAGAZINE (1940)

In order to get a sense of what the cinema-going public felt about the wartime newsreels, let us turn to what, at first, seems a rather unlikely source. In 1940 a fascinating dialogue between the readers of *Picturegoer* magazine struck up, debating the pros and cons of the wartime newsreels. Although very few in number, these letters to the magazine provide an invaluable insight into the views of the historic cinema-going audience.⁶ The majority of the *Picturegoer* letters concerning the newsreels originate from April to July 1940. Most from this four month period – perhaps unsurprisingly, as people tend to write to complain rather than praise – are highly critical of the newsreels' coverage of war. What is particularly extraordinary about these letters is the fact that they are reprinted in the context of a magazine devoted almost entirely to the fripperies of Hollywood stardom and excess. One letter from the 6 July issue entitled 'War news reels' sits rather incongruously alongside a full page spread entitled 'Beauty Parlour - in attendance: Ann Bourn' in which beautician Ann Bourn responds, in great depth, to readers' concerns about applying their eye make-up (1940: 21). This extract seems to mirror the extremely uneasy relationship in which the newsreels and for that matter, short Government information films, found themselves within the context of the cinema-going experience where Hollywood-style glamour existed in an uncomfortable tension with a dose of reality in the form of wartime newsreels and public information shorts. Although the tension between news and escapist fantasy had always existed, it became more pronounced in the case of war reporting. In 1938 poet C. Day Lewis, writing about the newsreels' coverage of the Spanish Civil War, bemoaned the dream-like state induced by the cinema-going experience and the effect it had on the audiences' abilities to comprehend the realities of war. He wrote '[e]nter the dream-house, brothers and sisters, leaving [y]our debts asleep, your history at the door' (1992: 270). However, when war directly threatened the British people, many were in fact deeply affected by the newsreels' coverage of the conflict. In his diary of a wartime filmgoer, Guy Morgan recalled the impact the newsreels had on the cinema-going audiences' experience: 'the enjoyment or non-enjoyment of programmes was always profoundly affected by the newsreels' (1948: 69). Morgan's sentiments are reflected in the correspondence to *Picturegoer* concerning the wartime newsreels which began in April

1940. In a letter written the following month reader F. Hughes wrote to complain that he found the news boring:

We know we are a great nation. We know we are fighting for freedom of the democracies. We know all this, why keep shoving it down our throats? I pay my bob and I want entertainment. (11 May 1940: 21) ⁷

A letter from R. Hamilton of Bury Grammar School, published on 15th June under the heading, 'Newsreels Deteriorate?' expressed similar dismay at the wartime newsreels' content:

It is with regret that many of us have watched the decline in entertainment value of the newsreels, since the outbreak of war. From being the finest newsreels in the world, they have, without exception, degenerated into mere propaganda mouthpieces. (15 June 1940: 19)

Both F. Hughes' and R. Hamilton's correspondence highlight the problematic issue of propaganda, of which, as noted, the British public were already deeply suspicious. But there was another acute problem for the wartime newsreels that sparked considerable public debate and official anxiety – the problem of screening graphic material. In a letter published in *Picturegoer* under the heading 'Too Much Horror', reader 'H.H.' from Leighton-on-Sea expressed the views of many cinema-goers:

The war newsreel of to-day is horrifying us [...] As the war continues in all its fury, are we to be subjected to further horror....? No, unless the film distributors realise that we cannot sit in a luxury cinema watching these ghastly things, unless they relegate the war newsreel to its proper place, the News Theatre, we will stay outside the cinema for the duration. (15 June 1940: 19)

Similarly, another letter suggested that the appropriate place to present war news was definitely not the cinema: '[p]eople go to the cinema to relax and enjoy themselves, or if you like to put it, "to live in another world" for a few hours' (13 July 1940: 19). And in her

correspondence, reader Irene McKee from County Down recalled her distress on a recent trip to ‘the pictures’:

I decided to go to the cinema, to forget the war for a brief spell [...] then came the news – towns being bombed, houses on fire, women and children homeless. [...] Must we have news reels such as the one mentioned above? We go to the pictures to get away from war and everything connected with it. We go to laugh and be happy. (22 June 1940: 19)

In response to these criticisms *Picturegoer* printed readers’ letters in support of the newsreels. In the first of these, reader Joan Wilson argued that the British people should not be shielded from the grim realities of war. Joan’s letter begins, ‘[w]hy should we hide from ourselves the fact that our men are fighting a grim battle?’ (6 July 1940: 21). Published in the following week’s edition, a letter from reader Pauline Lindon also took issue with the censoring of the harsh realities of modern warfare:

These vivid pictures of our battle front are painful and harrowing, but [...] as propaganda, necessary propaganda, they will reach further than any words can ever do. “Seeing is believing” is a very true statement. So however hard – on with our newsreels, please! (13 July 1940: 19)

The tide of public opinion seemed to be turning as the grim realities of war took hold and, as Philip M. Taylor claims, by 1941 the British public were beginning to reject the patronising attitude of the British ruling elite that it (the public) ‘could only stomach optimism and not bad news’ (1999: 173), a view a number of the *Picturegoer* letters examined above would seem to support.

4.3 MASS-OBSERVATION (1940)

As Annette Kuhn notes (2002), from its earliest years, cinema-going had caused public anxiety about its possible effects, including damage to eyesight and fatigue, and mounting concern was being expressed about the potentially negative psychological effects of regular cinema-going. However, as noted above, what is remarkable about studies of cinema audiences in general undertaken throughout the 1930s and 1940s is the degree to which they ignore the newsreels. Studies of effects undertaken during this period are almost entirely

focused on the fiction feature film, rather than any of the factual forms of cinema. The only social survey to look specifically at the cinema audience and newsreels was Mass-Observation. However, here too the accounts produced are problematic and partial; they cover only 1940, they are few in number, and they only address audiences' likes and dislikes in relation to newsreels. Writing about the use of the Mass-Observation reports in relation to intelligence reports for the Ministry of Information, historian Michael Balfour warns, '[t]here is a certain amount of useful material [...] but it needs to be used with caution as Mass-Observation was apt to generalise from inadequate data' (Balfour, 1979: 447); further, Mass-Observation made no distinction between the regular cinema and the news theatre audiences. As noted, the newsreel specific reports were only conducted in 1940 thus, although trends can be identified throughout this short period, there are no pre- or post- war records with which to make a comparison. In addition, 1940 was undoubtedly an extraordinary year in British history and, therefore, not one that provides a representative picture of the role of newsreels in everyday life. Nevertheless, in an area in which there is very little extant historical data relating directly to the newsreel audience, the Mass-Observation reports do provide a fascinating and at times, contradictory record of wartime responses to the newsreel, revealing, a 'mosaic of opinions' (Fox, 2007: 17). Further, the newsreel reports are useful in the contradictory picture they paint of audiences' responses to wartime newsreels particularly when compared firstly to the popular mythology of the role of the wartime newsreel and secondly and more specifically, to the current research participants' personal memories. Although not conclusive, this suggests that personal memory is influenced by popular and insistent mythologizing of the past; and it is for these reasons that I include a detailed overview of Mass-Observation's newsreel reports.

During the inter-war years cinema had become the most popular form of entertainment and, given the popularity of cinema-going during the period, it was inevitable, as Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (1987) point out, that cinemas were prime targets for the observational work on leisure of the Mass-Observation social survey. Undertaking a wide ranging social investigation of contemporary British life and adopting broadly anthropological aims, Mass-Observation aimed to study British life at 'first hand' (Street, 2000: 133). In 1939, with Britain on the brink of war, anthropologist Tom Harrisson, one of the organization's founding members, was quick to recognise the potential value of Mass-Observation's work; monitoring civilian morale would provide Government with invaluable information. Despite initial misgivings about the group's potentially subversive left-wing tendencies, and what were regarded as its 'lack of scientific and methodological rigour'

(Richards and Sheridan, 1987: 6), the group began their officially supported war work in September 1939 (Balfour: 1979: 72).

Given its proven ability to closely observe the British population in a wide variety of contexts, the work of Mass-Observation was officially recognised, and supported, during the war years as a form of home intelligence. It was agreed that its work on home front morale would bring to Government attention areas of concern whilst suggesting possible ways in which these concerns might be addressed. Using a range of indicators including audiences' behaviour in cinemas, their reactions to well-known figures and their responses to newsreels, Mass-Observation began to supply the Ministry of Information's Department of Home Intelligence with reports on the state of the nation's morale. Reading Mass-Observation's primary film reporter Len England's accounts, one gets a sense of the afore mentioned 'mosaic of opinions' (Fox 2007: 17) as individual audience members' responses appear to conflict, making an accurate summation of the gathered data extremely difficult. Nor does applause, on which much of the observation data is based, provide a reliable measure of approval, particularly given that cinema audiences were, by and large, simply responding to prompts by the newsreel commentators themselves which were guaranteed to raise some sort of response, and, as Mass-Observation themselves identified, some audiences were more responsive than others.⁸ Tom Harrison addressed the issues of the reliability and validity of the organization's methods in an article published in *Documentary News Letter*. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, he concluded, '[w]atching audience responses in cinemas gives us the same sort of information about what is really going on in people's minds as we get from intimate war diaries, or dream studies' (1940b: 11). Although Harrison's claims appear to be somewhat exaggerated, what the Mass-Observation reports from 1940 indicate are the changing fortunes of the newsreels throughout the first full year of war, with audience reaction ranging variously from disappointment and apathy to horror and keen interest.

The most pressing questions to be answered with regard to the newsreels, as far as Mass-Observation and the Ministry of Information were concerned, was their credibility with the public, 'did they believe the stories? Did they care about the authenticity of the footage?' (Richards and Sheridan 1987: 8). Although Mass-Observation's invaluable work provides a detailed record of the cinema-going habits of the British people, including the views of the audience themselves, according to Richards and Sheridan they were 'never able ultimately to determine how, if at all, films influenced people's behaviour and attitudes, arguably the *raison d'être* of their MoI work' (1987: 11).

Mass-Observation was interested in both the newsreels' subject matter and the public's attitude toward them. Although the group's reports on newsreels' content are interesting, the focus of interest for this research is predominantly the audiences' reactions observed by the survey. In the first of his newsreel file reports, from January 1940, Len England concluded that the newsreels had accurately judged public taste, a conclusion drawn from the fact that '[s]ince the war the public figures who have appeared most in the newsreels are those that have been most applauded' (FR22: 5).⁹ England went on to report that the 'shifting of emphasis from politicians to the royal family may indicate that the public now prefers the uninterfering royalty to troublesome Members of Parliament' (FR22: 5). What England was witnessing was an early indication of the audiences' dislike of the politicization of the newsreels. However, England was also detecting the public's dissatisfaction with the content of the newsreels which, they complained, contained either no news "[t]hey are all right most of them. There's not much news in them, of course" (Woman, 20, middle class) – or, they repeated the same news stories – "[t]hey are the same thing over and over again" (Man, 40, worker); "'They're good when you've only seen them once but after two or three times" (Man, 20, middle class)' (all FR22: 7). Additionally, in his January report, England noted the appearance of a 'new tendency [...] to produce in newsreels both faked news and reconstructions of events that could not be filmed, and also comic interludes that have no direct connection with any news item' (FR22: 5). England concluded that while this tendency was either the direct result of the lack of news or the result of the difficulty of obtaining footage, the practice set a dangerous precedent. He noted that in one instance in which faked footage had been used to enliven what would otherwise have been a rather dull piece, the audience laughed. He wrote, '[i]n their true form the newsreels can be regarded as a record more accurate than any other, but once reconstruction or faking appears, their whole value is lost' (FR22: 5). Indeed according to England, 6% of his respondents felt they could not believe *anything* they saw in the newsreels. As one respondent noted "I think the newsreels are hoey, they tell you what is dished up every five minutes on the wireless [...] I don't believe a thing, honestly" (Woman, 20, working class)' (FR22: 7). However, England observed that when dramatic action footage was screened, the audience responded enthusiastically. At a screening of the scuttling of the Graf Spee (caught on camera by newsreel crews), England reported that '[a]t the end of it the audience at The Cameo, Charing Cross Road, as a rule most unresponsive, clapped loudly, and even a fortnight later a suburban audience applauded' (FR22: 1). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the dramatic spectacle of the exploding and rapidly sinking battleship, this newsreel footage was

remembered by a number of my elderly male participants including Charlie Hall and John Charlewood.

Regardless of the often rather confusing picture England's wartime newsreel reports produce, they give a vivid sense of the mood of the nation at the time, and the impact the conflict was having on the public, such as in the following extract:

[B]efore the war, even in the last weeks of August, the only response to shots of soldiers was laughter. On not one occasion since the war has any soldier been laughed at [...] Though there has been no laughter, there has been a good deal of clapping at the sight of soldiers and sailors. (FR22: 1)

Despite the lack of news in the early months of war England noted that '[s]ince the start of the war the newsreels have continued to contain much propaganda, a little too much, judging from the questionnaires' (FR22: 5). Some of the comments gathered included: "[t]hey're all right when they are not saturated with propaganda as they invariably are" (Man, 25 middle class)' or ' "[t]here's too much glorious Britain, triumphant Britain about them" (Man, 25, worker)' (both FR22: 7). England noted that similar criticism had been levelled against the Ministry of Information feature *The Lion Has Wings* (1939, d. Powell, Hurst and Brunel) 'where it was established that any propaganda to be successful must be concealed. The newsreels [...] are not masking their propaganda sufficiently to give it most effect' (FR.22: 8). Thus, the question of the relationship between the wartime newsreels and propaganda, which, as noted, Britons regarded with grave suspicion, quickly became extremely controversial. The obvious resistance of the British public toward overt propaganda was not confined to the newsreels, and Mass-Observation (as noted above) reported audiences expressed equal dislike of propaganda-fuelled features.

In File Report 22, England also recorded considerable comment from audiences in response to the inclusion of 'horrific shots' (FR22: 6), including audiences' expression of their dislike of 'shots of actual fighting' (FR22: 7): "You get a lot of destruction in them, and my lady doesn't like it" (Man, 40, worker); "The bombing of Helsinki was a bit too realistic. It's all right showing war, I suppose, but that was a bit too much" (Woman, 20, working class)' (both FR22: 8). Here the description of the footage of the Helsinki bombing as 'a bit too realistic' reveals the invidious position in which the newsreels found themselves – within a light entertainment context. On the other hand, as England noted, many people were very supportive of the newsreels' coverage; for example one respondent admitted

“‘[t]hey are interest number one for me” (Man, 50, middle class)’ (FR22: 8). In summary, England calculated on the basis of returned questionnaires that the only group who strongly disliked the newsreels were men under thirty, ‘of the middle classes’; in contrast, he observed that ‘not a single woman over thirty had any criticism to make of newsreels’ (FR22: 6). However, one wonders how accurate an indicator of opinion these statistics actually represent or if they are simply indicative of class, gender and age distinctions.¹⁰ Increasingly England’s observations recorded a growing dissatisfaction with repetitive newsreel content as recorded in subsequent Mass-Observation reports. Paradoxically, this disquiet was magnified by the fact that the newsreels were beginning to take on an increased significance and profile; as the conflict escalated the public were looking to the newsreels for news and information and, as a result, were increasingly disappointed by their conspicuous absence.

By May 1940 audiences’ dissatisfaction with the newsreels had apparently grown worse: Mass Observation observers in cinemas noted ‘continual signs of boredom’ (FR141: 2). In the observers’ opinion this was due to the general feeling that “‘we’ve seen this all before”, as all shots, however well taken, of damaged streets and refugees bear great similarity to one another’ (FR141: 2). However, the May report records that footage of the armed forces, which took up the majority of newsreel screen time, was still regularly applauded. England noted that although *British Movietone News* had attempted to satirize Hitler in a very short newsreel sequence, the attempt was misjudged and there was ‘very little laughter...Nobody is in a mood to laugh at Hitler now’ (FR141: 3). He concluded that although the content of the newsreels had changed very little, ‘[i]n dealing with personalities, the newsreels seem to have lost some of their judgment of popular taste’ (FR141: 3). It should be remembered however, that his conclusion was reached by recording waning levels of applause, a less than accurate barometer of opinion, particularly given that Mass-Observation themselves had commented on the different levels of audience responsiveness in different cinemas (FR213: 2).

However, the situation in terms of Britain’s war status, and the status of the newsreels themselves, changed dramatically on Friday 10th May 1940 when Germany invaded France, Belgium and Holland; up until this date, with a few notable exceptions (for example the sinking of the Graf Spee as mentioned above), very little actual war footage had been available to screen. An article that appeared in the trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* a week later entitled ‘Newsreels are now top of the bill’, explained:

From now on the newsreel will be of extreme importance and will have to be given a place of honour in the programme of all classes of kinemas. That the public will anxiously follow the swaying tide of our destinies on the screen is obvious and exhibitors would do well to consider special exploitation methods for to-day newsreels are “top of the bill”. (16 May 1940: 1)

However, despite *Kinematograph Weekly*'s optimism, it became plain that this view was not necessarily supported by cinema-goers. As Mass-Observation reported, responses to the increase in graphic war footage had invariably ‘consisted of cries of “oh” and other signs of horror’ (FR141: 6). Len England noted that the newsreels were in an invidious position because of their exhibition in the regular cinema. He went on to observe that in the event that the war should become more violent, cinema would increasingly become a form of escape from the harsh day to day realities of the conflict, but that the presence of graphic newsreel footage ‘will immediately shatter any such illusions’ (FR141: 6). On the other hand, he surmised that if audiences did enjoy such newsreel footage, then the consequences could be grave. Just as audiences had grown apathetic to repeated newsreel coverage of the fighting in Finland, so too they might grow bored with, and uninterested in, coverage of fighting closer to home.

As total war continued, Mass-Observation began to report the increasing levels of dissatisfaction and disquiet of many cinema-goers toward the newsreel footage. As Len England noted:

An (M-O) observer coming out of a cinema overheard this remark from an elderly middle-class woman, “Oh, I wish I’d missed the news. With the other two pictures I forgot all about the war for an hour or two, but those horrid pictures brought it all back”. (FR141: 6)

In the following newsreel report it was noted that a Mass-Observation observer in a Streatham cinema heard one elderly audience member remark, “Gertie and I cried all through the newsreel. Those poor boys out there in all that. The pictures were terrible”, while at a Watford cinema, another observer heard one girl say to her friend of shots of air raid destruction, “I don’t think they should show you this, do you?” (FR215: 1). Mass-Observation noted that graphic coverage, although unpopular and the cause of much comment, continued to constitute the majority of newsreel issues. Paradoxically the

newsreels had asked ‘time and time again to be allowed to “lighten the reel”’ (Pronay 1982: 203), but were refused permission by the Ministry of Information. It appears too, from the Mass-Observation reports, that while audiences were making their opinions of the horrific content apparent, they were also responding more vociferously to other coverage. According to Mass-Observation, a *British Movietone News* item featuring Mussolini entitled ‘The Italian Assassin’¹¹ was received with ‘immediate and widespread outburst of hisses, boos, catcalls and laughs’, while the coverage of the evacuation of Dunkirk, presented by Pathé, ‘gained a higher response of applause than anything else yet noted by an observer’ (FR215: 1-2).¹² Despite this brief hiatus filled with heightened and often conflicting responses, the newsreels continued to lose their popularity. In its final Newsreel Report on 7 October 1940, Mass-Observation published figures revealing that those who liked the newsreels had fallen from 61% in December 1939 to just 24% less than a year later; and half of those questioned said they disliked them.

In an article for *Documentary News Letter* the following month Tom Harrison summarised the Mass-Observation organisation’s findings on all aspects of wartime British cinema, including the newsreels: ‘we have watched what we believe to a pretty steady decline in the prestige, never high, of the newsreels, in the past year’ (1940: 11). Exactly a year later and, according to *Documentary News Letter*, the situation had deteriorated still further:

The public expects to see the progress of the war reported on screen. It looks to the newsreels to fill this need [...] The scrappiness of the present day newsreel has gone far towards destroying its value as a medium of propaganda and public information. (November 1941: 205)

Ironically, according to Philip M. Taylor, the growing recognition that ‘newsfilm’ had an important role to play as a ‘weapon of war’ (1999: 188) resulted in a vast improvement in the supply of spectacular combat footage, but unfortunately the damage had already been done. As Nicholas Pronay has argued, the newsreels never regained the popularity they had enjoyed before the war and, as a result, they succumbed to the pressure of television ‘more easily perhaps than they might’ (1982: 204).

4.4 WARTIME NEWSREEL MEMORIES

Finally, then, we turn to the memories of wartime newsreels gathered for this research. As noted above, comparing the gathered recollections to the contemporary records of newsreel

audiences' opinions from the 1940s provides a useful indication of the extent to which popular memory and mythology influence personal memory. Although, as stated in Chapter One, the intention here is not to debunk the mythology surrounding the Second World War and its newsreels, I would like to consider an extended quote from revisionist historian Clive Ponting (1990). Here Ponting's assessment of the Ministry of Information's attempts to appraise the state of public morale in 1940 is useful because it highlights the value of comparing past and present opinion:

These contemporary records paint a picture of Britain in 1940 that differs markedly from the view popularly accepted today. The accepted view reflects the contemporary propaganda line rather than reality, yet it has become so strongly entrenched that it has affected individual memory about moods and morale in 1940. In the mid-1970s, when the Mass-Observation archive was catalogued, the organisers contacted the people who had provided diaries and information in 1940 and asked them to describe again how they had felt during that dramatic year. Their later accounts are seen through rose-tinted spectacles: they are full of received notions of unity of purpose, high morale, calmness and valiant struggle. These directly contradict both their contemporary impressions and the reality of Britain in 1940, when boredom, apathy and pessimism were widespread. (1990: 160)

Ponting's assessment is included here because, as outlined above, an increasing number of contemporary wartime audiences claimed to be dissatisfied with the newsreels' coverage of events, and yet my participants recall with great clarity the morale boosting role the newsreels played. In the People's War it has been assumed, and not only by lay people, that the newsreels undoubtedly played an important part in maintaining home front morale.¹³ For example, research participant Thelma Miller's remarks are indicative of the kind of 'rose-tinted' memories Ponting has in mind:

[T]hey did a wonderful service the newsreel; and during the war, these people who were the correspondents – they all deserved knighthoods they were fantastic, they went into. Well like today, the cameramen go into Iran it's exactly – nothing's changed, except we get it immediately into our

houses. In those days we had to go to the cinema, but those correspondents, they put their life on the line every day. (NRM08: 10)

Thelma's recollection provides a lovely example of shuttlework, her description of 'correspondents' moves effortlessly between past and present, to such an extent that it becomes rather unclear which period (past or present) she is referring to in the phrase 'they *get* [my emphasis] some amazing film shots'; she appears to conflate the work of past and present news correspondents. In addition, rather unusually given the overwhelming nostalgia for the period, Thelma's testimony demonstrates a favourable comparison between past and present, as according to Thelma 'nothing's changed'.¹⁴

A number of participants undertook this process of 'shuttlework' (Portelli 1991: 65), or the past/present trope as Annette Kuhn refers to it (2002: 10), to emphasise the significance of the wartime newsreels as they compared past and present coverage of war.¹⁵ While acknowledging that the sample is too small to draw general conclusions, a striking pattern occurred which deserves attention. The participants who had nothing but fulsome praise for the newsreels are on the whole older women like Jean and Thelma. In 1940, as noted above, Len England had reported that 'not a single woman over thirty had any criticism to make of newsreels' (FR22: 6). Although it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions without further study, it appears that gender and age continue to influence opinion, even in distant memory. However, as Ponting's analysis of wartime morale suggests, in examining memories of wartime newsreels we face a complex mosaic of memories, often overshadowed by received notions and entrenched views, and all inflected by individual consciousness. Despite a generalised acceptance of the popular mythology of the newsreels around a quarter of participants expressed some misgivings about their wartime role. For example, George Henderson, a former shipyard worker, recalled the newsreels as always being 'cheerful, upbeat' during the war, adding that they always had a positive effect on morale: '[N]ewsreels always gave the impression we were winning. How much credence people made to them, I don't know' (NRM44: 1). George's caveat, that he does not actually know whether people believed them or not, slipped in at the end of his sentence as an after-thought, suggests a degree of scepticism, no doubt concluded in hindsight, but one in which he challenges the popular mythology of the newsreel. Participant John Charlewood recalled that '[e]ven in 1940, 1941 [the newsreels] made it quite clear that Britain was winning the war [laughs], and that Hitler hadn't much of a chance [laughs]'.¹⁶ John's laughter appears to indicate his retrospective evaluation of the newsreel coverage; in hindsight, and only in hindsight, it is

possible to laugh at what now seems an outrageous and obviously wildly optimistic claim made by the newsreels. Later in our conversation John went on ‘[the newsreels were] incredibly optimistic. Very positive [...] You wouldn’t hear the other side of the story’ (NRM03: 22). When I asked John and his wife Tricia whether they considered the newsreels’ approach to reporting justified in the circumstances of war they replied:

T.C. Well, I think it is you know. Yes [...] Because they just wanted to keep the morale of the people up.

J.C. And they didn’t want to give information to the enemy.

L.A. So [...] morale on the home front was important?

T.C. Oh yes, very important...“Do your bit”. “Dig for Victory”. “Don’t be a Squander Bug”, wasn’t that one? (NRM03: 22-23)

Given the complexity of the gathered memories then, it is simply not adequate to claim that they reveal a rosy, quaintly nostalgic view of newsreels. Here we see that the research participants indulged in a complex and dynamic process of analysis in which many of them became vernacular theorists (McLaughlin 1996). In the following extract Christopher Beadle demonstrates a deft use of analytical ‘shuttlework’ to expose the complex role the newsreels played during war and how circumstances, attitudes and audiences have changed:

I’m sure during the war it would be partial but [...] if it had been presented in a balanced way, seeing a German point of view, it would have been an absolute outrage, you know. And there was certainly, I don’t think, there was any lobby saying, as you would get today, saying, “you’re not presenting the enemy’s.” You know now, in the war against terror, you know the Government’s got to be very careful to present the Muslim point of view as well. (NRM35: 9)

As Christopher’s recollections suggest with regard to wartime, newsreel memories constitute anything but a straightforward comparison of past and present, emerging instead as a complex, often critical, mixture of analysis, nostalgia and, in some cases as discussed below, self deprecation.

4.5 PLATO'S NOBLE LIE: NEWSREEL PROPAGANDA MEMORY AND VERNACULAR THEORISING

By comparing the contemporary reactions to newsreel propaganda outlined above, the processes of newsreel memory formation begin to be revealed. It is only through the processes of memory work that the many apparent contradictions encountered throughout the gathered testimonies can be fully explored and accounted for. Susannah Radstone has noted that memory work continues to hold distinctions between society and the individual in tension (2000: 11). Building on Radstone's ideas, I now turn to the tension between the social and the individual, that is, between dominant social ideas and their subsequent internalization, a trait that becomes manifest in memory talk of wartime newsreel propaganda in particular. In attempting to reconcile the personal and the ideological, subjects' memories of wartime newsreel propaganda are examined, and it is here that participants appear in hindsight to both recognise and justify the use of newsreel propaganda in war.

In his insightful account of 'vernacular theory' introduced in Chapter One, Thomas McLaughlin (1996) claims that theory, far from being an elite activity, is in fact 'an integral and crucial element in everyday culture' (1996: 29). McLaughlin's notion of a 'healthy skepticism', or a critically resistant mode of thinking learnt locally from family and neighbourhood culture, provides a useful pretext from which to examine my participants' remembered experiences and more particularly the formation of their memories of newsreel propaganda. McLaughlin was keen to prove that vernacular theory is widely practiced and that 'individuals who do not come out of a tradition of philosophical critique are capable of raising questions about dominant cultural assumptions' (1996: 5). He explores the way in which non-academics are able to acquire a level of critical consciousness which enables them to be sceptical or ask serious questions about the culture they inhabit. With regard to this study's participants it appears that, despite appreciable differences in economic, cultural, and social backgrounds, what binds the first self-identified cohort together beyond their obvious interest in newsreels is a critical consciousness, a desire to question, a curiosity and, in some cases, a scepticism encouraged and valued by their family.¹⁷ Thus, each participant who responded to my requests for information, to some extent, used their experiences to ask questions about the reliability or otherwise of the wartime newsreels. McLaughlin notes, in her study of the readers of romantic fiction, that Janice Radway found that although they knew nothing of feminist theory, readers had 'understood the realities of patriarchal culture' (1996: 20). Here, in a similar display of untutored critique, my subjects understood and accepted the role of the news media in war. However, despite the presentation of their

recollections, we must assume that much of the work of vernacular critique has taken place over many years and with a considerable degree of hindsight. The complex processes of newsreel memory formation, resulting in the recollections gathered for this research, are, without question, the result of both early familial encouragement and retrospective vernacular analysis and critique.

All of my participants had, to varying degrees, a theory – their own analysis of the newsreels – and while all of them admired the newsreels and felt they were an important part of the dissemination of news, this did not stop them from a retrospective critique of the newsreels’ methods, style and content.¹⁸ For example, participant Steve Whitley’s assessment demonstrates an extraordinary degree of insight and historical understanding:

On reflection, and having seen some of them again, I realise that in fact, they were part of the Ministry of Information propaganda machine. I mean they were done through Gaumont and Pathé and so on, but they were still, in effect, Ministry of Information films. (NRM21: 4)

Steve’s retrospective understanding of the newsreels may have been possible by what McLaughlin would call ‘a theoretical insight in a vernacular mode’ (1996: 18). Steve’s insightful analysis of the newsreels’ role in wartime propaganda, echoed by many of the participants, suggests a sophisticated understanding of the ideological positioning and purpose of the wartime newsreels. However, as he admits, his assessment has only become possible in hindsight – Steve was just five years old when war broke out. In his role as vernacular theorist, a role closely associated in the context of the interviews with the role of vernacular historian, Steve offered the following observation: ‘[y]ou’ve known only wars which have been controversial, the Second World War was not controversial [...] at the time it was something which everybody agreed with’ (NRM21: 4). A recurring feature of the interview with Steve was his demonstrable ability to rationalise both his own and other people’s attitudes. His observation deftly accounts for the degree of consensus throughout the gathered testimonies as the result of the agreement amongst the British people about the need to go to war. In answering my question with a statement, Steve rather expertly puts me – the interviewer – in my place, highlighting my lack of experience of uncontroversial conflict and placing me outside his sphere of knowledge and lived experience.¹⁹

Steve could, along with many of my participants, be described as a socially interested agent (Fiske, 1989), particularly with regard to issues of censorship and propaganda, since he

clearly understood the political dimensions of its wartime use. In other words, although my participants claimed to have recognised the less than fulsome truth of wartime newsreel reporting, they also expressed their understanding of the need for particular measures to be taken in extraordinary times. During the course of another conversation, retired journalist Doug Weatherall responded to a question about the news being ‘doctored’ (as he put it) with the following:

I’m sure it was [doctored]. I mean you can understand why - you don’t want to feed the enemy lots of information, and neither do you want to discourage the people back home about failure. I mean that’s part of the propaganda of any, of any side in any war. (NRM22: 9)

Doug’s wonderfully clear explanation of the purpose of wartime propaganda and censorship reveals a degree of careful thought and analysis. However, as already noted, the fact that most of the participants were children during the war – including Doug who was seven when war broke out – suggests that this understanding has come with hindsight. So, although some participants claimed to have been aware of wartime propaganda and censorship at the time, this seems extremely unlikely given their ages. In order to account for this claim, I would suggest they are reclaiming the attitudes their parents expressed at the time and similar popularly expressed attitudes over the intervening sixty years. However, it is not *when* this process of vernacular theorizing took place that I am concerned with, but the fact that my participants have, at some point in the past, engaged with debates around the issues of wartime newsreel propaganda and censorship. Indeed, it may even have been the particular circumstances in which they found themselves, that is, taking part in a research project, which prompted some participants to engage in a retrospective critical analysis of wartime newsreels. As McLaughlin has noted with reference to one of his own research group’s debate on issues of gender, class and race, ‘[t]hey knew they were in a special set of circumstances that allowed big ideas and free-wheeling talk’ (1996: 28). As McLaughlin suggests, the research interview context provided just the ‘special circumstances’ to enable my participants to express their personal theories of both the value of newsreels and their use as wartime propaganda. These insights, whether formed contemporaneously or in hindsight, remind us that, ‘ideological power isn’t total, that political resistance is made possible by intellectual critique, and that it is not only “intellectuals” who can produce that critique’ (McLaughlin 1996: 29).

However, as noted in Chapter Two, the special circumstances within which remembering takes place can also result in exaggeration. In order to fully appreciate the complexity of newsreel memory talk, I want briefly to turn my attention to one particular participant, Jean Murray, a keen vernacular historian, and an enthusiastic supporter of the Tyneside Cinema, having been involved in various oral history projects that emerged from the cinema's Picture Palace project. Jean is a smart woman who clearly enjoyed being involved in local history projects: her animated responses to questions were fascinating, and reveal what Susannah Radstone refers to as a 'retreat into nostalgia' (2000: 8) or a kind of sentimental remembering. While other participants extolled the virtues of the newsreels, none did so with her gusto. For example, she described the newsreels as

All the very latest up to the minute news; like it would come on the television [...] as soon as a battle was won or something happened they were at the news - th...they were all over the country at the news theatres and that was how people. You didn't have to wait for a newspaper the next day you know [...] with the news theatres it was practically instant. (NRM09: 11-12)

As outlined in Chapter One, the memories gathered here are not examined for evidence of historical accuracy, nor is there any suggestion that Jean is being economical with the truth; what she told me is how she remembers the newsreels, which, as discussed elsewhere, provides important insights into the value of the newsreels for individuals. Nevertheless, her recollections reveal something about the influential status of the popular mythology surrounding the newsreels, and the part this popular mythologizing plays in newsreel memory formation. Jean's acceptance of the popular myth of the newsreel as a precursor to television news appears to result in a lack of retrospective analysis. However, it may also be possible that Jean wanted to 'say the right thing'. Having presented herself as a vernacular (local) historian, she was keen to accentuate the positive and give the research a 'good story'. While Jean's recollection is rather exceptional – her positive 'spin' on the newsreels presents them as able to provide 'practically instant' news coverage. Whereas news items often took days, even weeks, to reach the screen – her testimony provides an interesting counterpoint to the previous wartime newsreel recollections of participants who, to a greater or lesser degree, were able to critically assess the newsreels' inadequacies. Thus, the diversity of critical responses to the question of wartime newsreels serves to reveal the enormous complexity of newsreel memory formation, based not only on the dynamic relationship between the

individual and the social outlined by Radstone but, as McLaughlin has suggested, the special set of circumstances within which research participants articulate their memories.

