



In the Studio and on Location: Mapping Pinewood's Culture in 1947–1950

Abstract This chapter focuses on films produced by the Independent Producers at Pinewood during 1947, a key year in which the film industry was under great pressure to produce more films. It examines in detail the new techniques and approaches to set design in the films *Blanche Fury* (1948), *The End of the River* (1947), *The Woman in the Hall* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (1948), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *Esther Waters* (1948) and *London Belongs to Me* (1948). Experiments in Technicolor design in particular emerge as an important theme, and also techniques used for films shot primarily on location. The chapter concludes with an overview and assessment of the immediate post-war years when Pinewood supported many productions whose art direction practices and working methods were very much situated in the exigencies of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation.

Keywords Set Design · Technicolor · Technology · Studios · British Film Industry

As Pinewood continued its return to production in the early post-war years, this chapter continues to examine how set designs and other innovative technical methods were deployed to rationalise production. During 1947–8 the Independent Producers enjoyed relative freedom while supported by Rank and Pinewood's resources. As the following

chart in Table 4.1 illustrates, some iconic feature films were made at the studios before the pressures for greater economies dictated even more cost-cutting regimes. As we shall see, further experimentation in studio-based ingenuity however continued, albeit overshadowed by broader economic and political issues which affected the film industry. Pinewood's infrastructure ultimately proved resilient at a time when other facilities struggled to survive.

BLANCHE FURY: COLOUR DESIGN AT PINEWOOD

Before *Black Narcissus* fifteen of Britain's twenty Technicolor sound feature films had been produced at Denham.¹ *The Mikado* (Victor Schertzinger, 1939) and *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson, 1944) were made at Pinewood, but the studios had not yet established a particular reputation for colour filmmaking. The situation was changed by the Archers' role in the Independent Producers, particularly with the seminal films *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes* (1948) which were admired internationally for promoting a particularly distinctive 'British' style of Technicolor.² While *Blanche Fury* (1948) was not an Archers film, it was an important Technicolor historical costume drama shot at Pinewood and on location. Marc Allégret came over from France to direct the film, an experience which, as detailed in Chapter 6, prompted a comparison with filming in contemporary French studios.³ The historical, melodramatic setting allowed cinematographer Guy Green to experiment with low-key lighting and colour. The film had an expressive colour design in many sequences, making it a significant Technicolor film that has tended to be overshadowed by the better-known Archers' films.⁴

The production design for *Blanche Fury* by John Bryan, working with Wilfred Shingleton as art director, needed to take Technicolor into account since colour values in cinematography as well as lighting technique were crucial variables in the planning of sets. Carrick likened gauging the emotional effects of colour to the coordination of different

¹ John Huntley, *British Technicolor Films* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1949).

² Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation, 1900–55* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), 179–93.

³ *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round (PMGR)*, January 1947, 4–5.

⁴ Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 148–53.

Table 4.1 Films in production at Pinewood in 1947

<i>Film and UK release date</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Pinewood shooting schedule</i>	<i>Editing completed*</i>	<i>Locations</i>	<i>Production design Art direction</i>
<i>Blanche Fury</i> (Technicolor) 22 Mar 1948	Cineguild	£382,200	Jan–Oct 1947	Feb 1948	Wootton Lodge, and Shire Hall, Staffs; Weaver Hills; Dunstable Downs, Beds	John Bryan Wilfred Shingleton
<i>The End of the River</i> 1 Dec 1947	The Archers	£217,400	Jan–Sept 1947	Oct 1947	Brazil	Fred Pusey
<i>The Woman in the Hall</i> 24 Nov 1947	Wessex	£201,200	Mar–Sept 1947	Oct 1947		Peter Proud
<i>Oliver Twist</i> 25 Oct 1948	Cineguild	£371,500	July–Dec 1947	June 1948		John Bryan
<i>The Red Shoes</i> (Technicolor) 6 Sept 1948	The Archers	£505,600	June–Nov 1947	July 1948	Monte Carlo; Monaco station; Villefranche-sur-Mer; Opéra and Gare de Lyon, Paris; Royal Opera House and Mercury Theatre, London	Hein Heckroth
<i>Esther Waters</i> 1 Nov 1948	Wessex	£338,600	Oct 1947–Feb 1948	Sept 1948	Folkington Manor, E.Sussex	Fred Pusey
<i>London Belongs to Me</i> 13 Sept 1948	Individual	£271,300	Oct 1947–Apr 1948	July 1948	Burnham Beeches, Bucks; London	Roy Oxley

* Editing was included in the *Kinematograph Weekly's* production charts from 1947

elements required for musical orchestration, an analogy that was often used about colour design. This echoed Michael Powell's comments on his return from visiting Hollywood about the need for British films to foreground colour as an integral aspect of a production's total design. Carrick pointed out that in turning two-dimensional sketches into three-dimensional coloured sets, designers had to allow for factors such as how light reflects from one surface to another and on the faces and costumes of the actors as they move.⁵ Technicolor rendered colours in a particular way, with an emphasis on accentuating 'warm' reds that were exploited in *Blanche Fury* in scenes involving the leading character's femininity and transgression.⁶ Ossie Morris, one of the camera operators on the film, admired Bryan's production designs and sets, with their emphasis on vertical composition which suited the film's standard Academy aspect ratio (1.37: 1) and *mise-en-scène* very well. The scenes of Clare Hall, for example, are designed to accentuate the impression of high ceilings, doors, and staircases, shot in low-key with the heroine's vivid red dress providing a stark contrast as seen in Fig. 4.1.

