



## CHAPTER 6

---

# Cultural Life at Pinewood: The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* Studio Magazine

**Abstract** This chapter draws on *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, a newly discovered primary source, which is a rare surviving example of a film studio magazine, produced at Pinewood by employees in 1946–1947. This chapter details how the magazine articulated Pinewood’s culture as a social enterprise as well as providing insights into its various working spaces. It brings to life the reality of being a studio employee, the day-to-day activities that are rarely described in film histories. The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides a rare glimpse into how studio employees bonded through sports and social clubs, musical and film groups, organising a Christmas pantomime, putting on art exhibitions, writing short stories, sharing studio gossip, and reporting issues of concern such as transport to work and long working hours.

**Keywords** Leisure · Sports · Labour · Recreation · Clubs and Societies

Film studios were communities of workers who established close bonds through the collective enterprise of film production. They employed many diverse occupations, including canteen employees, art directors, costume designers, hairdressers, secretaries, publicists, electricians, and carpenters. Establishing a sense of community was important, especially when working conditions could be pressured and intense, with each production throwing up new challenges, especially when working within tight

budgets and time constraints. The large numbers of ‘hidden’ contributors to a film’s production, particularly administrative personnel, or craft workers such as carpenters and wardrobe assistants, were not explicitly credited when films were released. Yet their work was crucial to the enterprise, constituting key elements of Pinewood’s complex infrastructure of experts whose labour was fundamentally important to the successful production of a film. While the details of their working practices and skills are to some extent apparent, far less is known about the broader experiences of the workplace community in an operation as large and complex as Pinewood. Surviving documentation on the social lives and activities of film studio employees is rare to find, even though it seems that several British studios produced in-house magazines.

One such example is the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, published monthly from August 1946 to December 1947 by Independent Producers, the holding company established by Rank in 1942 to finance and manage independent production companies including the Archers (Powell and Pressburger), Cineguild (David Lean, Anthony Havelock-Allan, and Ronald Neame), Individual Pictures (Lauder and Gilliat), Wessex Productions (Ian Dalrymple) and Aquila (the company associated with the Independent Frame films that joined in 1947). The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides a rare glimpse into how studio employees bonded through sports and social clubs, musical and film groups, organising a Christmas pantomime, putting on art exhibitions, writing short stories, sharing studio gossip, and reporting issues of concern such as transport to work and long working hours. This chapter details how the magazine articulated Pinewood’s culture as a social enterprise as well as providing insights into its various working spaces. It brings to life the reality of being a studio employee, the day-to-day activities that are rarely described in film histories.

The publication of a magazine such as the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* during a time when film studios were challenged by material shortages, the dollar crisis, and pressures to cut costs was remarkable. After the Second World War ended paper was still rationed but the magazine was rather lavishly produced, with a glossy colour cover design. The first issue’s cover (Fig. 6.1) featured red, white, and blue vertical lines which resembled closed stage curtains with a top ruffle emblazoning the title *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*. Peeping through the centre, as if making an entrance, was a clapper board with the Independent Producers’ logo and



**Fig. 6.1** *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* cover image, August 1946

date. Its sixteen issues, each with sixteen pages, were very professionally produced and gave the impression of a coherent group of creative workers who were intimately connected to Pinewood's identity as premier film studios. The extent to which it was a 'bottom-up' publication or whether the support it received from Rank personally was a signal that it functioned as a tool of management, is interesting to ponder. While much of the magazine's content seems to be driven by the enthusiasm of its contributors some features, such as reports on how British films fared in the USA, undoubtedly served to advance the Rank Organisation's post-war export drive.

It was imperative for film studios to keep their stages occupied at a time when producers were struggling to produce enough British films, especially in the wake of the ‘Bogart or bacon’ dollar crisis which resulted in the imposition of the ‘Dalton Duty’ in August 1947 on American film imports, and Hollywood’s subsequent boycott of the British market before a settlement was reached in March 1948.<sup>1</sup> Even though during the brief time of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s publication the emphasis was on making films for the domestic market, a cornerstone of Rank’s plans for future sustainability was getting British films screened in America via the Organisation’s distribution links with United Artists’ Eagle Lion and Universal-International.<sup>2</sup> This crucial period provides a formative context for how larger studios negotiated pressures to increase, manage, and re-calibrate film production after the severe disruptions caused by the Second World War when studios, including Pinewood, had been requisitioned for various wartime purposes.<sup>3</sup> It was imperative to recreate Pinewood’s positive pre-war culture that was described by John Dennis of the Association of Cine Technicians (ACT) as typified by a ‘happy atmosphere with a working spirit all of its own’.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the magazine’s publication in the immediate post-war years of reconstruction and optimism, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s effervescent glimpses into employees’ leisure activities can be read as unique traces of cultural abundance and the creative energies which emanated from the ethos of Independent Producers at Pinewood. At that time this grouping was associated with creative agency and freedom from managerial interference, as Sidney Gilliat recalled: ‘From the beginning of 1944 to 1947 filmmaking conditions were good and we had a remarkable freedom in most departments’.<sup>5</sup> Rank’s attempt to impose supervisory structures through Production Facilities (Films) Ltd (P.F.F.), the company formed to provide common services to all of the production units under the managing direction of Frank L. Gilbert as discussed in

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2009 Edition), 16–7.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 96–115.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Street, ‘Requisitioning Film Studios in Wartime Britain’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 1 (2023): 65–89.

<sup>4</sup> *The Pinewood Merry-Go Round (PMGR)*, August 1946, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Sidney Gilliat to Geoffrey Macnab, 3 June 1991 (private correspondence).