Given the context within which the majority of audiences encountered the newsreels (in regular cinemas), it is unsurprising that confusions and contradictions between fact and fiction or between the serious and the trivial abound. In terms of their propaganda value, Philip M. Taylor concludes that the newsreels trod a fine line between ‘alienating their audience by constantly pushing out propaganda – people [...] went to the pictures to be entertained – and explaining the news’ (1999: 95). Research participants John and Tricia Charlewood talked freely about this apparent anomaly, suggesting that the newsreels did not actually contain ‘anything too serious’:

J.C. Don’t think it would show all that much, as a rule, difficult subject matter.

T.C. No, I don’t think it would, not in the way the news does now. I mean some of them did, but I think when you’re just going to be entertained it would just be sort of information, wouldn’t it? “And today the King went and did this, that and the other. And the Queen did this.” So it wouldn’t be anything too serious. (NRM03: 13)

As John and Tricia’s comments make clear, the newsreels shared much in common with the tabloid press, which, as Stuart Allan (2004) has observed, maintain a clear strategy of upbeat, patriotic presentation. However, unlike the tabloids, the newsreels provided little comment and certainly no analysis, something for which, as we have seen, they were often heavily criticised. In the following extract, participant Yvonne Edwards talks about the newsreels’ role in fostering a sense of national safety and security and, like Tricia Charlewood, she describes the newsreels as providing ‘information’ rather than news:

Well, they [newsreels] were really a life line, or an information line, because you know, very little was said over the air, because they [the government] didn’t know who would be listening [...] I think they would do lots of things like that you know. (NRM50: 2)

Yvonne’s revelation that radio transmissions were not secure, but by implication the cinema screenings were, is not one shared by any other participant, the military, nor even the Ministry of Information, who, as we have seen, censored all sensitive newsreel material. In

fact Philip M. Taylor concludes that the military were over-zealous in their attempts to conceal information from the media, fearing that the so-called fifth columnists (spies) might be ‘sitting in British cinemas scrutinising newsreels for clues to troop locations and equipment’ (1999: 177). Interestingly, Yvonne’s supposition that ‘they would do lots of things like that’ suggests a resignation to the imposition of wartime measures including censorship of news. In this regard, participant Molly Alexander had a subtly different interpretation:

[T]hey showed us – what they showed the people what they wanted to, you see. Not the real thing [...] what *they* wanted you to know, you know because it was a very tricky situation at the very beginning of the war. I know it was called the ‘phoney war’ ‘cos nothing was happening, but plenty was happening, as you know now, by the documentaries you see in different countries. (NRM13: 6)

Unlike Yvonne, Molly’s inclusion of the conspiratorial ‘they’ suggests her distrust of official news output. Molly’s recollection gives the clearest indication of the process of complex memory formation, inflected by the benefit of hindsight and, as Molly suggests, encounters with cultural products (e.g. television documentaries) over the years which have informed her view. Reflection on past selves and past times in this way allowed subjects in some cases the critical distance to consider their personal reactions towards newsreel propaganda and censorship. This dialogue between past and present self or, as Nancy Huggett refers to it the negotiation between the narrated self (past self) and narrating self (present self) (2002: 208), manifests itself in participants’ willingness to reflect and pass judgment, particularly on the perceived propaganda of the newsreels, and their responses to it. For example, Steve Whitley recalled, ‘I wanted to know what was going on, and they were, I now realise, terrible propaganda but nevertheless then I thought gave a true picture of what was going on’ (NRM21: 4). Such earnest self-reflection becomes manifest in subjects’ willingness to admit a strong desire to want to believe the newsreels at the time, a desire shared by the nation as a whole, and clearly demonstrates participants’ understanding of the importance of home front morale during the war.

One of the study’s oldest participants Osmond (Ossie) Nicholson, a spritely ninety year old, usefully presented an opportunity to examine the memories of someone who was an adult during the War – Ossie was twenty-two when the Second World War broke out.

Throughout his testimony he provided exactly the same assessment as those participants who were children at the time. Ossie recalled, '[y]ou saw the war moving on the screen, as much as was allowed to be shown of course, apart from censorship, scenes from the war as it went on' (NRM14: 8). He recalled that he saw the Battle of El Alamein (1942) in what he described as 'limited form, cos they didn't like to show you everything' (NRM14: 8).²⁰ In response to questioning about the censor's with-holding of information, Ossie suggested that at the time this could not be regarded as censorship: '[t]here was nothing really hidden from you that was unnecessarily hidden' (NRM14: 7). Philip M. Taylor argues that few people in Britain realised during the war that all news and views circulating within the British media were subject to pre-censorship, meaning '[m]ost 'facts' (i.e. news) reaching the media in the Second World War through the agency machines were monitored and censored at source. Little was being left to trust' (Taylor 1999: 172). In the exchange below, Frank and Marjorie Knaggs admit that only in hindsight, 'on reflection' did the situation become clear. The couple also acknowledge the urgent desire, on behalf of the British public, to believe that the perennially patriotic and upbeat assessment of the newsreels was accurate, as Frank describes it, 'we were particularly receptive'. This does not presuppose the wholesale gullibility of the British public at war, but a desire to maintain morale, at whatever cost, throughout desperate wartime circumstances. Frank continues his assessment with a flawless example of the musings of the vernacular theorist, comparing the newsreels' justifiable distortion of the truth to 'Plato's noble lie':²¹

F.K. At the time we didn't realise that much of this was carefully doctored and was propaganda. We, of course being particularly receptive to any kind of thing like that, took it as it was. But on reflection we realise that it was very much sanitised. We wanted to believe it. We wanted to be reassured [...] I think it was necessary that the public be reassured I mean I suppose like Plato's noble lie [inaudible]. You know it's the same sort of thing that it's necessary sometimes to, not to distort the truth but em, present it in such a way. It's called spin nowadays, a palliative.

M.K. They told you what they wanted you to know.

F.K. Yes and actually we did know that, we didn't want to know the truth. Cos it was too – the truth would have been too much. (NRM07: 19)

Here Frank modifies his assessment of the situation: '[a]t the time we didn't realise...' later becomes 'and actually we did know that', followed by the justification for his apparent contradiction, 'we didn't want to know the truth [...] the truth would have been too much'. How much of what Frank recalls of his actual assessment of the newsreels at the time is impossible to measure. What is perhaps most revealing, however, in this context, is the fact that Frank was ten years old when war broke out, while Marjorie was just five. The 'we' they both refer to appears to refer not to their childhood selves, but to an appropriation of what their parents, or the nation as a whole, would have found reassuring at the time. When I asked eighty-two year old Yvonne Edwards if she thought the newsreels had had a positive effect on morale she replied, 'Oh absolutely, absolutely. It may have been staged, but to us, it was "oh the boys are alright", you know' (NRM50: 2).

What becomes manifest from Frank, Marjorie, Molly, Yvonne and Ossie's recollections is an on-going negotiation between the dominant discourse (as represented by the newsreels) and an impression of personal memory, influenced both by familial responses and popular memory. Sometime later in our conversation Frank spontaneously brought up the role of newsreel propaganda and both he and Marjorie pondered the changing nature of their attitudes towards it:

F.K. What about propaganda?

M.K. Yes – I think it's essential.

F.K. Now were we aware that it was propaganda? I would say before perhaps we weren't, but I'm wondering you know. As we got older we realised, I mean when you're young you know. I would be seventeen then [in 1946]. Yes, that's right. Whether newsreels influenced my way of thinking [...] I think that newsreels influenced me, in as much as they made me think about er, changing social conditions, [...] and it was largely the newsreaders themselves – it was the image that they projected, which made me question all these things. Well, you know, why should we have people from the middle class appearing? (NRM07: 25)

Frank's admission was one of the very few occasions during the interviews in which a participant raised the issue of class as represented in the newsreels. While Frank's comments indicate the importance of the newsreel commentators as guides to the interpretation of the

images, his assessment of how the newsreels influenced him provides another useful example of vernacular theorising. Frank appears to suggest that, rather than the newsreels' reflecting 'changing social conditions', they remained defiantly unresponsive to social change. As Anthony Aldgate has observed, the commentator and his scriptwriter had enormous influence over how newsreel images would be understood: '[w]here once "the picture told the story", eventually, after the advent of sound, it became a matter of the newsreel commentator "telling" and the picture "illustrating"' (1979: 41). In other words, the newsreels' allowed the audience very little, if any, room for their own interpretation of the items presented. In yet another assured display of vernacular newsreel theorising, Steve Whitley also recalled the newsreel commentators and observed the kind of socio-cultural assumptions the newsreels' producers made about their audiences:

I was thinking about the wonderful commentators' voices, and that authoritative – very, upper middle class – tone they used in order to give it that, well as I say, the propaganda impact that it used to have. Not like today's stuff. This was very much, "this is the establishment speaking, and you plebs" as it were, "we're telling you what actually happened here on the D-Day landing", or whatever it happened to be. (NRM21: 6)

Although devastatingly accurate, Steve's comments are slightly incongruous, given the fact that he described himself during our conversation as 'upper-middle class' or we might assume part of the establishment, he appears to be suggesting was condescending towards the newsreel audience (NRM21: 10). Steve also engages in a brief example of shuttlework as he judges the authoritative tone of the newsreels as 'not like today's stuff'. Despite a remarkable degree of consensus within the testimonies, cultural, social and economic differences begin to emerge. It appears, from the small research sample gathered, that there is a tendency for those who identified themselves - when asked - as coming from a middle or upper-middle class background, whose parents were from the professional classes, to display a greater degree of scepticism and be critical of the newsreels. Christopher Beadle is a good case in point, a self-identified professional middle-class man, his thinly disguised ridicule of the newsreel commentators seems to illustrate the point well:

Well, I do remember, yes now, the voice you heard then, it sounded so dated [...] It was all terribly jolly – "and now we see our happy soldiers going

aboard the ship to fight for the country's pride is in their face" [said with a flourish], you know, this sort of nonsense goes on, you know you hear it now, you sort of giggle, but at the time you didn't sort of, this was normal, seemed acceptable at the time. Now [...] I mean they're rather comic aren't they? (NRM35: 9)

Christopher uses an imaginative piece of shuttlework, comparing the past and the present, to reveal the extent of disparity between then and now. Thus, although consensus in memory is over-riding and, as a result, highly suggestive of a collective national or generational memory founded on a popular mythology of wartime newsreels, gaps, fissures and slippages begin to appear as participants expressed a variety of personal opinions and apply varying degrees of vernacular theorising to the subject.

4.6 THE PLEASURES OF WARTIME NEWSREELS

Finally, I want to return to the distinctive pleasures of wartime newsreel viewing, albeit for a minority of the audience. In his description of the wartime newsreels, Doug Weatherall recalled the drama of the newsreels' coverage of battle: 'we'd see action – normally the action was to our benefit, but it was still dramatic stuff' (NRM22: 8). Doug expresses a fascination, shared by a number of the men interviewed, with the drama and spectacle of much Second World War combat footage (particularly after 1941) when they were children. These elderly men now express their wartime fascination with a particular kind of 'boys'-own' relish. Vividly recapturing the childish excitement felt by some participants, Charlie Hall recalled:

We thought they were great and er, the more blood and guts the better. If half a dozen Germans got machine gunned, and you saw them dropping down somebody would say "eh, great" you know. (NRM16: 6)

Similarly John Charlewood explained, 'I was hooked on airplanes, ships and tanks and er, I mean, I enjoyed the cartoons but I really did enjoy – I was fascinated by the newsreels' (NRM03: 6). Despite being based on a small sample, there are nevertheless within the testimonies indications of the gendered dynamics of newsreel memory.²² Newsreel footage of battles, soldiers, guns, tanks, and planes (the paraphernalia of war) was remembered, and in some cases fetishised, exclusively by male participants who vividly recalled news images of

the armed forces, hardware, troop manoeuvres or combat; women did not recall the paraphernalia of war, nor the war itself, with such relish. Charlie Hall's testimony in particular captures the sense of adventure he and his friends experienced during the war in which the sense of youthful excitement is still palpable. Seeing newsreel footage of combat is remembered as 'great' and 'fantastic', as the childhood line between 'real' and 'pretend' becomes blurred. Here Charlie's childhood voice returns in his expressions of delight and awe at the newsreel coverage of events:

Now we knew it was happening but it never registered and we treated it as a pretend thing, yeah [...] you'd never go if you were bored. We thought it was great you know some ships getting sunk or a submarine getting captured you know this sort of thing – oh it was *fantastic* [...] You know, us kids, we didn't realize there was so many folks getting killed in the war we thought it was like a great game, you know like you get on games' consoles now.
(NRM16: 6)

Here Charlie makes the point that in his childhood 'naivety' he and his friends remained blissfully unaware of the implications of what they were witnessing. In addition, he uses the familiar trope of shuttlework, comparing his experience of watching the newsreel footage with the experience of playing a video game today. Despite facing criticism for the banality of much of their content, after 1940 wartime newsreels frequently featured spectacular footage, as the commentary for *Pathé Gazette's* coverage of the D-Day landings observed and the images confirmed: 'right in the spearhead of attack our allied service photographic units and our newsreel cameramen putting this amazing scene on celluloid'.²³ In terms of newsreel coverage of combat, both John Charlewood and Charlie Hall recalled the Battle of the River Plate and the subsequent fate of the pocket battleship, the Admiral Graf Spee, as Movietone's newsreel edition from 1 January 1940 announced, '[a]nd now, once again, *British Movietone News* presents the first film of an historic episode', as audiences watched images of the ship, scuttled by her defeated crew, sinking.²⁴ Interestingly John recalls that in reality the newsreel footage captured not the battle itself, but the *aftermath* of battle (a kind of post-event memory) and the Graf Spee being scuttled by her captain:

For example the Battle of the River Plate in 1940, the Graf Spee; you didn't actually see the battle [...] or you saw the Graf Spee being scuttled but the actual battles you saw very little of. (NRM03: 14)

Having identified the lack of actual battle footage in the newsreels themselves, John spontaneously recalled a feature film which contained spectacular combat footage:

I think the exception was one film called *Alamein*, wasn't there? Where they did have a cine – a film crew, actually at the battle and they made a feature film out of it. (NRM03: 14)

I include John's brief comment here as it indicates, particularly in relation to events from the Second World War, the difficulty in sourcing newsreel memory. As already noted, *Desert Victory: The Battle of El Alamein* (1942-3, d. David MacDonald), the film to which John refers, is in fact a compilation of newsreel footage, stock footage, and some re-enactment.

To end this chapter I want to focus on another characteristic of much newsreel memory talk. The anecdotal was an oft-used trope and illustrated best with reference to one particular participant's memory-talk. Charlie Hall was unique amongst the participants and almost deserves a descriptive category to himself. Although he is a particularly interesting example of both vernacular historian and theorist, he articulates his expansive knowledge predominantly with reference to his family; each sweep of reminiscence is tethered to home, giving it great personal significance. He appears to verify all his observations with examples either drawn from personal experience or overheard secondhand from witness testimony. In complete contrast to many other participants', Charlie's recollections were expansive, often involving long, elaborate explanations of situations. Unlike the newsreel memory trope that characterised so many of the interviews, that of forgetting, Charlie felt he had to apologise, on several occasions, for being 'long winded – I'm hopeless' he remarked. In the following extract Charlie's wartime memory talk ranges from battleships off the coast of Singapore to a colloquial, 'over-the-garden-fence' style memory of conversations between his mother and her neighbours: from the global to the local within the space of a few sentences:

They [newsreels] were censored, and they were and they always sort of showed our folks in a reasonable light. But if there was something serious, like the *Renown* [...] that were sunk off Singapore. They told you that it

happened you know if there was something serious like that [...] you always knew, [...] you knew Hull had been bombed, but you didn't know the degree it had been bombed [...] Oh, and there was a Mrs Leonard lived down the street, and she had a friend, Mrs Paules that lived in Coventry, and Mrs Paules just turned up one day with a suitcase. Sort of "where've you come from", and then she just described what had happened in Coventry you know. Coventry had been plastered, and Mrs Paules was bombed out the house – there was nothing left. (NRM16: 23)

Charlie's close familial ties (he still lives in the house in which he grew up) and the vividness with which he recalls events, suggest that over the intervening years his family would themselves engage in memory talk (reminiscence). Annette Kuhn notes that the shared remembering, and forgetting, that happens in families provides the model for other mnemonic communities, most especially the idea of the nation with its assumptions of a past held in common by all its members, a past that bonds them together and will continue to do so into the future (2000: 193). It is to the mnemonic communities of the family, the nation and generation that I turn in the next section.

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which we might regard newsreel memory, in relation to wartime newsreels in particular, as positioned between official and personal memory. By providing comparisons between contemporary audience responses to the newsreels and the memories of these newsreels recalled over sixty years later, and in the process highlighting the complex formation of newsreel memory with a view to accounting for newsreel memory's inconsistencies, it has set the scene for the remainder of this thesis. The next three chapters focus on an in-depth analysis of the gathered memories in order to explore further the complexities of newsreel memory and its formation.

¹ For a detailed examination of British wartime newsreels see Nicholas Pronay (1982: 173-208).

² Propaganda is defined here as 'the deliberate attempt to influence the opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values for a specific persuasive purpose, consciously designed to serve the interest of the propagandist and their political masters either directly or indirectly' (D. Welch, cited in Fox, 2007: 7). For a full discussion of British wartime film propaganda see: J. Chapman (2000); J. Fox (2007); A. Kuhn (1981); N. Pronay and D.W. Spring (eds.) (1982); A. Aldgate and J. Richards (1986); Taylor, P.M. (1999).

³ In peacetime the newsreel companies enjoyed a unique relationship with the British Board of Film Censorship. From the beginning of the Board's existence (1912), it was agreed that newsreel distribution should not be delayed by submission to the censors. Thus, the newsreels

took great care not to offend, since to do so would be to antagonise the authorities and could result in active censorship and inevitable and ruinous delays.

⁴ As Jo Fox points out, even when cinemas did come under fire from mid-1940 it had ‘relatively little effect on film attendance’ (2007: 37).

⁵ I do not include Box and Moss (1943) and Box (1946), although perhaps the best known cinema surveys of the period. Both consist entirely of statistical data on cinema-going in terms of: frequency of visits, regional variations, economic group, occupation, education, age and gender breakdowns. Neither reports why audiences went to the cinema, nor what they chose to see or why. In neither of these important statistical surveys there are the newsreels mentioned. As newsreels are barely mentioned in J.P. Mayer’s two social surveys (1946) and (1948) I have not included either of these studies. Finally, I do not include Sidney Bernstein periodic survey of the Granada Cinemas’ audience. Although Bernstein’s reports constitute one of the first large scale empirical investigations into cinema audiences’ preferences, as Jackie Stacey points out, they offer ‘little insight into more qualitative dimensions of those preferences’ (Stacey, 1994: 53).

⁶ As Jackie Stacey has noted in a different context, only six readers’ letters sent to *Picturegoer* magazine between May and November 1940, out of a total of 1,536, concerned the newsreels (1994: 54).

⁷ Even Sidney Bernstein, Chairman of the Granada Cinemas’ Group and one of the most influential figures in the British film industry, was moved to write to *Kinematograph Weekly* on the poor standard of newsreels at the beginning of war:

At the outbreak of war it was generally anticipated that newsreels would be an all-important factor in kinema programmes. That hope has not been fulfilled because of the quality of the newsreels which has not come up to expectations. We play all makes of newsreels and our experience has been that patrons have been disappointed in most of the issues shown since the outbreak of war. Frankly patrons so far regard war time newsreels as dull, and there is no excuse for dullness in any department of the business. (18 April 1940)

⁸ Mass-Observation made a clear distinction between what they termed ‘highly responsive audiences’ and ‘theatres where response is usually very low’, although they do not identify why these audiences might respond differently.

See File Report 215 ‘Newsreels’ June 1940: 2.

⁹ In accordance with guidelines provided by the Mass-Observation, Archive File Reports are referenced with the abbreviation FR followed by the report number and page number.

¹⁰ In analyzing the findings of a Mass-Observation report on audiences’ responses to *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), Tom Harrisson suggested that ‘many of those who said they liked the film apparently only did so because they thought it the right thing to say’ (1940a: 5).

¹¹ *British Movietone News*, ‘Italian Assassin’, 13 June 1940. Story no. 39173. British Movietone News on-line archive.

¹² *Pathé Gazette*, ‘Evacuation of the BEF (AKA Dunkirk)’, 6 June, 1940. Film ID. 1047.12. British Pathé on-line archive.

¹³ See Angus Calder (1997) for a detailed discussion of the part played by the newsreels in maintaining morale on the home front.

¹⁴ In terms of war reporting participants found little to distinguish between past and present, acknowledging the bravery and professionalism of contemporary war reporting.

¹⁵ Given the media profile of the ‘War against Terror’ circulating at the time the interviews were conducted perhaps this comparison is not surprising.

¹⁶ Later in our conversation John talks about *Target For Tonight* (1941, d. Harry Watt), a Ministry of Information production of which he says '[a]gain it gave you the impression that Berlin was being totally destroyed [laughs] by about three British aircraft' (NRM03: 16).

¹⁷ The second cohort of interviews was conducted in focus groups and the opportunity to explore individual family circumstances was restricted.

¹⁸ Jean Murray is a notable exception to this observation: she referred to the newsreels as 'just absolutely remarkable' (NRM09: 12) and at no point did she critique them in any way. I would argue Jean represents a very particular type of vernacular informer, one who conforms to the nostalgia model.

¹⁹ Steve Whitley was the only participant to directly challenge my questioning. In doing so, he unwittingly addressed my own concerns about interview questions, outlined in Chapter Two. For example, in response to a question about whether newsreels gave him a wider sense of the world he replied, 'that's a leading question' (NRM21: 4).

²⁰ *Desert Victory* (d. David MacDonald) was the first feature length documentary produced by the Army Film and Photographic Unit and the RAF Film Production Unit for the Ministry of Information during World War II. Released in March 1943 it deals with the battle at El Alamein between Allied and Axis forces. *Desert Victory* comprises a compilation of newsreel footage, interviews, animated graphics, stock footage and some staged scenes. On its release the film received almost unanimous praise from critics and the public alike. See Annette Kuhn's article "'Desert Victory' and the People's War' (1981).

²¹ The noble lie is a concept originated by [Plato](#) as described in [The Republic](#) (c. 380 BC). According to Plato a noble [lie](#) is a [myth](#) or [untruth](#) knowingly told by an [elite](#) to maintain social harmony, or the social position of that elite. Here, Frank ignores the highly problematic nature of Plato's politics and suggests that it was necessary to 'distort the truth' in this case to maintain morale. Interestingly Marjorie's brief interjection 'they told you what they wanted you to know' suggests that perhaps she has reservations about the practice – unlike her husband.

²² See Leydesdorff, Passerini and Thompson (2005) for a useful discussion of the differences between the ways in which men and women remember.

²³ For a spectacular example of the combat footage the British newsreels contained see *Pathé Gazette* 12 June 1944, 'D-Day, Greatest Combined Operation in World's History.' Film ID. 1360.03. British Pathé on-line archive.

²⁴ *British Movietone News* 1 January 1940 'Doom of the Graf Spee', Story No. 38025. British Movietone on-line archive.

PART THREE

ANALYSING THE

GATHERED MEMORIES

CHAPTER 5 - MNEMONIC COMMUNITIES: FAMILY, NATION, GENERATION

Pathé Gazette the Voice of Britain (Pathé Gazette Title Card)

In this chapter the analysis centres on the mnemonic communities within which the research participants located their newsreel memories. As individuals we are all members of a variety of different mnemonic communities through which personal experiences become meaningful. According to Wulf Kansteiner, these various mnemonic communities exist as ‘families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations’ (2002: 188). In order to explore how personal memory becomes meaningful it is important to investigate the influence of these mnemonic communities on individual memory. This chapter begins with the subjective, the familial and the local as the basis from which to explore childhood encounters with newsreels and the subsequent formation of newsreel memory. Having located the origins of newsreel memory, the analysis then assesses what participants’ newsreel memories reveal about how they positioned themselves in relation to the ‘imagined mnemonic communities’ of both the historic nation and the wartime generation of which they understood themselves to be a part. To investigate these questions, this chapter takes as its starting point the contention that the interviews conducted as part of the research gave participants the opportunity and encouragement to historicise their lives, ‘to set them in a framework of the collective events and the historical transformations they understood themselves to be a part of’ (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett 2008: 44). Thus, my participants’ memories are, to a greater or lesser extent, positioned in a generational space defined by the lived experiences of war and memorialised in a popular culture which includes the newsreel image.

This chapter also explores the symbiotic relationship between the spatial and temporal domains of memory; firstly, with an examination of the spatial memory of the cinema-going experience itself and the imagined boundaries of the nation-state; and secondly, with an examination of the temporal memory of the shared experiences of a particular wartime generation and the imagined simultaneous sharing of the newsreel viewing experience. Addressing the nation as a whole, the newsreels were produced and consumed as the popular articulation of a collectively imagined community. Indeed, newsreel journalism, as a mediator of a shared national public experience, presented the nation to the nation.¹ Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of a particular localised Northern consciousness expressed throughout the gathered recollections.

5.1 THE FAMILY AND THE BEGINNINGS OF NEWSREEL MEMORY

On the front page of a 'News Reel and Shorts Supplement', published with the *Kinematograph Weekly*, a cartoon MGM lion in dapper jacket and tie sits behind a desk, while before him stands his son, in bow-tie and short trousers. The father points to his son, and the caption reads, 'Like Father – Like Son...and like his old man he can speak up for himself...GO AHEAD BOY' (14 November 1935). Although promoting MGM's slate of short film production, the cartoon serves to illustrate an important point, and one explored in detail in this chapter, the influence of the family on children's newsreel viewing habits. Analysis of the personal narratives gathered for this research reveals the crucial role the attitude of participants' families played in their responses to and their interest in the news. Early enthusiastic exposure to news and current affairs appears to have engendered a life-long interest, an interest that may even have played a part in particular individuals volunteering to take part in the research.

For many among the 1930s and 1940s generation, cinema-going began when they were young children, for some even as babes in arms, and remained an important leisure activity until the arrival of their own children.² Somewhat at odds with the habits of regular cinema-going, for those interviewed news theatre attendance for children appears to have been an activity undertaken with parents or close adult relatives (aunts, uncles and grandparents). Younger children were taken to the news theatres by their parents and did not, by-and-large, go alone. At least, this is how early newsreel viewing experiences were remembered and subsequently narrated by my participants. The reminiscences recounted here reveal the role of the family in shaping reactions and responses to the news and the newsreels. As a result, the memories of news events themselves are inextricably bound-up with family memories. In their examination of personal narrative, Maynes, Pierce and Laslett begin by outlining the complex constitution of life stories:

A personal narrative can document a subjectivity that has evolved along with and within a memory embodied in an individual who has constructed him – or herself in a specific social context through interpersonal relationships and psychodynamic processes. That self has been constructed through self-narratives, culturally shaped and interactive forms that yield operative self-understandings that evolve over time. (2008: 41-2)

This definition of a personal narrative as a complex reworking of subjectivity over time that is subject to both social and psychodynamic processes applies to the personal narratives collected as part of this research, which contain within them a personal newsreel narrative strand. What follows here is an examination of some of the most frequently recounted interpersonal relationships encountered in the recollections of newsreel viewing. Predominantly, as noted, the most significant relationships within the newsreel viewing experience were between parents and children. The ever-present figure of the parent, most often the mother, in the recollections of early news viewing experiences serves to demonstrate the importance of parental attitudes towards news on the subsequent life-long levels of interest in news demonstrated by their children, now elderly themselves. As Ruth Teer-Tomaselli suggests, parental value systems provided a context ‘through which children made sense of news events’ (2006: 238). That is, the ways in which parents reacted to the news or discussed news items in the home shaped the meaning of, and attitude toward, what was happening for their children. Parental values also appear to have engendered a particularly heightened sense of social agency or responsibility in some of my participants and, even a degree of politically-motivated scepticism appears to have been nurtured by some subjects’ immediate family background. Thus, an interest in the news, and a propensity to ask awkward questions, appears to have been passed down from generation to generation.

The life stories within which newsreel memories are contained were interpreted by all my participants through multiple frames of meaning (Goffman 1997), both individual and collective. All personal narratives, like the examples collected for this research, are contextualised by personal relationships and the collective experience of significant historic events. Personal narratives are then, firmly embedded in a multiplicity of ‘narrative and historical temporalities and historical frames’ (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett 2008: 44). Personal memory is always, in various ways, structured and understood through a number of interpretative networks. As Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson point out, these cultural and institutional networks range from

[the] local or grand, micro or macro – stories about American social mobility, the “freeborn Englishman”, the working-class hero, and so on. Public narratives range from the narratives of one’s family, to those of the workplace (organizational myths), church, government, and nation. Like all narratives, these stories have drama, plot, explanation, and selective appropriation. (1994: 62)

In narrating their life story individuals use numerous frames of reference amongst them, the familial, institutional, and national (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett 2008: 44). These mnemonic frameworks appear to mirror Alessandro Portelli's notion of a 'phonology of time' (1991: 69) a concept he used to demonstrate how an individual, in choosing to relate the story of their life or a remembered event, will prioritise one of the following three aspects: the institutional including the national and international historical context; the collective including the neighbourhood and workplace; or the personal, the private and family life (1991: 70). Within the gathered life narratives it is the personal surround within which recollections of the newsreels are embedded which are explored in more detail in this chapter. Given the age of participants at the time they were being asked to recall, it is not surprising that the family is given a major structuring role in newsreel memories; however, it is worth noting here that the ever-present parental companion of early newsreel memory is virtually absent from general cinema-going memories.³

In 1943 Kathleen Box and Louis Moss revealed in their *Wartime Social Survey of Cinema-Going* that a proportionately higher percentage of youngsters aged fourteen to seventeen than those aged eighteen plus went to the cinema at least once a week or more; and of course, at 'the pictures' children and young adults would encounter newsreels, while their younger counterparts might see a newsreel as part of a children's Saturday morning cinema club programme. However, these particular encounters with newsreels within the regular cinema-going context were recalled by participants in the sketchiest of detail and, as a result, newsreel viewing becomes a rather vague and indistinct activity. Consequently, I have chosen to examine the circumstances surrounding children's visits to news theatres and their attitudes towards these trips, which emerged strongly from the recounted memories. As already stated, children were introduced to the newsreel viewing experience in the news theatre by their parents or grandparents. For a number of my participants, the recollections of news theatre visits take on the flavour of the quotidian; visits are remembered as routine, a habitual part of trips into Newcastle city centre with their parents, and recalled with fondly remembered inevitability.

The willingness, or otherwise, of younger children to freely engage with newsreels seems, on the whole, to have been largely determined by their parents' interest in news and newsreels. What is revealed within the recounted personal narratives is the general level of interest in news (radio, newspapers, newsreels) expressed and demonstrated by participants' parents appears to have translated to a similar interest in their children. However, a contrary attitude was also recalled; young viewers were often indifferent to or bored by the news, one

of the reasons perhaps, why participants did not remember frequenting the news theatres with friends of their own age. Nevertheless, as indicated elsewhere, the news theatres' programme regularly featured cartoons, which were guaranteed to appeal to children. Participants recounted that as children they would agree to accompany their mothers on shopping trips to Newcastle, on the understanding that they would be 'rewarded' with a visit to the news theatre – to see the cartoons. This experience seemed quite distinct in their memory from a visit to the regular cinema and was associated, almost exclusively, with the dreaded shopping trip. Participant Charlie Hall from Monkseaton recalled his mother's love of shopping trips and his loathing of such expeditions:⁴

My mother was a terror for shopping, she loved wandering round shops when I was about five year old, and I hated it; but the one redeeming feature is [...] usually at the end of that we'd go to the either, usually The Tatler, but occasionally the News Theatre. (NRM16: 3)

In Charlie's memory a visit to the news theatre becomes an integral feature of a 'trip into town', as many subjects termed it, as in this recollection from Christopher Beadle, who described just such trips into the city with his mother and younger brother:

During the war we'd come into Newcastle [from] time to time for shopping, whatever [...] to visit friends and shopping [...] and nearly always went to the News Cinema, that was a treat, it was on all day, and you know it was interesting. (NRM35: 3)

As noted in the previous chapter Annette Kuhn describes cinema-going as an 'unthreatening early venture into the public domain' (2002: 17). Here, through the presence of the mother, we can trace the cinematic link between the public and private domains still further. Historically, within the public realm, shopping has long been regarded as a legitimate feminine activity, linked to domesticity and consumption. The conflation in memory of shopping trips with mother and visits to the news theatre imbues the news theatre itself with connotations of domesticity for a particular group of patrons.⁵

Listening to similar accounts repeated almost verbatim from several participants, it seems likely that many mothers had similar strategies for dealing with their unwilling shopping companions. Charlie Hall recalled large numbers of parents accompanied by their

children making up a substantial proportion of the news theatre audience. His recollection appears to support the notion of the news theatre as a place of both refuge and convenience, refuge from the rigours of shopping and a convenient stopping-off place before the journey home. When asked if he could recall seeing other children at the news theatre Charlie explained:

Oh yeah. I would reckon a large part of the audience were the same [as him and his mother], not locals so much as shoppers that had just got fed up with shopping, and just wanted to sit before they went home. There's a lot of – one or two men – but mainly ladies and children. And of course when something happened you know something outrageous, all the kids went “w’hey”. You know they had a great time. (NRM16: 5)

As Charlie's memories seem to suggest, for some, a visit to the news theatre became an eagerly anticipated part of trips to the city centre with parents and of course the real appeal of the news theatres for most children was the cartoons. As Charlie again recalled, ‘[u]s kids loved it because you had, it must have been about three quarters of an hour of cartoons’ (NRM16: 5). Furthermore, it was not just children who looked forward to the prospect of a visit to the news theatre, as retired university lecturer Barry Worrall's memories of trips with his grandfather suggest:

[M]aybe he just wanted to sit down for a while – what people did you know [laughs]. You get a bus into town, didn't take the car, got the bus into town, and you'd traipse around town doing a bit of shopping with your grandson and you're fifty-five, you're worn out by the, after an hour of that, you want to sit down for a while [laughs]. (NRM12: 6)

Barry recalled, with great fondness, these regular trips with his grandfather. Although his memories lack detail, what is vividly remembered is the sense of affection between the two, and the delight both grandfather and grandson took in each other's company. In listening to Barry's memories the news theatre simply provides the backdrop to the time they spent together. In the following extract he recalled his grandfather's laughter, while the source of his mirth is forgotten:

Well, I distinctly remember going with m'granddad in the '50s. I would be ten years old so old enough to take to the cinema. And I remember meeting him in town and going to the town with him, and shopping, and going there [to the news theatre] on a Saturday afternoon. I remember him laughing at [inaudible] or whoever it was, I can't remember, the comedies [laughs].
(NRM12: 6)

Here we clearly see the importance of familial relationships in memory, rather than the recollection of the newsreels themselves. Participant Thelma Miller recalls, 'from being a tiny little girl it was big treat to come from Tynemouth on the bus with my mother, and we used to go into the Tatler and you could stay there all day' (NRM08: 4).⁶ As discussed in the Chapter Three, the news theatre auditorium could be regarded as a uniquely accessible space which, in many respects, lacked the formality of the regular cinema programme, and which consequently attracted an eclectic audience, from those eager to see footage of specific news events to the casual visitor or harassed mother.