The film required quite complex set-ups which at times stretched the crew: at one point the film was six weeks behind schedule, but the team tried to make up the time by shooting with dual technical crews. Producer Anthony Havelock-Allan directed a second unit on a set representing the gardens of Clare Hall while Allégret led the first unit directing scenes set in the Assize Court.⁷ Morris's recollections of *Blanche Fury* attest to the efforts that were attempted on set to achieve particularly challenging effects. One shot required the camera and crane, on which the large, heavy Technicolor camera and blimp were mounted, to track through an open window into a room on the set. The cumbersome technology made the shot very awkward, and the blimp fell off the crane when it caught the window frame when being pulled out. The crane then became unbalanced and shot upwards, causing camera operator Ernest Steward to fall to the studio floor, giving him a concussion and injuring his hand quite badly.⁸ The set had been redesigned so that part of the wall could be pulled away

⁵ Edward Carrick, *Designing for Films* (London: Studio Publications, 1949), 69.

⁶ Liz Watkins, 'Colour Consciousness and Design in *Blanche Fury* as Technicolor Melodrama', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7, no. 1 (2010): 57.

⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, iii.

⁸ *Birmingham Gazette*, 20 January 1947, 1.



Fig. 4.1 Contrasting colour and light. Valerie Hobson as Blanche Fury in *Blanche Fury* (1948)

at a precise moment to allow the camera to go through the window, but poor timing executing this difficult move caused the blimp to catch the frame. Morris took over from Steward the following day, but the shot as originally conceived by production designer John Bryan was abandoned.⁹ The idea for the shot may have come from *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), the Technicolor film that featured several remarkable crane shots and in part inspired the ‘look’ of *Blanche Fury*.¹⁰ Cranes were in short supply in Britain and those in use at Pinewood at that time were ‘antiquated’.¹¹ Despite its cumbersome size and weight Morris however liked using the three-strip Technicolor camera because ‘the viewfinder was mounted so close to the lens axis that all problems with parallax were

⁹ Ossie Morris interviewed by Sarah Street and Liz Watkins, 6 August 2008, published in Simon Brown, Sarah Street and Liz Watkins (eds.), *British Colour Cinema: Practices and Theories* (London: British Film Institute/Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 61.

¹⁰ Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 151–2.

¹¹ Oswald Morris, *Huston, we have a problem* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 44. MGM at Elstree had ‘prize pieces of apparatus’ including a special light, very easily manoeuvred crane made in the MGM engineering shop under special licence granted by its American manufacturer, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, xv.

virtually eliminated'.¹² In this sense shooting *Blanche Fury* was easier than Morris's experience as noted earlier with *Green for Danger* when the location of the viewfinder on Mitchell cameras challenged the operator.

The production of *Blanche Fury* indicated a confidence in colour film-making that had been identified towards the end of the war by the British Film Producers Association (BFPA) as an area for research and further expansion.¹³ It is no surprise that Michael Powell was a keen advocate, but it is significant that other filmmakers were considering colour at a time when any such production was more expensive and, as Morris's anecdote above indicates, could be more complex than shooting in black and white.¹⁴ Costs for the latter could still reach the higher range, especially the prestige Dickens adaptations produced by Cineguild. The budget for *Blanche Fury* (£382,200) was similarly well above average for the period and considerably higher than *Black Narcissus* (£280,000). These costs were however considered to be worth it, especially in view of the emphasis given by the BFPA to exploiting colour in the long-term. While this may have seemed a risky strategy to pursue in view of current economic pressures, the fact that Technicolor films were attempted indicates trust in locating Pinewood as the best studio to ensure both the future of colour and its own success. During this period Rank did not shoot any colour films at Denham, thus reversing the previous trend whereby Denham was the main studio producing Technicolor films.

The End of the River and the Woman in the Hall

The End of the River (Derek Twist and Lewis N. Twist, 1947), mostly shot on location in Brazil, was not in colour because of the expense. Although produced by the Archers, cinematographer Chris Challis recalled that Powell and Pressburger 'had very little to do with it'.¹⁵ In spite of the stunning Amazonian location and casting of Sabu, Esmond Knight and Brazilian actress, singer, and theatre director Bibi Ferreira,

¹² Morris, *Huston, We Have a Problem*, 44.

¹³ The National Archives (TNA), BT 64/95: 'The Future of the British Film Production Industry', BFPA report 1 July 1944.

¹⁴ BFI Special Collections, Tom White box 13: Minutes of second special meeting with technicians who recently visited Hollywood, 12 October 1945, and follow-up meeting 26 October 1945.

¹⁵ BECTU interview no. 59: Chris Challis, 11 October 1988.

Powell considered that *The End of the River* was directed in a ‘dull’ way from a poor script.¹⁶ This verdict was echoed in *Kinematograph Weekly*’s review: ‘For a time its finely photographed vistas and panoramas thrill, but after that all attempts to wade through its grisly detail and interpret its message become an unutterable bore’.¹⁷ When the film was finished in Pinewood no major issues were reported. Once released it was not profitable, although the Rank Organisation reported to the Board of Trade in 1950 that the film’s UK and overseas receipts were similar at a time when British films generally were making more money at home than abroad.¹⁸ *The End of the River* remains an interesting curio that could not quite deliver on its promise; although it was shot in an ‘authentic’ location, it could not match the more generally successful production values of the other films produced at Pinewood just after the war.

