



In the Studio and on Location: Mapping Pinewood's Culture in 1946

Abstract This chapter analyses how Pinewood's post-war culture was evolving as a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking with reference to some key film examples. While these resembled the mid-range budgeted type of films produced before the Second World War, it is argued that the adoption of newer, more efficient modes was key to Pinewood's identity. The chapter examines the desire to rationalise production methods in 1946 by focusing in detail on five films shot at Pinewood by the Independent Producers group. It concentrates on the methods used by set designers and other technicians working on the feature films *Great Expectations* (1946), *Green for Danger* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Take My Life* (1947) and *Captain Boycott* (1947). The chapter draws on the trade press's often extensive reportage of visits to Pinewood's stages when the films were being shot. It applies the concepts of 'studio relay' and 'situated art direction' to highlight the many innovative techniques which were integral to the films' economical and artistic creation.

Keywords Independent Producers · Set Design · Art Direction · British Cinema

Brian R. Jacobson has noted how film companies ‘use studio style to cultivate corporate identity’.¹ The power to embed such identities in the popular imagination was more than evident in Hollywood where MGM’s imprint was promoted and perceived as distinct from that of Warner Brothers and the rest of the ‘big five’. The tendency for each studio to be identified with a particular style of film, genres, and stars was accentuated by the fact that as vertically integrated companies the ‘majors’ each produced, distributed, and almost exclusively exhibited films in their own cinemas.² How a studio—as a physical place of filmmaking rather than relating solely to the product of a particular company—established, maintained, and developed its own culture can however be difficult to trace beyond matching film output to publicised corporate identity. This is particularly challenging in the British context since the vertical integration of film companies was less developed, and studios often rented out their spaces so output could be extremely varied. Periodic economic contraction in different periods also militated against the continuities of production that made studio styles easier to develop and track. Even so, it is possible to discern something of the cultures that pertained to studios such as Shepherd’s Bush when under the control of Gaumont-British, Denham, and Pinewood, particularly as they developed in the 1930s and 1940s. As noted in Chapter 1, the external-facing architectures of Denham and Pinewood, for example, reflected their different images and products. Denham’s streamlined Art Deco façade expressed an expansive, ambitious ethos that was to some extent evident in films produced on its stages in 1936–38 that were ‘marked by an emphasis on spectacle, pageantry and internationalism, many with high budgets and employing émigré professionals’.³ Pinewood, by contrast, was represented by Heatherden Hall, the Victorian mansion at the studios’ frontage which connoted a more traditionally ‘English’ image. A ‘Tudorbethan’ gatehouse lodge through which most visitors and employees had to pass was built as part of the studio complex in a contemporary style which

¹ Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and Its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 15.

² Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s* (London: British Film Institute, 1983), 8.

³ Sarah Street, ‘Designing the Ideal Film Studio in Britain’, *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 348.

imitated Tudor and Elizabethan architecture.⁴ Productions filmed during the same period tended to reflect this domestic orientation which featured in musical comedies, musicals, crime thrillers, and frequent use of British stars from radio and popular theatre.

The Second World War and requisitioning studios to aid the war effort disrupted these evolving identities. Dealing with material shortages, re-purposing, and in some cases closure, meant that studios were keen to return to normal as soon as possible. Experiencing the material and psychological strains of war gave them a renewed sense of purpose and even some strategies for survival during times of crisis. The immediate post-war years were therefore an opportunity for studios to resume making their mark by developing different images and styles of production. In this respect, Pinewood provides an interesting case of positioning itself as Britain's premier studio when Rank's corporate operations consolidated into a powerful, vertically integrated concern.⁵ Although Pinewood is the main studio under consideration, Rank also controlled Denham, Islington, Shepherd's Bush, and Ealing studios.⁶ This chapter will examine the extent to which Pinewood's culture was formed by and evident in films produced on its stages and on location at a crucial point in its history. As we have seen, Pinewood's investigations of methods, technical equipment, and cultures of production in the USA were inextricably related to acute economic imperatives as studios resumed filmmaking once they were de-requisitioned. How studios were organised was intimately related to their capabilities to deliver films at a time when there was pressure to expand British production.

⁴ The two studios' different images were noted by film critic C. A. Lejeune who described Pinewood as a 'garden city' whereas Denham as 'a grand hotel'. *The Observer*, 7 November 1937, 13.

⁵ This involved production, distribution (via General Film Distributors), and exhibition (via Odeon Theatres), as well as links with Universal and United Artists Margaret Dickson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government, 1927-84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 101.

⁶ Of these studios Pinewood was the only one built by Rank.

THE INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

The Independent Producers began to develop the ‘prestige’ label the Rank Organisation was promoting to both offset Hollywood competition at home and increase the chances of distribution in America. The key to this drive was to uncouple quality from cost, anticipating Rank’s criticism of *The Red Shoes* (1948; budget £505,600) as too profligate and lavish.⁷ As Chapman has noted, even though this expensive film and *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier, 1948, budget £572,500) returned large profits from the American market, the high-risk strategy they represented was questioned, even in retrospect by Michael Powell, and budgets were subsequently reduced.⁸ While the Independent Producers were given considerable freedom in 1944–47, an emphasis on making economies was nevertheless increasingly pervasive. When commenting in 1946 on the generally shorter shooting schedules in Hollywood (ten weeks for a ‘big picture’ and two for ‘B’ pictures) compared to British studios, Hollywood director Edward Dmytryk attributed the disparity to a ‘slowing down effect’ caused by independent companies renting studio space and service departments, and a unit’s producer not having a unified control of the whole studio. Another factor thought to lengthen schedules in Britain was an inconsistent and unpredictable turnover of different teams working in a studio at any one time.⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, Michael Powell extolled the benefits of using the same team from film to film. The advantages of consistency of personnel in areas such as art direction can indeed be seen in several films discussed in this chapter. Different companies renting studio space and facilities allowed studios like Pinewood to avoid over-committing space and resources to only one production company. The Independent Producers’ arrangement with Rank enabled the studios to benefit from different companies’ activities while reducing some of the risks identified by Dmytryk.

⁷ Alan Wood, *Mr Rank: A Study of J. Arthur Rank and British Films* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 157.

⁸ James Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen: A History of British Film Finance, 1945–1985* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 21–2.

⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 September 1946, Studio Supplement, xxv.