A number of participants expressed a genuine interest in the news as children, an interest which, as indicated, can in almost all cases be traced in the oral testimonies to a similar interest demonstrated by their parents. Throughout the personal narratives, analysis suggests that familial background and influence had a profound impact on the willingness of participants, as children, to engage with the newsreels. If their parents showed an interest in news, their children seemed to follow their example. In a sense one can detect the role of parents teaching their children the role of social responsibility, creating what John Fiske has described as 'socially interested agents' (1989: 162); this type of parental instruction becomes something of a political statement when considered in light of some of my participants' social and economic background. The following two extracts are illustrative of the influence of parental attitudes on childhood interest in news and current affairs within a working class family. Doug Weatherall's comments, in particular, reveal the engendering of a particular kind of social responsibility or interest and a belief in the democratic process instilled in him, as a young boy, by his father:

D.W. Oh, I mean sounds dreadfully adult of me, but I remember as a kid listening to the news. Because you've got to remember, the war was going on for much of my childhood, and er, it was always dramatic stuff obviously. And me father was eventually called up in the army.

L.A. So did he encourage you to listen to news or was it just...?

D.W. Always did, we were a household who discussed things. Because of me - you've got to remember me social background me father [...] treasured home life and family life, and er, but he wanted to change society actually [...] I might live in a posh area of Newcastle but I'll never forget from where I came, and the people who improved life for the like of us. This might not sound like a sports' programme [laughs] but that's me background. (NRM22: 4)⁷

Clearly Doug's familial roots are of enormous continued importance to his sense of his political and class identity. In this regard he attributes his interest and enthusiasm for discussion and current affairs to his father. As noted above, participants' reactions to news and current events are often inextricably bound-up with their family's responses. Henry Holden, from the mining town of Blyth in Northumberland, remembered being taken to the news theatre by his parents, both of whom had a keen interest in news and current affairs:⁸

I remember going with me mother and father when I first came into Newcastle, and I think I was about five, four or five. Just young then, you know just early '50s. Cos they were, they were interested, cos like me dad, he would like seeing stuff from erm, the world. Me mother and father were both interested in the world, and news and stuff like that, and so it rubbed off on me. (NRM17: 4)

As Annette Kuhn has noted, the 'family provides the model for every other memory community' (2000:193). Without exception, every childhood memory recounted for the research included recollections of the various family members, usually mothers, with whom visits to the news theatres were shared. Often a parental interest in news and current affairs extended far beyond simply the newsreels, to include radio and the newspapers, as Marjorie Knaggs recalled:

We always had newspapers at home which we read, *News Chronicle* and so on, and Dad got me *The Children's Newspaper* it was published by Arthur Mee -you know, the encyclopaedia man. And it used to have different things in it we were supposed to know, but it got you reading it [...] so Dad got me

that, so I've always been interested in reading papers, and there again, well that's rather like a newsreel isn't it? You just sort out, now you delve behind what they're trying to say. So it set me on the road to thinking about that. (NRM07: 25)⁹

Marjorie's recollection revealed her own assessment of the importance of parental guidance and encouragement in terms of both consuming and interpreting the news. Of particular interest is her understanding of the popular news media. Comparing the newsreels to the popular press, she clearly indicates what she perceives to be the need to 'delve behind what they're trying to say' and, further, that her interest in *The Children's Newspaper* sowed the seeds for more adult forms of critical thinking.¹⁰ Thus, early exposure to the news media and an active engagement by their parents set a number of my participants, by their own admission, on the road to thinking about and taking an interest in news and current affairs. Participant Tricia Charlewood's comments illustrate the enduring influence of her childhood engagement with the newsreels:

Before the war I'd be taken by my uncle, or my mother, because they wanted to see it, the news part; and I remember being quite bored most of the time, but it was worth it for the cartoons; but then, as I got older, I do remember going – when I was a student. I started going in 1950 and erm, I remember going quite often to see things like the Royal Wedding, and then the Coronation. (NRM03: 5)

Here Tricia recalls historic events, particularly important state occasions, that brought the nation together. Although not an admission that many of my self-identified participants made, Tricia's recollections do raise an important point about the relationship between young children and the news; children were often bored or even frightened by the news.¹¹ Another participant who admitted to a childhood lack of interest in the news was Veronica Walters:

Pathé newsreels, as a child I probably wasn't terribly interested in that part of the programme, but there was always cartoons, one or two cartoons and definitely travelogues. I can't remember the other things. (NRM11: 4)

As already suggested, within the gathered memories Veronica's revelations were unusual, as one might expect from individuals who expressed an interest in, and volunteered to talk about, their newsreel memories. However, participants from the Age Concern cohort of focus groups, who agreed to take part in the research but had not identified themselves as having useful newsreel memories, talked far less about their families. Their remembered attitude toward the newsreels, as outlined in Chapter Two, was often one of lack of interest. Unfortunately, given the context of a large group discussion, I learnt relatively little about their individual circumstances and, as a result, am unable to link their relative lack of interest in the newsreels with that of their parents.

Returning to memories of the cinema-going experience itself; although Kathleen Box's 1946 social survey of cinema going habits does not deal with newsreel viewing, it does provide a useful indication of the role of parents in their children's cinema-going activity. Box concluded that 'the majority of mothers do know what films their children will see before letting them go to the cinema' (1946: 10).¹² However, she recorded some differences between economic groups; here she concluded that '[m]others in the lower economic groups more frequently leave the children free to see whatever films they like than those in the higher group [22% and 4% respectively]' (1946: 10). In this regard one suspects that participant Rose Johnson's recollection might not be so unusual, she recalled 'matinees on a Saturday, your mother was glad to give you a penny to get shot of you' (NRM40: 6). However, with regard to news viewing in the news theatres, parents appear to have a rather more keenly defined gate-keeping role. Similarly, my participants engaged with the other forms of news media consumed by their parents and recall not only the news but also the familial interaction that accompanied the experience; in fact, in many instances, the news is the least well remembered aspect. For example, in the family home the radio would be on throughout the day and would provide a constant background to daily life, as Paddy Scannell describes it, stitching itself 'unobtrusively into the fabric of daily life' (cited in Moores, 1988: 36). In the evenings, families would gather around the 'wireless' to listen together. As Shaun Moores writes, '[t]he hearth, the radio and the mother between them signified a focus of interior space, family pleasure and domestic life (1988: 34). As already indicated, we might regard trips to the news theatre with mother as an extension of this domestic space. Often in memory the exact positioning and circumstances of radio listening were described in some detail. Again, the quotidian trope emerges in memory talk. For example, Charlie Hall's remembered experiences are typical of the communal nature of radio listening in the home,

particularly his focus around the period of early evening relaxation enjoyed by the whole family while listening to the radio:

C.H. The radio was like our TV nowadays, it was on most of the day.

L.A. Did you listen to the radio as a family?

C.H. Both, *Dick Barton* was on about ten to seven each day [...] and I was definitely in here for *Dick Barton* every night. And I was the one that listened to *Dick Barton*, my brother wasn't bothered. And er, round about, maybe eight o'clock, or seven o'clock something like that, er, even when m'father came home from work [...] we'd just sit round all together and listen to the radio.

L.A. Did you listen to news on the radio?

C.H. Oh yeah [...] this was a ritual. Whenever the *Six O'clock News* came on everybody was in here, listening to the news. (NRM16: 10)

Charlie's recollections are typical of participants' memories of their childhood radio listening experiences, in which family members are a central feature and radio listening becomes a fixture (a ritual) in the routines of everyday life. The extract from Charlie's interview is revealing of the extent to which he is able to recall, with precision, the timing of favourite programmes and of his father's appearance, which signaled the point at which the family gathered around the radio set to listen together. Charlie's narrative also revealed a recurring feature of many of the conversations undertaken with the research participants: as they recalled favourite programmes, or perhaps, simply listed films or programmes that came to mind, they asked me if I had heard of them or knew of them. This checking, and subsequent explanation or description of this or that film, programme or personality, recurred throughout the interviews. Here, as elsewhere, we have an illustration of the vernacular historian meticulously informing the less informed listener. Maurice Halbwachs ([1926], 1992) has argued that old people are assigned a specific role within society:

In primitive tribes, the old are guardians of traditions [...] Society, by giving old people the function of preserving the traces of the past, encourages them to devote whatever spiritual energy they may still possess to the act of recollection. (Halbwach 1992: 48)

In this way society ensures that the past is handed down through the generations; as Barbara Misztal argues, ‘this intergenerational transmission, or tradition, is a foundation of societal continuity’ (2003: 84). In reality successive generations share much in common and traditions, rituals and habits tend to be handed down with the result that successive generations often resemble one another closely. As Mannheim states, ‘generations are in a state of constant interaction [...] The fact that the transition from one generation to another takes place continuously tends to render this interaction smoother’ (Mannheim 1959: 301). This intergenerational influence is immediately apparent in the parental influence on participants’ childhood cinema-going experiences and particularly in relation to their interest, or otherwise, in newsreels. Thus, despite obvious generational differences, for many participants their relationship with the news and newsreels became embedded as ritual, or habit, handed down by their parents with the result that successive generations’ everyday activities resembled one another closely. For example, it was not only an active engagement with the news that motivated visits to the news theatre, the ritual of going to the news theatre, often as part of a shopping trip into ‘town’, was passed down from generation to generation. Some of my participants, like Jean Murray, recalled taking their own children to the news theatre:

And when my two boys were little, I would take them to The Tatler, ‘cos there was always a lot of cartoons and stuff on. Em, but The News Theatre it was just wonderful to pass two hours you know. (NRM09: 8)

Here we have a young mother occupying her young sons by taking them to the news theatres. As mentioned by other participants, it was cheap, convenient, and the programme provided just enough variety to engage younger viewers. Inevitably, it seems the ritual of accompanied visits to the news theatre was confined to young childhood. For some these visits engendered an interest in visiting the news theatre which endured for many years, while for others, as they grew into young adulthood, new pleasures began to emerge:

Once into the [19]50s, going to the News Theatre with mother was replaced by going to the cinema with your mates. Saturday afternoon at the Queen’s, Gaumont Odeon, Essoldo, Westerns normally, and must be in colour. (J. Swann, NRM33: 3)

Here Mr Swann's written recollections suggest a rite of passage, marking the end of childhood and visits to the news theatre with mother, and the beginning of independent young-adulthood. For young adults, it seems the news theatres represented the prosaic, a domestic space to be left behind; the news theatres no longer held the thrill of the 'pictures' with its air of mature, sophisticated glamour and in the 1950s the magic of Technicolor.

5.2 THE INFLUENCE OF GENERATION AND NATION ON NEWSREEL MEMORY

Using the concepts of both national (Anderson 1991) and generational (Eyerman and Turner 1998) identity, as our frames of reference, this section focuses on the formation of a specific generational memory. As noted in Chapter Two it is generally recognised that Karl Mannheim's essay 'The Problem of Generations' ([1928] 1959) introduced the idea of generation as a useful 'addition to the analysis of social stratification in modern society' (Eyerman and Turner 1998: 91). Mannheim claimed that in order to share a particular generational identity, individuals must be born within the same historical and cultural context and must share experiences that occur during their formative years. Mannheim's theory provides a useful starting point for further analysis of the memories gathered for this research, as it identified the way in which the 'specificity and uniqueness of each generation's experience results in the different character of their respective collective memories' (Misztal 2003: 85). The implied notion of generational identity recurred spontaneously throughout the gathered narratives. For example, when I asked Marjorie Knaggs why she felt she was receptive to wartime newsreel propaganda, her response referred explicitly to her understanding of generational difference and her membership of a particular generational cohort:

I suppose we wanted to believe it, whereas our parents probably wouldn't, because you've just got the age gap there. As I say my brother, like loads of others, was killed in '43 in the RAF, so I mean their em, acceptance of what was being said would differ from ours, cos we would want to be reassured. We wouldn't realise, I suppose, how close we were to defeat in '40. We wouldn't know that, but they would; that's the advantage of being a child.
(NRM07: 19)

Marjorie refers to the generational 'we' - what Mannheim referred to as 'association groups' (1959: 288) - and their desire to believe that the outcome of war would be positive. While her

parents, having lost a son, and presumably having lived through the First World War, obviously felt very differently. Marjorie's feeling that the wartime generation was significantly different to previous generations is echoed in Guy Morgan's diary of a wartime cinemagoer: he wrote, 'a generation has grown up since the war that is unlike any other generation' (1948: 72).

In his work on the study of generations, Julian Marias notes that an understanding of generation requires an understanding of 'the structure of the world at that time' (1976: 101). As noted in Chapter Two, Marias contends that the shared characteristics of a given generation 'do[es] not arise so much from themselves as from being obliged to live in a world of a certain and unique form' (1976: 104) or in the 'spirit of the time' (Miztal 2003: 84). As one listens to the recounted memories of wartime experience, it is clear that a particular generational community-spirit emerges strongly, most often in the 'we' or 'our' of impassioned conversation about the war; individuals rarely use 'I' when recalling the imagined mnemonic community of the wartime generation. In this regard we might consider the determinative effect of the experience of the Second World War on a generation.

New research into generational memory has sought to address the problem of how to define a concrete generation. In their research, for example, Howard Schuman and Amy Corning started with memories themselves and worked backwards towards a generational cohort (2000: 15). Similarly, the recurring patterns and tropes of memory talk in relation to issues of wartime newsreels are an indication that my participants are indeed members of the same wartime generation, despite some considerable age differences.¹³ Using this approach it becomes clear that generational memory reveals a certain social identification, an implicit sharing of a unique generational identity particularly in response to traumatic or formative events that have been widely shared and often represented in the newsreels. In this regard, the individuals involved in this project form a particular generational cohort because of their shared wartime – and newsreel viewing – experiences. What is more, for all those interviewed, their wartime experiences have left a lasting impression on their memory. As Barbara Miztal writes, 'the most important moments for a generation tend to be unusual historical events since the more an event generates emotions, the more it elicits social sharing and is hence better remembered' (2003: 88).

According to Ron Eyerman and Bryan Turner (1998), generational identifications are constructed out of generational cultures to form a particular generational consciousness. As explored in Chapter Two, Eyerman and Turner utilise Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' to

account for the uniqueness of a given generational memory. Bourdieu conceived of habitus in terms of

[S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends.
(cited in Eyerman and Turner 1989: 99)

A habitus then, represents a system of dispositions to act which are produced by objective structures and conditions and which organise the ways in which individuals experience the world. However, Bourdieu stresses that within these internalised structures, or habitus, individuals are still capable of creativity. Using Mannheim's concept of generation as their starting point and applying Bourdieu's notion of habitus, Eyerman and Turner usefully re-define the definition of a generation as 'a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus' (1998: 93). As a result, we might regard generational habitus as the foundation of generational identity and subsequent memory rooted, as it is, in the unique sociohistorical location of a particular generation (Misztal 2003: 90). In addition, Eyerman and Turner's approach allows for a dynamic approach to memory in which to explore the dialogue between the individual and the collective within which inconsistencies abound.

Before examining generational memory in more detail, it is necessary to introduce another important structuring element of newsreel memory – the nation. Benedict Anderson has argued that nations are imagined communities because although individual community members will never know or even meet most of their fellow members, 'in the mind of each lives the image of their communication' (1991: 6). Anderson argues that to imagine one's community is not to invent or fabricate it, and that in fact, communities are distinguished from one another 'by the style in which they are imagined' (1991: 6). In this context, it is the particularity of a British-wartime-generational imagination that comes to the fore in the gathered recollections; thus, generation *and* nation are both revealed as *remembered communities*. My participants recalled watching newsreels as engendering a shared imagining of a common national identity, one that entailed a series of transformations in memory, from the specificity of the familial to the regional and national. Thus, despite the fact that individuals' memories are grounded in the familial or local, they nevertheless reflect the concerns of the wider (imagined) national community. In the process of narrating their past,

participants as we have seen, often merged or conflated their own experiences with that of the nation as a whole. These confluences are expressed most vividly by individuals repeatedly using the term ‘we’ or ‘our’. In this way, individuals (including those who articulate a degree of scepticism about wartime newsreels), recast their personal memories as part of a wider collective memory.

Recalling what he described as the ‘heavily censored’ newsreel coverage during the war, John Charlewood conceptualised his experience, and that of the country, as one-and-the-same: ‘I don’t think we realised how desperate things were. I mean obviously the rationing system, cos the rations were pretty meagre made it fairly clear we weren’t doing as well as all that’ (NRM03: 14). Here, John’s use of the personal pronoun ‘we’ loosely equates to Anderson’s understanding of the imagined community. Much of the inherent contradiction arising from participants’ testimonies is a result of the complexities of belonging to these various communities, each with its own specific yet inter-related identity. Thus, newsreel memory is revealed as the place where individual and social memories merge and where the membership of the various imagined communities are often used interchangeably. For example, the idea of the Second World War as engendering a national identity is now, in memory, inextricably linked to a particular generation. As if to illustrate this symbiotic relationship, in the extract below, Doug Weatherall characterised ‘our generation’ as a ‘disciplined generation’ with a particular sense of duty towards the nation. As if acting as self-appointed spokesman, and using the now familiar trope of the vernacular theorist, he recalled:

It was a sense of duty. You see we also, we were a disciplined generation. I had discipline in the home. I’d discipline at school. I was called up, and had to be, and was told I had to dress correctly. When I started work I was told to wear a suit or a jacket and flannels ready to go anywhere, cover anything.¹⁴ Then, you go in the army, of course there’s discipline in there, so my generation had discipline all their lives [...] So that’s the generation, our generation, so we did have a sense of responsibility, and a sense of national identity. (NRM22: 15)

Here, Doug personalised national identity referring to an example from his own childhood, suggesting his experiences were shared by others of his generation. As mentioned above, Doug’s memory talk shifts, or slips, from ‘we’ to ‘I’ and back again. For example, he used

the phrase 'I was called up' to identify himself with the imagined community of wartime troops. The qualities of discipline, honour, fairness and responsibility that Doug identified are all closely associated with a particular nostalgic conception of Britishness; without perhaps realising it, Doug had perfectly described the popularly imagined British-at-war. Later in the conversation, he noted that newsreels were subject to censorship and again reverted back to the imagined community as he noted that the newsreels were censored, 'in the interests of our, of the nation [...] normally the action was to our benefit' (NRM22: 8). Again, his use of the phrases, 'in the interests of our' and 'to our benefit', attest to the memory of a unanimity amongst the imagined national community. Furthermore, when participants discussed their wartime experiences, they drew, as Doug's comments illustrate, on a shared mythological discourse of community, patriotism and duty. Benedict Anderson has argued that nations are imagined by their members as a community because they are 'always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (1991: 7); despite the existence of deep inequalities, and division amongst the populations of nation states, there remains a sense of loyalty, even kinship amongst its members. Anderson's argument is particularly useful with regard to the state of the British nation during the War, maintaining as it does that ultimately it is this 'fraternity' that makes it possible for individuals to be willing to die to uphold their shared values and identity. In memory, newsreels might then be regarded as the visual and aural articulation of these fraternal imaginings and may indeed have played an important supporting role in the formation of national identity in the ten years leading up to and including the Second World War (Taylor, 1999: 112). What seems clear from the gathered testimonies is that within the context of the War the newsreels encouraged Britons, despite the enormous differences and inequalities between them, to regard themselves as a community fighting a common enemy; thus the newsreels appealed to the deep, horizontal comradeship to which Anderson refers.¹⁵

If the spatial domains of memory merge both the individual and social, it appears the act of viewing the newsreels was regarded as an experience imagined across temporal borders. David Morley has argued that we can understand television viewing as 'simultaneously; a ritual whose function is to structure domestic life, and to provide a symbolic mode of participation in the national community [...] a process operating within the realm of ideology [power, and politics]' (1991: 5). Morley argues that we should regard the processes of television viewing 'as discourses which constitute collectivities through a sense of "participation" and through the production of both a simultaneity of experience and a sense of a "past in common"' (1991: 14). Despite obvious differences between television and newsreel presentation, in their address to the national collective both appear to have played

an important role in the constitution of national identity. Just as Morley has argued that we need to begin in the sitting room in order to understand the ‘constitutive dynamics of abstractions such as “the community” or “the nation”’ (1991: 12), we might, in the context of pre-television newsreel viewing, begin to think of the cinema or the news theatre as a suitable place to begin to understand similar abstractions in the 1940s. This similarity is strengthened by the contention, noted in Chapter Three, that the news theatre auditorium can be regarded in a number of important ways as an extension of the domestic sphere. In addition, newsreels played a crucial role in connecting the familiar (the cinema auditorium) and the unfamiliar national and international spheres and in both evoking and preserving the image of the nation. Of course, Morley is examining the relationship between the domestic and public realms; however, as we have seen, Giuliana Bruno (1993: 51) and Annette Kuhn (2002: 17) have both suggested the cinema provided a safe *intermediate* or liminal space between the public and the private realms. The news theatre in particular provided a space in which the world (as depicted in the newsreels and travelogues) was made safe, or palatable.

In a more personalised sense, the collective experience of viewing the news in the space of the cinema auditorium allowed for an apparent communion with others, both those encountered in the cinema itself, and in other imagined cinema audiences across the country. As Stuart Allan indicates, one of the particular pleasures associated with watching broadcast television is its ability to communicate a ‘sense of experiential immediacy’ to the viewer (2004: 116). Similarly, newsreel viewing represented an earlier and as yet unacknowledged embodiment of an imagined shared experiential immediacy. Despite dislocation in time, that is, the temporal dislocation of audiences’ experience of seeing the same newsreel editions (sometimes weeks late in second, third, even fourth run venues) participants’ memories suggest a sense of being part of a shared experience.¹⁶ As participant Harold Kemp put it, ‘you’d see it [the news], see it more or less live type thing’ (NRM46: 3). In Harold’s memory, just as for Jean Murray, the immediacy of the newsreels is still fresh. Other participants, however, offered a more nuanced explanation of the impression that the newsreels offered the very latest news, as in this comment from a focus group participant: ‘[n]ewsreels brought things to life, even though the news was probably a week old, at least’ (NRM33: 1).

As Deb Verhoeven has noted with regard to the cinema-going audience, the experience of ‘going to the pictures’ is based on ‘encountered’, as well as ‘imagined relationships’ (2009: 17), that is, encountered relationships with other audience members physically present within the cinema and an imagined communion with the entire cinema-

going audience itself. Thus, the cinema-going equivalent of Morley's 'symbolic mode of participation' and Allan's 'experiential immediacy' is of a subtly different and more complex order when located within the space of the cinema (or news theatre) auditorium. The 1940s cinema audience shared multiple tiers of experience, both with those with whom they shared the immediate cinema space and those with whom they shared the virtual or imagined experience of watching a particular newsreel. Often this experiential immediacy is linked in memory to the recollection of momentous events, which will be explored in the following chapter.

In his discussion of the relationship between language and the formation of the nation-state, Benedict Anderson discusses the way in which the existence of a contemporary community is suggested to its members through shared language, above all, in the form of poetry and song. Using the singing of national anthems as a case in point, he writes:

[T]here is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses and the same melody. The image: unisonance. (1991: 145)

It is Anderson's notion of unisonance that I want to apply to the viewing of newsreels, the unison of experience within the cinema and the simultaneously imagined unison with all those beyond the immediate space of the auditorium who watched the same news footage. For Anderson, singing a national anthem 'provide[s] occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community' (1991: 145). Not only was the national anthem sung at the end of the evening's performances in cinemas until the 1970s - a constant reminder for audiences of their nationhood - but watching the newsreels, just like the act of singing in unison, provided audiences with an impression of being part of an imagined community at the very moment of viewing. In a powerful testimony to the importance of singing the national anthem to his national identity, Doug Weatherall recounted the ritual of standing for the national anthem at the end of the day's performances, 'they always used to play the National Anthem at the end; and people always stood up [...] and you stood out of respect to your national anthem' (NRM22: 15).¹⁷ Doug's words are full of nostalgia and an undeniable sense of pride and respect for what the national anthem represented. However, here it is the notion that audiences acted in unison, that they were watching and singing together as one, that has subsequently had a powerful and sustained influence on popular memory. Tricia Charlewood also recalled the practice of singing the national anthem:

And at the end when the cinema was finished everybody stood up and they played “God Save the King”, or “God Save the Queen” [...] it was still very patriotic that feeling. (NRM03: 13)

Similarly, despite the temporal and spatial dislocations of newsreel viewing in cinemas across the country, the newsreels nevertheless encouraged a powerful sense of unisonance, of an imagined community sharing the news, and forging feelings of belonging. As Marita Sturken has argued, again referring to television broadcasts but in terms also applicable to cinema newsreel viewing, ‘the experience of watching “national” events [...] enables Americans, regardless of the vast differences among them, to situate themselves as members of a national culture’ (Sturken, 1997: 26).

If the newsreels, as I have argued, gave the impression of experiential immediacy, live radio broadcasts provided the real thing. Here, John and Tricia Charlewood’s comments are typical of participants’ responses, revealing their memories of the importance of live radio broadcasts to the nation during the War:

T.C. But the radio was very important. And I can remember at Hexham, and I might have been eight or nine, being allowed to stay up again till nine o’clock to hear Winston Churchill, and it was his very momentous speech about fighting on the beaches, and I didn’t really understand it, but I realised it was serious, and I remember listening.

J.C. I remember listening to Neville Chamberlain at eleven o’clock on the third of September, on the declaration of war [...] for those sort of broadcasts, there’d be an announcement, “the Prime Minister will speak to the nation at eleven o’clock this morning”, and er, I mean most people have a fair idea of what was coming, but er, everybody, but everybody would be listening to it. (NRM03: 20)

Here the act of engaging with two extraordinary news broadcasts created a sense of national unisonance. The two broadcasts remembered, Churchill’s ‘We Shall Fight on the Beaches’ speech of 4 June 1940 and Chamberlain’s declaration of war on 3 September 1939, are both recalled as flashbulb memories; that is, they are memories of a broadcast that provoked a heightened emotional response, elicited vivid memories and, most importantly in this context, evoked a sense of a widely shared experience.¹⁸

5.3 A NORTHERN SENSIBILITY

‘Don’t forget all you Tyneside folks dig in and keep cracking’. *Messages Home* May 1944¹⁹

In the final section of this chapter we return to the home, family and the local. As cultural historian Dave Russell has noted, the formation of national identity is an immensely complex process, but one which without doubt is ‘constructed in and experienced through the locality’ (2004: 273). As we have seen, the War engendered a specific and fiercely fought patriotism amongst the British people. However, in response to Russell’s observation, we now turn briefly to the expression of a northern regional patriotism and north-eastern kinship in relation to newsreel memory. Despite regional identity emerging as a strong theme in a number of participants’ narratives, it was not a significant feature of wartime newsreel memory. Although we might regard the region as another imagined community and one much closer to home, in the context of newsreel memory it featured far less prominently than the nation as a whole. What was revealed in most of the memories, however, was what we might refer to as a northern sensibility or a ‘northern consciousness’ (Russell 2004: 273). Russell has suggested that this sense of Northerness is ‘both extremely fragile and generally secondary to other systems of identification’ (2004: 273). What becomes manifest in the participants’ recollections is that their northern consciousness is subsumed within a complex network of mnemonic allegiances to family, friends, street, town, city, nation, and generation that frame personal identity and memory. In the following excerpt Doug Weatherall expresses his own northern sensibility through an appraisal of his native County Durham’s contribution to the national economy. Here too, he clearly links a particular northern consciousness with a social consciousness through the figure of his father:

D.W. I was aware that areas like mine, coal-mining areas, provided one of the great basic minerals which helped our economy, which kept Britain going. And we also built ships at Sunderland [...] which was such a big - officially the biggest ship building town in the world. More people built ships, worked in the shipyards in Sunderland, than in any town in the world.

L.A. So you did have a sense of pride about being a North-Easterner?

D.W. Absolutely! To this day I have. I think the North-East contributed a lot to society.

L.A. And would that come from your father? Because he obviously...

D.W. I think it probably would do because he was very much aware. He was very socially conscious put it that way. (NRM22: 15)

Here we see the complex network of mnemonic allegiances and communities framing Doug's memories; he refers to 'areas like mine' (Seaham in County Durham), coal mining communities which kept the nation going. But, as if to underline the complexity of regional identity, Doug also refers to the ships 'we [also] built' on the river Wear at Sunderland. Although now in neighbouring counties, Seaham and Sunderland have strong historic ties, and here Doug allies himself with these two distinct sub-regional communities.²⁰ What is more significant perhaps, and also operating at a sub-regional level, is that Doug's affiliations are located south of the River Tyne; in other words Doug would not regard himself as a Tynesider. As Dave Russell notes, '[t]he North's [...] host of powerful local and regional identities in fact make it an excellent site for observing contending versions of national identity' (2004: 8). Doug is at once British, a Northerner who identifies himself with two distinct local communities, a Durham mining community and a Wearside shipbuilding community. It is important to stress that it is these two local communities, along with his familial ties, that shaped his view of the world and to which his continued loyalty is manifest. Doug's recollections also reveal that his sense of Northerness is closely linked to the issue of class. Dave Russell again notes that 'some sense of in particular, an embracing national working class identity will have been a powerful element for many Northerners' (2004: 274). In emphasising his own northern working class roots, Doug also introduced the notion of 'us' and 'them':

L.A. You were talking about your roots, so you still regard yourself as working...

D.W. One of them - absolutely! I've, I'll never forget from whence I came [...] I think me background helped me to be a er, a socially aware journalist and hopefully a more compassionate journalist than I otherwise would have been [...] I'm not saying we used to call them "Southern softies" but there was a sort of feeling that they were a bit different down there. Apart from the accents and the speech lots of people seemed, were more comfortably placed than we were. (NRM22: 16)

Doug's class allegiances seem to bear out Russell's contention that regional identification tends to take second place to other, more powerful, affiliations; here Doug is emphatic about belonging to the English working class. However, as we can see from his assertion that Southerners were 'more comfortably placed than we were' he is adopting the popular Northern view of 'us' and 'them'. According to Dave Russell the 'North-South economic divide [...] appears to have passed into Northern consciousness' (2004: 27). Although Doug quickly reassessed his view, and admitted that even some Southerners fell on hard times, it is plain that his working-class allegiances are at odds with the popular Northern imagination of the South. Similarly Frank Knaggs revealed his northern sensibilities when he observed:

The North–South divide was more apparent then, and, or rather it was more fiercely emphasized, you know. We thought of ourselves as Northerners and the Southerners, well as foreigners really, “Oh they’re foreigners”, and when you went to London it was exotic [...] There was a kind of fierce independence, “oh well those poncy people down South” you know, that sort of thing [...] it used to be very exotic to visit London. (NRM07: 21)

Like Frank, a number of participants positioned themselves as Northerners in relation to Southerners; as Russell notes, the ideological underpinning of Northerness takes the form of 'a dislike for another imagined community rather than a clear sense of its own' (2004: 275). A number of participants, like Doug and Frank, utilised the populist northern discourse about so-called Southern softies, and if they did not necessarily articulate what being Northern was, they were clear about what it was not. However, inevitably the remembered character of the region was dictated by the interviewees themselves and whilst Doug was intensely proud of his northern working-class roots, others described the region in very different terms. For example, although born in the region, Christopher Beadle, whose middle class parents came from the South, clearly viewed himself as an outsider and remembered Tyneside in the 1930s in altogether different terms:

Coming to Newcastle in those days for the sort of middle class academic, was like a posting to Siberia, because Newcastle had an extremely small middle class in those days...[it] was the home of heavy industry, coal mines, heavy engineering, ship building, armaments [...] Newcastle was a sort of depressing place, very working class place. (NRM 35: 12)

National culture, as Dave Russell notes, ‘has always been largely constructed from within London and its immediate environs and the ‘North’ has therefore been defined in that culture as “other” and ultimately, as inferior’ (2004: 9). In this context, former merchant seaman George Henderson indicated that North-Eastern news never featured in the newsreels because ‘we didn’t exist’ (NRM44: 1). George’s ‘we’ reveals a sharp sense of his regional affiliation in contrast to a national sensibility, a vivid illustration of his own Northern consciousness; his statement also reveals his keenly felt dislike of the newsreels’ apparent metrocentrism.