The next film to begin filming at Pinewood was *The Woman in the Hall*, directed by Jack Lee. Designer Peter Proud remembered the film as a failure ‘that should never have been made’ because of a poor script and cast.¹⁹ Proud’s efforts were however recorded in the trade press as ‘remarkably fine’.²⁰ One of the sets for a restaurant was built ‘in a long, narrow triangle formation’ to allow for long tracking shots. This is an interesting approach to making such shots interesting through significant contributions from designers, as was the strategy demonstrated in *Take My Life*. Despite giving the appearance of being expensive the film was created using basic materials. The production report explained that Proud and the design team had through ‘imaginative improvisation’ nevertheless created a sumptuous, rich-looking set. Decorated drapes, for example, were made of hessian and plaster was used to give them shape and texture, as was typical at the time when fabric shortages caused by rationing necessitated using practical alternatives and improvisation. ‘Sumptuous ceilings’ were made of carpets slung across from wall to wall and fringed with frayed rope. The restaurant’s tablecloths were ‘cut and folded into a deceptive semblance of elegance’.²¹ There were no delays in filming

¹⁶ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 648.

¹⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 30 October 1947, 28.

¹⁸ TNA, BT 64/4490, J. Arthur Rank memorandum.

¹⁹ BECTU interview no. 27: Peter Proud, 18th November and 3rd December 1987.

²⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 May 1947, 37.

²¹ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 May 1947, 37.

and astute use was made of art direction and set-dressing teams preparing different sets at the same time. Such reportage illustrates the extent to which there was interest in how effects were achieved, and an emphasis on ingenious set design often tended to offset criticisms of films like *The Woman in the Hall* that were otherwise judged to be below par. These considerations draw attention to how the team's skills in economical art direction and resourceful set dressing were appreciated at the time of production. These were seen as a continuum of Pinewood's resilience, and in this respect the studio relay generated marks *The Woman in the Hall* as a significant film in the slate under consideration in this survey.

OLIVER TWIST: DESIGNING DICKENS

Oliver Twist was a large-scale prestige production that began shooting at Pinewood in July 1947. Directed by David Lean and designed by John Bryan, *Oliver Twist* was intended as a follow-up to the achievements of *Great Expectations*. One report during the filming implied that it might be shot in Technicolor, but this did not happen, probably because of costs but also the film's association as a prestige film with *Great Expectations* which was known for its striking, graphic black and white cinematography.²² The film's visual design was plotted precisely by Bryan in thumbnail sketches and inspiration for the city scenes was taken from illustrator Gustave Doré's nineteenth-century engravings of London. As Ede has noted, a great sense of movement and contrast was conveyed in *Oliver Twist*, with its 'tall, twisted buildings' and cramped interior spaces: 'He emphasized the claustrophobic elements by placing "lids" (ceilings on many of the sets). Moreover, Bryan used all of the elements of production design—sets, locations, and optical effects—to produce an impression of Dickens' London which was at once believable and exhilarating'.²³ As Carrick noted of Bryan's work, the unnatural emphasis of ceilings had the effect of lending perspective to a set.²⁴ Bryan used his signature method of 'perspective construction' for sets, as seen from shots taken of the lot during filming which show how sets were built using unrealistic dimensions so that objects and buildings in the

²² *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 August 1947, 11.

²³ Laurie Ede, *British Film Design* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 63.

²⁴ Carrick, *Designing for Films*, 47.

distance were built smaller to create the illusion that they were further away from the foreground view. In this way space was saved on the set but when filmed the view looked accurate.²⁵ In addition, a visitor to Pinewood when *Oliver Twist* was in production reported that the sets appeared to be constructed of interchangeable sections which could be rearranged to suit different story requirements and fresh camera set-ups.²⁶ Bryan thus continued experiments in perspective previously demonstrated in *Great Expectations* and *Take My Life*. Lighting director Guy Green used a simple approach of one key light, a smaller backlight, and a soft fill light.²⁷ The film enabled him to demonstrate his proficiency with low-key lighting as in *Blanche Fury*, but this time using black and white to achieve similar results to animate evocative period sets. Green's lighting design was a judicious means of achieving what was best for the film without using unnecessarily complex set-ups. In these ways the ambition of prestige production was not incompatible with time, space, and cost-saving methods.

THE RED SHOES: ORCHESTRATING 'TOTAL CINEMA'

In production at the same time as *Oliver Twist*, *The Red Shoes* was a prestige film of a different style. Shot at Pinewood and on location in Paris, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Monte Carlo, and London, it used Technicolor, music and ballet as inspiration for innovative production designs by Hein Heckroth (Fig. 4.2). Michael Powell wanted a very specific approach of lighter, 'flimsier' art direction that created 'atmosphere rather than naturalistic reproduction of so-called reality'.²⁸ Rather than reproduce buildings as concrete structures Powell advocated scenery that was more flexible, an idea that Heckroth responded to most effectively. As Ede has commented, *The Red Shoes* exhibited Heckroth's successful balance of non-naturalistic approaches utilising the idea of 'mobile' design.²⁹ It provided the Archers with the opportunity to also experiment with

²⁵ *PMGR*, September 1947, 19.

²⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 August 1947, 11.

²⁷ Morris, *Huston We Have a Problem*, 44.

²⁸ Monk Gibbon, *The Red Shoes: A Critical Study* (Addlestone: Saturn Press, 1948), 52.