Even though the Independent Producers consortium financed by Rank attempted to offset these issues by concentrating its constituent production companies at Pinewood, its aims and ethos could not be sustained when subsequently reigned in by John Davis, leading to the companies' departure to 'the apparent haven of British Lion' and Alexander Korda.¹⁰ How to maintain quality and box-office appeal became intertwined with the raft of cost-cutting mechanisms that featured widely in the trade press. Gainsborough producer R. J. Minney resigned from the Rank Organisation in 1947 as a criticism of how the company had become enmeshed in financial difficulties after overspending. He published a book the same year advocating lower-cost, good quality British films primarily aimed at the home market, recommending 'careful reorganising...an economical use of [studio] space' and 'the utmost attention to detail so as to attain maximum saving of time'.¹¹ A film's budget did not necessarily reflect its box-office receipts; winners and losers can be found in low, mid-range, and higher-budgeted films.¹²

In the post-war period, a plethora of other publications focused on how British filmmakers could make films more economically, and which highlighted studio techniques and personnel.¹³ These evidence how knowledge about filmmaking practices was very much part of contemporary film culture. The work of various production designers was often celebrated by the trade press and in publicity, linking the studio experience to contemporary design practice and the development of associated filmic effects. What could be achieved despite material shortages and cost-cutting was regularly reported. As for popularity, or notoriety, the work of various production designers was often celebrated by the trade press and in publicity, linking the studio experience to contemporary design practice and the development of associated filmic effects. These discourses created a kind of 'studio relay' effect in advance of a film's release. These generated a set of expectations about how a film's production circumstances contributed to its pleasures, especially in trade papers aimed at exhibitors with an eye on 'showmanship' strategies and box office. How particular

¹⁰ Charles Drazin, *The Finest Years: British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: André Deutsch, 1998), 52.

¹¹ R. J. Minney, *Talking of Films* (London: Home & Van Thal, 1947), 15.

¹² Chapman, *The Money Behind the Screen*, 71.

¹³ For example, Junge, *Plan for Film Studios*; Oswald Blakeson, *Working for the Films* (London: Focal Press, 1947).

effects were achieved was a consistent area of fascination. On-set visitors representing trade papers such as *Kinematograph Weekly* and *The Film Industry* and in fan magazines revealed production ‘secrets’ which then informed reviewers and audiences interested in those aspects.

ART DIRECTION AND STUDIO RELAY

The following case study films illustrate how Pinewood’s post-war culture was evolving as a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking. While this resembled the mid-range budgeted type of films produced before the Second World War, the adoption of newer, more efficient modes was key to Pinewood’s identity, an idea that connects prevailing studio practices to the types of films produced in the key years 1946–50. While the ‘quality’ films produced by the Independent Producers in 1944–47 represented ‘an extraordinarily rich period’¹⁴ in terms of the range of themes and genres they tackled, as this chapter demonstrates, the desire to rationalise production methods just after the war was an important aspect of this trajectory; innovation was not necessarily compromised by economy. While the Independent Producers’ films have received fairly extensive critical commentaries, including canonical British films such as *Great Expectations* (David Lean, 1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (David Lean, 1948), and *The Red Shoes* (1948), these have overshadowed other titles which were part of the same cycle. These included several mid-range budgeted films at the heart of Pinewood’s post-war culture as it evolved into a more streamlined, economical style of filmmaking. The cyclical approach to analysing these films brings out continuities in production methods across different genres as well as communicates a sense of how Pinewood operated during a pivotal period of transition.

How this could be achieved was largely dependent on how set designs were planned, organised, materialised, and shot in the studios. Each phase took an approach of ‘situated’ art direction, a term I use to reference art direction that was securely and precisely suited to the time, materials, and resources which reflected Pinewood’s physical capacity and creative capabilities. Except for Alexander Vetchinsky, a production designer who ‘always combined an acute visual sense with cost-cutting abilities’, Harper

¹⁴ Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 96.

has argued that in the 1950s neither Rank nor Pinewood was ‘designed...nor was Pinewood a hotbed of innovation, since it was rigorously controlled from above. In consequence, in-house art direction at Rank was unremarkable’.¹⁵ This verdict underestimates the influence of other designers’ responses to tighter economic constraints in ways that were both pragmatic and creative, particularly towards the end of the 1940s when the tone began to be set for an era of ‘cut price aesthetics’ and ‘pragmatic design techniques’.¹⁶ How designers responded to severe shortages of timber, and when the costs of other basic materials used for set construction such as paint and plaster were rising, allows us to track a particular mode of economical production that left its imprint on the films.¹⁷ Examples that in addition featured location shooting are interesting to gauge the extent to which Pinewood’s methods and working practices continued to support production teams when working away from its own physical and material parameters.

Developing Ede’s focus on art direction’s great varieties from a ‘new’ film history perspective, as the following films illustrate, the studio context can be prominently foregrounded so that as well as designers, other personnel, methods, and technologies become a more fully integrated aspect of film analysis.¹⁸ This approach highlights the role of the film studio, its techniques, and equipment in shaping a film’s aesthetic. It also stresses how particular contexts encouraged practical, creative responses that were part of a film’s evolution. The films discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4 featured prominently in trade paper reports, particularly those generated by studio correspondents who were able to relay key details of a production’s technical innovations and development to readers. As noted above, the *Kinematograph Weekly* in particular reveals details that, in the absence of actual production records, allow us to track the ways in which the films were embedded within and contributed towards a film culture that was fascinated with how films were made.

¹⁵ Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 202.

¹⁶ Laurie Ede, *British Film Design: A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 71.

¹⁷ ‘Rising Costs: A *Kine* Investigation’, *Kinematograph Weekly*. Studio Supplement, 10 July 1947, iv–v.

¹⁸ Laurie Ede, ‘Art in Context: British Film Design of the 1940s’ in James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper (eds.), *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 73–88.

While technical reviewers may not constitute what we usually understand to make up typical film audiences, their opinions and specialist knowledge influence a film's reception. As Staiger's work on interpreting films has shown, 'extratextual' discourses such as knowledge of production circumstances, are important for historical materialist approaches.¹⁹ Films that were 'popular' in terms of the discussions in *Kinematograph Weekly*, *Film Industry*, and other trade papers gained respect, even notoriety, precisely because the paper revealed the 'secrets' involved in their production. Fan magazines occasionally relayed such information, such as when *Picturegoer* reported on the filming of *Green for Danger* at Pinewood.²⁰ Interest in how films were made was an important aspect of film culture more generally through competitions with prizes of studio tours, reportage of and interest in location shooting and novelties such as when British National at Elstree went on tour in 1946 to demonstrate studio techniques.²¹ Film industry exhibits such as models of sets were also displayed at the annual Ideal Home Exhibitions, Olympia, London. Looking at the following titles in Table 3.1 as a slate of productions at Pinewood allows us to compare strategies as they evolved from film to film, as well as bringing to light the specifics of both famous and lesser-known films.