As suggested above, to varying degrees the North-South divide was recalled by the majority of participants. A particular Northern sensibility was articulated (literally and metaphorically) in recollection, and sometimes even in vocal imitation, of the newsreel commentators. However, in memory it is not what was said that is recalled, but how it was said, in other words, commentators’ posh or plummy accents are remembered. For example, participant Ann Alexander remembered the ‘*Pathé News* given by a man with a posh voice as narrator’ (NRM27: 1). Similarly, Henry Holden recalled the accent as, ‘[d]efinitely posh [...] You just accepted it at the time, that the person doing it wouldn’t be from working class would have a certain, er, voice’ (NRM17: 12). Henry’s recollections reveal the overwhelming sense evoked in the gathered memories that this was ‘just the way things were’. Frank Knaggs’ comments on the matter, however, again reveal him as the study’s resident vernacular theorist, as he expressed his views on the nature of society as revealed through the newsreel commentators’ accents:

I’ll tell you what tells me the most about society at the time and that was the commentators on the newsreels. There was a, one thing that I noticed, well I didn’t actually consciously notice, this is in recollection [...] I remember when Wilfred Pickles became an announcer and he had a Northern accent and that was absolutely incredible people were saying “a fellow with that accent can’t read the news”. (NRM07: 13)

Frank’s observations are, as ever, acute. Northern accents were marginalized, as the newsreels, like radio, utilised a uniquely exaggerated derivation of BBC English. It is the commentators’ particular style of enunciation which is recalled in newsreel memory. So distinctive were some voices that individual commentators became personalities in their own right: E.V.H. Emmett at Gaumont, R.E. Jeffrey at Universal, Roy de Groot at Pathé, and Leslie Mitchell at Movietone all became household names.²¹ Although in reality their accents

are rather less ‘Southern’ and, as indicated above, rather more representative of a particular form of received-pronunciation, the commentators’ accents have, nevertheless, in memory become indicative not only of the North-South divide, but often of significant class differences.²²

Moving from their presentation to focus on the newsreels’ content, although the issue of regional news was not a priority for the newsreels, this had as much to do with the practicalities of newsreel production and of addressing a nationwide cinema audience, as with deliberate metrocentricism. According to Jean Murray who could not recall any local news, ‘I think it was all world news you know, and national news’ (NRM09: 15). Similarly, John and Tricia Charlewood’s response to my question about local newsreel stories explains why, within the context of newsreel memories, the recollection of regional newsreels proved so elusive:

J.C. [There were] virtually none, unless the local story had an impact at a national level, but erm no, there wouldn’t be any local newsreels.

T.C. No, I mean having local news on television is a different concept now. We didn’t have anything like that. (NRM03: 24)

Tricia’s interesting use of shuttlework highlights an important point, and one which in a regional context it is perhaps easy to overlook. The equivalent of regional television news broadcasts during the 1940s was the local paper press; in this period radio news and the newsreels had a decidedly (inter)national agenda. This is unsurprising, since as mentioned in previous chapters, newsreels were driven by a metropolitan-national agenda in which regional items would be included primarily to give a flavour of the diversity of the nation’s culture but within the predominant discourses of Britishness. The newsreels represented a kind of institutional arbiter of national culture, and both contributed to and mirrored a broad representation of the nation as viewed from the metropolis. Occasionally individual newsreels featured extended coverage for particular regional audiences if a news item happened to feature their region, or a local personality. Examples of this practice include: the extended regional editions of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth’s visits to Tyneside in February 1939, June 1941²³ and April 1943²⁴ (see figure 7); Gracie Fields’ visit to Tyneside in July 1941; and Churchill’s visit in November 1941.²⁵ As Ossie Nicholson recalled, the only local stories were ‘celebrities arriving at [Newcastle] Central Station [or the] royals’ (NRM14: 9).



Figure 7: King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visit Tyneside. April 1943.

Another important practical consideration for newsreel companies, and one which dictated the coverage of regional issues, was the lack of regional news gathering facilities. As a result, with the exception of pre-planned news events, civic receptions, royal visits and the like, relatively few news items involving the North-East featured in the newsreels. As participant Christopher Beadle explained:

I don't think there was any local stories [...] because there would be no sort of camera people in the area. I mean unless it was a very big story I mean you might have seen something of launching a ship, the Queen launching a ship on Tyneside, that sort of thing. (NRM35: 11)

Another participant, Henry Holden recalled 'you had local, this country news, you had stuff from around the world, wars, and stuff like sporting things, football matches and that' (NRM17: 4). Here, in relation to 'stuff from around the world', the national news becomes local, the two merging in memory. Henry also introduced the fact that an interest in football was, and still is, popularly associated with a particularly Northern sensibility (see Mason 1996: 41-52). In this regard coverage of Newcastle United's three FA Cup victories in the

1950s featured more prominently, and at greater length, in special regional editions of the newsreels screened on Tyneside.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, almost as if to confirm the sporting character of the region, Newcastle's FA Cup victories featured as a recurring memory throughout the gathered narratives, as Cynthia Campbell explained:

The newsreels although they were, um, you did get some local flavour in them specially the sport, 'cos it was the years of Newcastle United winning the FA Cup which we had to go and see. And then we had to go and see the following one [newsreel] where it showed you them bringing the Cup back to Newcastle [...] Because, well this is your local team. (NRM02: 7)

In the context of the sporting culture of the North-East, the newsreels' representations of Newcastle United's victories certainly seemed to suggest that the whole community or region were supporting the team, and in the process lending further credence to the popular notion of the close relationship between the North and football.²⁷ Cynthia's recollections suggest a kind of tribal allegiance to her local team, an allegiance formed in childhood and part of a particular northern sensibility. Doug Weatherall offered his own vernacular theory on the link between the North-East's economically depressed coal mining areas and football and, in the process related both to his own childhood experiences in Seaham:

The mining areas were always great at producing footballers [...] and of course you've got to remember if you became a footballer you didn't have to go down in the bowels of the earth to hew coal as my father did, and thousands more did, throughout the North East coalfield. So it was a great outlet for people who were ambitious. (NRM22: 1)

Here again, Doug recalled the North-East's economic climate and predominantly working-class population, many of whom he describes as heroically going down into the 'bowels of the earth to hew coal'.²⁸

However, despite these isolated regional newsreel memories, we should remember the newsreels were intended for a national cinema audience and, as Dave Russell has also acknowledged, it would be unwise to 'downplay the power of national and imperial sensibilities within the North as in every other region' (2004: 8). With this in mind, the region featured far less prominently in memory than the nation as a whole, particularly within the

context of the Second World War memories. Ossie Nicholson, for example, suggested that ‘nothing ever happened locally, I can’t remember anything. Nobody was killed there were no bombs round here’ (NRM14: 9). Here, Ossie uses ‘local’ to refer to his immediate neighbourhood and, although claiming nothing much happened, he went on to recall that he was almost killed in one of the first bombing raids on the Tyne. Likewise, Sheila Weir attributed her lack of regional memory to the fact that nothing very much happened on Tyneside:

No, I don’t think so, no – just trying to think – I don’t think there was anything very much on [the newsreels]. There wasn’t an awful lot happened here you know. They tried to bomb the shipyards and things like that, but they seemed to miss them. I mean we were lucky, there was a bomb dropped just behind us. Cos two houses in the next street were demolished. Cos I just thought, if he’d dropped his bombs either a minute sooner, or later, it would have been my house. (NRM30: 12)

In fact, as these testimonies show, it was not the case that nothing happened in the region during the War. Although the devastation was nothing like that caused in London, Coventry and Portsmouth, as one might expect given its strategic importance in armament production and shipbuilding, Tyneside suffered significant bombardment during 1940-1. Here, however, both Ossie and Shelia’s recollections appear to slip between a popular mythology about the lack of damage inflicted on the North-East region during the War and their lived experience. It is almost as if this slippage between a constructed and constituted memory causes a disavowal of the life threatening incidents experienced by both. Although apparently suggesting something entirely different, Thelma Miller’s memory of local stories appearing in the newsreels reveals a similar slippage and is equally illustrative of the complexity of newsreel memory:

L.A. Do you remember any local stories?

T.M. Just about the Wilkinson’s factory which was bombed, of course that was tragic. There were a lot of people working in a lemonade factory on Falmouth Road, just along the road from here between Tynemouth and North Shields [...] and lots of people were killed; that was very dramatic.

L.A. Was that on the newsreels?

T.M. The newsreels yes. And in fact I saw it again I saw it again on *Wish You Were Here* sort of you know it was shown recently, very recently the BBC have hold of it in their archives you know [...] And then there was another case in Ocean View in Whitley Bay where there was a series of bombs on one night, incendiaries and it was all ablaze and that was all on the news [...] that sort of thing they were all shown obviously because they were of local interest you know.
(NRM08: 16)

There is silent amateur film footage of the devastation caused by bombing in North Shields, however, it did not feature, as Thelma suggests, in the national newsreels.²⁹ Thelma revealed that she had seen the footage recently on television, but equally recalled seeing it in the newsreels' coverage at the time, convinced that these events were shown in the newsreels because 'they were of local interest'. However, there is no evidence to suggest this is the case. This is an example of the complex entanglement of newsreel memory in which familiar events, sometimes seen many years later, take on the remembered form of newsreel footage. As she continues, Thelma's vivid newsreel memories become more generalised reminiscences as she recalls events that were undoubtedly talked about locally at the time and have subsequently found their way in to local history.³⁰

As noted above, regional editions of national newsreels were occasionally produced featuring extended coverage of an item with particular regional interest. However, as we have seen elsewhere, during the Second World War the newsreels' regional coverage of events was not intended to highlight regional difference, but to suggest the nation was 'all in this together'. The very notion of being British was re-made as the Second World War mobilised the whole nation following a period of marked regional differences and the crushing decline in the heavy manufacturing industries suffered in the Northern regions during the 1920s and 1930s. As a result of this wartime mobilization, the North-East's mass unemployment was consigned to distant pre-war memory. As Dave Russell has noted:

The exceptional circumstances of wartime should also be noted [here], especially those relating to the 'People's War' of 1939-45 when the North was warmly embraced for its distinctive contribution to a wider Englishness or Britishness'. (2004: 33)

This distinctive contribution was characterised in populist discourses of Northernness which imbued ‘individuals with valuable cultural associations implying a capacity for hard work, a lack of pretension, a certain generosity and warmth’ (Russell 2004: 277). Just such characteristics were revealed in a short drama documentary *Tyneside Story* (1943, d. Gilbert Gunn) made by Spectator Films for the Ministry of Information. Featuring amateur actors from Newcastle’s People’s Theatre Company, the film intertwines documentary footage and re-enactment to illustrate how thousands of former shipyard workers returned to the yards – idle since the depression years of the 1920s and 1930s – to begin the job of replacing and expanding Britain’s devastated naval and merchant shipping fleets. Unusually the film ends with a straight-talking shipyard worker addressing the camera directly and asking what will happen to the yards after the War; will lack of economic investment and political will once again abandon them to their fate? ‘Will it be the same, five years from now? That’s what we on Tyneside want to know’ he entreats. In the worker’s final appeal there is the undeniable accusation that Tynesiders are only valued and supported under the most exceptional of national circumstances. In the context of a government-funded film, this thinly veiled accusation appears to be an extraordinarily sour note on which to end and one which perhaps lays bare the deep divisions and resentments obscured by war and only partially revealed in memory.

This chapter addressed the complex nature of newsreel memory formation and the mnemonic structures within which it is embedded. Analysis of the gathered recollections has revealed the value of an interpretative approach that encompasses the wider cultural and historical frames of meaning which structure and inform newsreel memory itself. Such an approach highlighted the fact that a number of mnemonic communities have an important determining influence on personal memory. As we have seen, these range from the close familial bonds of parents and children to wider socio-historic groupings. Significantly in this regard, a shared generational habitus has come to structure participants’ newsreels memory of the 1940s. Indeed it appears that one of the most important determining factors in memory formation was participants’ identification with, and allegiance to, the wartime generation. Here, too, participants displayed a deep and abiding loyalty to their hard won sovereignty (Britishness), although undoubtedly for a number of participants their national identity was inflected by a strong Northern sensibility. What becomes clear, despite these complexities, is memory’s powerful relation to lived experience. Although, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the interview process afforded the participants the opportunity to historicise their lives, time and again their recollections returned to their familial experiences through which

were inflected the era-defining events of total war. Taking up and developing this characteristic of personal memory further, the next chapter explores the dynamic relationship between participants' memories and the events of history around which they cluster.

¹ Although in the context of a discussion on the legitimization of journalistic authority Barbie Zelizer utilises a similar analogy in relation to televised journalism 'as a mediator of national public experience' (1992: 4).

² In his article entitled 'Britain Off Duty' Mark Abrams noted that
[I]n fact, the entertainment industries of this country [...] look primarily to the unmarried sons and daughters in working class homes and to the middle class, both young and old, for their patrons. These groups, with their shorter working week and their limited domestic chores, are the only people with enough spare time to constitute a leisured class' (1947: xx).

³ In Annette Kuhn's cinema memory study, her participants more often than not appear to have inhabited a space 'temporarily freed from the strictures of the adult world' (1992: 47).

⁴ Monkseaton is nine miles east of Newcastle city centre.

⁵ See Anne Freidberg (1993) for discussion of the historic links between shopping and cinema-going.

⁶ Tynemouth is a coastal village eight miles east of Newcastle city centre.

⁷ Doug Weatherall was born in Seaham County Durham, just over 5 miles south of Sunderland and 18 miles south of Newcastle. From a mining family, his father worked at Dawdon Colliery, Doug won a scholarship to the local grammar school in 1943, leaving at sixteen to become a junior sports' reporter for the *Sunderland Echo*. In 1963 Doug became a full-time sports' reporter for the *Daily Mail* as well as a familiar face on local regional television.

⁸ Blyth is a coastal town, 13 miles north-east of Newcastle city centre.

⁹ Box's 1946 survey includes some interesting comparative statistics on newspaper reading.

¹⁰ First published in 1919 and selling up to 500, 000 copies a week *The Children's Newspaper* was aimed at keeping young people up to date with the latest in world news and science.

¹¹ For an in-depth investigation into children and young people's responses to news see David Buckingham's (2000) work on children and the news.

¹² It was a very small majority of just 51 % (Box, 1946: 9).

¹³ The oldest participant was born in 1912 and the youngest in 1948. The majority (around 80%) of the participants were born between 1929 and 1937.

¹⁴ Doug's first job was as a junior reporter for the local newspaper; here he is referring to covering a story for the paper.

¹⁵ See *Pathé Gazette*, 'Our Island Fortress' 8 July, 1940. Film ID. 1049.33. Pathé on-line archive. The opening titles read, 'There's A Land, A Dear Land'. Over shots of the English countryside, seaside and a typical small town, and ending with the firing of artillery guns,

Bob Danvers Walker's rousing appeal, "To British manhood and British womanhood is left, the proud task of saving civilisation from the rank and defiling growth of barbarism".

¹⁶ Not all participants however, would agree with this supposition. When talking about seeing repeated newsreels Charlie Hall remarked 'You'd see the news that everybody else had seen a week ago sort of thing. So if you'd seen it at The Regal you'd think, 'oh hell's bells', you'd just close your eyes or talk to somebody until the damn thing was finished' (NRM12: 21).

¹⁷ Doug is referring to his local cinema the Cosy in Seaham, County Durham.

¹⁸ Marita Sturken refers to psychologists Roger Brown and James Kulik's categorisation of flashbulb memory as one that "suggest[s] surprise, an indiscriminate illumination and brevity" (1997: 25).

¹⁹ This quote comes from Norman Banham from Gateshead who was stationed in February 1944 with British troops in Italy. Sergeant Banham's message to his family and friends formed part of an occasional series from *British Movietone News* called 'Messages Home' in which men stationed abroad greeted their loved ones back home.

²⁰ Sunderland was a municipal borough of County Durham until 1974.

²¹ Anthony Aldgate describes some of the most famous commentators' styles thus, 'Emmett at Gaumont had a style which was light, witty and tongue-in-cheek [...] his voice was instrumental in dictating the tone and mood of a story...R.E. Jeffrey at Universal [...] his style was far more homely, with its strength in a slow, heavily emphasised, fireside manner (1979: 41-2).

²² Although not recalled by any participants, an example of newsreel commentary from Jeffrey Sumner of British Movietone serves to illustrate the tacit acknowledgement of regional differences in an item titled, 'The Cup Goes North', Sumner translates a banner on the team's train announcing 'It's wors agen' as 'It's ours again'. *British Movietone News*, 12 May 1955. Story No. 63506. British Movietone on-line archive.

²³ *British Movietone News* 'King and Queen Tour Tyneside' 18 June 1941, Story No. 40890. British Movietone on-line archive.

²⁴ *Pathé Gazette Special* 'Royal Visit to North-East' 15 April 1943. Film ID. 1081.15. Pathé online archive.

²⁵ *British Movietone News* 'Churchill's visit to Tyneside; Tour of the Old War Horse'. 13 November 1941, Story No. 41558. British Movietone on-line. Leslie Mitchell's commentary below provides an example of the morale boosting role the newsreels played during the war. Mitchell's commentary also acknowledges the distinctive Northern spirit outlined above while simultaneously embracing the importance of national unity in the figure of Churchill.

The Premiere has completed a high speed tour of the North of England and whether he was inspecting troops, munitions works or the results of a blitz, he got a great welcome everywhere. He rode around in an armored scout car while inspecting an armored brigade, and he went on to Newcastle upon Tyne to see how shipyard workers were doing there. He saw that the workers and all the people there are in great heart, and that this vital aspect of our war effort is more than good. Both here and at Hull, which has suffered a number of blitzes, everyone is confident and quite undeterred by anything the enemy has done or may attempt to do. On the contrary Northerners have every intention of hitting back. There was plenty of evidence of this at Sheffield where Mr Churchill looked over an arms factory, he complimented the workers here with the way they're getting on with the job and he also made a surprise speech at the town hall. No matter how long this foul war might last he said, the British Commonwealth of Nations will come through united, undaunted, stainless, unflinching. Great crowds collected in the streets of the

city to see the man whose leadership is such an inspiration. On visits like this he himself has surely drawn inspiration from the people. Stalin has called him the old war horse; the people of Sheffield seem to think he was alright too.

²⁶ See *British Pathé's News Special* 'Newcastle Welcomes the Cup Winners'. 7 May 1951. Film ID. 1451.10. Pathé News on-line.

²⁷ During the celebrations at Wembley following Newcastle United's win in the 1951 FA Cup Final, British Movietone invited Captain Joe Harvey to say a few words to the fans back home on Tyneside. Holding the Cup aloft Harvey gestures to the cinema audience '[H]ere you are. Hello Tyneside we're bringing the Cup back for you now so wait for us on Thursday.' *British Movietone News* 30 April 1951. Story No. 55387. British Movietone on-line.

²⁸ See Huggins for a detailed examination of the relationship between the newsreels and footballing culture (2007: 80-102).

²⁹ This footage can be accessed at the Northern Film and Television Archive based at Teesside University, Middlesbrough.

³⁰ Another local event remembered vividly in the same way was in the words of members of one focus group, 'the night they bombed the goods station' (NRM42). On 1 September 1941 New Bridge Street goods station in Newcastle suffered a direct hit. 300 tons of food supplies were destroyed and it took two days to put the fire out.

CHAPTER 6 - NEWSREEL MEMORIES AND POST-WAR EVENTS

We are living in the midst of many great events. We know in the days when the war seems remote and far away these will be historic pictures. They will tell another generation how we celebrated Victory in Europe Day.

Pathé Gazette, 17 May 1945

Referring to the practices of oral history, Alessandro Portelli notes that '[t]he first thing that makes oral history different, [...] is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*' (1991: 50). Taking up the hypothesis examined in the last chapter, that newsreel memories often represent moments of perceived collective witnessing of historically significant events, this chapter shifts the focus to the memories of some of these specific events themselves. Most of these events recalled in newsreel memory stand out as moments where the 'continual flow of history' is ruptured (Sturken, 1997: 25). As a result, they provide the basis not only for remembered acts of collective witnessing but for the formation of personal memories. As research participant Henry Holden recalled, 'certain things stuck' (NRM17: 4) revealing, in the process, the iconic status of certain events. In the previous chapter, newsreel viewing was likened to television viewing in terms of its ability to simulate a sense of collective national witnessing, and in this chapter the analogy with television viewing is extended once more. In a piece examining television's role in sustaining the image of the imagined (national) community, and referring to Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan's work on the television coverage of the Royal Wedding in 1981, David Morley writes:

[t]elevision [...] is not so much reporting on the event but actively involved in "performing" it. Television is not simply transmitting such an event (or commenting on it) but is bringing it into existence. (1991: 13)

The question such televised events raise, Morley argues, is whether or not it is still possible 'to speak of a public event, when it is celebrated at home' (1991: 13) or, in other words, when the collective is fragmented. In the previous chapter I concluded that in memory, newsreel viewing is described as though it was a collectively shared experience, not only shared with those in the cinema or news theatre auditorium but with the wider imagined community of the national cinema-viewing audience. In this chapter I examine whether the gathered recollections reveal that newsreel viewing, in an important imaginative sense, brought

specific events into existence, allowing audiences to experience the sensation of a shared public event. As was noted in the previous chapter, generational identity reveals itself in part as a response to widely shared traumatic or formative events. As a result, the individuals involved in the current research appear to form a distinctive generational cohort because of their shared wartime – and indeed newsreel – experiences. For all those interviewed, such experiences have left an indelible impression on their memory. As Barbara Misztal has noted, ‘the most important moments for a generation tend to be unusual historical events since the more an event generates emotions, the more it elicits social sharing and the better it is remembered’ (2003: 88). Here Eyerman and Turner’s notion of generational habitus, explored in the previous chapter, is useful in that we might regard all the significant events that a generation experiences at first hand as part of the habitus from which that generation defines its collective identity. Here then, I will explore the memories of significant events and the discourses surrounding them in order to explore the relationship between the historic events recorded in the newsreels and a shared generational memory.¹

As Susannah Radstone has concluded, the complex processes of personal memory are ‘held in tension with an understanding of memory’s relation, however complex and mediated, with history, with happenings, or even and most problematically [...] with events’ (2000: 10). In this regard, understanding the gathered newsreel memories requires an acknowledgement that personal memories are situated between the complex processes of memory construction and the events of history. In an attempt to reconcile these two positions, sociologist Stephen Feuchtwang (2000) has rejected a simplistic reduction of the complexities of memory transmission, advocating instead a ‘third position’ within the partialities of memory. That is, he recognises memory as inhabiting a liminal space between the extremes of postmodern theory, in which memory is validated by its subjectivity, and earlier understandings of memory as simply the registration of events (Radstone 2000: 16). Undoubtedly the newsreel memories gathered here reveal something of the personal circumstances surrounding, or feelings about, a particular event. However, the recurrence of the same limited number of freely remembered event memories, or memory clusters, suggests the existence of a shared wartime generational memory and further provides evidence of not only the significance of a popular shared memory, but as Radstone and Feuchtwang suggest, the conflation of personal memory and history.

Although individual newsreel memories of specific events may differ in the way they are expressed between individuals, there is nevertheless a remarkable degree of consensus in the examples participants chose to recall; in other words, the remembered newsreel events

themselves are universally recognised as significant. The bond between historic events and newsreel memories is strengthened by the fact that only a minority of participants spontaneously recalled the fact that newsreels consisted primarily of unremarkable topical items.² Thus, a distinctive feature of newsreel memory is its equation with footage of major news events, so-called ‘marker events’ (Teer-Tomaselli 2006: 228). As participant Tricia Charlewood recalled ‘momentous events, remember seeing them on the newsreels’ (NRM03: 5). This chapter demonstrates how memorability and collectively agreed historic importance merge and, as a result, how memorable newsreels and their perceived importance merge.³ However, this chapter also explores how memories of wartime newsreels become part of the meta-narrative of war.

As outlined above, this chapter examines spontaneously evoked memories of particular events featured in the newsreels, which it was suggested rupture the flow of history. Claude Levi-Strauss referred to such events as ‘hot moments’ (cited in Teer-Tomaselli 2006: 228), that is, incidents held to be critical in the life of a nation. Taking up Levi-Strauss’s ideas in her work on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Barbie Zelizer refers to what she has called:

Critical incidents [...] those moments by which people air, challenge, and negotiate their own standards of action [...] critical incidents uphold the importance of discourse and narrative in shaping the community over time. (1992: 4)

These moments are in fact often exactly what participants recall in newsreel memory and, further, as Zelizer highlights, these memories reveal a remarkable degree of consistency in both the way they are articulated (discourse) and what is articulated (narrative). When considering these limited clusters of remembered newsreel events, we might think of them as examples of so-called flashbulb memories, a useful visual metaphor for memories of film journalism. These are memories most often associated with an event that provokes an emotional response, elicits vivid images, and evokes a sense of a widely shared experience. According to Catrin Finkenauer *et al.*, such memories are both individual, ‘because they consist of people’s memory of their personal memory context’ (1997: 192), and collective, because they involve a shared recollection of the actual event. The intense personal emotions expressed in the narratives gathered here, which are used to contextualise the very limited

number of events remembered, suggests the memories of these events have become examples of flashbulb memory.⁴

In her comparative study of news memory across generations and cultures, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli has demonstrated that memories of ‘marker events’ differ between nations and generational groups. Teer-Tomaselli identifies five factors that play a major part in the memorability of news items:

the size and impact of the event; the negativity as well as the ongoing or continuing nature of the event; those items that deal with elite personages and countries; and finally, and most crucially, proximity, both geographic and more particularly cultural. (2006: 229)⁵

Similarly, the current research revealed that within newsreel memories, size and impact, elite personages, countries and proximity all played a major role in the memorability of newsreel items. However, while the remembered events of, for example, the Second World War may be negative (the Blitz and so on), the memories are often expressed with the same ‘upbeat’ discursive register as the newsreels themselves. Further, a substantial proportion of the remembered events from the Second World War were of military successes or the end of the war itself.⁶ The significance of the geographic or cultural proximity of a news item also requires further qualification in this historic context; geographical proximity of course was of vital importance to an island nation at war. However, as revealed in Chapter Five, Britain’s imagined community included the Empire, or the ‘great British Commonwealth of nations’ as it was referred to in the newsreels.⁷ In this context it would appear affinity, and thus memorability, was built on apparently shared ideological goals or governance rather than geographic or even cultural proximity. As the newsreels reported, proximity stretched to include all Allied nations and their troops, frequently referred to as ‘our boys’. In this regard newsreel footage from El Alamein (1942) and manoeuvres in the Western Desert was remembered by a number of participants. Thus, it is memories of incidents involving members of the imagined community of the ‘great British commonwealth of nations’, wherever and whoever they may have been, that feature prominently in the recollections.

In their work on generations and collective memories Schuman and Scott use the simple hypothesis that ‘people of all ages will tend to report events and changes from their youth’ (1989: 359). Utilising Karl Mannheim’s assumption that late adolescence and early adulthood are particularly important in terms of the formation of a world view, Schuman and

Scott sought to determine whether the events and changes remembered have similar meanings for individual members of particular generational cohorts; they concluded that ‘memories are strongest for those in their youth at the time of the event’ (1989: 365), adding that age, rather than education, gender or race is the strongest predictor of memory. However, as outlined in Chapter Two this study has revealed that those events that occurred in early childhood – between the ages of five and thirteen – appear to form the bedrock of generational consciousness. As Mannheim himself stated, ‘it is of considerable importance for the formation of the consciousness which experiences happen to make those all-important ‘first impressions’, ‘childhood experiences’ (1959: 298). Thus, we see that it is around this all important first ‘strata’ of experience that later youthful experiences coalesce.

Schuman and Scott revealed generational differences in both conception and perception of the same event and that ‘youthful experience of an actual event or change often focuses memories on the direct personal meaning of the experience’ (1989: 378). Thus, newsreel memories often turn out to be less about the collectively conceptualised event and more about the personal circumstances surrounding it, or the feelings it engendered. These memories are then based on living through the ‘real time’ in which the event took place, if not the direct experience of the event itself.⁸ Schuman and Scott’s rigorous analysis supports the contention that generational identity plays an important role in the memory of events and that youthful experience of living through the real-time of events or social change affects how these events are subsequently recalled.

In their investigation of generations and collective memories, Schuman and Scott noted, ‘[e]ven a well demarcated “event” such as the Second World War consisted of a complex series of more specific events’ (1989: 364). However, the memories collected for the present study did not support their findings. In fact, they appear to suggest the opposite tendency. As noted previously, detailed recollections of the historic events, including the Second World War, as depicted in the newsreels were relatively rare; rather, memories were presented as little more than inventories or catalogues of named momentous events, or else described in the broadest of terms. In this way newsreel memories become an integral part of a historical discourse, a meta-narrative of events in British history, 1939-55. Despite participants’ obvious desire to share their newsreel memories, spontaneously recalled memories of specific news events featured in the newsreels were few and far between. As participant Steve Whitley expressed it, ‘[s]orry my recollections are fairly slender – they [newsreels] were just part of the backdrop to going to the cinema, as I say I can’t recall anything in particular’ (NRM21: 9). With respect to newsreel memory, Steve’s use of the

term ‘in particular’ is revealing; when participants were asked to focus their memories from the rather general enquiry, ‘what do you remember about the newsreels?’ to the much more specific, ‘can you recall any particular events?’ many struggled to recall anything in detail; as indicated in the following responses. For example, eighty-eight year old Harry Lenthall told me, ‘[w]ell, anything that was topical at the time’ (NRM40: 8); while seventy-six year old Ted Moralee revealed, ‘[t]hat was the main thing, the War in news’ (NRM40: 8). Here the stock response, recalling a vague generic memory impression of the newsreels, is not enough to sustain a detailed response. As ninety-six year old Rose Johnson put it, ‘[y]ou’ll find it [newsreel memory] pretty general I would think’ (NRM40: 11); or as Doug Weatherall recalled, ‘[w]ell I can remember the Dunkirk evacuation and all that sort of thing’ (NRM22: 9), but when pressed was not able to elaborate further on the vague recollection, ‘all that sort of thing’. Further, often individual wartime events were merged in memory talk, contradicting Schuman and Scott’s findings. For example, Jean Murray recalled:

And then when the em, in the D-Day landings would be shown em, it’s disgraceful what-do-you-call-it? You know when the little ships had to go - Dunkirk. When the little ships went to pick the them, the soldiers up, dozens of little ships from Ramsgate [...] and then they went and then they er, the Middle East and then the forgotten army in er, Burma and places like that everybody’d forgotten about. Just every mortal thing you can think of to do with every battle. (NRM09: 12)

Here Jean confuses the ‘D-Day landings’ with ‘Dunkirk’, then adds the ‘Middle East’ and ‘Burma’. In her confusion Jean includes a generic roll-call of significant wartime events, or as she put it, ‘just every mortal thing you can think of to do with every battle’; rather than any specific newsreel memory. (This tendency to recall ‘just every mortal thing to do with battle’ was widespread and these memories were explored in Chapter Four on wartime newsreels). The inclination to recall the same limited itinerary of momentous events aligns newsreel and popular historical memory, but also suggests that the events are recalled because of their historic significance; in other words they *should* be remembered. One wonders whether, if asked to recall significant events from the War, rather than newsreel events, participants’ responses would have differed in any significant way. With the notable exception of the liberation of the Belsen concentration camp following the end of hostilities in 1945, few wartime newsreel events appear to have captured the childhood imagination.

Surprisingly, despite their prominence in popular history, the events of 1940 – Dunkirk, the Blitz, and the Battle of Britain – were mentioned only in passing by my participants. Here Doug Weatherall’s recollection is representative of the comments made, ‘[r]emember I was watching them during the War as a boy and we’d see, we’d see, where the bombs had been dropped in London during the Blitz, and all that sort of thing’ (NRM22: 8). Doug’s ‘all that sort of thing’ equates to Jean’s ‘every mortal thing’. I can only surmise that this is indicative of the particular childhood concerns of the participants and that growing up during this period, war simply becomes part of the flow of everyday life. Here, as Jack Barry, a retired cinema projectionist from Consett, County Durham, recalled that war becomes the ‘norm’:

I remember a lot of wartime stuff was on at the time. A lot of wartime stuff, like what the troops were doing abroad or wherever they were fighting. Bomb damage in London things like that. That was the norm, you know.
(NRM20: 5)

Participant Charlie Hall responded to my question about specific events, recalling ‘various newsreels about tanks belting through the desert and shooting at Germans’ (NRM16: 26). As noted in the previous chapter, Charlie’s testimony, like a number of others, is notable for its personalisation of history; by and large all the testimonies consisted of narratives of self, in which experiences from everyday life are framed by the meta-narrative of war. Charlie’s recollections suggest that newsreel memory talk shifts subtly from the vague and detached ‘various newsreels about tanks’ to the personal and emotional in which participants detail their remembered responses to individual newsreel footage, as well as describing the responses of accompanying family members; as we shall see with particular reference to memories of the liberation of the concentration camps. However, across these personalised memories there is a high degree of collective expression as newsreel memory reveals itself in clusters of significant events. The same generic tropes are used to recount events, thus, the liberation of the German concentration camps was described in terms of disbelief, whilst in the recollections of the Coronation of Elizabeth II, memories of the pageantry and celebration came to the fore. Of course, as noted throughout the research, what is being recalled, by and large, are memories from childhood which may explain the lack of descriptive detail and participants’ tendency to simply catalogue noteworthy events. Furthermore, newsreel memories are distant memories which, for the most part, are expressed in rather imprecise

and formulaic responses. Unsurprisingly, the events that feature most prominently in memory are the most visually arresting, the images fixing the events in memory, while stock images of battle are apparently lost in the meta-narrative of war and politicians, or anonymous aristocracy, disappear completely in personal memory.