²⁹ Ede, *British Film Design*, 59.

the concept of the ‘composed film’ in which all elements, particularly music and colour, were designed to cohere into a ‘total cinema’ experience. Heckroth’s prior expertise in fine art, theatre, ballet, film costume design and as set designer for *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal, 1945) convinced Powell that he was the best person for the job. On *The Red Shoes* he worked with set designer Arthur Lawson to realise Powell’s ambition for an imaginative production which was particularly evident in planning ‘The Red Shoes Ballet’, a spectacular 12.5-minute ballet-within-the-film sequence. This was planned by creating a short 141-shot ‘story strip’ film of 500 paintings which had been produced by Ivor Beddoes based on Heckroth’s original 300 sketches of the ballet (Fig. 4.3). This method, used by Disney in the USA, was discussed in 1945 at meetings attended by Powell and Pressburger to discuss reports by British technicians who had visited Hollywood. A model (Fig. 4.4) was also used to plan the set.

The short film guided how the sequence should finally be filmed on Stage ‘E’ at Pinewood with the music and actors on the actual set. It



Fig. 4.2 Hein Heckroth designing *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images



Fig. 4.3 Hein Heckroth design for the Red Shoes ballet in *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images

also allowed for any necessary adjustments to be made to the timing in advance of preparing the shooting script. This level of planning was essential, especially because the ballet had to be filmed in sections which posed challenges to dancers not used to having their movements interrupted. The short film was shown to the different production departments to aid the construction of sets and planning of effects. It demonstrated Heckroth's careful planning of colours according to a particular scheme, as well as lighting, camera angles, and trick effects such as the illusion of a dancing newspaper figure and the use of reflective materials such as cellophane.³⁰ Once in production, the shooting of *The Red Shoes* posed many

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of colour in *The Red Shoes* see Street, *Colour Films in Britain*, 184–93.



Fig. 4.4 Hein Heckroth with model for the Red Shoes ballet sequence in *The Red Shoes*, 1948. Alamy stock images

challenges for cinematographer Jack Cardiff, especially in terms of accelerating camera speed to film dancers as they leapt in the air and needing to allow for Technicolor's high-key lighting requirements.³¹

Many different techniques and devices were used for the sequence shot on the studio's stage including mountain ranges each painted on a separate glass sheet and set at intervals one behind the other, and in the foreground 'various coloured chemicals which wave streaks and trails in the water' that was poured into a flat glass tank which separated the camera from the set.³² It was an elaborate orchestration of production design involving high levels of collaboration between technicians, whereas the film's other sequences, such as Lady Neston's house in Belgravia, used more conventional sets.³³ Degrees of realism were required for some sets. Pinewood's modelling department of seven craftsmen headed by Fred

³¹ Jack Cardiff, *Magic Hour* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 94.

³² Gibbon, *The Red Shoes*, 73.

³³ Ede, *British Film Design*, 57.

Newman, provided models. The team's previous work on *Black Narcissus* had 'demanded all the reserves of ingenuity and improvisation they could muster', and this was no less the case with *The Red Shoes*.³⁴ Their work, mostly in clay, provided a basic design which was then completed by plasterers, painters, carpenters, and riggers. One such model was created for a theatre box which appeared as very realistic in the film. Details of the skilled work of modellers were reported in the studio magazine the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, with images of the process and this particular model.³⁵

While the showcase ballet sequence has been admired by many critics, less attention has been paid to location shooting for *The Red Shoes* which was an important part of the film's appeal of quality combined with aesthetic sumptuousness.³⁶ Heckroth produced sketches for the whole film which was typified by imaginative responses to both working in the studio and in exterior locations. In June 1947 exteriors were shot in Monte Carlo and Nice, followed by Paris and four weeks in the Cote d'Azur.³⁷ This was documented by Ken Rick, second assistant director, in the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*.³⁸ When filming at the Gare de Lyon in Paris the unit used hourly paid labour hired from Parisian film studios and local extras. This was reported as a positive experience, with the French technicians in particular keen to learn about shooting in Technicolor. This coincided with a time when French filmmakers were considering making greater use of colour, although at that point they were not certain which process—Technicolor or Agfacolor—might deliver the best results.³⁹ At Cannes station several complete trains were used for filming, and action props featured in other locations included yachts in the bay of Monte Carlo and an outdoor lift with hydraulic power at Villefranche. The

³⁴ *PMGR*, November 1947, 13.

³⁵ *PMGR*, November 1947, 13.

³⁶ Shooting films abroad required multiple considerations, including restrictions on the convertibility of sterling into foreign currencies (as formalised by the 1947 Exchange Control Act). Location shooting for *The Red Shoes* thus required very careful planning to maximise the opportunities it provided in terms of authenticity of locale, use of local labour etc.

³⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 June 1947, 15.

³⁸ *PMGR*, June 1947, 4–7.

³⁹ Dudley Andrew, 'The Post-war struggle for colour' in Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (eds.), *Color: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40–49.

Casino terrace and entrance to the Hotel de Paris was very high above Monte Carlo station. To make the most of the spectacular location Powell filmed in the lift which transported people up to the terrace. The location shooting was recorded as an exhilarating experience by Jack Cardiff, and Rick noted that ‘we felt we were truly making a great picture’.⁴⁰ In this way facilities at Pinewood and on location were used for maximum visual impact.

As is well documented, the reception of *The Red Shoes* was not what one might have expected for so exceptional a film, even though the extent of negative critical responses has been exaggerated.⁴¹ Issues over the budget, and Rank’s decision not to give the film a lavish publicity campaign or gala première, were related to the timing of its release when the Rank Organisation was concentrating on cutting costs, although in the longer-term *The Red Shoes* was a successful international release. Its reputation as an extravagant film has been overshadowed by its demonstration of many of the techniques and creative ideas Michael Powell flagged in 1945 as important in his reports on visiting Hollywood. The film is a prime example of many of the insights and observations gained during that trip being put to use in extraordinary ways.