GREEN FOR DANGER: PINEWOOD'S FIRST POST-WAR FILM

The first film to be produced once Pinewood was de-requisitioned sheds light on the ingenious and resourceful ways in which production teams rose to the challenge of making films when materials required for building sets such as hessian, plaster, timber, paper, rubber, and canvas were in short supply, and post-war recovery was only just beginning. As the *Kinematograph Weekly* put it: 'Pinewood is the mirror of the production industry: in it we can see many of the problems that are going to face

¹⁹ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁰ *Picturegoer*, 27 April 1946, 7.

²¹ For details of such activities see STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2022/10/10/who-wouldnt-want-to-have-a-peek-studio-tours-in-britain-and-germany/>.

Table 3.1 Films in production at Pinewood in 1946

<i>Film and UK release date</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Pinewood schedule</i>	<i>Locations (non-studio)</i>	<i>Production design Art direction</i>
<i>Great Expectations</i> 27 Jan 1947	Cineguild	£391,600	Jan–May 1946	Kent marshes	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>Green for Danger</i> 10 Mar 1947	Individual Pictures	£202,400	Dec 1945–July 1946		Peter Proud William Hutchinson
<i>Black Narcissus</i> (Technicolor) 26 May 1947	The Archers	£280,000	May–Aug 1946	Leonardslee, Horsham	Alfred Junge
<i>Take My Life</i> 30 Jun 1947	Cineguild	£211,800	July–Oct 1946	York Railway Station	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>Captain Boycott</i> 1 Sept 1947	Individual Pictures	£250,000	Sept 1946–Feb 1947	Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Ireland; Lough Mask, Co. Mayo, Ireland	Edward Carrick

our other major studios when they resume production'.²² Pinewood reopened its doors to companies in the Independent Group: Cineguild, the Archers, and Individual Pictures. Individual was a newly formed production company of prolific British filmmakers Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, and *Green for Danger* (1946), an adaptation of a detective novel by Christianna Brand, was the first film they made at Pinewood after the war, with shooting commencing in December 1945.²³ In Fig. 3.1 they are shown in a publicity shot which features the set in the background.

The fiction revolves around a detective's often rather blundering investigations into some unexplained murders which have taken place in a hospital, and possible suspects are key people who work there: a surgeon, three nurses, the theatre sister, and an anaesthetist. The action takes place within the confines of the hospital, and for this an elaborate, convincing set was required. Apart from two brief shots at the beginning, the film was made entirely in the studios spread over two of Pinewood's sound stages. The work of production designer Peter Proud was remarkable for achieving some amazing results: the creation of a composite hospital set which in the story has been established within the interior of an Elizabethan house requisitioned for an emergency wartime hospital. A design (Fig. 3.2) by Proud shows the exterior. This plot concentrates action within the hospital's spaces including a main corridor, several wards, Sister's office, a large operating theatre, a scrubbing-up room, sterilising room, hospital laundry, a social hall, adjoining nurses' rest room, an office, reception desk, and porter's lodge. Proud made detailed sketches of the sets in advance of filming, collaborating closely with director Sidney Gilliat to work out the most effective shot constructions. Proud devised several ingenious methods which made filming on this set as smooth and mobile as possible, including making ceilings on runners which could be moved quickly to assist the camera crew. Most of the wall sections were mounted on rollers so that entire sections could be swung in and out of position very quickly.²⁴

To save time the operating theatre set (Fig. 3.3) was built twice, each set providing a different viewpoint that the unit could easily capture by

²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 14 March 1946, 12.

²³ *The End of the River* (Derek N. Twist, 1947; produced by Powell and Pressburger) was shot almost entirely on location in Brazil in 1946; studio work was completed at Pinewood from January 1947 and the film was released in October 1947.

²⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 28 February 1946, 29.



Fig. 3.1 Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat on set of *Green for Danger*, 1946. Alamy stock images

moving effortlessly between the two. Proud also used materials in highly resourceful ways such as covering a ceiling by sandfly netting to create a strong, solid ceiling effect but which was transparent enough for the studio lights to penetrate. He used paint rather than plaster on floors to create the impression of concrete and a brick wall effect was made using painted details on glass. Another clever trick was created by special effects expert plasterer Bill Baines who made a bas-relief in plasticine on a glass



Fig. 3.2 Set design by art director Peter Proud for *Green for Danger*, 1946. Alamy stock images

panel to create the effect of a tower. A report on the film's production gave the details: 'The lower outline was painted to match the lower half of the tower set. Foliage and a cloud effect were painted on a plaster cyclo-rama, standing behind the bas-relief. The camera crew panned down on a model head'.²⁵ The large number of specialist props including hospital equipment were loaned from the Ministry of Supply. The incongruity of a camera crew in an operating theatre provided some wonderful photo opportunities for reporters, such as a photograph of the crew taking a tea break during filming, as seen in Fig. 3.4. This is an example of how knowledge about the filmmaking process was considered a novelty in the popular fan-orientated press as well as in the more specialised trade journals.

The camera operator on *Green for Danger* was Oswald ('Ossie') Morris, who recalled difficulties working on the film because Pinewood had started to use American-designed Mitchell cameras which had a different viewing system from the French manufactured Debric cameras

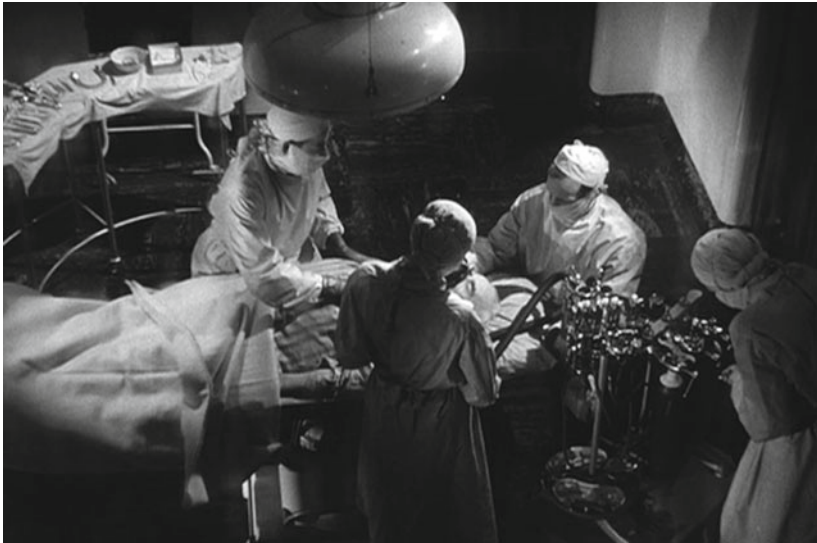


Fig. 3.3 Operating theatre set, *Green for Danger* (1946)

²⁵ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 May 1946, 40.