As explored in previous chapters, analysing newsreel memories is a complex and, at times, baffling process; newsreel memories inevitably become amalgams of multiple, often distant, sources that are formed within the constraints of particular cultural discourses. However, there were a very limited number of events from 1945 onwards which captured the imagination and around which memories appear to cluster, recalling moments in which, as Sturken notes, ‘the continual flow of history is ruptured’ (1997: 25). Analysing public responses to newsreels of the liberation of the German concentration camps, Hannah Craven notes the fact that, ‘[p]eople went to the cinema specifically to see these newsreels, rather than viewing them as an incidental feature at the beginning of the cinema programme’ (2001: 248). This desire to see a specific newsreel appears characteristic of all the memory clusters below – audiences went to the cinema or news theatre with the express intention of seeing these specific events. Further, what is notable about these clusters is the way in which, throughout the process of narration, personal experience merges with the collective experience of particular historic events.

6.1. POST-WAR NEWSREEL EVENT MEMORY CLUSTERS

6.1.1 VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY, 8 MAY 1945

‘Sardines had nothing on the crowd in Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly’, *Pathé Gazette*.⁹

Unlike other events from the Second World War, Victory in Europe (VE) Day marked a moment of intense and ecstatic celebration. However, as with all the examples discussed thus far, what the newsreel footage showed was often the aftermath of events rather than coverage of the event itself. As noted in Chapter Four, we might regard the subsequent recollections as examples of post-event memory. In their recollection of VE Day 1945, participants recalled and described the celebrations, rather than the declaration itself, and these recollections originate from the newsreel presentations several days, sometimes weeks, after the celebrations had taken place. As Jean Murray recalled:

And then Winston Churchill em, oh V Day, D Day, V Day - Victory Day- [...] where they were all in Trafalgar Square and the Royal family standing on the balcony and Winston Churchill. (NRM09: 12)

Nevertheless, in an important imaginative sense, as Katz and Dayan's work on television broadcasts suggests, Jean's vivid memories indicate that the newsreel images did not simply record the event, they actually brought it into existence for audiences or, as one focus group participant recalled, '[i]t brought to life what we were reading or had heard' (NRM42). Participant Harold Kemp's recollections, below, are typical of participants' rather vague memories of the wartime newsreels in general. Only the VE celebrations stand out in Harold's memory:

It was mostly war you know because the television came shortly afterwards you know well. So there wasn't really much of interest other than the celebrations of the er, War being over you know, in London and you know, I still remember the scenes you know Buckingham Palace you know they're all cheering and that, climbing up on lamp post and all sorts; just parties all over the place. (NRM46: 3)

Here the meta-narrative of war renders individual events indistinct in Harold's memory, as though war had become almost routine, and certainly not noteworthy. However, there was one newsreel event that all participants recalled vividly: the liberation of the German concentration camps in 1945. The memories of witnessing images of the camps stand out in the discussion of newsreels, and, as we shall see, often focus on the act of newsreel viewing itself.

6.1.2 THE LIBERATION OF BERGEN-BELSEN, APRIL 1945 ¹⁰

'I peeped through her fingers and saw the appalling sights shown on the screen' J.Swan (NRM33)¹¹

Mr Swan's memory (above) raises an important issue, the responses of children viewing filmed footage of the Holocaust. As was noted in Chapter Five, the relationship between parents and children in terms of their willingness to engage with news, and newsreels, was crucial. As was also explored in previous chapters, individuals' recollections of newsreel

viewing are replete with references to the family members who accompanied them to the cinema or news theatre, particularly their mothers. As Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (2006) has noted, the way in which parents react to events inevitably shapes the subsequent understanding of what happened for their children. With regard to the newsreel memories of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, most of the recollections gathered here refer either to the reaction of parents to the filmed evidence of atrocity – something that one senses frightened the children perhaps even more than the images they had seen on screen – or to their parents’ attempts to physically shield them from seeing some of the images on screen. To return to Mr Swan’s recollections, he wrote ‘[a] memory I keep to this day was the capture of the concentration camps, my mother covered my eyes with her hand saying “don’t look at this”’ (NRM33). Mr Swan’s vivid memory of his mother covering his eyes suggests she, like many other parents, reprised her gate-keeping role in respect of the news items her son could and could not see. Another participant, George Henderson, also recalled that during a screening his mother covered his eyes – deliberately shielding his gaze from the horror on screen. In all cases, nevertheless, it is the vivid recollection of their parents’ uncharacteristic responses to this particular newsreel that is striking; thus, it is their parents’ strange behaviour that participants remembered – walking out of the screening, remaining silent, or covering their (children’s) eyes.¹² Jack Barry was only eight when the War ended, his recollections began with the same generic wartime role-call outlined above, but then he moved the conversation on to Belsen and, in particular, his father’s reaction to the newsreel images:

J.B. I do remember when the War was at an end em, *Paramount News* covered some items about the, when the Belsen prisoner of war camp was liberated you know. And some of the shots there I can still remember them and it was really bad. In fact me father had to come out because it was [...] there was no censoring of newsreels you know, it was always as seen. And I remember me father had to come out, couldn’t, he couldn’t watch it.¹³

L.A. Can you remember what you thought – I know it’s a long time ago?

J.B. Well, I mean, you couldn’t really believe that men, why women as well, could deteriorate so much you know. You wouldn’t think that other human beings could do that to them; to starve them to make them look like that. Because I had a, me father had a half brother who was in the War, and he was one of the first into the Belsen camp. He

was in the army you know and he had first hand experience, and he would never ever talk about it – even to his own family. He was so upset about it all you know, yeah. (NRM20: 5)

Jack frames his memories with reference to both his father's and uncle's experiences; his father's inability to watch and his uncle's first hand experience of the camps are recalled, but remain allusive as Jack makes it clear both men were unable to articulate their experiences. Jack's testimony reveals his incomprehension, as an eight year old, both at the horror he witnessed on screen and his father and uncle's reactions; it is, after all, their reaction that he recalls with the greatest clarity.

Charlie Hall, whose mother features prominently in his narrative, recalled being amazed by her reaction to the newsreels of the liberation. As already noted, throughout his testimony Charlie firmly located his memory of events within the local, and particularly the familial, specifically the matriarchal:

There was a Mrs Goldman lived up the street. [...] em, Mrs Goldman mentioned, she says "you'd be surprised at what's actually happening in Germany"" this would be maybe 1942 something like that [...] and m'mother thought, "oh it's pro-Jewish propoganda" you know. "We know the folks are having a rough time but not that bad." But she was really shaken you know, you could see, she never spoke. She came out of the cinema and us two came home, and I think from the Regal Cinema round to here I don't think she spoke a word; really shook her you know things were that bad. (NRM16: 9)

In his anecdote laden recollections, Charlie populated his memories with animated local characters as he recalled conversations between neighbours weaving them masterfully into his own newsreel memory. In all his wartime memories, Charlie's mother is a central character who, until this point in our conversation, had been a verbose presence; however, here, like Jack Barry's father and uncle, she is rendered silent by the newsreel images she saw.

Of course the footage from the camps was particularly graphic and, as the testimonies suggest, could not be ignored or forgotten, as so much newsreel footage undoubtedly was. As Hannah Craven notes, 'the [newsreel] companies did not settle for banality with the story of

the camps' (2001: 239). Craven goes on to point out that the newsreel companies faced a serious dilemma in dealing with the liberation footage from the camps (2001: 238).¹⁴ In her research on press reports and images from the concentration camps in the British media, Craven examines this problem at length, detailing the 'considerable debate' (2001: 248) conducted in the British press in relation to the suitability of the images for children.¹⁵ As Annette Kuhn (2002) has argued elsewhere, there had long been lively debate concerning the relationship between children and the cinema. She writes, '[f]rom the earliest years of cinema, the effects of moving pictures on children had been a subject of considerable public concern [...] The early 1930s, however, saw a new focus for anxieties about young people's cinema-going' (Kuhn 2002: 80). Although of a different order, public concern about the effects on children of viewing newsreel footage from the camps built on this underlying anxiety. Although Craven does not deal with the rather different screening circumstances encountered in news theatres,

There was an inherent problem about how to handle people who had gone to see a popular film at the cinema and were then confronted with shocking scenes from the camps [...] this raises the whole spectre of placing the Holocaust within an entertainment setting. (2001: 238-9)

Furthermore as Craven herself concludes 'it is obvious [...] that people were inordinately interested in seeing the films' (2001: 249).¹⁶ Indeed, the news theatres screening this footage witnessed record attendances.¹⁷ After much official discussion it was agreed that children would not be admitted to any cinema or news theatre screening the liberation footage without adult supervision, something both John and Tricia Charlewood recalled:

J.C. The only thing I remember not being allowed to go in without an adult was the Belsen film. When they showed that I think children were not allowed to....

T.C. But I saw that and that's the one thing I can remember seeing, the Belsen film and how horrific it was, but that would be about 1945 wouldn't it? But I would have been young then. I'd only be twelve or thirteen.

J.C. Well, you would go in with somebody.

T.C. I would I suppose, yes. But I can still see it, you know.

- L.A. Did you see that in the cinema or at the News Theatre?
- T.C. At the newsreel I'm sure it was the newsreel I saw it.¹⁸
- J.C. I think it was the newsreel I saw it too [...] I think there had been some stuff in the newspapers about it er, but the, yes the newspapers came out first I think, everybody had a fair idea of what it was likely to be [...] I think a lot of people went to see it because I mean they felt it was almost unbelievable.
- T.C. Yes, it had a big impact I think. (NRM03: 6)

Despite the widespread anxiety about the possible effects of the footage on young viewers, it appears that some of my participants were taken to see the newsreels by their parents as an act of moral responsibility. For example, participant Christopher Beadle recalled that his mother felt she 'ought' to witness the images for herself and, further, that her two sons should accompany her: 'So my mother said you're going to go, I'm going to take you, you ought to see it. And she wanted to see it too – well I'm not sure she wanted to see it, she felt she ought to' (NRM35: 8).

As Hannah Craven notes, the main problem with the inclusion of Holocaust images stemmed from the fact that newsreels screened in every cinema and inadvertently children may have been exposed to the images without warning or adult supervision; some participants' memories attest to this while others recall no discussion or warning about what they were about to witness.¹⁹ Charlie Hall could not recall that he was given any indication by his mother that the newsreel they saw that day in May 1945 would be anything out of the ordinary, 'it was rolling news you see, just like that' (NRM16: 9). On the other hand, a young Christopher Beadle recalled being aware of the debate and controversy surrounding the newsreels:

I remember at the time, a lot of discussion about this and how much they should show and not show cos in those days you know people were, there was censorship and people were prudish and er you know. So showing pictures of all these graphic people dying in the gas chambers was rather like the same controversy as suddenly if the cinemas started showing hard porn [...] it was very controversial that so much gory detail, horrible detail was shown. And then there was great discussion of whether their children should be allowed to go, whether they should sort of make it the equivalent of, not

sure if they had an X certificate, and ban children. You know I think ultimately they decided that it was up to parents but they, the children, couldn't go on their own. And I think my mother and her friends – there was a lot of discussion whether or not they should take their children. (NRM35: 8)

In this extended extract, Christopher makes a number of claims about the footage that are worth further investigation. Firstly, he recalls images of 'people dying in gas chambers'. Of course no footage of this particular act of atrocity was ever screened in the newsreels. As outlined above, the newsreels portrayed the aftermath of the event itself, the event Christopher claimed to recall. Nevertheless, he is clearly keen, as were other participants, to convey the full horror of what he witnessed. Secondly, his comparison to the controversy the inclusion of hard core porn would provoke today is an interesting one – his choice of the depiction of fetishised sexual violence with which to compare the newsreels is calculated to emphasise the controversy. As has been manifest throughout the gathered memories, Christopher recalled the past in nostalgic, although not altogether positive, terms: 'cos in those days [...] people were prudish' he remarked, an assessment of moral attitudes that sits more comfortably with his references to explicit porn films. As Christopher's narrative continued he became something of the vernacular historian, outlining the controversy and debates surrounding the events, and finally contextualising his experience by introducing his mother as gatekeeper of what his younger self could, and should, see.

Although the memories gathered for this research do not support contemporary press fears that '[a]trocity film may warp children',²⁰ or the press' suggestion that the images would encourage sadistic behaviour, the fact that all the gathered testimonies include references to the liberation footage suggests they had a profound impact on the generation of children and young adults who saw them first. As Tricia Charlewood mentioned above, it was the 'one thing I can remember seeing [...] I can still see it' (NRM03: 6). The impact of footage of the camps is perfectly illustrated by Christopher Beadle's admission that, 'you know I can't remember much else apart from the Belsen one' (NRM35: 7). Similarly, other participants felt unable to remember individual newsreels and then spontaneously remembered the extraordinary images from the camps they had encountered as children. As Steve Whitley recalled:

I don't, no. I don't [...] Oh, there's one I can remember and that's the um, the liberating of Belsen. Yes, I can remember that one. It was both in *Picture Post* and on the newsreels, and oh – one of total horror. So that would be when I was ten.²¹

Participant Frank Knagg's dramatic response to the question of the liberation footage (below) again provides an indication of some of the contemporary attitudes to the release of the newsreel images, while Marjorie's more measured tone, introduces the now familiar process of comparing past and present or shuttlework:

F.K. I can still remember early days, my early days when I first saw the Belsen victims and Auschwitz and [gasps] and that there was, people didn't believe it. There were actually people in this country who said "oh no it's faked, it's faked. Couldn't be, you couldn't have".

M.K. It would have more effect then than now. When you think what we see now on TV. That was a big shock – even though the war had gone on for six years.

F.K. There was a different kind of sensibility in those days. Nowadays we're so hardened to this kind of thing. (NRM07: 19)

Frank and Marjorie's testimonies introduce two important concerns for an analysis of newsreel memory: firstly, Frank's introduction of the question of the evidential status of the footage (although he does not pursue the notion further); secondly, his reference to 'a different kind of sensibility', reveals the presence of a generational sensibility, a palpable sense of belonging to a particular generation, and mirrored in Christopher Beadle's 'in those days'(NRM35: 8) and Marjorie's assessment that '[i]t's a different mind set [today]' (NRM07: 27).

Recollections of the liberation footage often refer directly to the cinema or news theatre viewing experience, as individuals recall not only the filmed images on screen but the reactions of family members. Thus, although participants may, and probably have, encountered newsreel footage of the liberation in subsequent years, the specificity of their memories suggests they viewed these newsreels at the time. Indeed, the recollections have all the characteristics of 'flashbulb' memories. Thus, despite criticism of the newsreels' inability to deal with hard news, it seems that, as the gathered memories reveal, '[t]he newsreels did

undoubtedly have a unique role in exposing in graphic images exactly what the camps were all about' (Craven 2001: 250). A review of the Holocaust images in *The Times* printed on 1st May 1945 ended with the words '[t]he printed word can glance off an inattentive mind, but the moving picture bites deep into the imagination' (cited in Craven 2001: 250) and, given the often inattentive minds of children, this seems to have been a prophetic statement. Thus, as demonstrated by the frequency and the vividness of these particular recollections, the footage has a unique status in newsreel memory. As noted above, '[t]he public regarded newsreels which contained footage of the camps as being inherently different to other newsreel programmes' (Craven 2001: 248). Every participant referred to the Belsen film specifically by name; the Bergen-Belsen newsreel has become, in popular memory, the archetypal Holocaust footage despite the existence of many other camps and newsreel footage from other such camps.²² What undoubtedly distinguished the coverage of the liberation of Belsen were the horrifying images of survivors hovering between life and death amongst the piles of skeletal corpses (see figure 8). Barbie Zelizer (1999) has written compellingly about how photographic images from Buchenwald have become generic views of the liberation, and it would appear that the newsreel coverage of Bergen-Belsen has taken on a similar function in terms of cinematographic images.²³



Figure 8: A still from Pathé's newsreel footage of the recently liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. April 1945. The survivor appears oblivious to the presence of the newsreel camera.

As suggested in previous chapters, one of the few participants who was able to talk expansively about his newsreel memories was Charlie Hall. His testimony is particularly useful here. As noted above, he used family members throughout to anchor, or orientate, his memories. In the following extract he introduces his brother to personalise his memory and perhaps to give his narrative an eye witness' authenticity or authority: '[m]brother was stationed near Belsen in the army, and he said it was quite amazing that round Belsen you got no birds at all' (NRM16: 8). Charlie's testimony reveals one of the recurring tropes within newsreel memory's narrative that of the vernacular historian, as he recounts the historic events themselves rather than his memory of the actual newsreel film. It was only after he had spent sometime recalling the circumstances of the camps that Charlie remembered what he was talking about:

So, oh sorry, I was telling you – and on the newsreels – erm, it amazed folks, they were almost dumbfounded. Belsen was the first one liberated and you saw all these haggard people with, often with very little clothing and bones sticking out, and you saw heaps of dead bodies. People that had died and the Germans hadn't got round to burying them and it was so amazing you know that [...] it really stunned – there was deathly silence in the audience and everybody went out sort of absolutely shaken. (NRM16: 8)

Charlie's memories contain vivid descriptions of the viewing experience and its aftermath in which the audience leaves the cinema shaken and silent. In stark contrast to Charlie's expansive recollections participant Veronica Walters' newsreel memories were minimal, however, she too spontaneously remembered the camp footage: 'I can remember being horrified at the war footage of the concentration camps that does stick in my mind' (NRM11: 4). Veronica goes on to recall that as a child she was not 'terribly interested' in the news, and yet the images of atrocity have remained in her memory, as has her emotional response, which she describes as 'being horrified'. When I returned again to the subject later in the interview, Veronica was unable to elaborate on her memory. Her inability to put into words how she felt seems to substantiate Barbie Zelizer's contention (1999) that words are insufficient to convey the horror of the camps. A little later in the conversation I asked Veronica whether, as a child, she was more interested in the cartoons than the newsreels, '[y]es I was - than the news parts; apart from the horrible concentration camps making such an impression on my memory. I thought they were absolutely horrible' (NRM11: 12). In her

reply Veronica returns again to the ghastly images of the Holocaust. As alluded to in the previous chapter, Veronica's interview is notable because the voice of her childhood self is consistent throughout; she refers often to her mother and her lack of distinct memories which, as noted above, she attributes to being a child. And yet she ends her interview with the following assessment, as if to contradict her own childhood self:

I suppose as a child as well I wouldn't be reading newspapers for news but when I was in the Tyneside, in the News Theatre, well they did make an impression because I was sitting there listening and watching. (NRM11: 14)

This form of shuttlework, and the resulting contradictions, are typical of a number of the interviews, as participants shift or shuttle from one position to another; from that of the child (the narrated self) to that of the veteran or vernacular historian (the narrating self). While recollections of the newsreel footage from Belsen remained vivid, there were two more occasions captured by the newsreel cameras that virtually all participants recalled: Newcastle United's hat trick of FA Cup victories in the early 1950s and the Coronation of Elizabeth II. We might account for these universally recalled memories by virtue of the impact each had, providing moments of celebration. However, we should also note that by the 1950s virtually all of the participants who took part in the research were young adults and thus perhaps more keenly aware of news and current events.

6.1.3 NEWCASTLE UNITED RETURN TO TYNESIDE WITH THE FA CUP ²⁴

'The Cup Goes North', *British Movietone News*.²⁵

Just as VE Day is remembered as a time of national celebration, so too Newcastle United's FA Cup victories in the early 1950s are recalled with a degree of regional pride. As noted in the previous chapter, a particular Northern sensibility distinguishes this particular newsreel memory as participants locate themselves, and their recollections, within the region; here a local event with great significance for Tynesiders, whether team supporters or not, is recalled. In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of football to the North-East region and the fierce allegiance and pride shown for local teams. However, what remains here in memory are not the games themselves, few supporters could afford to travel to Wembley for the games, but the celebrations surrounding the victory parades as the Newcastle United team brought the Cup back to Tyneside. Participant Henry Holden recalled

seeing 'sporting events, Cup Finals and all that'. Although, by his own admission only five or six years old, Henry claimed to:

Remember it [the 1955 Cup Final] clearly and then of course you didn't get to the Cup Final, so you actually saw Newcastle winning the Cup on the [newsreels], so you went to the newsreels to see the, a bit of the match. They showed the goals and stuff like that. (NRM17: 8)



Figure 9: Newcastle United Captain Joe Skipper arrives back on Tyneside with the FA Cup. May, 1951.

None of the study's participants recalled travelling to Wembley to watch the three Cup Finals featuring Newcastle United. However, they may well as children or young adults, like Jean Murray below, have attended the homecoming parade in Newcastle, and may well have watched the subsequent newsreel footage (see figure 9). Jean recalled seeing

Newcastle United bringing the Cup home twice. Er and we were – that film there me friend and me what we knew about football wasn't worth thinking about. Knew nothin'. And [the] crowd [...] right outside the News Theatre [...] and er she [her friend] and I were with the rest screaming and jumping

up and down cos there were all the famous footballers and the Cup.
(NRM09: 11)²⁶

What is unique about memories of this particular event is that some, though not all, participants attended the homecoming celebrations. Here, Jean's memories appear to spill out of the News Theatre itself and onto the crowded streets, revealing a complex slippage in memory between the lived experience and the subsequent newsreel experience the tangle of newsreel memories begins to reveal itself. A further tangle of memory experience is revealed in the second of the celebrations universally remembered by participants, the Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

6.1.4 THE CORONATION OF ELIZABETH II, 2 JUNE 1953

'Day of Days Most Memorable When the Queen was Crowned', *British Movietone News*.²⁷

In Chapter Five it was noted that civic occasions like Coronations played an important role in bringing the nation together, and with the introduction of live television coverage the Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953 was more significant than most. According to Andrew Crisell, the BBC's coverage of the Coronation 'is widely regarded as having been the first ever "media event", [and] usefully symbolises the point when television surpassed radio as the major mass medium' (2002: 81).²⁸ As was noted above, Katz and Dayan argue that television coverage is actively involved in performing the broadcast event, 'bringing it into existence' (cited in Morley, 1991: 13). Likewise, I argued that newsreel screenings could be regarded as performing a similar function for cinema audiences. Although this study is not an investigation into the introduction of the new medium of television, the relationship between the cultural event, that is the introduction of television to a mass market, and the coverage of the Coronation of Elizabeth II in June 1953 is an important one. In participants' memories the sense of excitement, both about the arrival of television and the possibility of witnessing history as-it-happened in one's home, is often vividly expressed. In memory, the advent of television was a rather more significant cultural event than the Coronation itself. Paradoxically, this era defining event, captured for the first time by television cameras, signalled the beginning of the end for the newsreels; thus, the arrival of television as a mass medium coincided with a memorable point in participants' early lives, the historic occasion of the Coronation and the dawn of a new Elizabethan era, but also the point at which the fate of the newsreels was sealed. As Tricia Charlewood recalled:

I went on going to newsreels during the '50s probably until we got television at home which was about 1958 or '59. And then you didn't really have the need, if you wanted to see news and things, unless it was some event you know that you want to go and see it in colour, cos we didn't have colour TV then. (NRM03: 15)



Figure 10: Elizabeth II's Investiture Westminster Abbey. 1953.

In memory almost every participant situated the Coronation and the arrival of television into family's, friends' or neighbours' homes, as in Veronica Walters' recollections, 'I did see television in the '50s 'cos I had friends who had television. I remember seeing the Coronation on friends' television, but I didn't have one at the time' (NRM11: 9). In fact, few of my participants' families owned television sets at the time of the Coronation in 1953. As Cynthia Campbell recalled, 'not many people had television in Newcastle then' (NRM02: 10). However, Joyce Ketchen's family were one of the few who did, a situation she attributes to her father's love of 'gimmicks', a term highly suggestive of the novelty of the new medium of television:

J.K. We were one of the first [to get a television set]. Em, Coronation.

1950...yes it was, because the Coronation was June 1953 and I was married December 1953 – so all my husband, em Mam’s sister, m’Dad’s sister all came to our house cos we had a television.

L.A. You must have been one of the few people who had one.

J.K. Well, we did get one for the Coronation, yes we did. We had a television for the Coronation. Now m’Dad was gimmicky. (NRM10: 5)

As Christina Slade has noted, the acquisition of the hardware associated with a new technology is often converted into social capital, she writes, ‘[o]wnership of the new machinery gives social status’ (2006: 200). Thus, as we see repeated throughout the testimonies, significant social capital was gained by the first television set owners, as friends, neighbours and family gathered to watch the Coronation. Just as watching newsreels in the cinema had been a communal activity, so too this initial television viewing experience is recalled as a communal experience. In addition, the occasion marked the point at which the British people first witnessed live broadcast images of a Coronation as members of an imagined national community.

The newsreel coverage of the Coronation was remembered particularly vividly principally because it was an event of great pageantry, pomp and ceremony and, as the title card to the ‘Coronation’ edition of *British Movietone News* put it:

Movietone proudly brings to the screen the greatest spectacle which a newsreel has ever been privileged to portray. The climax of the Queen’s accession, the professional pageantry and the crowning ceremony in Westminster Abbey recorded for you in a vivid chapter of history.²⁹

As Pauline Watson and Ella Foster (NRM48) agreed, they were ‘awe struck’ at what they witnessed, but then astutely noted that, of course, they had nothing to compare these events to. They, along with the vast majority of the population, but particularly as members of a younger generational cohort, were in a sense witnessing the Coronation of their monarch for the first time. Although the newsreels had covered previous Coronation ceremonies, such extensive news coverage had not been possible, and coverage had never been broadcast live (on television). Paradoxically, while the newsreel commentary (above) hinted at the arrival of a new era of hope and optimism for the future, it was the beginning of the end for the

newsreels. It seems this particular momentous event marked the point at which an entire generation began to turn away from cinema and fall in love with television; many of my participants recalled that once their family acquired a television set they seldom visited the cinema.

However, as already revealed, not all of my participants had access to a television set. Cynthia Campbell, whose newsreel memories were expressed in a very personal narrative, described in some detail what she did on the day of the Coronation itself, rather than the experience of watching the event. Her memory is tinged with disappointment, both at not having the opportunity to see the event live on television and the rain forcing the street party celebrations she attended in to her aunt's garage. Here, the historic event simply provides the backdrop to personal memory:

L.A. Did you see the Coronation on television?

C.C. No I didn't. When the Coronation happened, oh, it was a pouring day in Newcastle and I spent it with my aunt and cousin who lived in the West end of Newcastle. They were having a street party, so we had it in their garage in their back lane. So we had to wait for the newsreel of the Coronation, and then of course there was the film of the Coronation, and I think that was, we saw that at the Haymarket [...] film of the whole ceremony, which was *very* impressive. (NRM02: 10)

Cynthia's recollections also revealed the degree to which the filmed images impressed those who saw them; as far as any of my participants could recall, this was the first time newsreel footage had been presented in colour. Usefully, Cynthia's recollection revealed the sequence in which moving images of the Coronation were released to the public; following the live television broadcast, newsreels were screened in cinemas the following day(s), while a feature length film of the event made it to the screen sometime later. A recurring memory for many participants was the colour feature film of the Coronation *A Queen Is Crowned* (1953, d. Castleton Knight), as Tricia Charlewood recalled:

I remember going quite often to see things like the Royal Wedding and then the Coronation to see it – we didn't have television – to see the whole thing in its colour and splendour. (NRM03: 5)

The issue of colour film is an important one, even if households owned a television set, regular colour transmissions did not begin until July 1967 when BBC 2 became the first European network to do so (Crisell 2002: 121). Furthermore, television's poor picture quality and size remained an issue for many years, therefore, to appreciate the splendour of the State occasion the cinema experience was a must, as Tricia's recollection suggests. Former projectionist Sydney Stoker recalled the three royal weddings he had witnessed during his time at Newcastle's News Theatre and the importance of colour to the experience:

Ladies, when they want to see a weddin' they want to see the colour, brides. They know she's in white but they want to see how white and everything. So of course Princess Margaret – we had queues round the block all day. (NRM34: 8)³⁰

As an example of a vernacular theorist, Sydney's testimony is compelling. He goes on to reveal his in-depth knowledge of the various newsreel companies' policies and output, noting that *Gaumont British News*, in particular, produced colour newsreel to compete with black and white television broadcasts. These factors may go some way to explaining how the news theatres and the newsreels survived for years after the advent of television.

I noted in Chapter Four that the paraphernalia of war was remembered exclusively by male participants. Similarly, in recollections of the Coronation there is again some evidence of a gendering of newsreel memory, as female participants were more likely to recall in detail ceremonies and civic occasions. Although a small research sample, there appears to be evidence that memories are gendered, if only in relation to *what* is remembered. One wonders whether the gendered pleasures expressed in newsreel memory are in fact culturally determined, and that men and women from this older generation conform to more traditional notions of gendered interests. As both Jackie Stacey (1994) and Annette Kuhn (2002) have described, a generation of young women in the 1930s and 1940s became captivated by the glamour and romance of the female film star. In relation to the appeal of the newsreels' coverage of 'glamorous' occasions to female audience members, Sydney Stoker's observation (above) is perhaps rather apt, 'ladies, when they want to see a weddin' they want to see the colour'. The glamour and romance of royal weddings and the coronation of a young Queen appear to have fascinated young women in particular. For example, all the participants who spoke fondly about the Coronation and the Royal Wedding in 1947 were women, like Thelma Miller who recalled:

One of my most abiding memories of going to the Tatler was the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip in November 1947, because I've always been a great, very fond of the Royal Family and I've always collected cuttings and things about cinemas and the Royal Family. (NRM08: 4)

Thelma's memory is dictated by her passion for the royal family and her memory of visiting the Tatler news theatre is dominated by the occasion of the Royal Wedding. Seventy-six year old Jean Murray also revealed her 'love' of royalty. In a poignant newsreel event memory, Jean revealed a regard for royalty prevalent among participants and characteristic of this particular generational cohort. Manifest in both Thelma and Jean's recollections there is an overwhelming sense of nostalgia for the period. For example, when I asked Jean whether she could remember any particular newsreel events she replied:

Umpteen of them – Well, there was the one on there which I've been besotted – I loved George VI and he'd been diagnosed with cancer of the lungs and Princess Elizabeth and her husband were setting off for Kenya and he stood on the roof waving his hat. You could see he was dying, he died shortly after. And then shortly after, on the Queen's Coronation day, Edward [sic] Hillary and Sherpa Tensing got to the top of Mount Everest which was, they did it for a celebration of the Queen's Coronation so that was brilliant. (NRM09: 11)³¹

Paradoxically, while recounting royal occasions, a number of the research participants were quite adamant about their status as what they termed 'Republicans', or they remembered the newsreel coverage of the Coronation precisely because they did not see it. Steve Whitley recalled, 'a lot of people bought their first television set to see the Coronation didn't they? Not that my parents were anti-royalist, but just didn't see the point' (NRM21: 9). Similarly Frank Knaggs confidently declared that he and wife Marjorie refused to watch the live television broadcast of the Coronation in 1953: '[w]e refused to watch it – we're Republicans by the way, we refused to watch it. Yes, we went to see *The Third Man*' (NRM07: 20).³² However, Marjorie immediately qualified his statement with, 'but we did see it on the newsreels though, we did go. Well that was a piece of history I suppose, pageantry' (NRM07: 20). Marjorie's qualification clearly demonstrates the particularly strong appeal of the occasion even it appears, to professed Republicans. As Frank himself went on to explain:

In those days royalty were held great, almost in awe. Nowadays they're not; but I like to think, "oh I wasn't impressed by this", but I probably was. (NRM07: 20)

As noted previously, Frank displays an impressive degree of insight in a vernacular mode; here he reflects upon his memories – calling into question his ability to recall how he actually responded – concluding that what he would like to believe took place and what actually happened are probably two quite different things.

According to Steve Whitley his parents took a more drastic approach to avoid any possible media coverage of the event: '[w]e opted out of that event, deliberately went away to Wales where not only wasn't there any television but there wasn't any electricity' (NRM21: 7). However, in probing Steve's memories further, he revealed something of the specificity of newsreel memory, he does recall newsreel images of the Coronation, but he is unable to recall when, or where, he first encountered them:

Would I have seen it? Well I was at school so the answer is probably no. Unless – I'm sorry, I can't remember. I do have images in my mind of the Coronation and I wasn't there so I *must* have seen it at some stage but whether this was er, contemporaneous or much later, I'm sorry I can't remember. (NRM21: 9)³³

Rather unusually amongst the participants interviewed for this research, Steve was aware of and, what is more, able to articulate his confusion. In these few sentences the essence of newsreel memory is revealed; it is the complex issue of when and how newsreel memory is formed, to which Steve alludes, that is explored in depth in the next chapter.

This chapter has revealed the extent to which history and personal experience collide; a collision that appears to open up a liminal space into which newsreel memory slips, between memory as postmodern subjectivity and simply a register of events. In addition, the analysis of the newsreel event memories above confirms Radstone's proposition that the processes of personal memory are held in tension with the events of history (2000: 10). Indeed we have seen that the clustering of newsreel memories around a limited number of unusual historic events, and the deeply felt personal emotion with which those memories are expressed, reveals the formative relationship between historic 'marker' events recorded in the newsreels and the expression of personal memory. Further, the repeated expression of similar

meanings and understandings of these same historic events is highly suggestive of a shared wartime generational identity (Schuman and Scott, 1989). Finally, this chapter has demonstrated how these remembered newsreel events encompass the imagined community at a local, regional and even a national level. We have seen that collective witnessing of events in an important imaginative sense appear to have brought historic events into existence – and in the process provided cinema audiences with the sensation of a shared public event. What has become clear is that an examination of the complex entanglement of public and private memories reveals the extent to which personal experience is always, in important ways, structured and expressed through shared cultural narratives.