ESTHER WATERS: NATURALISM AND THE COSTUME FILM

The next production on the floor at Pinewood was *Esther Waters* (1948), and this film took a completely different approach to design. As an adaptation of a naturalistic Victorian novel by George Moore, the production took ‘an unusually painstaking approach’ to reproducing elements of the *mise-en-scène*, including the life-size interior of a Victorian mansion named Woodview.⁴² It was directed by Ian Dalrymple of Wessex Films and Peter Proud, but for this film the art direction was by Fred Pusey. The narrative called for many different sets and the film also featured location shooting at Folkington Manor in East Sussex, as well as exterior scenes for the Derby which were used for two sequences including a tense climax towards the end of the film. While for some reviewers the

⁴⁰ Cardiff, *Magic Hour*, p. 95; *PMGR*, June 1947, 7.

⁴¹ Mark Connelly, *The Red Shoes* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 67.

⁴² Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 168.

focus on detail for the *mise-en-scène* was ‘superfluous’, from the point of view of design it was extraordinarily precise in its aim to painstakingly reproduce accurate period detail.⁴³ The film’s publicity drew attention to the level of detail that had been researched for reproducing authentic facsimiles of items such as race cards and flags. While such claims were not uncommon for period films, in this case they were central to its pitch. Proud later said he disliked *Esther Waters* and that he ‘didn’t approach it with the proper attitude’.⁴⁴ His disavowal may have been influenced by the film’s failure at the box-office and generally negative critical reception, but the scenes he directed at the Derby are remarkable in many ways. These include an establishing shot at the beginning of the Derby Day sequence which closely resembles an engraving and painting by William Powell Frith (‘The Derby Day’, 1856–8) which appears to come to life as the crowd becomes animated. The camera tracks past them to evoke the event’s ebullient, funfair atmosphere and festivities. When representatives from six Scottish newspapers visited Pinewood in June 1947, they were amazed at the ingenious techniques being used at the studios to cut costs. These included illusory experiments such as using cardboard figures to create the illusion of background crowds in *Esther Waters*.⁴⁵

Fred Pusey’s art direction contained remarkable period detail such as the kitchen set of Woodview, as well as its other rooms that had been constructed as life-size sets. The mansion’s interiors were enhanced by high camera angles which augmented the impression of ornate grandeur and the imposing, vertical dimensions of the hall, its furniture, tall candlesticks and statues, paintings, and formal, precisely situated decoration. As a form of visual contrast, these helped to articulate through embellished *mise-en-scène* the film’s theme of class (the kitchen is shot from lower angles), the drudgery of domestic work and material hardships experienced by the heroine which are made clear by her very different, impoverished lodgings after losing her job at Woodview. The cinematography also helps to enhance the visual impact and thematic function of other sets: in a scene set in a conservatory used for keeping plants, deep focus cinematography captures their sheer abundance, almost as if they

⁴³ *Monthly Film Bulletin* review *Esther Waters* 15, no. 169 (1948): 138.

⁴⁴ BECTU interview no. 27: Peter Proud, 18th November and 3rd December 1987.

⁴⁵ *The Falkirk Herald*, 18 June 1947, 1.

have taken over the space, looming large in the foreground with the human figures in the background (Fig. 4.5).

Having worked on several British films as an art director and in art departments in the 1930s, Pusey's credentials included several high-profile films including as a sketch artist on *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936), and as assistant to Vincent Korda in creating the sets for *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). While the emphasis for *Esther Waters* is primarily naturalistic, there are occasional scenes which are less so, for example, the visually striking sequence at a servants' ball held at the mansion. The festivities include free reign of the gardens, an experience which acquires heightened intensity through illuminations, fireworks, and an unexpected use of tubular scaffolding. This is used in a graphically composed shot, shown in Fig. 4.6, which replicates figures on a bridge with a firework display in the background. While the scaffold's horizontal and vertical tubes form the structure on which the figures are standing,



Fig. 4.5 Conservatory set in *Esther Waters* (1948)

wooden poles positioned diagonally form part of the design which frames the servants enjoying the festivities. This non-realistic structure acquires added, self-reflexive interest in the material history of film studios since tubular scaffolding was increasingly used to replace timber which was in short supply; Pinewood faced a 50% reduction in its timber quota from the beginning of 1947.⁴⁶ This is a rare instance of it appearing in a film as a prop, rather than its usual invisible role as a material structure used to support sets, lighting, scenery, etc. during production. While *Esther Waters* was not profitable for Rank it nevertheless demonstrated how a production could deploy many attributes that can in retrospect be seen as experimental, and as a real attempt to make production design and cinematography cohere in a consistently expressive manner. In addition, the film's climactic sequence, which intercut the Derby Day with a death-bed scene, used effective editing as a culminating, evocative technique.

LONDON BELONGS TO ME: SPATIAL DESIGN

In a very different context and genre, *London Belongs to Me* (Sidney Gilliat, 1948), the final film which commenced shooting in October 1947, also focussed on the spatial dimensions of a house. The majority was filmed at Pinewood, including 'Dulcimer Street' which was built as a set, with some location shooting in London and at Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire. The narrative, set in London just before the Second World War, centres on the inhabitants, as the opening voice-over informs us, of number ten, an early Victorian house once situated in a 'quite exclusive' part of London (SE11) which had since 'gone down in the world'. Even though the film is set in the 1930s the décor of the house displays its rather faded Victorian heritage, as was common in houses of the period, and art director Roy Oxley's sets made the most of this design opportunity. The designs, as seen in Figs. 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, evoked the film's London locales and prevalent atmosphere.