Fig. 3.4 Tea break on set of *Green for Danger*, *Picturegoer*, 25 May 1946, p. 9

with which he was more experienced. Rather than being able to see exactly what the camera would capture through the viewfinder, the Mitchell camera had its viewer on the left-hand side, away from the axis of the lens and the film gate.²⁶ This caused parallax problems and particular difficulties in shots which included all the murder suspects even though Morris could only see three in the viewfinder. As he put it: ‘Getting compositions in the viewfinder you have to adopt a whole different approach...You have to make your brain realise you’ve got five people [*sic*] in there’.²⁷ Early on in the film a very challenging 360 degrees shot required the camera to pan across the suspects in the operating theatre set. In the finished film this shot provides the key visual setting which is

²⁶ Mitchell had long been the camera of choice for cinematographers in British studios, as observed by Charles Christie, vice-president of the company on a visit to Europe in 1935: *American Cinematographer*, February 1936, 53, 56.

²⁷ Oswald Morris, BECTU interview no. 9, 21 July 1987. There were actually six suspects present in the operating theatre scene.

accompanied by the voice-over of Police Inspector Cockrill (Alastair Sim) as he recalls the investigation. Morris's experience is a prime example of technicians having to learn to operate new equipment quickly, often on the job, at a time when resources were limited.

Even though most of *Green for Danger* was shot inside Pinewood, an exterior flashback sequence to a London air raid required a perfectly clear sky. This provided an opportunity, as publicised in the trade press, to show off Rank's interest in using the latest ideas and technologies to save time and therefore money when shooting films both inside and outside the studios. Gilliat was equipped with meteorological reports provided by IMCOS (International Meteorological Consultants), a new service recently hired by Rank which provided production units with supposedly more accurate local weather reports than had previously been possible from the Air Ministry. But although the service aimed to save producers time and money, Gilliat was not impressed with its rather inflated claims of super-accuracy.²⁸

IMCOS's American director Ken Willard and the employment of American personnel were criticised by the Association of Cine Technicians which at the time was pressing for any hiring of non-British studio personnel to be a reciprocal arrangement. IMCOS was connected at that time to Rank's internationalist policies and post-war export drive even though in the end producers preferred to rely on local weather reports when scheduling exterior location shooting. On this occasion night shooting was however successful, but the sound crew encountered an unusual problem when some nightingales they had disturbed started singing into the mike. The *Kinematograph Weekly* reported: 'The unwelcome guests were quickly dispersed by a flood of light from an inverted arc'.²⁹ The trade press relished this kind of anecdote which lightened the tone of location reports. These drew attention to how new methods and economical techniques were achieved. Models were used to supplement studio and location shooting, and these were also a source of commentary such as the notable work of special effects expert Percy Ralphs, whose V-1 (flying bomb) model was flown over a foreground model hospital for *Green for Danger*.³⁰ The film's wartime setting tapped into recent

²⁸ Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 104.

²⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 20 June 1946, 43.

³⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 25 July 1946, 35.

memory of aerial bombing raids, and Pinewood's experience of wartime requisitioning was evident from the studios still being 'drably camouflaged' with 'conspicuous' Army Film Unit signs.³¹ An aerial shot of Pinewood taken in August 1945 (Fig. 3.5) shows the camouflaged roof clearly. For this reason it was referred to in the trade press as a 'studio in battledress'.³²

Green for Danger was greeted favourably by critics; it did good business at the British box office and despite distribution problems comparatively well in the USA. For Launder and Gilliat it represented another well-crafted, mid-range budget film costing £202,400 whose reputation has increased over time.³³ The film nearly did not get made because the British Board of Film Censors got the wrong end of the stick, thinking the proposal would be a literal adaptation of Brand's novel which was set in a military hospital, rather than the civilian facility which featured in the film. Gilliat recalled their reasoning was 'that any soldiers would be so overcome by the fear of being murdered by one of the nurses that it could seriously affect their chance of recovery!'³⁴ As soon as they were put right, the production was given the go-ahead. It was praised for its economical approach and, as we have seen, for making the most of Pinewood's space and facilities in novel ways. The sets were key in communicating 'a darkness of tone that creeps into even its comic moments', the aerial bomb attacks mirroring those from within the hospital.³⁵ The requisitioned Elizabethan house setting for the hospital also served this purpose through the strangeness of the older property's new, emergency purpose. All in all, it indicated an excellent post-war start for Pinewood as working conditions were gradually being orientated towards a return to normalcy.

³¹ *Picturegoer*, 27 April 1946, 7.

³² *Kinematograph Weekly*, July 5, 1945, 21.

³³ Geoff Brown, *Launder and Gilliat* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), 120.

³⁴ Brown, *Launder and Gilliat*, 120.

³⁵ Geoffrey O'Brien, 'Laughing while the bombs fall', booklet in *Green for Danger* DVD release, p. 6: Criterion Collection, 2007 release CC1682D.



Fig. 3.5 Aerial photograph of Pinewood August 1945. Reproduced with permission from Historic England: RAF 106G UK 620 RP 3041

BLACK NARCISSUS: ‘THE ATMOSPHERE IN THIS
FILM IS EVERYTHING, AND WE MUST CREATE
AND CONTROL IT FROM THE START’ (MICHAEL POWELL)

Michael Powell’s insistence, as expressed in the above quotation, that the Archers’ latest production *Black Narcissus* (budget £280,000) was very much a studio production, is testament to his confidence in Pinewood’s technical infrastructure and facilities to deliver the film’s highly stylised

Himalayan setting.³⁶ The studio environment became a site of technical virtuosity and team collaboration to produce what is regarded as one of Powell and Pressburger's most important Technicolor films.³⁷ Filming began in May 1946 and was completed in August but before that considerable preparation took place to create the fabricated environment of an old palace at Mopu, a fictional place described in Rumer Godden's popular novel published in 1939 on which the film was based, where a group of British nuns begin their mission to establish a school and dispensary for the local people. The evolution of Alfred Junge's set designs from drawings to structures erected and filmed on Pinewood's studio lot and grounds show the ingenuity involved, and photographs of the now much-celebrated sets are still proudly displayed at Pinewood Studios. They had considerable influence over *Black Narcissus*, a television mini-series produced in 2020 which was also based on Godden's novel and shot at Pinewood and select locations.³⁸ Both the mini-series director Charlotte Bruus Christensen and production designer Kave Quinn were highly respectful of the 'look' of Powell and Pressburger's film. Using digital technology, they tried to replicate the Technicolor aesthetic of Jack Cardiff's cinematography as well as Junge's set designs seven decades after the film's release.³⁹

Junge's drawings and their realisation in the finished film create the impression that the old palace, renamed by the nuns as the Convent of St Faith, is located high in the mountains on a terrifying precipice from which Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) dramatically falls to her death at the film's climax. Location photographs reveal however that the bell tower set was only a few feet above the ground. Junge's drawing shows a precise and vivid visualisation of the bell tower and a photograph taken when the film was being shot reveals the constructed set on the exterior lot. The palace/Convent set was built high above other buildings and trees, surrounded by a wall of timber planks and inclining at an angle of 35 degrees. A model (Fig. 3.6) was created to inform the construction. This created a slope that would banish shadows, meaning that shooting could

³⁶ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 562–3.