¹ In the next chapter I deal with fact that participants are not recalling first hand experiences, but experiences mediated through the newsreels.

² Although trivia is unlikely to be remembered, given the fact that newsreel programmes primarily consisted of topical, rather than news items, the fact that this characteristic was consistently forgotten or not remembered is significant; and highly suggestive of the influence of the popular mythology surrounding the status of the newsreels.

³ As noted previously, participants often only visited the news theatres to see a specific event, as Cynthia Campbell recalled ‘I think it [a visit to the news theatre] was mostly when there were events that we wanted to see’ (NRM02: 8).

⁴ Of note in the context of flashbulb memory is the recollection of momentous live radio broadcasts. Doug Weatherall recalled the declaration of war by pinpointing his exact location:

Mind I can remember the day war was declared I know exactly where I was. My father was the deputy er, deputy head warden of Seaham and on September third 1939 when er Chamberlain declared war I heard that in the warden’s post in the council yard at Seaham. I was with me father, me father being a warden, being alerted that something was going to be happening and he went down to the warden’s post and I went with him and we heard that broadcast and I’ll never forget it. (NRM22: 9)

⁵ Teer-Tomaselli refers to the work of John Galtung and Mari Ruge (1973) and The Glasgow Media Group (1976) on the formation of memorability in news items.

⁶ The notable exception is the liberation of the concentration camps.

⁷ *Pathé Gazette* 17 May 1945 ‘Fruits of Victory’. Film ID 1155.01. British Pathé on-line archive.

⁸ For example, participants may not have experienced the Blitz but having lived through the real-time experience of the War they often recalled it as if they had.

⁹ *Pathé Gazette* 17 May 1945, ‘Fruits of Victory’. Film ID 1155.01. British Pathé on-line archive.

¹⁰ See *Universal News* 3 May 1945, ‘Nazi Atrocities at Belsen’, issue no. 1544; *Gaumont British News* 30 April 1945, ‘Horror in Our Time’, issue no. 1181; *British Paramount News*

30 April 1945, 'Proof Positive', issue no. 1478; *British Movietone News* 30 April 1945, 'Atrocities-The Evidence', issue no. 830. More information on each of these is available at the British Universities Film and Video Council website, <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk>.

Although all five newsreel companies used a collective pool of footage each chose a different approach to presenting the material. Perhaps the most affecting of all the newsreels released is *Pathé Gazette* 30 April 1945 'German' Atrocities', in which MP Mrs Mavis Tate, who visited Buchenwald concentration camp, describes what she saw there. Film ID 1153.17. British Pathé on-line archive. Although virtually impossible to verify, given the frequent references to the Pathé Cockerel throughout the gathered memories I suggest it is to this particular newsreel that most participants referred.

¹¹ Like a number of my participants Mr Swan wrote to me with his memories. Inevitably these written recollections differ significantly to the oral testimonies in terms of the lack of depth and nuance.

¹² The only other example of an event which evoked such vivid memories of a child's shock and fear were from Henry Holden who recalled seeing the Hungarian Revolution (NRM17: 8). See *British Movietone News*, 8 November 1956, 'Hungary's Agony'. Story No. 68723A. British Movietone on-line archive.

¹³ As outlined in chapter four during the Second World War there were, of course, restrictions on newsreel output.

¹⁴ According to Jeff Hulbert (2002: 261) the issue of showing film of the concentration camps was discussed just once by the Newsreel Association following pressure from the Government about the importance of screening it to as wide an audience as possible.

¹⁵ *The Daily Herald* 30 April 1945 carried the front page headline 'Don't let children see this film' (cited in Craven 2001: 248).

¹⁶ See Hannah Craven (2001: 243) for a discussion of the public's response to stories in the press and in particular the reaction to the *Daily Express* exhibition of photographs 'Seeing is Believing', some of which were considered too shocking to publish in the paper itself. Children were refused entry to the exhibition.

¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph* 1 May 1945 'All box office records at London news theatres showing these films have been broken' (cited in Craven 2001: 249).

¹⁸ Rather than this being an isolated incident, a number of participants confused or conflated the newsreel and news theatre. This may be a regional trait but more comparative research would need to be undertaken in order to establish if this were the case.

¹⁹ Although subject to pre- and post-production censorship during the war, newsreels remained un-certificated.

²⁰ Headline in *The News Chronicle*, 3 May 1945 (cited in Craven 2001: 248).

²¹ Although newsreels were the public's only source of moving images, they would have had the opportunity to see images from the camps printed in the press. See Steve Whitley's recollections of *Picture Post* (NRM21: 3). See also Barbie Zelizer's (1999: 136-175) assessment of the response to photographs in both the British and American press.

²² See *British Movietone News* 30 April 1945. 'Atrocities – The Evidence'. Story No. 45699. Movietone on-line archive. This edition includes footage from Buchenwald Concentration Camp, Stalag Tekla, and Gardelegan, a German labour camp as well as Bergen-Belsen. See also *British Movietone News* 22 April 1945, 'In the Wake of the Hun'. Story No. 45682. This edition shows footage from camps at Ohrdorf, Göttingen, Schnellbach and Thüne. British Movietone on-line archive.

²³ For a detailed textual analysis of these newsreel images see Hannah Craven (2001: 238-243).

²⁴ Newcastle won the FA Cup in 1951, 1952 and 1955. Participants understandably do not distinguish between these dates.

²⁵ *British Movietone News* 12 May 1955 'The Cup Goes North', Story No. 63506. British Movietone on-line archive.

²⁶ See *Pathé News Special*, 7 May 1951 'Newcastle – Welcome to Cup Winners' Film ID. 1451.10. British Pathé on-line archive. Although I am unable to verify this, I suspect this may have been footage that was used exclusively for Tyneside editions of *Pathé News*. Captain Joe Harvey and Jackie Milburn address the crowd at Newcastle's home ground St. James Park. See also *British Movietone News* 12 May 1955 'The Cup Goes North', Story No. 63506. British Movietone on-line archive.

²⁷ *British Movietone News* 4 June 1953. 'The Coronation in Colour'. Story No. 59205. British Movietone on-line archive.

²⁸ According to Crisell (2002: 81) 56 percent of the nation watched the service in Westminster Abbey on television and 53 percent the procession that followed.

²⁹ *British Movietone News* 4 June 1953, 'The Coronation' (Black and White Version). Story No. 59201/7. British Movietone on-line archive.

³⁰ *Pathé News* 7 May 1960, 'The Royal Wedding 1960' (Black and White Version). Film ID. 1678.21. British Pathé on-line archive.

³¹ *British Movietone News* 4 February 1952, 'Royal Departure for Commonwealth Tour'. Story No. 56716. *British Movietone News* 25 June 1953, 'Everest Conquered'. Story No. 59279. British Movietone on-line archive.

³² Of course newsreel coverage of the Coronation, although rushed through to the cinemas, would not be broadcast live. Here it is rather unclear whether the Knaggs are referring to television or newsreel coverage of the event. The film Frank and Marjorie saw instead of the Coronation was *The Third Man* d. Carol Reed, 1949.

³³ Steve attended a private boarding school without a television.

CHAPTER 7 - NEWSREEL ACTUALITY AND THE ARCHIVE

‘Description pales before the vastness of reality’.

British Pathé Gazette, 12 June 1944 ¹

Taking the newsreels’ most important remembered characteristic – the sight of the ‘real’, of actuality – this chapter investigates the powerful authority the newsreel image exerts on both personal memory and collective memorial and commemoration. The notion of visual authenticity is vital to the success of newsreels, and it is this remembered trait above all others that is both evoked in memory, and which continues to fuel the demand for the newsreel image as evidence of history. Indeed the simple inclusion of newsreel footage in documentary or fiction film texts is used to create a realistic effect, the ‘illusion of actuality’ of which Nicholas Pronay has written (1976: 95-119). Thus, the remembered value of the newsreels is located in their presentation of embodied experience, giving visible form to the news. In addition, filmed news images are powerful precisely because they are regarded as evidence of the events of history and come to embody the historical; thus, for example, newsreel images of the Second World War become indistinguishable from history. The most vivid example of the evidential status of the newsreel image, as we saw in the previous chapter, is in relation to the revelation of atrocities perpetrated during the Holocaust. The newsreel images recorded in April and early May 1945 at Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau in the first days after the camps were liberated, were presented to the world as picture-proof of the indescribable horrors perpetrated there. In these newsreel editions it is the discourse of visual evidence that is evoked throughout; for example, the special edition of *British Movietone News* released on the 30 April 1945 was titled ‘Atrocities – The Evidence’.² As Hannah Craven writes ‘[t]he newsreels did undoubtedly have a unique role in exposing in graphic images exactly what the camps were all about’ (2001: 250). It is the ability of the newsreel image to visualise and, even, verify historic events, animating or ‘bringing them to life’ that is most often recalled in memory.

News film in particular is a powerful mechanism through which to present the past in the present, and the news film image has the capacity to create and confirm, or conflict and contradict memories we hold both as individuals and collectively as a nation. Newsreels undoubtedly provide important evidence of the past, capturing momentous, history-defining events. For participant Henry Holden certain newsreel images were fixed in memory, or ‘stuck because you couldn’t see them anywhere else’ (NRM17: 4) as he phrased it. As

indicated in previous chapters, and as will be examined further here, newsreels were regarded as significant because they provided compelling evidence of events, a convincingly accurate record of history. Filmed images were reassuring in their status as proof that something had taken place and their ability to claim an absolute mimetic truth. Even though, like the research participants themselves, we are aware of the potential to manipulate and distort filmed and photographed images, we hold to the conviction that the filmed image irrefutably provides evidence of the real. As André Bazin wrote with reference to the photographic image:

In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (1967: 14)

This belief is demonstrated time and again as participants recalled the visual impact of the newsreel image. According to George Henderson, '[t]he public got their news from the radio, but went to the cinema for news *and* pictures' (NRM44). Walter Sinton recalled, '[i]t brought the world to your eyes' (NRM38), while for Henry Holden, '[i]t was really the only form of seeing what was happening in the world [...] So that's one of the reasons you would go, to have a look at what was going on' (NRM17: 9). Likewise, Cynthia Campbell remembered '[i]t was the only way to see what was going on in the world. So it was an interesting eye on other people's lives' (NRM10: 2).

Here the copious references to the visual, and the unique status of the moving image itself – to 'actually see it happening' (Jean Murray, NRM09: 12) – invests the newsreel with connotations of actuality. That newsreels acquired a greater immediacy and authority than any written or verbal account in conveying news is illustrated as participants made their own comparisons between wireless and newspaper journalism and the unique evidential qualities of the newsreel reports. Marjorie Knaggs recalled, 'you'd hear the news on radio mainly, and then you would see the visual' (NRM07: 18). Tricia Charlewood's memories highlight the fact that, although the newsreels were not a primary source of news, their impact was no less significant:

- T.C. I think when you went to see a newsreel [...] it wasn't anything new. You would know the news, but it was just pictures of it, you know. You would see people like the Prime Minister or whoever on it. But it wouldn't be something new because you would have heard it on the radio, or read it in the papers.
- L.A. Did it make a difference to see it?
- T.C. Oh very much so, yes, yes; [it] had a bigger impact. (NRM03: 21)

On the other hand, Harold Kemp's recollections seem to go far beyond the notion of actuality:

Oh well, you'd get it from the papers of course you know. The stories from the papers and then they [the newsreels] more or less followed on. A few days later you'd see it, see it more or less live type thing. (NRM46: 3)

In the process of recollecting, 'a few days later [...] more or less live type thing' Harold imbues the newsreel with cultural meanings and expectations normally associated with television news and the latter's ability to broadcast live news images. In Harold's memory the time lapse between filming the newsreels, post-production processes and eventual screening simply vanishes. He appears to appropriate his memories to satisfy his nostalgia for the past and perhaps even my perceived need for affirmation of the newsreels' significance.

Of course, what the newsreel viewer actually saw, and subsequently recalls in memory, is an index of truth or an account of events apparently anchored to reality by visual evidence. Thus, the newsreel image provides an indexical link to the news event itself and in the process adds authority to the newsreels' journalistic vision. What viewers recall is not the pre-discursive events, which happened in their absence, but the diegetic world of verisimilitude created by the newsreel footage.³ Susan Sontag has remarked that '[s]omething becomes real – to those who are elsewhere, following it as "news" – by being photographed' (2003: 19). As participant Charlie Hall recalled 'because you heard the news [on the wireless], but when you actually saw it in black and white, it really sank in what was happening' (NRM16: 12). For Sontag the photographic image is like a 'memory freeze-frame' in an era of non-stop imagery: 'the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it' (2003: 19). Yet my participants replayed moving images in memory; what they recalled was not a moment captured in time, as Sontag

suggests, but dynamic sequences of moving images. For example, Christopher Beadle recalls his memory of flying bombs:

I mean I have vague recollections of seeing pictures of London during the flying bombs, seeing pictures of flying bombs going over, cos they were quite dramatic cos went over relatively slowly. They were sort of a particularly horrible thing, 'cos you saw it going over slowly and you knew somebody over there was going to get it. (NRM35: 7)

Newsreel memories do not present themselves in single snapshot images, but rather expand to embrace time and movement. Another participant, Cynthia Campbell recalled the impact moving images had on her sense of 'closeness' to the subject of the newsreels (in the following example, the royal family) and how the coverage made them appear 'more real as people'. Cynthia makes a distinction here between magazine images of the royals and seeing them animated or brought to life in the newsreels:

I think it brought them closer, made them more real as people. Er, because then you would have just seen them in magazines, just a still photograph with a caption, but to see them [in the newsreels], yes that was an influence. (NRM02: 9)

If further assurance of the authenticity of the newsreel image were needed, then it was provided by the presence of the eyewitness, the surrogate eyes of the audience, in the embodied gaze of the newsreel cameraman. Although referring to still images Susan Sontag embraces what she describes as the camera's mediating presence:

Photographs had the advantage of uniting two contradictory features. [...] They were a record of the real – incontrovertible, as no verbal account, however impartial could be – since a machine was doing the recording. And they bore witness to the real – since a person had been there to see them. (2003: 23)

Despite the rumbustious image of the newsreel cameramen (Philip Norman describes them as 'the last buccaneers' [2002: 2]) the newsreel images they produced were authenticated by

their physical presence, witnessing the pre-discursive event on behalf, as it were, of the viewer. The assumption of authenticity provided by this eyewitness account afforded the newsreel image a powerfully remembered verisimilitude, in which the truth value of the image is located in the production of an embodied experience. The presence of the authenticating surrogate is signalled repeatedly since the commentator announces the fact that the newsreel cameramen were there to capture the event, as in this extract from *British Pathé Gazette*'s commentary from its coverage of the D-Day landings: 'right in the spearhead of attack our allied service photographic units and our newsreel cameramen putting this amazing scene on celluloid'.⁴ Almost as if remembering this particular commentary, Jean Murray recalled:

Pathé News [...] they had these remarkable reporters who, I mean our reporters now will have it hard, but at least they'll be staying in hotels and stuff like that. Newspaper reporters and newsreel reporters would be there at the battlefield. (NRM09: 12)

As Jean's recollections suggest, the newsreels were at great pains to proclaim the truthfulness of the images presented on screen, and the lengths to which their cameramen were prepared to go to capture these events on film.⁵ The fact that newsreel cameramen actually witnessed the events on behalf of the newsreel audience provided a direct experiential link to the events depicted. Furthermore, this strategy appears to have been enormously successful and one that appears to be freely and vividly recalled in memory.⁶

As became manifest throughout the research, memory is often embodied in images. Walter Benjamin highlighted this link between memory and image: '[t]o be sure, most memories that we search for come to us as visual images. Even the free-floating forms of the *mémoire involontaire* are still in large part isolated, though enigmatically present, visual images' (1999: 209), and evidently remembering the newsreels, as we have seen, is synonymous with the recollection of the newsreel image itself. However, although memory is often embodied in images, it is also produced by and through images. For Marita Sturken '[t]he image [...] remains the most compelling of memory objects' (1997: 11), however, she argues that, 'memory does not reside in images so much as it [memory] is produced by it' (1997: 19). According to Freud (2006: 559) memories do not emerge, they are formed at the point of remembering, and as a result memory is constantly rewritten and re-presented in the present, in the moment of remembering. As Sturken notes, the distinction between the

emergence and formation of memory is crucial in the analysis of photographic images and, as this thesis argues, cinematographic images no less so. Further, the process of gathering oral histories within a research context necessarily imposes a particular present on the past, as participants both recall and comment on the past in response to specific research questions. However, while Sturken refers to those moments in which individuals come into direct contact with ‘memory objects’, what distinguishes the memories included here is that they are *not* formed as a spontaneous response to viewing images; rather the memories themselves take on the form of newsreel images. The newsreel memories gathered here were thus *not* created in response to viewing newsreel images, but are visualised recollections of previous encounters with individual newsreels. Participants’ memories were not prompted by visual *aide-mémoires* but were, instead, prompted by my voice, to form recollections which are embodied or given shape at the very moment of remembering.

7.1 THE NEWSREELS’ AURA IN MEMORY

In his keynote address entitled ‘100 types of Deception’ given to delegates of *The Story of the Century!* newsfilm conference (1996), Anthony Smith outlined how the enthusiasm which greeted photography and moving images in news reporting quickly turned to fundamental questioning of the reliability and the truthfulness of the news image. Indeed debates about these concerns were already well established in the period under discussion. For example, in 1936 A.W.F. Sinclair, editor of the *Daily Sketch*, criticises the newsreels’ ability to mislead their audience, informing interviewer David Myers:

There are millions of newsreel fans, but they are slow to criticise the newsreels. They are terrified into submission by the false shibboleth that the camera cannot lie, whereas by sins of omission and commission it maybe as expert an Ananias as the printed word. (Myers, 1936: 31)

What remains undeniable is that over the intervening seventy-five years or so since Sinclair made his remark, the illusion of the ‘false shibboleth’ of the newsreel camera’s ability to capture the truth seems for many of my participants (although not all) to remain remarkably intact. In his essay ‘The Newsreel: the illusion of actuality’ Nicholas Pronay discusses the development of the newsreel from the actuality film to ‘its final form [...] the ‘newsreel’ which created the illusion the viewer was actually witnessing the event’ (1976: 96); a process referred to throughout his paper as the ‘illusion of actuality’.⁷ As Pronay discusses, despite

evidence to the contrary, as a journalistic form newsreels were and, in an important sense, continue to be widely associated with documentary truth. As one of my participants explained, as if to illustrate Susan Sontag's notion discussed above, that 'the something becomes real' (2003: 19): 'You knew it had happened, whereas newspapers was airy fairy, it [the newsreels] brought to life what we were reading or had heard' (Participant Byker Age Concern Group, NRM42). Thus, newsreel memories were regarded by participants as memories of the real, of fact as opposed to fiction; a simple but important point to make as newsreel images, if not the newsreels themselves, are regarded as the height of mimetic achievement. The particular cultural value of the newsreel image as documentary evidence of the real gives rise to a shift in memory, giving newsreels a renewed, reinvigorated sense of verisimilitude. Thus, it appears that because of the popular regard in which the newsreels are held, as examples of genuine historical documentation, in personal memory their evidential status becomes heightened. For example, one participant, eighty-two year old Yvonne Edwards, recalled the newsreels in the following terms:

Well they really were a lifeline or an information line you know [...] you got a good grounding of the news that was going on in er, well it was nearly global wasn't it, once Pearl Harbour was bombed and it was just about global. (NRM50: 2)

The discourse of a peculiarly British history, in relation to the Second World War (as explored in Chapter Four) is insistently evoked through newsreel images, lending them in the process an aura of authority; regarded as the genuine article, their intrinsic value lies in their perceived authenticity. By and large the newsreel image is remembered by participants as self-evident proof of a specific period of British history. Furthermore, certain formal conventions of the newsreel image contribute to both its perceived authenticity and historic value. As Marita Sturken notes in relation to still images from the Vietnam War, 'they have the sharp edged, gritty quality of film images, as they have aged, their grainy black-and-white and faded color have enhanced their historicity' (1997: 90). In a similar way, the often grainy black and white newsreel footage becomes an intrinsic part of the authenticated representation of the first half of twentieth century British history.

In his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' ([1936] 1999), Walter Benjamin examined the effect of mechanical reproduction on the meaning and value of the image. He argued that an original art work derived its value from a particular aura

writing '[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (1999: 214). Developing Benjamin's argument in relation to the newsreel image, I argue that its aura comes precisely from the presence of the newsreel camera itself in the time and space of the news event, providing an indexical link and capturing the unique historical moment on film. Benjamin wrote, '[u]nmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image as seen by the unaided eye. Uniqueness and permanence are closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former' (1999: 217). Benjamin concluded that the 'auratic' quality of the photographic image comes from its ability to give the impression of presence, making present that which is, in fact, absent. Hans Belting has noted, however, that images do not simply return that which is absent, instead he insists they embody an 'iconic presence':

'Iconic presence still maintains a body's absence and turns it into what must be called a *visible absence*. Images live from the paradox that they perform the *presence of absence* or vice versa. (2005: 312)

Images then, are perceived to have 'a power and an agency to bring to life – to bring into a particular kind of presence' in absence (Guerin and Hallas, 2007: 10). As Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas reiterate, the authenticity of the photographic image derives from the perception that it offers the viewer the experience of a personal encounter through such iconic presence. In addition, newsreel images seem to embody a particular kind of agency, and thus a particular kind of faith is invested in the newsreel image's capacity to bring the event into a kind of iconic presence before the viewer. Here, perhaps, the mystery of the newsreel images' continued authority begins to unravel, despite the proliferation of a popular discourse distrustful of the photographic image, and the ready acknowledgement of journalistic mediation, participants continued to recall the newsreel image as a significant example of visual evidence.

To bring these presences and absences together the camera (and the cameramen) witnessed the event or its aftermath while the audience, either contemporaneous or yet to be realised, remains absent. Nevertheless, it is paradoxically this acknowledged subjectivity, in the presence of human mediation, that gives the newsreel image its status as an eyewitness account, conferring on it the auratic quality of which Benjamin wrote. The concept of authenticity, the genuine, reliable, or 'not false', is central to the way in which newsreel

images are perceived to have historic value. As noted above, it is this remembered trait above all others that is evoked in memory. However, it is not simply the auratic quality of the newsreel image that it is important to note; the participants' recollections themselves (oral testimonies) on which this research is based are also imbued with the aura and authority of the authentic. Again the notion of their particular authenticity is derived from their (the testimonies') very subjectivity. The fact that viewers were present in history, that is in the cinema or news theatre, when the newsreels were first released connects them directly to the past and invests their recollections with their own powerful aura, endowing them, as Pam Cook notes, 'with authority and emotional power' (2005: 3).⁸ The following extract, in which Jean Murray passionately expressed her opinion of the newsreels, is a fine example of the kind of authority and emotional power Cook describes:

L.A. And would they [newsreels] show images of that?

J.M. Yes, [...] cos you could get it on your radio but to see it, *actually see it happening* on the news theatres er, was just absolutely remarkable.

(NRM09: 12)

Another participant also vividly recalled the remembered aura of the newsreels: '[n]ewsreels were brilliant to us. Well, if you didn't see it on the news theatre you didn't see it at all' (Byker Age Concern Group NRM42). The particular emotional power, or *emotional authenticity*, of the gathered newsreel memories derives from their investment with personal experience and a particular nostalgia for the newsreels' re-presentation of that which is lost or absent and which lies at the heart of their appeal. Participants' memories are suffused with nostalgia for a period which is often longed for and yet is acknowledged to be retrievable only in as much as the newsreel image will allow. Thus, the past remains present in the available newsreel image, and these available images appear to limit what can in fact be remembered; in a powerful sense then, these newsreel images provide the limits of memory.

For all my research participants, the remembered value of the newsreels lay in their visualisation of the world or an event that would only otherwise have been talked about (heard on the wireless) or seen in still images (newspapers and magazines); and what is more, for them, the newsreel image provided the reassurance of animated photographic evidence. It is the newsreels' claim to absolute mimetic truth that gave them value for audiences, and it is this same value that makes them memorable. The more the images are perceived to capture the real, the event itself, or the closer the newsreel came to providing documentary evidence

of an event, the more likely it is to be remembered. For example, Charlie Hall recalled the liberation of the concentration camp at Belsen:

In fact when these films were shown in Germany some people in Germany said, “Ah its propaganda it’s a load of rubbish, it’s actors doing it and all the rest of it”. But you can’t get actors with their every rib showing and that sort of thing you know. (NRM16: 8)

Here Charlie recalled the graphic images as proof that the event took place. In a very different example, Doug Weatherall recalled, in no less vivid detail, a quarter final FA Cup tie he had seen in the newsreels:

D.W. I can remember footage of one of the, of probably my favourite shot of footballing at that time, it was Jackie Milburn who scored a hat trick in a quarter final win at Portsmouth when defending the Cup [...] It was Portsmouth 2 - Newcastle United 4, and er Jackie Milburn, “wor Jackie”, got a hat trick and his goal - one of his goals was a fabulous drive which kept low and beat Butler, well to Butler’s left, and it was about 25 to 30 yards it was a magnificently struck shot [...], it would be Gaumont British or Movietone News you know, you’ll get a shot of that alright and er, let’s see - so I would watch that when it was on the news when I was in the army.

L.A. It would just be highlights – short?

D.W. Yes. It started with almost stilted commentary, but it was the pictures we were interested in, wonderful goals by Jackie Milburn. (NRM22: 13)

What is most illuminating, in this context, is Doug’s apparent disregard of the newsreel’s commentary; what he and his friends were interested in was actually seeing the goals themselves. This perceived relationship to the real event, for example Doug triumphantly recalls in relation to Milburn’s goal, ‘and I saw that’, may account, amongst other things, for participants’ failure to remember the whole range of newsreel images; in other words, verisimilitude combined with the historic fixes itself in memory. What is important, and therefore remembered, are those moments when the newsreel camera seemed to capture a

heightened sense of reality or drama. It is those moments when the newsreel camera appears to be in the midst of things, the drama of the event or the action of combat, as the news (and history) is being made. The newsreels were not, then, first and foremost remembered as a source of information, or even as news; above all they are remembered for their images. There were many examples of the precedence of the newsreel image amongst participants' testimonies, and what follows is a small selection of their memories on this particular subject. In response to my question about the particular appeal of going to the news theatre, Steve Whitley replied without hesitation:

Oh, the visual impact I suppose of um, of course it was always much, much later it's not like um, instant television [...] this could be weeks old. So it was a *visual confirmation* if you like of what you'd already heard on the radio or perhaps seen in the paper. (NRM21: 5)

Similarly Doug Weatherall told me '[i]t was a change to see what you'd heard illustrated, that in effect, that's what it amounted to' (NRM22: 9). In a further analogous response Marjorie Knaggs explained '[w]ell, you'd hear the news on the radio mainly and then you would see the visual' (NRM07: 18).

Undoubtedly, newsreels are overwhelmingly remembered as establishing journalistic truths, despite the acknowledgement by participants of both creative and political interventions and omissions. As ninety-six year old Rose Johnson informed me, '[b]ut of course you didn't see what was going on in the War. You didn't see the soldiers, like you do now, fighting and that sort of thing' (NRM40: 3).⁹ However, the notion of photographic truth is still potent, as is the commonly shared belief that news images have heightened truth-value. Linked to the powerful mythology surrounding the photographic news image is the equally powerful mythology surrounding the 'newsworthiness' of certain images and, as suggested above, participants' uncanny ability to 'forget' the trivia or 'un-newsworthiness' of much newsreel content. As outlined in previous chapters, newsreels were not, despite their undeniably powerful testimony, full of hard, breaking news. On a routine and regular basis newsreels provided audiences with topical content, much of it in the style of the British tabloid press or twenty-first century celebrity gossip magazines.

The perceived evidential status of the image apparently provides material evidence of real history, proof that an event took place and proof of its newsworthiness or even its credibility as news. Despite all the evidence to suggest that moving images, and newsreel

images no less, can be manipulated they are still regarded as ‘picture proof’. Marita Sturken has noted, ‘[o]ne looks through the image to the “reality” it represents, forgetting, in essence, the camera’s mediating presence’ (1997: 21). Yet, given the views expressed by participants like Thelma Miller (see Chapter Four) and Jean Murray, it is precisely *because* of the acknowledgement of both the camera and the newsreel journalists’ presence that these particular images have credibility, have a particular ‘auratic’ quality. For my participants it is the unique ‘auratic’ quality of the newsreel image that is the essence of much of the newsreels’ historic significance.

7.2 THE IMPACT OF THE VISUAL ON CULTURAL MEMORY

At this point it is useful to return to the premise of this research; namely that a particular form of popular cultural memory, that I have chosen to call ‘newsreel memory’, is entangled with popular cultural products (newsreels), and that popular cultural images, like those from newsreels, move effortlessly between cultural memory and history. As Marita Sturken notes, ‘[p]hotographs are often perceived to embody memory, and cinematic representations of the past have the capacity to entangle with personal and cultural memory’ (1997: 11), an entanglement illustrated above by Doug Weatherall’s memories of Jackie Milburn’s goals.

The newsreels recollected for this study are often perceived to contain memory itself; they have, over the years, become vessels of memory, as participants’ memories appeared to reside (are contained) within the newsreel image itself, newsreels are the embodiment of memory. However, memories are also produced by the newsreel image; that is, in response to viewing material, memories are created. Some of my participants for example, had viewed newsreel material as part of earlier Tyneside Cinema reminiscence projects and subsequently referred directly to the newsreels they had been shown.¹⁰ Thus, the newsreel image both contains and produces memory. But more than that, and as explored in previous chapters, the newsreel image embodies history: the memory of a specific event is often perceived to be located within a specific newsreel, and beyond this, for many people newsreel footage *becomes* the historic event to such a degree that it is often impossible to imagine the event itself in the *absence* of the newsreel footage.¹¹ In this way the newsreel image becomes synonymous with memory and history, as its repeated use affords the newsreel image historical authority. Further, the cultural value of the camera image resides in its continued regard as evidence of the real, of fact as opposed to fiction. The newsreels exert cultural authority because they are taken, for the most part apparently unchallenged, to be faithful records of major historical events providing an invaluable record of the past.

In a sense, newsreel journalism has little to do with the reality of the pre-discursive events and all to do with the confident re-imagining of the diegetic world represented on screen, the re-presentation of the absent. The reports presented in the newsreels are verified by their presentation of actuality or mimetic truth, thus verification comes first and foremost, from ‘that which can be seen’ and then, and only then, by reference to the real.¹² As noted above, Charlie Hall recalled, ‘[b]ecause you’d heard the news but when you saw it actually in black and white you know, it really sank in what was happening’ (NRM16: 12). However, the process of recollection is heavily imbued with a nostalgia for a by-gone era, in which the thrill of seeing the moving image recalls the earliest days of film viewing. To return to Jean Murray’s remarks once again, ‘to see it, *actually see it happening* on the news theatres er, was just absolutely remarkable’ (NRM09: 12). Even beyond this nostalgia, participants’ recall in awe the ability of the newsreel cameras to record moving images from the actual event: ‘You see you never had television in those days. You only had the wireless so it was quite attractive to see the news on the screen you know’ (Harry Lenthal NRM40: 3). Harry’s memory of the ‘attractiveness’ of the newsreel image introduces an important point about the newsreels’ appeal. As noted in Chapter Two, Elizabeth Cowie’s account of the development of the cinematographic desire for reality as both knowledge *and* as spectacle, or the ‘spectacle of actuality’ as she phrases it, is enormously useful in accounting for the attraction of the newsreels themselves, and the kind of distinct pleasures they offered audiences. Given the memories of Harold and Jean above, perhaps it is the ‘spectacle of actuality’ that accounts for the continued fascination of the newsreels and may account for some, if not all, the memories gathered in this research. These unique pleasures of the factual film form, Cowie notes, arise not in

[F]ictional re-enactment but by the re-presentation of actuality. In recording actuality, photography and cinematography address two distinct and apparently contradictory desires. On the one hand there is a desire for reality held and reviewable for analysis as a world of materiality available to scientific and rational knowledge, a world of evidence [...] On the other hand there is the desire for the real not as knowledge but as image, as *spectacle*. (1999: 19, emphasis added)

As outlined above, newsreels, like the documentaries to which Cowie refers, appear to present visible evidence and share a particular cinematic discourse of knowledge and

information exchange, 'a spectacle of knowledge' as she puts it (1999: 21). In his memory of the drama *and* proof of the newsreel image, Doug Weatherall seemed to bear out Cowie's contention:

I mean I use the word *drama* a lot. I mean I was aware of what was, you would be aware of what was going on, but it was good to see *picture proof* shall we say, the – what you'd heard there on the news blah, blah, blah.
(NRM22: 12)

In comparing newsreels to radio and newspapers Doug refers to the particular pleasures afforded by the visual spectacle of actuality. What is equally revealing in relation to newsreel footage is that, given the limitations of newsreel journalism in the 1940s (notably the lack of newsreel gathering personnel and equipment) a great deal of newsreel footage was recorded, as noted in Chapters Four and Six, in the aftermath or in the wake of an event. Thus, the newsreel image represents not only the trace of an event but, as we shall see, a cinematographic trace of an absent event.