The house serves as an economical yet effective means of delineating the different tenants' lives, particularly following Percy (Richard Attenborough), whose failed attempt to steal a car leads to him being accused

⁴⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 July 1947, Studio Supplement, iv; *PMGR*, 2: 1, February 1947, 2. For the earlier development of tubular scaffolding in Britain see Richard Farmer, 'Supporting Feature: Tubular Scaffolding' STUDIOTEC website accessed 2 October 2023: <https://studiotec.info/2021/05/25/supporting-feature-tubular-scaffolding/>



Fig. 4.6 Scaffolding being used as part of the set in *Esther Waters* (1948)

of murder. Following the set of Dulcimer Street at the beginning of the film, the camera looks in through the windows of each floor of the house, as if inviting us in to introduce the tenants in their immediate domestic environments. Oxley used this situation as the basic template through which to communicate key visual information about the tenants' slightly different social positions in terms of wealth and status. The Jossers, the tenants on the ground floor, are about to start a new stage in life since Mr. Josser (Wylie Watson) has just retired and plans to move with his wife to a country cottage. Their lodgings, where their daughter also lives, are tidy but cluttered with treasured possessions, photographs, paintings, plants, cards on the mantelpiece, and ornaments accumulated over many years. These are material embellishments included by Oxley as indicative of a respectable, hard-working family. Mrs. Boon (Gladys Henson) lives on the first floor with her son Percy where the residue of Victoriana is also evident, although the difference between their bedrooms signifies Percy's



Fig. 4.7 Roy Oxley design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

youth, with his posters and photographs pinned to the wall in a skewed manner, as if to show that he is in transit, on the way to a different stage in his life. The top floor and basement, more grandly referred to by the landlady Mrs. Vizzard as ‘the lower ground floor’, are occupied by people not quite as materially comfortable. Connie Coke’s (Ivy St. Helier) top floor rooms are drab and untidy, her stockings hung to dry across a dishevelled space which, as the voice-over tells us, seems appropriate for someone with ‘irregular habits’. The basement becomes a feature of the narrative when a new tenant, Henry Squales (Alastair Sim), turns out to be a fake spiritualist who tries to charm Mrs. Vizzard with a view to accessing the money left to her by her late husband. This space is drab and dingy, the least appealing part of the house, with its subterranean darkness as a suitable milieu for a shady character.

The hallway and staircase of the house also feature prominently to show the characters entering and exiting, encountering each other as they pass through an environment that exudes the familiarity of co-habitation while at the same time revealing the differences between the



Fig. 4.8 Roy Oxley busy London street design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

tenants. Mrs. Vizzard's rooms on the ground floor are the most elaborate, indicating her position as landlady with high ceilings, long, formal heavy curtains, elaborate patterned wallpaper, and ornaments as material possessions which connote her relatively well-off position. In this way the central sets of the house and street are economical ways to stage a drama which otherwise favours medium-close shots of characters. Many established techniques used by art directors were employed effectively on the film. The office set, for example, where Mr. Josser's retirement event is taking place, shows him coming through a door carrying a pile of books. Perspective is created by the illusion through the doorway of a long corridor, a painted background effect created by the Art Department. After Percy's arrest he is held in a police cell where he has a nightmare of various terrifying scenarios regarding his fate. Intercut with this is a darkly lit set with shadows of the cell's bars starkly cast on the wall as expressive of the gravity of his predicament.

Oxley recreated some other parts of London such as 'a perfect reproduction' of a railway viaduct. The lot stood alongside another setting



Fig. 4.9 Roy Oxley courtroom design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

of London since there was some overlap with the production period of *Oliver Twist*.⁴⁷ A few scenes were shot on location in London, including the garage where Percy works, a cinema frontage, canal bridge, and Westminster Bridge. Trinity Church Square, Southwark, became Individual's unit base when shooting scenes of a procession carrying a petition to the Home Secretary. Artificial rain showers were created by using water pressure from a local hydrant as well as studio hoses to produce the effect of a building storm.⁴⁸ In all, the sets were perfect examples of work that was very precisely situated in a milieu that was about to experience change. The typical houses in east London were, like the fictitious Dulcimer Street, a hundred years old, but many of these were destroyed or damaged by wartime bombing. The sets were based on photographs

⁴⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 November 1947, 25.

⁴⁸ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 21 April 1948, 7.



Fig. 4.10 Roy Oxley Bentley lock-up design for *London Belongs to Me* (1948)

of two Lambeth squares off the Borough High Street which were ideal because they were ‘untouched by war, although bomb damage lies all around them’.⁴⁹ The film therefore provided an opportunity to document pre-war housing at a time when post-war reconstruction included new building projects. The film generated considerable commentary while it was in production as its methods were closely followed by reporters who visited Pinewood. Like the other films discussed in this survey, their reports brought to people’s attention the skills and ingenuity involved in working in British studios in the first years after the war.

⁴⁹ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 7 April 1948, 9.

REVIEWING 1947–1950

The quality and generic variety of films shot at Pinewood in 1947 was in many ways remarkable. The various pragmatic approaches taken to enable different stages and the exterior lot to be used for several productions at the same time, combined with selective location shooting, meant that production designers continued to be central to the effective delivery of an impressively varied slate of films. The year was however a momentous one in terms of Anglo-American film relations, with the imposition of the Dalton Duty in July 1947 which effectively stopped Hollywood's new films and other imports from being distributed and exhibited in Britain until March 1948 when the dispute was settled. The trade press charted the dramatic developments of the crisis which placed great pressure on British studios to supply cinemas with new films, but also because it had created a unique chance of a market which could for the first time be dominated by British films.