³⁷ Sarah Street, *Black Narcissus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 9–22.

³⁸ The TV mini-series featured location shooting in the district of Mustang in Nepal.

³⁹ Sarah Street, 'The "Exaggerated" Colors of *Black Narcissus* (1947 and 2020)', *Comparative Cinema* IX, no. 17 (2021): 10–37.

take place throughout the day.⁴⁰ The ‘mountain’, terraces, and winding pathways were built on scaffolding, 120 feet high, and strengthened by sleepers which formed ‘stilts’ or a framework for the sets. These were then covered with prefabricated plaster or cement sheets to create the impression of natural rock. The ‘mountain’ was then filled in with gravel and soil and the terraces were planted with quick-growing seeds.⁴¹ Junge also prepared clay models of the palace/Convent set prior to construction. This was another technique that saved time while facilitating very precise planning of the rooms and particular iconic design features such as the wall paintings and latticed, cross-cross patterned window frames which help suggest through *mise-en-scène* the film’s unsettling psychological atmosphere.

The artificially created world required for *Black Narcissus* also called on the skills of matte painters Walter Percy (‘Poppa’) Day and his sons, since many of the ‘locations’ created in the studio were scenes painted on glass. Day, a special effects director who had previously worked for London Films and the Archers, was particularly known for the technique used on *Black Narcissus* whereby they would ‘matte out the “NG” [no good] parts of the frame with black card very exactly and then rephotograph the painted glass with mountains and clouds as a second exposure of the film’.⁴² Careful modification of the exposures used for the process was required for Technicolor which saved time because tests were no longer necessary before the shooting of actual scenes and the film could be developed and printed straight away.⁴³ Use of these techniques to achieve a consistent stylistic vision for *Black Narcissus* realised Powell’s aim stated in the autumn of 1945 that production designers should be allied to special effects and imaginative painters working in close co-operation with art departments: ‘There should be someone to take a bird’s eye view of

⁴⁰ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 563.

⁴¹ *Black Narcissus* pressbook, British Film Institute Library, London.

⁴² Justin Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff: Art, Light and Direction in Cinema* (London: Batsford, 2003), 73.

⁴³ W. Percy Day, ‘How the Matte Process Works’, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 29 January 1948, 27–8.



Fig. 3.6 Model of the palace at Mopu constructed for *Black Narcissus*, 1947. Alamy stock images

all the processes involved, so that imagination was not subordinated to stereotyped design'.⁴⁴

The film was shot in Technicolor, so the specificities of that technology had to be carefully considered, both at the design stage and when shooting. As cinematographer Jack Cardiff explained, for colour films issues such as the use of backgrounds and lighting were particularly challenging. The backgrounds of the physical environment surrounding the Convent would have been very expensive at that time if enlarged colour photographs were used. A more practicable solution was to use black and white photographs which were hand-coloured using chalk. The elaborate backdrops were set up against the sky to hide the shrubbery in

⁴⁴ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Minutes of second special meeting with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 October 1945 and 26 October 1945 follow-up meeting.

the studio grounds at an angle of 30 degrees from the vertical to catch as much sunlight as possible to facilitate longer filming slots.⁴⁵ A wind machine was used to create the gentle breeze which throughout the film is an important feature of the region's physical environment. The breeze was one of the key registers of the nuns' increasingly unsettled state of mind when attempting to carry out their challenging mission. Cardiff recalled that instead of the very noisy wind machines that were normally used for such purposes, they devised a silent method involving 'a sort of long sleevelike tube that ran straight out of the studio's air control vents'.⁴⁶ Achieving effects such as candlelight posed problems because of the high levels of light required for Technicolor. The arc lights they used could not be faded up or down so Cardiff had to use other diffusion methods including moveable lights with adaptable light modifiers hanging above the candle, filters, tracing paper, dimmer shutters, and spraying ochre paint on a candle below the wick so it would look as if it was alight.⁴⁷ These methods, combined with Cardiff's highly creative and expressive colour design, mark *Black Narcissus* as a classic of Technicolor filmmaking.⁴⁸ It also demonstrates how quickly Pinewood was able to mount an ambitious studio-based film less than six months after commercial filming had resumed there after the war.

TAKE MY LIFE: DESIGNING CRIME MELODRAMA

Shooting began in July 1946 for *Take My Life*, a mid-budget (£211,800) British *noir* thriller directed by Ronald Neame and produced by Anthony Havelock-Allan for Cineguild. Neame had been a cinematographer since the 1930s, and the film was his first time as director. *Take My Life* was adapted from a novel by Winston Graham and shot by Guy Green at Pinewood and on location at York railway station.⁴⁹ The sets were

⁴⁵ Herb Lightman, 'Black Narcissus: Color Masterpiece', *American Cinematographer*, December 1947, 433.

⁴⁶ Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, 73.

⁴⁷ Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, 75.

⁴⁸ Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation, 1900–55* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), 179–83.

⁴⁹ Winston Graham was a British novelist and screenwriter. Several of his novels were adapted for the screen with Graham as co-scriptwriter. The most famous film adapted from his work is *Marnie* (Hitchcock, 1961).

designed by John Bryan and Wilfred Singleton, and the drama presented a variety of challenges which tested the studios' post-war capabilities. Bryan had worked on *Great Expectations* (1946) which started production at Denham in December 1945 but then moved to Pinewood early in 1946 after the studio re-opened, locations were filmed on the Kent marshes, and production was completed in May 1946. The historical setting of *Great Expectations* provided Bryan with an opportunity to develop his skills in an area in which he excelled, producing remarkable designs which incorporated expressionist elements based on detailed thumbnail sketches which also informed the camera set-ups.⁵⁰ The contemporary setting of *Take My Life* offered different challenges but showed that Bryan's methods were easily transferable to a different genre.