7.3 THE ELSE-WHERE AND ELSE-WHEN OF NEWSREEL MEMORY

One of the distinctive features of a great deal of newsreel footage, with the exception of planned civic occasions and the like, was the fact that what was actually recorded were the traces left behind in the absence of the event itself. Thus we see the destruction of bombings, the results of starvation and torture, the aftermath of violent storms, the wreckage of cars, planes and ships producing what we might refer to as a post-event memory. The audience witnesses and experiences both the event's absence and the newsreel camera's belatedness. While the newsreel derives its significance as outlined above from its iconic status as witness to history it simultaneously presents an indexical link to the event; it is thus both presence and absence. The newsreel image is adept at bringing into a kind of presence that which is absent. In *Camera Lucida* (1993) Roland Barthes insists that the photographic image holds a uniquely referential relation to the real by virtue of its indexicality. It is this, Barthes argues, that gives the photograph its unique evidential authority:

I call 'photographic referent' not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph [...] The photograph is

literally an emanation of the referent. From the real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here [...] A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (1993: 76-81)

Similarly the memories gathered here embody the experience of trips to the news theatres or cinema and the very physical impact of certain newsreel images, particularly those of the liberation of the concentration camps which, as revealed in Chapter Six, rendered audiences unable to speak or even physically sick. However, despite the remembered physical and emotional impact of the newsreel image, it is nevertheless a memory of the imaginary, a memory of an else-where (in space) and an else-when (in time). As was argued in the previous chapter, the events witnessed in the newsreels, and recalled in memory, (with the exception of Newcastle United's victory parades) were not experienced first hand. When audiences first encountered the newsreel image they were witnessing an already remembered event, which could also be characterised as what Christian Metz (1975) called a 'memory trace'; an event captured on film and remembered on celluloid. This, then, constitutes the specificity of newsreel memory; these are not memories of first hand experiences of events, although of course participants have direct experience of news theatre or cinema-going, and as outlined in previous chapters they were indeed part of a lived generational habitus. Audiences were paradoxically both present at the moment of screening (the cinematic event) and absent at the moment of the pre-discursive event (the news event); as a result the event, as witnessed in the newsreel, is already a mediated one. It is already a memory, a trace, an index, of a real event when the newsreel audience first encountered it in the cinema.

While the newsreel image derives its significance from its iconic status, what is recalled in newsreel memory is expressed as an imaginary witnessing of the pre-discursive newsreel event. As noted above, despite the fact that participants articulated their newsreel memories as though they were present at the events, few, if any, of the events remembered were experienced first-hand by participants. For example, Tricia Charlewood, although referring to the newsreel footage she had seen of George V's funeral, told me 'I remember when George V died too, I mean I went to see his funeral' (NRM03: 5). What is recalled in newsreel memory is a recollection of film of an event witnessed else-where and else-when, but nevertheless it is an absence that has, in many instances, enough resonance for participants to recall the viewing experience over sixty years later.

Although it has not been appropriate in the context of this research to approach the memory of viewing Holocaust newsreels as an example of trauma memory, Holocaust memory theory and the notion of secondary witnessing are nevertheless extremely useful in highlighting the philosophical debates around the use of photographic and cinematographic images as evidence. Although newsreels are mentioned in a number of authoritative Holocaust and trauma studies (Zelizer 2000, Apel 2002, Sontag 2003, Kaplan 2005, Guerin and Hallas 2007), I would not want to equate newsreel viewing of atrocity as akin to witness testimony. Nevertheless, the attention paid in these studies to the status of the photographic image as evidence and as memorial has been enormously useful in the interpretation of the newsreel form and of its recollection in newsreel memory. The issue of the evidential status of the newsreel image took this research beyond most cinematic memory studies I could find into the realm of documentary, news and non-fiction. In this way, the role of newsreel viewing as a form of secondary witnessing, and thus newsreel memory as a unique example of cultural memory, was foregrounded. Today, due to the saturation of popular culture with recollections of the Second World War and the Holocaust, inevitably one is forced to the alarmingly obvious conclusion that memory, and newsreel memory no less so, is almost impossibly entangled (Sturken, 1997: 11). While not wishing to make direct comparisons with the trauma memories of which Marianne Hirsch writes so affectingly in her essay ‘Surviving Images’, the notion of ‘postmemory’, a term Hirsch uses to refer to the memories of the children of Holocaust survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators, is a useful way to imagine the relationship of newsreel viewers to events unfolding on screen. She writes:

The term “postmemory” is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness. Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection and creation. (2001: 220)¹³

According to Christian Metz, a film unfolds for its spectator in that ‘simultaneously quite close and definitively inaccessible “elsewhere”’ (1975: 64). Metz concluded that the cinema’s signifier is perceptual (visually and auditorily); when compared to other media he argued, ‘cinema is more perceptual [...] than many other means of expression; it mobilizes a larger number of the axes of perception’ (1975: 46). According to Metz the cinematic image is

inscribed in a photographic space, unlike theatre and opera which are ‘actively produced’ in the presence of the audience, in what he described as a ‘true space’. What unfolds on the cinema screen, he continued:

[M]ay [...] be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is fictive: the actor, the ‘décor’, the words one hears are all absent, everything is *recorded* (as a memory trace which is immediately so, without having been something else before), and thus is still true if what is recorded is not a ‘story’ and does not aim for the fictional illusion proper. For it is the signifier itself, and as a whole, that is recorded, that is absence. (1975: 47)

Metz argues that all cinema’s perceptions are in a sense ‘false’; insisting that of course the ‘activity of perception is real (the cinema is not a fantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is the shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror’ (1975: 48).¹⁴ Just as Metz outlines in relation to cinema, what newsreel audiences perceived or rather what they witnessed on screen is ‘not really the object’, which is absent. This elsewhere and else-when is, then, one of the key features of newsreel memory. As a result the memory signifier is absent, as the newsreel image is already a memory trace of an event which took place else-where and else-when. Echoing Metz, Susan Sontag writes, ‘an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens’ (2003: 21); likewise, oral history itself deals with the slightest of memory traces. Research participant Bill Stephenson’s comments inadvertently reveal this link: ‘[w]e really enjoyed the newsreels – this was modern day history before your eyes [...] all this was almost eye witness stuff’ (NRM31). For Bill, the newsreels were ‘almost’ eyewitness stuff, almost like being there – but not quite. In his testimony Bill appears to be recalling the tracings of an event on screen, an event that is at once present on the screen and simultaneously absent in an inaccessible elsewhere, or as Metz would have it ‘the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade’ (1975: 48).

7.4 OVER-EXPOSURE OF THE NEWSREEL IMAGE

To return for a moment to André Bazin’s influential essay, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ in which he claimed that photography ‘embalms time’ and that likewise, cinema appears to embalm movement through time, or as he phrased it ‘change mummified’ (1967: 14). Rather than than preserving single moments in time, the

cinematographic image preserves the passage of time, allowing repeated viewing of the same moments or sequences of change through time. No longer anchored to the present, the cinematic image allows for the replay of historic moments *ad infinitum*. Given the evidence presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six, we might reasonably claim to have identified a limited canon of newsreel images depicting important historical events. The repetition in memory of specific newsreel images suggests the importance of the canon not only in newsreel memory but in wider popular historical and cultural discourse. The process of repetition reinforces the inclusion of particular overexposed newsreel images in the canon. As discussed in the previous chapter, when asked to recall specific newsreels, participants appear to draw upon a rather limited repertoire, and we are left with the overwhelming impression that because the same newsreel footage has been repeatedly used it is subsequently and spontaneously brought to mind. It is almost as if these canonised images come to function as tropes of memory, as if such overexposure limits available memory itself.

In her examination of the photographic records of atrocity and human suffering, Susan Sontag addresses the over-exposed image of horror thus: ‘the ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated image – of an agony, of ruin – is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war’ (2003: 21). One might argue the newsreel image becomes ‘ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated’ as the cinematographic image often blurs the boundary between cultural memory and history and between cultural and personal memory. Over-exposed images of the type Sontag refers to, or newsreel footage, may then become part of our personal recollection, and the original viewing experience or encounter often impossible to pinpoint.

Sigmund Freud (1999) famously claimed that memory is continuously rewritten and transformed over time in a process of re-telling and re-imagining the past. Similarly, memory of the newsreel image, like memory itself, is continually involved in a process of re-telling or re-imagining the past in the present. For example, as noted elsewhere, participant Christopher Beadle re-imagines particularly horrific newsreels ‘showing pictures of all these graphic people dying in the gas chambers’ (NRM35: 8). In his memory Christopher is allowed to witness a scene the newsreels of course did not reveal. Further, he describes the people rather than the images as graphic, almost as though he envisages himself present at the event as the imagined scene unfolds. The capacity for memory to create, expand and change experience is expressed by Walter Benjamin: ‘[a]n experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it’ (1999: 198). Both Freud’s and Benjamin’s ideas when applied to newsreel memory position it at the centre of an infinite process of re-imagining the

past, but one in which the over-exposure of individual newsreel images marks the point at which this process of re-imagining takes hold. However, as if to further complicate matters, the newsreel narrative and image weave into the memories of participants. As already discussed, they become a part not only of popular cultural memory but of personal memory. Thus, the newsreel image moves from history to cultural memory, and finally to personal memory as frequent re-use of newsreel footage begins to fuse the personal and the public. As Marita Sturken writes in relation to personal memory's entanglement with popular film versions of the Vietnam War, 'the narratives of popular films weave themselves into the experiences and memories of those who took part in the war and those who remember viewing news coverage of it. They become part of cultural memory' (1997: 86). Similarly in his oral history of Australia's First World War veterans or Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) veterans as they are more commonly known, Alistair Thompson reveals the extent to which changes in cultural memory and life experience affected the veterans' memories of the Great War. Thompson's work focuses particularly on the interactions between the veterans, the popular mythology surrounding the Anzac legend, and the extent to which their 'memories were entangled with the myth' (1990: 25); revealing that some of his participants even related scenes from the 1981 film *Gallipoli* (d. Peter Weir) as if they were their own memories of lived experiences. Thompson uses the term 'composure' to describe the process of 'constructing memories using the public language and meanings of our culture. [...] we compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable' (1990: 25). Although not of the same order as the Anzac veterans, much of what is recalled as newsreel memory is of an indeterminate source in both time and place. As illustrated above, Christopher Beadle's recollection of a newsreel scene recording the movement of death in the gas chambers, like the Anzac memories, must originate from a fictional re-enactment or, even, from imagination. As Sturken has observed, and as Thompson's research confirmed, on the one hand filmed images can create or substitute for memories, while on the other, they can confuse and even obliterate them completely. Sturken writes, '[d]oes the photographic image allow the memory to come forth, or does it actually create the memory?' (1997: 22). As was noted in the previous chapter, but is worth restating in this context, participant Steve Whitley doubts his own memory of newsreel coverage of the Coronation (of Elizabeth II) in a way which perfectly illustrates Sturken's point: 'Would I have seen it? [...] I can't remember. I do have images in my mind of the Coronation and I wasn't there so I *must* have seen it at some stage' (NRM21: 9). Similarly in this recollection from Christopher Beadle, he appears to be trying to convince himself of his own memories of

flying bombs, ‘and you certainly remember newsreels of flying bombs going over cos I can visualise it, I must of seen it cos I can visualise it’ (NRM35: 7). Here Christopher is confused about when and where his image of the flying bombs originates. A further illustration of Sturken’s point is made by Tricia Charlewood who, as noted above, vividly recalled seeing the funeral of George V (1936) (NRM03: 5). Tricia is referring, of course, to seeing newsreel footage of the funeral; however, she was born in 1932 and would have been barely four years old when the newsreel footage was released. She and I will probably never know for sure whether her recollections come from those contemporaneous screenings or whether they originate from subsequent encounters with the newsreel footage – and as demonstrated throughout, it is this very uncertainty that defines the specificity of newsreel memory

The capacity of memory to create or substitute imagined experience for memories of a real (lived) experience, as illustrated in these memories, also extends to news theatre-going itself. There is a suggestion in some of the gathered testimony that going to the news theatre may be an activity remembered rather than actually experienced. In his recollections Christopher Beadle rather unconvincingly suggested he ‘envisages going to the news theatre’ as though the visual memory remains of rather indeterminate origin:

they’re [the newsreels] sort of part of the normal course of events so one certainly envisages having been to the news theatre, you got a better picture of what it was like. (NRM35: 16)

7.5 RE-IMAGINING THE PAST

To return to the question of the creation or formation of newsreel memory, we could regard the repeated return within televisual and filmic representation to newsreel footage as embodying a form of nostalgic repetition compulsion or the desire to re-live a longed for past. It is this type of nostalgia for certain periods in British history that drives the particular fascination and desire to see authentic footage from the period. This nostalgic desire fuels the market in television programmes, DVDs and films that re-package the newsreel image. Indeed my research participants represent an important target audience for the re-cycled, re-presented newsreel image. Today, a global heritage industry has evolved around the re-use of newsreel footage in which the newsreel itself represents historical authenticity and a guarantee of historical accuracy. Yet, the repertoire of newsreel images used to represent the 1940s and 1950s in such circumstances appears to be self-limiting.¹⁵ In most instances it seems television producers and researchers select from a familiar back catalogue of newsreel

footage such as the Blitz, Dunkirk, Belsen, the Coronation, the very same images recalled by participants.¹⁶ Further, newsreel footage has become an accepted part of what we might refer to as a process of cultural re-enactment or, as suggested above, re-imagining in which television documentary and feature film utilise newsreel images, and in which the newsreel image becomes part of the cinematic re-enactment or re-imagining before the cinema or television audience. Thus, newsreel images take on a rather different iconic status, as Marjorie Knaggs summed up:

When they show the old footage now it's repeated again and again and again, same bit. You know invading the house in France on the front. It's almost an icon now isn't it? (NRM07: 19)¹⁷

Undoubtedly particular wartime newsreel images have value as icons of, or monuments to, British resolve and of the struggle for victory against a formidable foe. Evoking considerable symbolic feeling, the newsreel image has become a cinematographic icon of an era, etched into the collective national memory.

Through these re-appropriations of newsreel footage a complex array of histories emerge, but perhaps more importantly, these re-appropriations become important new sources of historical information, not only for subsequent generations but significantly in this context for the wartime generation itself. Such is the ubiquity of newsreel images within historical representation that, as we have seen, an accurate recollection of the 'when and where' of newsreel viewing becomes almost impossible to fathom. Nevertheless, this cultural re-appropriation of the newsreel image as historical fact cannot be overlooked, nor can its powerful ability to create popular memories of the war under estimated. Newsreels have a unique status as cultural artefact in that they represent both the historical text and its use in popular re-interpretations of the past; part of a popular re-imagining of the historical moment. Newsreel images represent both documentary evidence and an apparently authentic re-telling of the past – becoming part of a contemporary re-telling of popular history.

Despite the ambivalence outlined above towards the image, visual archives of various forms are in the vanguard of attempts to memorialise the past. In its selection of images and newsreel editions, contemporary media forms (film, television, DVDs, the internet) present the user or viewer with newsreels worth remembering and fix particular newsreel images in both personal and popular cultural memory. A useful example of this process is the Tyneside Cinema's daily programme of free newsreel screenings which presents the often casual

viewer with a selection of memorable newsreel footage, endorsing its selection as newsreel images ‘worth remembering’.¹⁸ Such screening selections from the archive sustain the canon of memorable-enough newsreels while the archive ‘serves a narrative function, prescribing the limits of history and defining what will and will not be preserved. The archive determines what will speak for history’ (Sturken, 1997: 80). As a result, as is outlined above, the archive delimits the imaginary from which participants – the archive users – recreate their memories. For example, research participant Bill Stephenson’s ‘list’ of newsreel memories seems to confirm the influence of the canon, but also represents the limits of his memory. In the list, presented in a letter written in response to my request for newsreel memories, he wrote:

We really enjoyed the newsreels – this was modern day history before your eyes – Sir Malcolm Campbell’s ‘Bluebird’ car breaking the world speed record, (years later Donald Campbell water speed tragedy); launch of the ‘Queen Mary’ on Clydeside; the Coronation of King George VI; Prince of Wales and Mrs Simpson; HMS Thetis. Then all the war newsreels; Dunkirk; HMS Kelly limping home; North Africa with Alexandria; Monty; The Blitz; sinking of the Graf Spee; Allied invasion of Europe; then V.E. Day; the Normadic capsizing in New York harbour. (NRM31)

From this ‘over-exposed’ repertoire of newsreel footage and given the clustering of memories around specific newsreels, as explored in Chapter Six, one is led to the conclusion that repeat exposure to the same newsreel images encouraged participants to recall only these canonized newsreel moments in memory. The individual newsreels that are remembered and discussed by individuals are to a significant degree defined by what Marita Sturken refers to as ‘technologies of memory’ as was discussed in Chapter Two. For Sturken cultural memory is produced through objects, images, and representations: ‘[t]hese are technologies of memory [...] objects through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning’ (1997: 9). Sturken re-interprets Michael Foucault’s concept of the technologies of the self to indicate the ways in which cultural memory is defined by the cultural objects available to it. Foucault’s technologies suggest that the way in which people present and police their ‘selves’ in society is both enabled or constrained by available discourses; similarly it seems newsreel memory is both enabled and limited by the popular discourses of history and, more importantly in this context, the canon of memorable-enough newsreel images. Thus, who and what gets remembered relies, in part, on the availability of memorable-enough footage and

the appropriation of particular newsreel images to represent a version of the past. Watching television programmes like *People's Century*, *The World at War*, *A History of Britain* or *The Making of Modern Britain*, or indeed any of the cable or satellite television channels dedicated to history, all of which utilise vast amounts of newsreel footage, appears to have been instrumental in the recasting of participants' memories.¹⁹ Thus, cultural memory and history become entangled in the re-use and popular re-appropriation of newsreel material.

7.6 THE NEWSREEL IMAGE AS EPHEMERAL MONUMENT AND VIRTUAL MEMORIAL

I intend to draw this chapter, and indeed the thesis as a whole, to a close with an examination of commemoration and remembrance, and the part played by both the newsreels and the virtual newsreel archive as the site at which we both commemorate and remember the past. The newsreel image is, at different times and in different contexts, both monument and memorial and – as philosopher and critic Arthur Danto observed in an article for *The Nation* entitled 'The Vietnam War Veterans' Memorial' – there are important distinctions in intent between these two concepts:

We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget [...] Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the end of reality. (cited in Sturken 1997: 47)

For the most part, the research participants appeared to regard their newsreel memories as commemorative or even, at times, celebratory and indeed, as outlined above, the events recalled are indeed memorable. However, there were moments throughout the testimonies in which the very act of recounting newsreel memories brought forth emotional responses and personal grief as participants recalled those lost during the Second World War. For example, Ossie Nicholson remembered his brother who was lost 'off Crete [he] served in the Navy and his ship was bombed and he was killed' (NRM14: 2). Thelma Miller recalled with great sadness a young soldier she knew 'who was twenty-three [when he] was killed unfortunately on D-Day he was very... [her voice breaking]. They were good days but terribly sad' (NRM08: 7), while Yvonne Edwards' newsreel memories prompted her to recall the individual heroism and sacrifice of those lost in action. Yvonne's recollection is significant as her private grief for family members merges with a collective mourning for the thousands of lives lost at sea:

I had relatives that died – had one cousin [Edgar] who was torpedoed three times. Lost three ships and the fourth one was bombed, and he actually went down [...] The only thing they [the newsreels] couldn't keep from you was things like, was it the *Hood* that went down? ²⁰ I think there was only two survivors out of a complement of er, a thousand or something like that. And the tragedy was about merchant shipping, if they – as soon as they went into the water the ship was sinking, or damaged, “abandon ship” was the call – as soon as they got in the water they got no pay until they were rescued and had a new ship to go to. They had to replace the uniform. I know this because Edgar had to. (NRM50: 2-3)

Thus, newsreel memory brings forth commemoration, personal remembrance, grief and anger. As Susan Sontag has observed, ‘photographs [are] superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed’ (2003: 21); yet here the personal memories these newsreel images bring to mind are often vivid reminders of personal tragedy.

Despite, as outlined above, ambivalence towards the image in terms of its value as documentary proof, newsreel material remains an integral part of attempts to commemorate the past. Today the Tyneside Cinema’s daily programme of free newsreel screenings, as mentioned previously, is an act of public commemoration of both the historic events unfolding on screen, and the cultural significance of the newsreels themselves. However, the programme of screenings is also an act of public remembrance, as particular programmes throughout the year memorialise particular tragedies. Examples of the cinema’s daily newsreel screening programmes include: ‘The Hindenburg Disaster’ (play-date May 2008); ‘Spectre of War: Holocaust Memorial’ (play-date January 2009); ‘Outbreak of War’ (play-date September 2009); ‘Operation Crossroads, Nuclear Tests’ (play-date February 2010); ‘Battle for the Sands’ (El Alamein) (play-date July 2010).²¹ In this very specific context, that is within the space of the former News Theatre, the newsreel image functions as *both* monument and memorial. Both the newsreel archive and the re-use or appropriation of newsreel footage in the other contexts outlined above has an important pedagogic role in attempts to recreate or re-materialise the past and historical figures within it for subsequent generations of users. Here the canon is put to use both in the search for historical meaning and national identity and for memorialising, honouring or mourning the dead. Thus, while the newsreels commemorate the memorable they are also, in a sense, memorials themselves,

providing a narrative framework and confirmation around which viewers believe they have access to history or the 'site of truth' (Sturken 1997: 120). In an article published following the events of 11 September 2001, Sturken notes that the pedagogy of memorials 'is highly limited. Memorials do not teach well about history, since their role is to remember those who died rather than to understand *why* they died' (2002: 384). Any memorial composed entirely of newsreel footage, of which the various on-line archives are examples, and which purport to represent history, may in fact limit the user's ability to understand the past; as we have seen, British newsreels simply illustrated the news rather than attempting to analyse or interpret it, thus they illustrate history rather than explaining it.²²

Returning finally to André Bazin, who famously proclaimed that the photographic image appears to defend against the passage of time, acting as a memorial to the dead. As noted above, in relation to the specificity of the moving image in memory, Bazin wrote that the photographic image embalms time, while the cinematographic image mummifies the process of change (1967: 14). Here we return to the heightened nostalgia for an unchanging and incorruptible past and a link to the filmed event or person. Roland Barthes similarly wrote that in modern society the monument has been replaced by the photograph:

Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) Photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of "what has been", modern society has renounced the Monument. (cited in Sturken 1997: 11)

Barthes is, then, suggesting that photography becomes a substitute for memory; in other words, we do not have to remember any more, the photographic image or the newsreels will do it for us. As Marita Sturken points out, Barthes made this statement before the revival of memorial culture in the 1980s which, she claims, demonstrated that the memorial had not been replaced, but rather instead 'demanded the presence of the image' (1997: 11) to materialize memory. Pierre Nora has written vividly about this dependence of modern memory on the material content of the archive:

Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording [...] No longer

living memory's more or less intended remainder, the archive has become the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory. It adds to life – itself often a function of its own recording – a secondary memory, a prosthesis memory. (1989: 13)

But what about the archives (both real and virtual) generated by the newsreels, the newsreel archive that vast, virtual storage space of memory? Here, I am more concerned to explore the value and significance of the existence of the newsreel archive rather than an examination of its specific contents. Jacques Derrida wrote of the monumental, yet largely invisible, archive: '[i]t is spectral a *priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met' (1996: 84): the newsreel archive might be imagined as a vast collection of virtual tracings of the past. Here we return, once again, to Christian Metz's memory trace of an event captured on film, and the notion that the newsreel image is itself already a memory trace of an event on film which took place else-where and else-when. Today, there are vast amounts of digitised newsreel footage available to access on-line, countless hours of broadcast material and huge numbers of DVD compilations utilising newsreel footage.²³ It is this vast virtual archive, or virtual memorial, that popular film and television regularly plunders for material to broadcast; this virtual archive, like the individual newsreels, has become the official repository of moving images from the collective past – in other words a virtual memorial to a shared history.²⁴ While open access to these on-line sites represents a particular kind of public commemoration this virtual memorial or archive is not a space with which many, if any, of my research participants will engage. Thus, for this generation, the virtual has little if anything to do with their memories.²⁵ However, inadvertently the on-line newsreel archive experience appears to replicate the newsreel memory experience itself. Rather than complete editions of newsreels being available to view, by-and-large the on-line sites separate individual news stories in an attempt to simplify and focus the on-line search process. The result of this search strategy, however, makes the reconstruction of actual cinema viewing experiences extremely difficult; news stories were not, as indicated elsewhere, shown separately. The stream of unrelated moments or newsreel stories available in the on-line archive marks the disintegration of the narrative flow of the newsreel viewing experience. However, this pattern reflects the ruptured flow of newsreel memory, as individual stories are remembered rather than the whole newsreel programme; as a result the user of the newsreel archive on-line experiences fifty second fragments of history, like fragments of distant memory.

Just as we might conceive of the archive as a vast storage space in which to classify artefacts, so too, we might consider memory as a similarly vast and variously organised storage space: an imaginary archive from which, for example, my participants have gathered their testimonies. The newsreel memories collected for this research constitute the vital contextualising heart of the real or virtual archive. As we have seen, photography, news film and the archive are all associated with the concept of memory, functioning as surrogate or virtual sites of remembrance, becoming vast collective memory banks. In this regard, the newsreel archive provides an almost limitless storehouse of potential national, collective memory and remembrance. The collected oral testimonies gathered in this research act like artefacts left at the site of a memorial representing the tellers' participation in the process of history-making as part of the newsreel audience and as part of the wartime generation. In addition, in numerous small but important ways, the individual testimonies collected in this research now become part of official discourse, adding to and enriching newsreel history.

In the historic realm, it seems the newsreels were unsure of the role they would play in fixing memory, as the following commentary from the *British Movietone News* edition entitled 'Atrocities – The Evidence' (30 April 1945) wondered, 'shall we remember these things in ten, fifteen, twenty years time? It will be wise if we all of us retain a lasting memory of the horror of this place'.²⁶ However, it seems that in the archive of newsreel memory, the past does indeed remain in the present.

¹ *British Pathé Gazette* 12 June 1944, 'D-Day Greatest Combined Operation in World's History. Film. I.D. 1360.03. British Pathé on-line archive.

² *British Movietone News* 30 April 1945, 'Atrocities-The Evidence', issue no. 830. See also, *Universal News* 3 May 1945, 'Nazi Atrocities at Belsen', issue no. 1544; *Gaumont British News* 30 April 1945, 'Horror in Our Time', issue no. 1181; *British Paramount News* 30 April 1945, 'Proof Positive', issue no. 1478; *Pathé Gazette* 30 April 1945, 'German Atrocities' Film ID 1153.17.

³ However, it is not only images that are recalled within the experiences being remembered, it is often the non-diegetic music and the voice of the narrator which emotionalise the memory for participants.

⁴ *British Pathé Gazette* 12 June 1944, 'D-Day Greatest Combined Operation in World's History, Film I.D. 1360.03. Available at British Pathé on-line archive.

⁵ Paul Rotha, who had been memorably scathing about the newsreels as the least progressive form of cinema, noted that, '[d]uring the recent war [...] official Service cameramen showed great skill and courage in their coverage of the battlefronts' (1960: 123).

⁶ Both Jean Murray and Thelma Miller spoke about the newsreel cameramen, who did indeed experience newsreel events first-hand. For the cameramen Leslie Mitchell (1981) *Leslie Mitchell Reporting*; Ronnie Noble (1955) *Shoot First! Assignments of a Newsreel*; John

Turner (2001) *Filming History: The Memoirs of John Turner, Newsreel Cameraman*; Paul Wyand (1959), *Useless if Delayed*.

⁷ However, in relation to the development of the newsreels' mature style Pronay writes 'It was not long before the originally claimed intention of merely recording what had been said or heard at an event took second place to the voice of the commentator/journalist doing his own direct persuasion instead' (1976: 111).

⁸ Cook is of course referring to the memories of more general cinema-going practices.

⁹ In response to Rose's observation, fellow group member and former marine Harry recalled, 'I'll tell you what, you saw more on the newsreels than what the Navy did. You saw more news when you came ashore on the newsreel than on the ships' (NRM40: 3).

¹⁰ For example, throughout her testimony Jean Murray referred to the mysterious 'on there' as in 'well there is one on there which I've been besotted – I loved George the VI' (NRM09: 11). Jean is in fact referring to the newsreel compilation tape she had been shown at the Tyneside cinema during an earlier reminiscence session. Coincidentally Jean recalled a number of events from the DVD compilation *20th Century Newsreels* (2002) Classic Pictures Entertainment which were screened at this session.

¹¹ This concept is adapted from Marita Sturken's assessment of Abraham Zapruder's footage of President John. F. Kennedy's assassination. (1997: 29)

¹² This process of verification was aided enormously by the authoritative voice of the newsreel commentator, reassuring the audience of the authenticity of the newsreel image.

¹³ Hirsch concedes that survivor memory is also not unmediated but 'that it is more directly – chronologically – connected to the past' (2001: 220).

¹⁴ Of course Christian Metz was considering the Lacanian aspects of this conceptualisation of cinema, however, I am concerned here not with the production of identity but the relationship between the newsreel image and memory.

¹⁵ It is worth noting however, that this may be as a result of copyright restrictions or the prohibitive cost of screening rights.

¹⁶ With regard to footage from the Second World War, news footage was pooled between the companies. Therefore the same footage would be shared across the five newsreel companies. As a result the same limited pool of newsreel images are available.

¹⁷ To see the house to which Marjorie refers, *British Pathé Gazette, D-Day Greatest Combined Operation in World's History* (12/06/1944) Film. I.D.1360.03. British Pathé on-line archive.

¹⁸ For further details of the Tyneside Cinema's screening programme see <http://www.tynesidecinema.co.uk>

¹⁹ *The World at War* (first broadcast 1973) Thames Television; *People's Century* (first broadcast 1995) BBC; *Simon Schama's A History of Modern Britain* (first broadcast September 2000) BBC; *Andrew Marr's The Making of Modern Britain* (first broadcast May 2007) BBC. Other sources of newsreel footage include The Imperial War Museum's considerable DVD collection.

²⁰ The Royal Navy battle cruiser *HMS Hood* was sunk by the *Bismarck* at the Battle of Denmark Strait on 24 May 1941. The news was particularly dramatic as the *Hood* had been regarded as a symbol of British naval power. For library footage of the *Hood* see *British Movietone News*, 29 December 1941, 'Review of 1941', story no. 41760.

²¹ A number of the Tyneside cinema's newsreel screenings are selected to coincide with new film releases. For example when the cinema screened *Public Enemies* (d. Michael Mann, 2009) the newsreel screenings featured footage of John Dillinger. The newsreel programme was billed 'Public Enemy Number One!' (play-date June/July 2009).

²² The major on-line newsreel archives are: British Pathé Archive ‘the world’s finest news and entertainment video film archive’ <http://www.britishpathe.com>; British Movietone Digital Archive ‘One of the world’s great newsreel archives’ <http://www.movietone.com>; ITN Source ‘The world’s leading provider of motion imagery from breaking news to historical footage’ <http://www.itnsource.com>; Pathe, Movietone and ITN Source are all commercial archives from whom newsreel footage can be purchased although low resolution images are available to view without charge. Other non-commercial archives of newsreel material include; NewsFilm Online <http://www.newsfilm.bufvc.ac.uk>; and the Universal Newsreel archive, gifted to the American National Archives in 1976 and available at http://www.archive.org/details/universal_newsreels. In addition The Imperial War Museum in London has an impressive collection of newsreel footage which must be viewed on the premises or can be copied for individual use for a fee. <http://www.iwm.org.uk>

²³ See for example probably the best known of all these series (see note 19) *The World at War* (1973) Thames Television.

²⁴ Kumar, Hug and Rusch (2006) suggest that access to the media archive is having an impact on generational communities and giving rise to what they call trans-generational media communities. Using Karl Mannheim’s distinctions between the perspectives of different ‘generational units’ (Mannheim, 1972) Kumar, Hug and Rusch argue that in fact in the media age:

generations do not only appear as sociodemographic units (as contemporaries for instance), but as groups of people who share knowledge, preferences, habits, beliefs, experiences, and memories. Media generations are widening because they know the same mediated events as they are reported worldwide, presented, and repeated, put on the Internet, or stored on tape, CD, DVD, etc. Transpresence and omnipresence of media events, therefore, are the prerequisites of a global, transcultural, and transgenerational media community. (2006: 219)

²⁵ None of my participants spoke of on-line access to newsreel footage while many recalled seeing newsreel extracts in TV documentaries and the like.

²⁶ *British Movietone News* 30 April 1945, ‘Atrocities-The Evidence’. Issue no. 830. British Movietone on-line archive.

CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is worth reminding ourselves that British cinema programmes of the 1940s and 1950s were much more than one feature film; for audiences seventy years ago the cinema programme included news, shorts and a second feature, additional elements which are so often forgotten in film histories. Further, it is this cinematic surround that is integral to the remembered experiences and social history of cinema-going itself. This project started with the notion that oral history interviews would reveal the experiences of the newsreel audience on Tyneside in the 1940s and 1950s, and, further, that an ethnographic approach to this particular audience would reveal aspects of newsreel viewing that were not included in film histories. In this respect the oral histories on which this thesis is based have been instrumental in producing both a cultural history of newsreel viewing in the mid-twentieth century and have provided the primary data for an in-depth analysis of the complex processes of newsreel memory formation.

As a result of using ethnography and theories of memory – which are *both* theories *and* practical methodologies – this research involved a continual reformation of the initial research questions in response to the accumulating data. A great many issues arose which were not identified at the outset and which required a re-negotiation of both research questions and approach, leading finally to a thesis that employed, in Susannah Radstone's words, a number of 'liminal practices' (2000: 13) in both theory and methodology. Inevitably during the lifetime of a research project research questions are re-framed, re-phrased or abandoned altogether.¹ Crucially, the thesis has been written in direct response to the research data, regardless of the implications (and headaches). Consequently, I have referred throughout to a diverse range of studies and theories from a wide variety of disciplines, adapting them according to the particular needs of this research project as it evolved and changed over time.