The 'Studio Supplement' of the *Kinematograph Weekly* published in October 1947 reflected the cautious tone of prevailing discourse: 'British film makers...are presented with a magnificent opportunity—but it is an opportunity alarmingly hedged around with harsh conditions'.⁵⁰ The shortages of studio space, materials, and labour were cited as causing difficulties, and a survey of the crisis was accompanied by articles on reducing production time and money through increased use of special effects and greater economies in set building and shooting time.⁵¹ Less than a year later degrees of 'recovery' were in evidence, indicated especially by the reconstruction of the ABPC Studios, Elstree, and of Teddington, studios which had been severely damaged in the war. Conditions were nevertheless uncertain for producers, as evidenced by the generally lower-cost slate of films produced at Pinewood in 1948–9, several of which developed David Rawnsley's Independent Frame experiment. Economy of space was achieved at Pinewood by permitting one unit to use one end of a stage while another could come in and put up a set on the remaining half without waiting for the whole stage to be vacated.⁵² Shifts in the

⁵⁰ *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 2 October 1947, iii.

⁵¹ Howard Cricks, 'A few leading questions About reducing shooting time', *Kinematograph Weekly*, Studio Supplement, 2 October 1947, xix.

⁵² *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 12 January 1949, 3.

management style of the Rank Organisation failed to retain the Independent Producers as a group beyond the end of 1948 when the company was wound up, although during 1948–9 some of the associated companies such as Cineguild, Wessex, Two Cities, and Aquila made films at Pinewood.

When a Board of Trade Committee published its report on the *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films* in 1949 one of the appendices included detailed information on film production and studios in 1948.⁵³ A production costs table examined by the Board of Trade showed that budgets were at their highest in 1948. An official commented that any financial aid to the industry had to be conditional on future cost reductions.⁵⁴ On occasion, the language used in official communications about the film industry was invested with critical, even punitive tones. Harold Wilson, President of the Board of Trade, for example, was adamant that ‘extravagance’ in the industry should be curbed:

The extravagance of the film industry is proverbial and much of the criticism is justified. Not only will the City hold completely aloof from the industry unless it can be shown to be taking radical measures to eliminate waste, but even such limited assistance as the Government is giving will be liable to criticism so long as it can be said that we are merely underwriting the continued supply of fur coats and other luxuries to the film moguls.⁵⁵

A crisis of production and employment was declared because none of Britain’s thirty-one studios was working at full capacity even though some studios, including Pinewood, Denham, ABPC, and MGM at Elstree, Shepperton, and Nettlefold at Walton-on-Thames, were working to full forward programmes. Of a total of 7,800 feature studio employees 25.6% were unemployed.⁵⁶ Persistent difficulties were blamed for the crisis including the length of production schedules; an alleged increase in the number of sets requiring complex lighting set-ups which took up space on the stages; scripts not being sufficiently ready when shooting commenced,

⁵³ *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films: Report of Committee of Enquiry* (1949), Cmnd. 2324.

⁵⁴ TNA, BT 64/4467, minute by Ms Brewster, May 1950.

⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 129/33: Memo by Harold Wilson on the Film Industry, 15 March 1949.

⁵⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 17 March 1949, 1.

and insufficient planning in general. The reference to sets is interesting in view of the creative strategies used at Pinewood the previous two years, practices which I have termed ‘situated’ art direction. The comment was perhaps influenced by optimism about the potential benefits of increased use of back projection and other cost-cutting methods associated with the Independent Frame, although the report was cautious about its general applicability to all types of production. The reference to an increase in the number of sets was not accompanied by figures or detailed evidence. While a rise in the material costs of making sets was clear, no specific figures were given to support the claim that the number of sets had actually increased. Sets attracted attention because of their obvious relation to material price rises, shortages, and the labour involved in their assembly. From the films reviewed in this chapter it does not however seem to be the case that there had necessarily been a rise in the number of sets; as we have seen the opposite was true in some cases when great efforts were made to be economical with stage space, and some productions made considerable use of location shooting. Sometimes a film would be shot in more than one studio. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949), for example, was on the floor at Pinewood for five weeks in the autumn of 1948, with the rest filmed at Ealing. Michael Balcon decided this was a good way to speed up production.⁵⁷

Although, as noted in Chapter 2, in the longer term the Independent Frame was significant for its introduction of new equipment and techniques at Pinewood, its immediate reception was mixed, not least when criticised by art directors including John Bryan and Alfred Junge.⁵⁸ The Independent Frame was applied by Aquila Films for the following feature films released in 1949: *Warning to Wantons* (Donald Wilson); *Floodtide* (Frederick Wilson); *Stop Press Girl* (Michael Barry); *Poet’s Pub* (Frederick Wilson); *Boys in Brown* (Montgomery Tully) and with partial application by Gainsborough and Sydney Box Productions for *The Astonished Heart*

⁵⁷ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 6 October 1948, 3.

⁵⁸ For a full discussion of the Independent Frame, its methods, films and legacy see Sarah Street, ‘Pinewood Studios, the Independent Frame, and Innovation’ in Brian R. Jacobson (ed.), *In the Studio: Visual Creation and its Material Environments* (Oakland: University of California Press), 103–21.