The filming of *Take My Life*, completed by October 1946, involved shooting 447 set-ups. Some of these were complex, such as constructing in the studio a model tunnel which was filmed, and the footage was then used as back projections for scenes in a studio-built railway carriage. An entire street, an entrance to some flats, a porter's lodge, a chemists' shop, and a pub were constructed on 'E', one of Pinewood's largest stages (165 × 110 ft; 18,150 sq ft). Covent Garden Opera House was created as a 'hanging miniature', that is a forced perspective, in-camera effect using a model or photograph. A report noted that 'mathematically planned camera angles, exact perspective workings and clever lighting' made this set-up particularly impressive.⁵¹ Bryan was known for favouring forced perspective as a means of saving on space with built sets; in this case the miniature achieved the same stylistic effect of presenting the audience with a world in which all might not be right.⁵² Hanging miniatures had also been a feature of *Great Expectations*, so this film gave Bryan further opportunity to use the technique.⁵³ To obtain close-up shots of a railway engine a small unit was sent on location to Hatfield; the main railway scenes were shot at York. Models were used for sets so that camera positions and lighting could be carefully planned, such as for the courtroom scene. The model was featured as part of a film industry exhibit

⁵⁰ Ede, *British Film Design*, 61–2. A few of the sketches for *Great Expectations* are reproduced in Edward Carrick, *Designing for Films* (London: Studio Publications, 1949), 54–5.

⁵¹ *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round (PMGR)*, November 1946, 12.

⁵² Ede, *British Film Design*, 61.

⁵³ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 June 1946, Studio Supplement, xxiii.

at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, in 1947. The film was very tightly edited, and it is significant in this regard that the editorial associate was Jack Harris, one of the technicians who visited Hollywood in 1945. As we have seen in Chapter 2, comparisons between editing techniques there and reputedly ‘slower’ British films were detailed in Harris’s report. It is likely that its findings influenced the crisp editing of *Take My Life* which indeed never wasted a moment in its prioritisation of suspense while communicating key points of detail and locale.

The narrative, likened by critics to the work of Hitchcock, concerns Nick Talbot (Hugh Williams), a man accused of murdering his former girlfriend Elizabeth, and the attempts of his wife Philippa Shelley (Greta Gynt), an opera singer, to clear his name when circumstantial evidence and mistaken identity lead the police to suspect him of being guilty. Philippa’s investigations take her to a school in Scotland where she discovers that Elizabeth was married to headmaster Sidney Fleming (Marius Goring), a fact he has tried to conceal which makes Philippa suspect him of being involved in the murder. She leaves with photographic evidence of Elizabeth’s identity but Fleming, suspecting that Philippa has found him out, follows her. Travelling by train, Fleming confronts Philippa and confesses that he murdered Elizabeth. He attempts to kill Philippa but jumps to his death when interrupted by an undercover police officer whose corroboration of Philippa’s discovery leads to Nick’s acquittal. The inclusion of suspenseful scenes on a train, a musical clue, and mistaken identity contributed to the film’s association with Hitchcock’s British thrillers.

This suspense-driven narrative and variety of sets was highly conducive to testing the full capabilities of Pinewood’s stage ‘E’. This stage was conveniently located close to the stores and the painters’ and carpenters’ workshops. In terms of planning the ideal film studio layout this configuration was considered by architects to be beneficial for productivity.⁵⁴ Neame originally wanted the film to access two stages but limitations on space when shooting commenced forced the original ten-week schedule to be lengthened. This was because Pinewood had only recently reopened, and material and labour shortages affected studios’ capacities. Shortages of materials were indeed embedded within the film’s creation.

⁵⁴ Frank Woodward, ‘The Planning of Film Studios’, *Building*, April 1935, 154.

As noted above, the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1947 featured a ‘British Film Section’ in which models of selected film sets were shown.⁵⁵ The catalogue explained how a convincing ‘modern apartment of some luxury’ set was achieved in one of the sets for *Take My Life* despite the need for economy. The sets were supposed to inspire visitors to the exhibition by giving tips on how to create an impression of luxury at a time when many materials were still rationed. A complete suite of furniture was covered in ‘filter cloth’, or muslin, dyed in the studio workshops. The impression of a ‘rich fitted carpet’ was created by using dyed hessian on a layer of unrationed felt. Canvas rugs were placed on top and again to create an impression of luxury these were hand-painted in the traditional carpet weavers’ designs. Net curtains were made with butter muslin and other curtains with dyed ribbed linen. Ornate cigarette boxes were cast from the quick-setting plaster of Paris and painted. In this way the film was promoted as an example of pragmatic ingenuity in set dressing, a theme which spoke to the film’s imbrication within the exigencies of post-war rationing and shortages. Audiences were thus encouraged to link the film’s economies with their own personal experiences of rationing.

The drive for economy also involved the costumes, as with designer Joy Ricardo’s ‘mushroom-pink’, English tailor-made topcoat for Greta Gynt as shown in Fig. 3.7. This, claimed the *Kine Weekly*, was ‘the first to use a new material which – born of the post-war shortage – may revolutionize winter fashions’.⁵⁶ It reported that the fabric called Bedford cord had hitherto been used only for car and cinema upholstery. A virtue was made of this because it had proved so easy to mould and tailor that it would be featured ‘prominently’ in London couturiers’ winter collections for home and sport. As Richard Farmer has documented, the film occasioned another fashion ‘first’—a special hat designed by London milliner Hugh Beresford. It was known as the ‘Philippa’, named after Gynt’s character in *Take My Life* in a film that featured the star donning several different hats.⁵⁷

A studio-by-studio top feature output survey for July–December 1946 conducted by *Kinematograph Weekly* demonstrated that Pinewood (five

⁵⁵ Ideal Home Exhibition 1947 catalogue, V&A archive of art and design, London.

⁵⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 September 1946, 33.

⁵⁷ Richard Farmer, ‘Philippa’ Arrives at Pinewood’. STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2023/03/03/philippa-arrives-at-pinewood/>.



Fig. 3.7 Greta Gynt as Philippa Shelley wearing Bedford cord topcoat in *Take My Life* (1947)

stages) could only accommodate eight feature films a year; Denham (seven stages) could produce twelve. The thirty or so stages available to MGM in Hollywood, by comparison, meant seven films could be in production at once.⁵⁸ Even so, the production team managed to work well within these parameters, providing optimism that the current restrictions affecting the film industry did not necessarily prevent turning out good quality films with good box-office potential. The film's approach to economy meant that some shots, such as the backstage area of Covent Garden, were shot using Pinewood's own corridors and non-stage spaces which convincingly doubled for Nick's walk to see Philippa in her dressing room. The shot, without edits, takes time to follow Nick's journey down the corridor. Rather than being an example of a British film taking too much time in showing transitions from location to location which as noted in Chapter 1 was seen as a scriptwriting issue, Harris's editing here chooses to show that exact thing but to great effect. The shot is an example of how Harris deftly alternates between shots to create rhythm and pace as Nick walks briskly past busy technicians moving theatrical scenery. As he moves, we fleetingly see various dials on the corridor wall

⁵⁸ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 July 1946, 28.

and technical kit. While this is meant to evoke a theatrical backstage area, Pinewood's corridor is a perfect double to evoke an atmosphere of hurried activity. In this case Pinewood quite literally comes into the frame (Fig. 3.8).