As noted in Chapter Two, the nature of academic publication often leads the reader to the conclusion that research projects are straightforward and their findings obvious, while unhelpfully obscuring the true complexity and variety of ethnographic film research. As the volume of empirical research into the film audience increases, it is the responsibility of researchers to remain open and honest about the challenges inevitably encountered when engaging with 'real people'. The greatest challenge is to deal with participants who say the unexpected, but whose memories, views and opinions must be accounted for. In addition it is impossible in oral history work of the kind conducted for this research to ignore the

contribution of *both* interviewer and interviewee in the process of bringing memories into existence; as also noted in Chapter Two, Alessandro Portelli considers the oral history testimony as a 'shared project' (1991: 54). In this regard I determined the shape of the interviews as much as the participants themselves, both in the interview situation itself and in the subsequent processes of interpretation and analysis. As the thesis analyses at length, the relationship one forms with participants is crucial and the issue of trust between interviewer and interviewee is paramount. Thus, the process of reframing the gathered material in order to respond to a set of academically imposed questions confers a particular ethical responsibility on to the interviewer. This responsibility was particularly pressing when often vulnerable older people are involved in the research process, and in this regard, it has been particularly important to remain faithful to the spirit of the original material. Thus, throughout the interpretation of the individual oral history narratives I have attempted to draw conclusions about how newsreel memories are formed while at the same time I hope I have retained something of the personalities of those involved through their anecdotes and memories of the period.

As examined throughout the thesis personal identity was an important part of the narratives in which particular personal traits and familial relationships were revealed. I hope, therefore, to have also retained the uniqueness of the personalities involved in the research, preserving at the very least the narrator's essential character traits, for example: Frank and Marjorie Knaggs, the flamboyant double-act who referred to themselves as the 'intellectuals of Wideopen'; former tabloid journalist Doug Weatherall with his brilliant sporting memory and heroic northern pride; Jean Murray and her firm convictions that the newsreels were the 'very latest up-to-the-minute news'; Charlie Hall and his verbose and detailed descriptions of his mother and their neighbours Mrs Paules, Mrs Leonard, Mr Welsh, and Mr and Mrs Goldman; and not forgetting Rose Johnson, whose staunch *lack* of newsreel memory told me more about the newsreels than I could have imagined. While of course one is required to analyse and deconstruct the gathered data (memories), the thesis would be far less convincing without the inclusion of lengthy quotes from the gathered oral histories. One of the challenges of work of this kind is forming conclusions which necessarily involve a process of generalisation while maintaining the distinctive voices of individuals and the dynamic ways in which newsreel memory is formed. Thus, I have attempted to negotiate the liminal spaces between unique personal identity and the wider frames of reference to which all my participants referred while maintaining as far as possible the individual personalities of the participants themselves.

Throughout this thesis we have seen how participants revealed themselves as both vernacular theorists and historians. In this regard Thomas McLaughlin's work (1996) provided a useful starting point for re-thinking the value of popular theory and accounting for the many insights and thoughtful, often critical, analysis of participants' own and other's newsreel viewing experiences. In particular participants revealed their critical insights when discussing the function of wartime newsreel propaganda. Additionally, we have seen how newsreel memories revealed distinctive ways of telling newsreel stories – or newsreel memory tropes – which provide a useful indication of the discourses of popular newsreel memory talk. Although this approach is not new – Annette Kuhn (2002), for example, identifies numerous memory tropes in her work on cinema memory – the distinctive tropes referred to in newsreel memory talk are unique, revealing a complex articulation of public and private memory. Remembering their distant newsreel viewing allowed participants to negotiate different configurations of identity: national, local, personal, and at times political, as in their sometimes critical analysis of wartime newsreel propaganda. As revealed throughout the gathered narratives, the relationship between past and present selves, a process Alessandro Portelli called 'shuttlework' (1991: 65), is dynamic and constantly shifting, persisting as a delicate negotiation or dialogue between individual's past and present selves. What Nancy Huggett refers to as the 'narrated self' (the young remembered self) and the 'narrating self' (the older speaking self) (2002: 208).

From the outset this thesis has shown that understanding newsreel memory requires an acknowledgment that personal memories, within which newsreel memory is embedded, are located between the complex processes of memory construction and the events of history. According to Radstone, it is memory's 'relation to lived historical experience that constitutes [its] specificity' (2000: 11). As a result it was clearly not enough to ask my participants for their newsreel memories in isolation, as these recollections are so often entangled with both personal memory and history; as explored in the thesis, the newsreel image has become synonymous with history. Thus, newsreel memories occupy a liminal space (between personal memory and popular history) and, as a result, required analysis that acknowledged their status as *both* personal cinematic memory *and* the memory of the events of history. As I have explored, the evidential status of the newsreel further complicated the process of analysis, as the newsreel image is routinely taken to be empirical evidence of the historic event itself. With this in mind, this thesis has also argued that one of the unique features of newsreel memory is its 'entangledness', that is the way in which newsreel memory is entwined with the use and re-use of the newsreel image within a wide range of popular

cultural products. In this regard Marita Sturken's (1997) observations on the multilayered formation of popular cultural memory were particularly useful.

Although not an oral history, Sturken's work addresses one of the central questions of cultural memory and one that has been key to analysing the participants' recollections: '[does] the photographic image allow the memory to come forth, or does it actually create memory?' (1997: 22). To this end this thesis has examined in depth the problematic nature of encounters with newsreel images in which formative personal encounters become inextricably bound up with recurrent interactions over subsequent decades and in which the moment of the original encounter continually slips from view. As a result, newsreel memory slides effortlessly between cultural memory, personal memory and history, and very often disappears from the sight of the researcher. Indeed this project has confirmed that any future audience research into the factual film form must address the slippage between the real and the imaginary. The researcher, then, must employ a dynamic range of approaches in response to the gathered data and pay close attention to this fundamental relationship. Only in this way is it possible to account for the entangledness of original encounters with newsreel footage and subsequent interactions over the ensuing decades.

This research has also examined canonical newsreels of memorable events; these events, recalled in newsreel memory, not only provide the basis for remembered acts of collective witnessing but provide the foundation on which personal memories are formed. The analysis has also revealed that the gathered recollections illustrate that newsreel viewing, in an important imaginative sense, brought specific events into existence for cinema audiences. Further, the recurrence of the same limited number of freely remembered newsreel memories, or memory clusters, is suggestive of the existence of a collective wartime generational memory and reveals not only the significance of a popular shared memory, but the conflation of personal memory and popular history. Given the clustering of newsreel memories around a limited number of unusual historic or 'marker' events, and the deeply felt personal emotion with which those memories were expressed, my thesis reveals the formative relationship between the historic events recorded by the newsreels and the personal expression of generational memory.

A thesis exploring the formation of a type of cultural memory suggests a type of memory constructed from other cultural forms. Here, however, we have seen that newsreel memory is much more than simply the recollection of a succession of cinematic or televisual encounters. As a result, this research has addressed the complex nature of memory formation and the mnemonic communities that shape and structure it. We have seen that newsreel

memories are anchored within the personal, the autobiographical, and that each recollection is framed within a familiar context of both domestic and leisure activities with family and friends. In particular participants' relationships with their mothers emerged as crucial in the newsreel memories; trips accompanying mother to the news theatre were often recalled as excursions into public spaces made safe by the maternal presence. As explored in Chapter Three, this is perhaps hardly surprising, given that participants were often young children at the time they were asked to recall; a fuller investigation into the maternal influences on childhood cinema-going would provide a fruitful area for future study.

Thus, at the heart of this thesis lies the interpretation of individual stories or autobiography within wider cultural frames of meaning utilised in order to elucidate the relationship between newsreel memory formation, familial influences, national identity, generational habitus and a particular northern sensibility. As we have seen, the cultural history of the newsreels is not simply about the consumption of newsreels, but about how these encounters are integrated into the very fabric of participants' everyday lives. In recounting their trips to the news theatres, for example, participants revealed an enormous amount of detail not only about their personal relationships, but about society and culture more generally, particularly during the War. Thus, this thesis has sought to situate the formation of newsreel memory within a series of meaningful contexts or frames of meaning. Further, within these contexts, it is the particularity of a British-wartime-generational imagination that comes to the fore in the gathered recollections. As noted in Chapter Five, both generational *and* national identity shape the formation of memory. As was also revealed in the same chapter, participants recalled watching newsreels as engendering a shared imagining of a common national identity, inflected here with a particular northern sensibility. In this regard newsreel viewing brought forth the memory of a communal experience, akin to the symbolic communion made possible for television viewers of public events, coronations, royal weddings, national sporting occasions and the like. Indeed, we might regard newsreel viewing of such events as proto 'event' or 'must-see' television moments.

In addition, the narratives gathered here reveal that newsreel memories are equally embedded (embodied) in a particular generational consciousness, developed in response to the external structuring of society at a given moment in history. Eyerman and Turner have posited this generational consciousness as a generational habitus which they described as 'a mode of distinction based in age differentiation' (1998: 99). Shot through the newsreel stories gathered here are the ways in which my participants self-consciously identified themselves as members of a particular generational cohort, an allegiance expressed in the manner in which

they recalled their experiences and articulated their shared outlook on life, and in the way they differentiated themselves from younger generations. Thus, I concluded that despite the fact that individuals' memories are embedded in the familial or local, they nevertheless reflect the concerns of wider (imagined) communities and, more particularly, their perceived generational cohort. In exploring this relationship the thesis reveals the way in which individuals recast their personal memories as part of a popular collective memory.

The investigation of useful frames of meaning extended to an exploration of the spaces of the news theatre itself as the site of much newsreel memory formation and as a cinematic space quite unlike any other in terms of its screening programme and the accessible and transitory space it offered to the public. From within this space a number of different news theatre audiences begin to emerge. Unlike the 'twilight reveries' to which Roland Barthes (cited in Bruno 1993: 48) compared the experiences of the cinema audience, the news theatre audience's activities were at once more mundane and often part of an urban routine; the news theatre was often somewhere convenient to pass, or waste some time. From the gathered recollections we can see that, far from being a space of enlightened citizenship in which audiences engaged with news and views from around the world, the news theatre often served a much more mundane purpose as a form of social service – a refuge – not however, an escape into the realms of fantasy, but the more prosaic world of comedy, cartoons and news. In addition, the remembered intimacy of the news theatre auditorium, shrouded in the perpetual darkness of a continuous programme, afforded it a particular quality and referred to by many participants as 'cosy'. However, the space of the news theatre, located in the heart of the city, could equally be regarded as one of transit and modernity. As illustrated in Chapter Three the news theatre audience was often referred to as a 'floating public', a description borne out in the remembered experiences of many participants. In addition, given the cheap admission price and the extended opening hours, the news theatres seemed to represent a truly accessible cinematic space in which an eclectic audience moved together (brushed alongside each other) inside the space of the news theatre before moving apart and out into the hustle and bustle of the city centre streets. Finally, in this regard, this thesis has illustrated how the news theatre programme itself, far from being simply an endless repetition of newsreels, was in fact more akin to variety theatre or the 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 1990); continuing in the tradition of the cinematic variety programme well into the 1960s. Although small in number, very little is known about the news theatres that sprang up around the country in the 1930s, and much work remains to be done to elaborate a comprehensive account of these unique spaces of cinematic history.

However, as examined in this study, while the memory of the news theatres or cinemas in which these encounters took place remains solid and stable, the recollection of encounters with the newsreels becomes - in memory - unstable and often indistinct. This research has also emphasised that newsreel viewing engendered a unique viewing experience, and one in which the pleasures associated with the spectacle of actuality and knowledge were paramount. Though there has been a significant amount of research into the television news audience, particularly by the Glasgow Media Group (e.g. 1976, 1982, 1990, 1995), cinema and cultural studies lack any substantial body of work about audiences for factual film forms.² In this regard, this thesis has gone some way to account for the particular viewing pleasures offered, and the different viewing position imposed, by the newsreel form. Newsreels have been variously described as a form of cinematic journalism and as such offer pleasures distinct from those afforded by fiction or fantasy. As discussed in Chapter Two, Elizabeth Cowie's (1999) excellent analysis of what she calls the spectacle of actuality (and knowledge) helps to account for the specific pleasures and viewing positions engendered by the newsreels. It is precisely those newsreels that offer the spectacle or drama of actuality that are both remembered and which are enveloped within the historic newsreel canon. However, with this sense of the pleasures and attractions of the newsreel image in mind we should not forget that much of the mundane or unexceptional of the newsreels' content is forgotten or slips from view. In addition, a great deal of newsreel memory is characterised by a remembered lack of interest in, or dis-engagement with, the newsreels, a finding which may appear counter-intuitive in relation to the perceived historic significance of the newsreel image in popular cultural memory. Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that so little work has been undertaken into viewers' distant memories of the news media in general and cinematic news journalism in particular.

I have argued that the ability to recall newsreel content appears to depend on its depiction of events of personal, local or national significance. However, I have also argued that the newsreels were of greatest significance for participants as a form of visual confirmation or empirical evidence of events, a 're-presentation of actuality' according to Cowie (1999: 19). The newsreel camera acts as the viewer's substitute, taking his or her place at the site of the news event itself and becoming, in the process, a metaphor for the impassive witness of history and conferring on the newsreel camera the status of objective mechanised observer, as the work of André Bazin (1967) and Roland Barthes (1993) has shown. I have also argued in this regard that the newsreel image is rather unique as the figure of the British newsreel cameraman (and they were all men) stands alongside the mechanical eye of the

newsreel camera adding another layer of credibility or authenticity to the newsreel image. Walter Benjamin's (1999) notion of the unique aura of an original art work provided a useful starting point for an exploration of the particular auratic quality of newsreels in which history becomes embedded in a particular newsreel image. It is this auratic quality, along with the 'spectacle of actuality' as outlined by Elizabeth Cowie (1999) that confers on the newsreel its particularly emphatic status as visual evidence and why it continues to embody the historically significant.

This thesis has also argued that memories of particular historic events evoke specific iconic newsreel images with which they have become synonymous. In this way, newsreel images become etched into both personal and collective memory, not only in terms of their initial exhibition, but also by their frequent reiteration over subsequent decades. Thus the newsreels continue to exert cultural authority because they are taken, for the most part, to be faithful records of major historical events, providing an invaluable empirical record of the past. The cultural status of the newsreel image took the research beyond most cinematic memory studies into the realm of television documentary, news and non-fiction audience studies, and highlighted the role of newsreel viewing as a unique form of secondary witnessing or even 'postmemory' (Hirsch 2001: 220). In attempting to account for newsreel memory's formation I was drawn to the scholarship of Holocaust memory. As I made clear in Chapter Seven, I do not wish to suggest a direct comparison between newsreel and Holocaust memory. However, research into witness testimony, particularly Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory' (2001: 220) which she uses to describe second generation memories of the Holocaust, has been enormously helpful in forming an understanding of newsreel memory as mediated memory. It is postmemory's basis in vicariousness, belatedness and most importantly representation that drew me to make the comparison with newsreel memory, which is always already second-hand, even at the first moment of encounter between the newsreel image and the historic audience.

Throughout the gathered narratives we have seen that the repetition of a handful of iconic newsreel images suggests the existence of a canon of newsreel footage, not only in newsreel memory, but in wider popular historical discourse. Further, the repeated use of this particular newsreel footage reinforces the canon that has become over the years ultra-familiar. This thesis argues that newsreel memory is both enabled and limited by the popular discourses of history, as it evokes the popular and enduring mythology surrounding the Second World War and plunders the archive of available and over-exposed newsreel images used to support this popular mythology. As a result, who and what gets remembered relies, in

part, on the availability of memorable-enough newsreel footage and the appropriation of this footage to re-present a version of the past. Thus, cultural memory and history become entangled in the re-use and popular re-appropriation of newsreel material.

In his short film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), director Alain Resnais' camera takes the viewer on a journey through the vast spaces, mechanisms and cataloguing processes of the French National Library. As Resnais' camera homes in on a microphone suspended in mid-air, a disembodied voice declares "[b]ecause humans have a short memory, they accumulate countless *aide-mémoires*". We might usefully regard the newsreel image as a potent *aide-mémoire* which often threatens to overwhelm memory itself. As noted throughout the thesis, participants' memories appear to reside within the newsreel image itself: newsreels are the embodiment of memory. Indeed the memory of a specific event is often perceived to be located within particular newsreel footage to such a degree that it is impossible to imagine the event in the *absence* of the newsreel footage. In this way the newsreel image, like the archive, becomes synonymous with memory and history. While Resnais' film emphasises the vast materiality of the archive and the seemingly uncontrollable tide of incoming material continually threatening to overwhelm the spaces of the Bibliothèque Nationale - order is eventually imposed on chaos by the imposition of the cataloguing and storage systems - I suggest that we can imagine the digitised archive of newsreel footage available on-line as a vast collection of virtual tracings of the past through which users navigate an uncertain, often directionless path. As outlined in this study, the experiences of the archive user, particularly the on-line user, fails to recreate the historic newsreel viewing experience and instead mirrors the distant and often fragmentary newsreel memory experience itself. In this regard Jacques Derrida's wonderful description of '*le mal d'archive*' (archive fever) conveys the frustrations and heady possibilities involved in the research, '[i]t is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away' (1996: 91). Thus navigating newsreel memory is rather like finding one's way through the labyrinthine newsreel archive itself, a process full of chance encounters and surprising revelations.

Finally, this study has shown that the newsreels play an important role in both commemorating and remembering the past, and that the newsreel archive from which commemorative images are plucked serves as a vast virtual repository of national memory. However, like memorials generally, newsreels actually tell us relatively little about why events took place. As the research has revealed, the newsreels simply illustrated or visualised the news rather than critically examining it. And it is here that the gathered oral histories finally come into their own, as part of this unfathomable newsreel archive, helping in

numerous important ways to contextualise the images, memories and history contained therein; negotiating a path through the liminal spaces between official and personal histories in which newsreel memories begin.

¹ See Appendix 3 for the various iterations of the interview questions.

² Of the limited number available see: John Corner, Kay Richardson and Natalie Fenton's (1990) case-study of viewer interpretations of depictions of nuclear energy on TV; Birgitta Höijer's (1992) study of viewers' horizons of expectations with regard to news programmes; and Thomas Austin's (2005) work on screen documentary.

APPENDIX 1

NEWSREEL MEMORIES: AUDIENCES, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN 1940S AND 1950S TYNESIDE

The following Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative PhD Award project description and person specification appeared in the national press in April 2006.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project will investigate audience use of newsreels in Tyneside in the 1940s and 1950s, with a particular focus on children and their engagement with news media. The Newcastle News Theatre (now Tyneside Cinema) was built in 1937 and was an instant success, playing a crucial role in the lives of the people of the North East and giving them access to news of world events and images of unimaginable cultures from across the globe. In many cases, programmes were designed specifically for children.

Bourdieu (*Distinction*) and Anderson (*Imagined Communities*) have respectively related cultural consumption to the legitimation of social difference, and the construction of collective identities. How can the news cinema experiences of these audiences be understood in the light of these different framings of the links between cultural consumption and identity? Does cultural consumption enable such audiences to challenge dominant assumptions, or does it reinforce the social status quo?

The focus on child audiences will provide definition and focus to the research questions, and simultaneously ensure the availability of participants for an oral history study (because of age, but also thanks to the connections between this PhD and the Tyneside Cinema Picture Palace reminiscences project, further details given below).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- To study the consumption of newsreels by audiences in the 1940s and 1950s, in Tyneside.

- To analyse primary material (newsreels, accompanying material, and interviews, films, etc made as part of the Tyneside Heritage project) in order to address key questions relating to the consumption of newsreels and the construction of a community imaginary (Benedict Anderson).
- To engage in and develop current debates relating to cinema spectatorship, cinema-going and national cinema, drawing on ethnohistorical studies, psychoanalytic and cognitive theory, social histories.

Key research questions that may be addressed are:

- How did audiences in the 1940s and 1950s engage with newsreels?
- How did the presentation of newsreels affect the audience use of them?
- Are there differences in the ways people consumed these newsreels according to gender, class, age, etc?
- What is the relationship between consumption of newsreels and the construction of cultural, regional and national identities?
- Is this relationship affected by the content/context/style, e.g. events such as World War II, didactic aims of the films?

NB: This project outline provides a framework within which the successful candidate will define a thesis, focus the research questions to be addressed and determine the theoretical approaches and methodologies, which will necessarily include oral history.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The AHRC is currently funding research on newsreels in the national context which is being carried out by the [British Universities Film and Video Council](#) (BUFVC) and the [British Universities Newsreel Database](#) (BUND). These projects focus on the production and distribution of the films. This PhD aims to address the as yet unexplored questions of exhibition and reception. As such, it will be of interest beyond the immediate regional context of the study, offering a valuable contribution to the national history of newsreels and cinema audiences, and to the growing body of work on cinema audiences, spectatorship and film consumption.

The PhD will link with two major research projects:

1. Tyneside Heritage Lottery funded Picture Palace Project, which is exploring the history of the Tyneside Cinema as a newsreel cinema. The Heritage projects include an inter-generational collaboration between school children and older residents based on the reminiscences of the older generation's visits to the Tyneside and other cinemas in the region throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The output will be digital films made by the participants in conjunction with film-makers, based on their reminiscences. This material will be archived in 2006, and will provide the starting point for the student's more academically focused analysis of the consumption of newsreels. The student will work with the Tyneside Cinema oral historians to gather and interpret data. The collaboration will offer access to these archives and ensure that the student is provided with the necessary academic framework for analysis. The student will also be closely involved in developing material for heritage interpretation displays that will form a major exhibition at the Tyneside Cinema upon its re-opening in 2008, marking its history as a newsreel cinema, and providing a unique space devoted to newsreels.

The PhD will bring an important further dimension to the archive material gathered from the reminiscences project, and from the student's further research. By bringing an academic perspective to the interpretation of this data, the PhD will identify the significance of this material in relation to the field of study, thus showing the relevance of the project beyond the regional context, in terms of national and international histories of cinema-going, and film consumption, and newsreels.

2. The second project is a study of contemporary cinema-going in Newcastle examining audiences in three different exhibition venues in Newcastle, in order to analyse the relationship between cinema-going, cultural consumption in a broader sense and the construction of cultural identities.

PRINCIPAL DUTIES

In addition to conceiving and completing a doctoral thesis on the use of newsreels by cinema audiences, the student will:

- contribute to the heritage interpretation displays that will form an important and unique attraction once the Tyneside Cinema reopens in 2008, as well as to the virtual exhibition that will be available online.
- contribute to public events such as screenings of the newsreels and of the films made as part of the Reminiscences project.
- participate in conferences.
- help to develop the archive of oral history material.
- help to develop research guidelines and future directions for the Tyneside Cinema's Education & Outreach department.
- help to organize a Symposium on Newsreels to be held in early 2009.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

The successful candidate will:

- be self-motivating with demonstrable skills at working independently
- have a strong track record of meeting deadlines
- be a good communicator and alert to the need to liaise with both organisations
- have an academic background in a relevant area (e.g. Film Studies, Cultural History, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Area Studies)
- have excellent inter-personal skills
- have excellent computer skills
- be comfortable working as part of a small interdisciplinary team
- be flexible in time-management
- be able to cope with working in a rapidly developing organisation

In addition, the applicant will need to be sympathetic to the ethos of the Tyneside Cinema and should be committed to equal opportunities. Previous experience of working on oral history projects would be an advantage. Because of the nature of the oral history research all employees working for the Tyneside Cinema will be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sml/postgrad/funding/studentship_AHRC2006-detail.htm
(Accessed 23/05/2006)

APPENDIX 2

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE & TYNESIDE CINEMA

CLEARANCE NOTE AND COPYRIGHT FORM

The purpose of this form is to make sure that your sound recording can be added permanently to the collections of University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Tyneside Cinema, in accordance with your wishes. All material we are given will be preserved as a permanent public resource for possible use in exhibition, reference, research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet.

If you wish to restrict how the material can be used by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Tyneside Cinema, please state your conditions in the box below:

I hereby assign the copyright of my contribution to University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Tyneside Cinema.

Name (PLEASE PRINT).....

Signed Date

Office Use Only

Signed (NU) Date

Accession No. NRM:

APPENDIX 3

DETAILS OF ALL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

<i>NRM01</i>	Muldoon	Kathleen
<i>NRM02</i>	Campbell	Cynthia
<i>NRM03</i>	Charlewood	Patricia & John
<i>NRM04</i>	Fisher	Keith
<i>NRM05</i>	Fleck	Muriel
<i>NRM06</i>	Nicholson	Alan
<i>NRM07</i>	Knaggs	Majorie & Frank
<i>NRM08</i>	Miller	Thelma
<i>NRM09</i>	Murray	Jean
<i>NRM10</i>	Ketchen	Joyce
<i>NRM11</i>	Walters	Veronica
<i>NRM12</i>	Worrall	Barry
<i>NRM13</i>	Alexander	Molly
<i>NRM14</i>	Nicholson	Osmond
<i>NRM15</i>	Lee	John
<i>NRM16</i>	Hall	Charlie
<i>NRM17</i>	Holden	Henry
<i>NRM18</i>	Scott	Peter
<i>NRM19</i>	Stafford	Lesley
<i>NRM20</i>	Barrie	Jack
<i>NRM21</i>	Whitley	Steve
<i>NRM22</i>	Weatherall	Doug
<i>NRM23</i>	Harrison	Geoff
<i>NRM24</i>	Warburton	Mr
<i>NRM25</i>	Elliott	Dorothy
<i>NRM26</i>	Armstrong	Mr
<i>NRM27</i>	Alexander	Ann
<i>NRM28</i>	Walker	Shelia
<i>NRM29</i>	Charlton	Marilyn
<i>NRM30</i>	Weir	Shelia

<i>NRM31</i>	Stephenson	Bill
<i>NRM32</i>	Edwards	Wesley
<i>NRM33</i>	Swan	Jef
<i>NRM34</i>	Stoker	Sydney
<i>NRM35</i>	Beadle	Christopher
<i>NRM36</i>	Trailer	Jeremy
<i>NRM37</i>	Phelan	Betty
<i>NRM38</i>	Sinton	Walter
<i>NRM39</i>	Beadle	Angus & Jean
<i>NRM40</i>	Age Concern 1	6 Participants
<i>NRM41</i>	Age Concern 2	6 Participants
<i>NRM42</i>	Byker Group	12 Participants
<i>NRM43</i>	Age Concern 3	6 Participants
<i>NRM44</i>	Henderson	George
<i>NRM45</i>	Forster	Ella
<i>NRM46</i>	Kemp	Harold
<i>NRM47</i>	Kearney	Norah
<i>NRM48</i>	Watson	Pauline
<i>NRM49</i>	Lenthal	Henry
<i>NRM50</i>	Edwards	Yvonne

APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEWEES

Below are brief details of the participants identified in the thesis. Details include the initials used to identify participants; their research coding; the place and date of the interview; their place and date of birth (where known); their age at the time of interview.

All the interviews were conducted by Louise Anderson (L.A.)

M.A. Molly Alexander, (NRM13) Longbenton 20 June 2007. 1919 Walker. (88 years)

J.B. Jack Barrie, (NRM20) Leadgate 13 July 2007. 1937 Medomsley, County Durham. (70)

C.B. Christopher Beadle, (NRM35) Jesmond 1 August 2007. 1933 Jesmond. (74)

J.C. John Charlewood, (NRM03) Gosforth 30 July 2007. 1930 Cullercoats. (77)

T.C. Tricia Charlewood, (NRM03) Gosforth 30 July 2007. 1932 Tynemouth. (75)

C.C. Cynthia Campbell, (NRM02) Heaton 11 July 2007. 1941 Gilsland. (66)

Y.E. Yvonne Edwards (NRM50) Byker 20 September 2008. 1926 Ashington. (82)

C. H. Charlie Hall, (NRM16) West Monkseaton 11 July 2007. 1934 Tynemouth. (73)

H.H. Henry Holden, (NRM17) Gateshead 12 July 2007. 1948 North Shields. (59)

R.J. Rose Johnson (NRM40) Byker 1 October. 1912 (96)

H.K. Harold Kemp, (NRM46) West Denton 15 October 2008. 1933 Elswick. (75)

J.K. Joyce Ketchen, (NRM10) Gateshead 19 September 2007. 1932 South Shields. (75)

F.K. Frank Knaggs (NRM07) Gateshead 25 July 2007. 1929 Elswick. (78)

M.K. Marjorie Knaggs (NRM07) Gateshead 25 July 2007. 1934 Walker. (73)

J.L. John Lee, (NRM15) Gosforth 9 July 2007. 1920 Corbridge, Northumberland. (87)

H.L. Harry Lenthall, (NRM49) Byker 20 October 2008. 1920 Taunton, Somerset. (88)

T.M. Thelma Miller, (NRM08) Tynemouth 16 July 2007. 1930 North Shields. (77)

T.M. Ted Moralees (NRM40) Byker 1 October. 1932 (76)

J.M. Jean Murray, (NRM09) Prudhoe 18 July 2007. 1931 Wallsend. (76)

O.N. Osmond Nicholson, (NRM14) Gateshead 26 June 2007. Gateshead. 1917 (90)

S.S. Sydney Stoker, (NRM34) 20 July 2007. Gateshead. 1940 (67)

V.W. Veronica Walters (NRM11) Blyth 27 July 2007. 1933 Greenock, Inverclyde. (74)

D.W. Douglas Weatherall, (NRM22) Darras Hall 21 September 2007. 1932 Seaham, County Durham. (75)

S.W. Shelia Weir, (NRM30) Walkergate 26 July 2007. 1929 Gateshead. (78)

S.W. Steve Whitley (NRM21) Fenham 23 July 2007. 1935 Chelmsford, Essex. (72)

B.W. Barry Worrall (NRM12) Gosforth 19 July 2007. 1947 Crocksdale, County Durham. (60)

N.B. Clear distinction are made where necessary in the thesis between S.W. Shelia Weir or Steve Whitley.

APPENDIX 5

FIRST SET OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS (JANUARY 2007)

About you

- What is your name and where were you born and brought up?
- How old were you when you left school and what did you do after you left school?

General cinema-going

- Which cinemas did you go to?
- How often did you go?
- How much did it cost?
- Why did you go to the cinema?
- What was it like? Sights/sounds/smells?
- Who did you go with?
- What were the cinemas like? Were they different? Did you ever go into Newcastle?
- What type of films did you like and why?
- Did you have a favourite film star?
- What did you do before or after seeing a film?

Newsreels

- Do you remember the newsreels?
- What do you remember about them?
- Do you remember any particular events/occasions/personalities/film stars/politicians from the newsreels?
- Do you think newsreels were an important source of news in 40s and 50s, if so why? (bearing in mind newsreels often late with the news)
- What did you think of them? Boring, interesting?
- Where did you see them?
- If you went to the Tatler or News Theatre, why did you go there?
- Did you go to the café?

Travelogues

- Do you remember the travelogues? What do you remember?
- What did you think?

Cartoons

- Do you remember the cartoons? What do you remember?

The News

- What do you think you learnt about the news from the newsreels? Did you learn more or less than from radio/newspapers?
- What do you remember about the style of the newsreels? How the stories were presented, the voice over, the things you were shown and the things you weren't shown? (Did you like it, never thought about it, would have liked it to be different?)

- What do you think you learnt about the rest of the world from the newsreels and travelogues?
- Did what you saw ever make you want to travel and see more of the world even if this was impossible?
- Do you remember seeing any local stories included in the newsreels?

Film Societies

- Was anybody a member of a film society in Newcastle?
- If so which one and what do you remember?

SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS (APRIL 2007)

About you

- Where and when were you born and brought up?
- How old were you when you left school and what did you do after you left school?

General cinema-going

- Which cinemas did you go to?
- How often did you go?
- How much did it cost?
- Why did you go to the cinema?
- What was it like? Sights/sounds/smells?
- Who did you go with?
- What were the cinemas like? Were they different? Did you ever go into Newcastle?
- What type of films did you like and why?
- Did you have a favourite film star?
- What did you do before or after seeing a film?

Newsreels

- Do you remember the newsreels?
- What do you remember about them?
- Do you remember any particular events/occasions/personalities/film stars/politicians from the newsreels?
- Why did you go to see newsreels?
- Do you think newsreels were important in 40s and 50s, if so why?
- What did you think of them?
- Where did you see them?
- If you went to the Tatler or News Theatre, why did you go there?
- Did you go to the café?

Travelogues

- Do you remember the travelogues? What do you remember?

- What did you think?

Cartoons

- Do you remember the cartoons? What do you remember?

The News

- Did you have a radio? - What did you listen to and which whom?
- Did you read a newspaper? – Which one?
- What do you think you learnt about the news from the newsreels? Did you learn more or less than from radio/newspapers?
- What do you remember about the style of the newsreels? How the stories were presented, the voice over, the things you were shown and the things you weren't shown? (Did you like it, never thought about it, would have liked it to be different?)
- What do you think you learnt about the rest of the world from the newsreels and travelogues?
- Did what you saw ever make you want to travel and see more of the world even if this was impossible?
- Do you remember seeing any local stories included in the newsreels?

THIRD SET OF QUESTIONS FOR AGE CONCERN FOCUS GROUPS (SEPTEMBER 2008)

About you

What is your name, when you were born and where were you living in 1940s?

General cinema-going

- Which cinemas did you go to?
- How often did you go?
- Why did you go to the cinema?
- What was it like?
- Who did you go with?
- What type of films did you like?
- Did you have a favourite film star?

Newsreels

- What do you remember about the newsreels?
- Can you describe a typical newsreel? What was the content?
- Do you remember any particular newsreels? Can you remember what you saw? (i.e. more detail)
- What did newsreels mean to you then?
- Can you remember any local stories (Newcastle/Tyneside?)
- How informative do you think the newsreels were?

- What do you think the newsreels were for?
- Do you know who made the newsreels?
- What do you think the companies' main aim was? (News or entertainment?)
- Can you tell me anything about newsreels during the war?
- Were newsreels during the war different to peacetime and if so can you say how they were different?
- Were you ever disappointed in the newsreel stories? (Do you remember ever criticising the newsreels?)
- Where did you see newsreels?
- What can you tell me about going to the cinema?
- What can you tell me about the News Theatre?
- If you went to both was it different?
- Have you seen newsreels more recently perhaps on television? Part of a documentary?
- What do you think about them now?
- About your memories are they as vivid of newsreels as regular films? Why do you think there might be a difference?

Interest Films

- Do you remember the short interest or information films?
- What do you remember?

Cartoons

- Do you remember the cartoons?
- What do you remember?

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