(Terence Fisher and Antony Darnborough), released the following year.⁵⁹ Special effects were of paramount importance in reducing the number of sets that needed to be built. Process work included hanging miniatures, glass shots, matte shots, and foreground transparencies. Sets were built on wheeled rostrums so that studio floors were never idle as one set replaced another very quickly. Michael Powell's approach to production design was in some ways applied in the Independent Frame: 'Realism is one thing and naturalism another. I hate naturalism. I hate it when we have a simulated exterior scene in the studio, and I see prop men bringing in great branches of living trees, covered with leaves, which wither under the light and are thrown out the next day'.⁶⁰ Simplified sets had the potential for stylization via emphasis on shadows and props and a few of the films, such as *Floodtide* and *Boys in Brown*, demonstrated such creative techniques even though neither film achieved the 'total cinema' artistry of *The Red Shoes*. A production report on *Boys in Brown* concluded that the Independent Frame's techniques such as sets constructed on mobile rostrums, use of models and back projections, did not rule out on-the-spot changes: 'In certain respects the director could have as much freedom as he desired in controlling the movements of both his players and his camera despite the need for having everything pre-arranged'.⁶¹ A few more Technicolor films were made at Pinewood in the final years of the decade including *The Blue Lagoon* (Frank Launder, 1949) and *Trottie True* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1949), and *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend, 1948) was made at Ealing which was under Rank's control. During the 1950s the cheaper Eastmancolor format gradually replaced Technicolor as the primary colour process.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Boys in Brown* began production at Pinewood but completed at Denham as reported in *Film Industry*, 16 June 1949, 10.

⁶⁰ Michael Powell, *Million-Dollar Movie* (Heinemann, London: 1992), 79.

⁶¹ *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 4 May 1949, 9.

⁶² Powell and Pressburger's *Tales of Hoffmann* (1950) was made at Shepperton. Technicolor's expense continued to limit its use during this period.

CONCLUSION

In the first years after the war, as the examples discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, Pinewood supported many productions whose art direction practices and working methods were very much situated in the exigencies of post-war shortages and studio rehabilitation. The trend towards pre-planning and utilising stage space and exterior lot spaces as effectively as possible did not necessarily relate to a film's budget. While *The Red Shoes* was an expensive film and on first release its overseas success could not necessarily have been predicted, its methods were nevertheless very much in step with Michael Powell's advocacy of pre-planning, use of effects, and non-realistic design that were associated with the Independent Frame techniques he endorsed in 1945 as 'a revolution...[and] a big step forward'.⁶³ All of the films produced at Pinewood in 1946–7 demonstrated some of these initiatives, indicating the extent to which post-war production culture was dominated by the need to find practical, creative ways to grapple with adverse economic conditions. They also show that some of the techniques associated with the Independent Frame were already being used before its official roll-out in 1949. Resourceful use of stage space was particularly evident in *Green for Danger* and *London Belongs to Me*, the first and last films in this survey of art direction practices that built self-contained sets for the hospital and house that were at the heart of their respective fictional dramas. In its concentration on the people and activities of a single house, *London Belongs to Me* demonstrated the benefits of a formula which was particularly suited to economical filming. This was taken up in other films shot at Pinewood, most notably *The Woman in Question* (Anthony Asquith, 1950). Production reports show that this film was carefully pre-planned before shooting on Pinewood's Stage 'C' which ran very smoothly.⁶⁴ The turn towards greater use of effects such as hanging miniatures and models can be seen in *Take My Life* and *The Red Shoes*, as well as how some of the tighter editing practices admired in Hollywood's films were being applied in Britain. In addition to *Take My Life*, Jack Harris edited other films featured in Chapters 3 and 4: *Great Expectations*, *Blanche Fury*,

⁶³ Michael Powell to J. Arthur Rank, quoted in Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 122.

⁶⁴ Report on *The Woman in Question*, Film Finances archives, London.

and *Oliver Twist*. In these films he was given considerable autonomy for creative decision-making.⁶⁵

The role of production and set designers in making economic production choices possible for lower, medium, and higher-budgeted films was clearly crucial. The incidence of location shooting in films such as *Esther Waters* and *The Red Shoes* enabled stage space at Pinewood to be occupied for less time which was also helped by using the exterior lot to build ambitious sets for films such as *Black Narcissus* and *Oliver Twist*. Even Pinewood's non-production spaces could be utilised for filmmaking, as in *Take My Life*. This idea was adopted by later productions, such as *Once a Jolly Swagman* (Jack Lee, 1949) which used Pinewood's very useful 'covered way' (a servicing point between the workshops and stages) as a corridor contrived to give impression of that normally found under terraced stands of a speedway grandstand.⁶⁶ Art director Fred Pusey and construction manager Charlie Cusack had to be ingenious to construct 'attractive and adequate sets in the space available'.⁶⁷ The momentum of all this resourceful inventiveness was nevertheless held in check by wider adverse economic conditions affecting the industry. The Independent Frame's difficulties in gaining general acceptance indicate the problems of launching such an experiment at a time of post-war re-adjustment. The longer-term benefits for Pinewood however highlight how rather than being an isolated experiment, it relates to the many similar and different ways in which art directors and other technicians responded ingeniously and resourcefully to the realities of making films in the immediate post-war years. Pinewood's facilities, spatial design, and culture were central to supporting that enterprise.

⁶⁵ Roy Perkins and Martin Stollery, *British Film Editors: 'The Heart of the Movie'* (London: BFI, 2004), 207.

⁶⁶ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 19 May 1948, 11.

⁶⁷ *Cinema News and Property Gazette, The Cinema Studio* supplement, 5 May 1948, 9.

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