The set built for the school's cloisters was a replica based on the school attended by Ronald Neame at Hurstpierpoint College, West Sussex. The back-projected footage referenced earlier for the climactic scene when Fleming is trying to strangle Philippa on the train is also effective in heightening the impression of danger while the train is passing through a tunnel. This is skillfully set up in the previous scene when Phillipa is on the first part of her journey as the space of the carriage is prepared for future suspense. Here we see the mechanics of studio practices being used: back projection (Fig. 3.9), dissolves and a slow tracking shot as the camera follows her eyeline outside the train carriage window and using a dissolve to transition to York station. Here the location footage is used as Philippa gets out of the train to buy a newspaper. The camera's apparent movement outside the window foreshadows the villain's death in the following scene when he jumps from the train. Using the studio in these resourceful



Fig. 3.8 Hugh Williams as Nicholas Talbot. Using Pinewood's corridor in *Take My Life* (1947)



Fig. 3.9 Greta Gynt as Philippa Shelley travelling by train. Back projection in *Take My Life* (1947)

ways demonstrated that to deal with current problems Pinewood was actively experimenting with many initiatives. At the same time, these were designed to promote the film industry's longer-term recovery.

CAPTAIN BOYCOTT: IN THE STUDIO AND ON LOCATION

Captain Boycott (budget £250,000) made use of both the studio and locations to depict its nineteenth-century Irish setting. Frank Launder directed for Individual Pictures a film based on the theme of landlord tyranny involving tensions between violence and non-violence which resonated with more contemporary politics in Ireland. The film's combination of 'picturesque and star values within a coherent political framework' yielded moderate business at the box office, and there were reports of a positive reception in the USA.⁵⁹ Shooting began in September 1946. Much was made in the press of the location shooting in Mullingar, County Westmeath in Ireland. This had been chosen because of its racecourse, a key site in the drama, which involved just over a thousand extras recruited through advertising in the local press and cinemas,

⁵⁹ Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 168.

who were paid a little extra if they wore period costumes.⁶⁰ Although a Dublin firm supplied some of the vintage costumes, a dockers' strike at Dublin prevented the rest being imported from Denham. Residents were therefore encouraged to wear their own claw-hammer coats and voluminous skirts.⁶¹ Another location was a nearby seventeenth-century country mansion for the military encampment scenes.

Mullingar was pleased to have been used as one of the film's locations, recognition of which was indicated by two parties that were given by the National Federation of Irish Ex-Servicemen and by the Mullingar Industrial Development Association at the end of filming.⁶² The ex-servicemen had been employed during shooting scenes for the film.⁶³ The experience of shooting on location seems to have been very successful, with the film crew receiving a positive local reception. Ossie Morris, who had shot *Green for Danger*, also worked on location as a camera operator on *Captain Boycott*. As well as employing Irish people locally 'a great many Irish artists came to Pinewood Studios to take part in the film'.⁶⁴ Details such as this were celebrated in the press, tying in the participation of residents with publicity about the locale's authenticity. This theme was repeated in reports of scenes shot in the studios. Shooting appears to have been very efficient, including on the exterior lot at Pinewood where an Irish village was created. The set was unusually visited by Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, a dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁵

Edward Carrick was the art director on *Captain Boycott*. He went with Frank Launder to inspect the Irish locations after which he decided to build some of the locations, such as a hill over which a cavalry rode, on the studio lot.⁶⁶ In addition, a model of the set was made with the purpose of being able to assess how much or little needed to be built to obtain a particular shot by looking at the model through a miniature frame which replicated what a camera would shoot.⁶⁷ This technique was welcomed by

⁶⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 9 September 1946, 13.

⁶¹ *The Irish Times Pictorial*, 27 July 1946, 2.

⁶² *PMGR*, September 1946, 1.

⁶³ *The Irish Times*, 27 July 1946, 7.

⁶⁴ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 December 1946, 193.

⁶⁵ *PMGR*, January 1947, 16.

⁶⁶ Edward Carrick, BECTU History Project Interview 1991, no. 182 transcript, 19.

⁶⁷ *PMGR*, May 1947, 10.

Carrick who thought set sketches would eventually be replaced by ‘properly lighted models around which the miniature viewfinder can move’ so that the designer could concentrate on creating a mood by illustrating the script.⁶⁸ Sets with intricate camera movements which involved tracking an actor’s movements going upstairs or across a hallway required models in the planning stages ‘in order that complete understanding can be reached between director, art director, and cameraman as to the working of the scene’.⁶⁹ Using models saved time planning lighting set-ups and the positioning of microphones by the sound crew. In *Captain Boycott* the character Hugh Davin’s (Stewart Granger, Fig. 3.10) cottage had two levels and the model created to help plot the relationship between camera and the set was used as one of Pinewood’s ‘film studio’ exhibits in the Ideal Home Exhibition, 1947.⁷⁰ The technical ingenuity of filmmaking was thus publicised to a wide audience. This was especially impressive in the case of creating *Captain Boycott*’s distinctive locales with historical detail. Attention to the film’s production values enhanced its status as a key indicator of Pinewood’s post-war recovery. Although filming on location and, to a lesser extent, filming on the exterior lot, introduced difficulties such as weather problems and the need to control other logistical issues, in this case valuable stage space was saved at Pinewood.

When Carrick published the 1949 second edition of his book on set designing for films, he included a plan and sections of Davin’s cottage. It showed in detail the plotting of some of the camera set-ups and Carrick noted that the drawings were to be read in conjunction with a construction sheet which described the materials used for the walls and ceiling, and also the treatment of wood surfaces, the floor, and backings.⁷¹ Sam Eastlake, a plasterer at Pinewood, followed Carrick’s instructions for the floor around the fireplace ‘to be carried out in cement and sand modelled on the job to represent old slabs.’⁷² Eastlake was credited in the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* for demonstrating in this job ‘outstanding ability in

⁶⁸ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 20.

⁶⁹ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 50.

⁷⁰ *PMGR*, March 1947, 3.

⁷¹ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 62–5.

⁷² Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 65.



Fig. 3.10 Stewart Granger as Hugh Davin in cottage set in *Captain Boycott* (1947). Alamy stock images

reproducing natural stone'.⁷³ The large set allowed for freedom of movement for the actors and was constructed to evoke maximum verisimilitude concerning the spaces, materials, and 'lived in' appearance. The detail provided by Carrick further showed that as well as using the model shooting was anticipated at the drawing and construction stage of the designs which were also crucial for saving time and cutting costs. Further ways of ensuring that the shoot was both efficient and pictorially effective were achieved by instructions in the script. As noted by Harper the film was filmed in such a way as to 'wring the maximum picturesque effect from the scenery: the final shooting script insisted that the castle ruins "should be situated on a piece of rising round, so that the broken walls stand out in sombre contrast to the evening sky"'.⁷⁴ In this sense the production was in step with the post-war issues of scriptwriting debated by Pinewood's Research Committee in 1945, as well as anticipating

⁷³ *PMGR*, November 1946, 12.

⁷⁴ Harper, *Picturing the Past*, 168.

recommendations made by the Joint Production Advisory Committee in 1948–51.

Captain Boycott was an example of how both studio and location shooting could be achieved without undue delays or rising costs. After the commencement of shooting in September 1946 production stayed on schedule and once filming in Ireland was completed, intermittent shooting was continued on the Irish lot at Pinewood, and then the bulk of the work in October 1946 was concentrated in the nine sets constructed on the floor. A report detailed the complexity of the sets: ‘Certainly there was very little of “D” stage left by the time the Country Fair – complete with side-shows – the cottage, the grassy bank and the tree had all been built in...Not to mention the crowd of more than 200 extras and small-part players, and the camera crane for the overhead shots of the Irish Reel dancing’.⁷⁵ Stage D was one of the largest (165 × 110 ft; 18,150 sq ft) of Pinewood’s five main stages. Launder and Gilliat collaborated once again with precision, with Launder leading a second unit in Ireland to clear up some remaining shots while Gilliat took a third unit to Brighton to obtain ‘matching shots’ of Hugh riding his horse and coach scenes. By February 1947 the rough cut was ready for the final stages of post-production and the film was released in the UK on 1 September 1947; its US release was on 5 December 1947 in New York. The production showed how coordinating different units, the Irish locations, and studio work could be effectively achieved at a time when working conditions in studios were still adversely affected by the pressures of post-war recovery; the exceptionally harsh winter of 1946–7; the dollar crisis and conflict with Hollywood over the Dalton Duty; and the need to rapidly increase British productivity.

REVIEWING 1946

Pinewood had done well in 1946 to bring to completion four high quality films, one of which was in Technicolor. *Captain Boycott*’s production started in 1946, and the film was completed in February 1947. *Great Expectations*, one of Rank’s prestige pictures, was the most expensive, with *Black Narcissus* reflecting the generally higher costs for Technicolor films. The budgets for the five films averaged £267,160, which was the

⁷⁵ *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

mid-range region that would not attract adverse criticism as too expensive. While in the shorter term few of the films made profits, *Great Expectations* and *Black Narcissus* have long since been considered classics of British cinema and both films were eventually successful at the box office. Both *Take My Life* and *Captain Boycott* were very good examples of post-war genre filmmaking which, as we have seen, involved set designs which used the studios' facilities and expertise very effectively. When assessing the period from September 1945 to August 1946, the trade press emphasised the need for more floor space. Figures were published (Table 3.2) showing the number of films produced by each studio in relation to the square footage of their floor spaces.⁷⁶ These ratios produced variable results but when compared to Hollywood, with its much higher number of stages, it was demonstrated that the studios there produced more films using less space than in Britain.⁷⁷

This kind of commentary was in step with the interest shown in studying production methods in Hollywood which resulted in the visits there made by British technicians just after the war detailed in Chapter 2.

Table 3.2 Completed floor work in British studios September 1945–August 1946

<i>Studio</i>	<i>Number of films</i>	<i>Available floor space square feet</i>	<i>1 film to space ratio</i>
Denham	7	108,700	1: 15,528
British National, Elstree	6	43,256	1: 7209
Ealing	4	24,694	1: 6173
Riverside	3	12,265	1: 4225
Nettlefold	3	13,076	1: 4358
Pinewood (open 8 months)	3	54,360	1: 18,120
Shepherd's Bush	5	30,785	1: 6157
Sound City (some space requisitioned)	1	53,300	1: 53,300
Welwyn	3	15,368	1: 5123

⁷⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 October 1946, 12.

⁷⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 November 1947, 9. The deduction was that even though Hollywood had far more stages than in Britain, their efficient use of stage space also enabled it to produce more films.

The figures need to be taken with caution however, since the use of floor space simply stated in square feet ratios does not account for the type or quality of films being shot on the stages. Also, considering floor space without reference to the other facilities that made studios run efficiently, such as the proximity of workshops and equipment stores, or the ability to assemble sets adjacent to stages, limits understanding of how studio infrastructures functioned holistically. As we have seen, effective use could be made of the exterior backlot for *Black Narcissus* and *Captain Boycott*, as well as location shooting. The calculations seem to indicate Denham's quicker return to normal after the war than Pinewood and Sound City, the other larger studios on the list. But in the war Denham continued to be operated as a commercial studio, so it was in a different position to other studios in relation to difficulties associated with de-requisitioning and adjusting to peacetime conditions.⁷⁸ While films had been made by the Crown Film Unit (CFU) and Service Units at Pinewood it took some time before the CFU transferred operations to Beaconsfield when the war ended and the Service Units were disbanded. These units had specialised in short and instructional propaganda films, rather than fiction feature films. Even so, none of the films produced in 1946 at Denham were particularly significant in terms of quality, box office, or the prestige tag associated with *Great Expectations* and *Black Narcissus*. British National at Elstree was relatively productive in turning out six films, along with the five completed at Shepherd's Bush. The general point that British studios needed more space to cope with an expansion of production was made repeatedly in the trade press, a situation that became more intense in the wake of the Dalton Duty crisis the following year.

The films made at Pinewood in 1946 thus reflect in microcosm the multiple temporalities and spaces of studio production. These first films on the floor in the post-war period showcased some of the techniques and economies that were to typify Pinewood's production culture for the next decade. Thinking about them as *studio* films invites a different way of evaluating the films, their reputations, and identities as they constituted Pinewood's image, capabilities, and evolution as a studio very much situated in the contexts of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation. As detailed in the following chapter, this trend continued in subsequent years.

⁷⁸ Sarah Street, 'Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

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