Chapter 5, could not prevent producers insisting ‘on having a completely free hand in their own productions’.<sup>6</sup> But as costs increased in 1946 the need for economies, including streamlining and then winding-up P.F.F., began the trend towards budgetary controls. Indeed, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s abrupt cessation in December 1947 coincided with a tightening-up of the regime at Pinewood under the direction of Rank’s business manager John Davis when a severe cost-cutting culture was instituted in 1948–1949. As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the films produced at Pinewood while the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* was being published were however distinctive for their innovative approaches to economical filmmaking practices. Some of these were indeed referenced in the magazine, often in a light-hearted way, as part of its reportage on employees’ skills and prevalent creative ideas that were circulating at the time.

### FIRST ISSUES OF THE *PINEWOOD MERRY-GO-ROUND*

The first issue’s editorial declared the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s purpose as ‘an interesting, informative and amusing magazine for all Pinewood people, written and illustrated by them’.<sup>7</sup> Rank provided a welcoming message saying that the magazine’s purpose was ‘to help spread knowledge’ about what everyone did in the studios, and there were also supportive messages from the three main trade unions, the ACT, the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the National Association of Theatrical and Kinematograph Employees (NATKE).<sup>8</sup> This encouragement from management and unions reflected the magazine’s co-operative culture that was very much centred on Pinewood’s identity as an institution and collaborative workplace, as described in Chapter 5. The editorial stated further that: ‘Nothing will be included that is not of interest to Studio people themselves. It must be remembered however, that copies are bound to find their way into the hands of “outsiders”, so we must make every effort to do ourselves justice’.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on exclusivity gestures to the idea that Pinewood employees associated themselves with

<sup>6</sup> Memo by Frank L. Gilbert on the Rank Organisation. I am grateful to Geoffrey Macnab for sharing this private document.

<sup>7</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 11.

<sup>9</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 1.

a particular brand. When other studios showed interest and asked to be put on the mailing list their approaches were firmly rebuffed: 'This is Pinewood's own Magazine, for us and by us, a policy that is unalterable'.<sup>10</sup> This attitude was later criticised as 'insular' in *The Cinema Studio*, a supplement to *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* published weekly from March 1948 to November 1951.<sup>11</sup>

At a time when studio employment was unstable, and the economic advantages of renting stages militated against long-term contracts, the Independent Producers set-up to some extent provided a sense of continuity and orientation centred on Pinewood. The connection with the Rank Organisation however meant that the companies involved were not technically 'independent', a reality which in time became problematic for producers such as The Archers whose film *The Red Shoes* (1948) was criticised by Rank and John Davis as too costly and over-indulgent.<sup>12</sup> The short lifetime of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* is in part explained by the winding-up of Independent Producers in 1948 as John Davis sought to curb any semblance of 'independence' the enterprise might have encouraged. While the magazine was recognised as a symbol of Pinewood's success its dependence on the Independent Producers meant that its lifetime was limited. But its existence had provided a short-term sense of confidence in British prestige production, a context with which the magazine's ethos was fundamentally connected. Its features communicated a spirit of camaraderie and excitement about film production, as well as documenting the numerous communal social activities that were organised by Pinewood's employees. Considering the turbulent period in which it was produced, the magazine emerges as a defiant attempt to promote the ethos of a 'Pinewoodian' studio culture.

The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* was posted free of charge to every member of the studios once a month. Joy Redmond, the Acting Editor who was a film publicity director with an editorial office located in Room 176, Block J, called for contributions: 'We need short stories, cartoons, details of any hobbies you have, technical articles that are of interest

<sup>10</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, 1. Copies did however circulate widely, as reported by Michael Powell in the last issue, presumably passed on by studio workers.

<sup>11</sup> *Cinema News and Property Gazette*, *The Cinema Studio* supplement, 21 September 1949, 9.

<sup>12</sup> The irony was that *The Red Shoes* was one of the biggest-grossing films in Rank's American export drive: Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 109–10.

to us all; sketches, amusing incidents and bits of gossip that are always happening in the studios and hundreds of other items that will make the magazine representative of you all'.<sup>13</sup> Other people involved in producing the magazine's launch issue were Vivienne Knight, Sally Sutherland, Betty Carter, and joining a few months later were Stuart Chant of Cineguild and David Pursall of Individual Pictures. When Joy Redmond took up a new position as Publicity Director for Wessex Film Productions she was succeeded as Editor in October 1946 by journalist Tom Moore who occupied the role for the rest of the magazine's lifetime. The magazine provided a 'pass' into the studio like no other, as captured by a cartoon printed in the first issue and shown in Fig. 6.2. The freely drawn black and white line drawing shows a person at the studio entrance wearing a placard with 'Merry-Go-Round' written on the front being given a studio pass by a much larger, uniformed porter. The disparity in height communicates something of the studios' sense of grandeur, with an implication that official sanction was needed for entry. Such imagery supported the idea that Pinewood was an exclusive environment to which employees had unique access. It also indicates the magazine's status as a publication approved of by studio management.

By November 1946 the magazine had established a clear role for itself, its success leading to a broadening of its scope, as noted in the editorial: 'There can be few industries which call for greater team-work than ours. The more a film worker knows about the broad principles of the other man's job and what he is trying to get at, the greater will be his own contribution to the general efficiency of his studio and ultimately, of course, to his own well-being'.<sup>14</sup> This slight shift from emphasising strictly social activities to highlighting inter-work relations and efficiency introduced the combination of features which became typical for the magazine. Both unions and managers were represented, the former writing columns and reports on key issues such as poor transport links to and from the studio and working hours, while J. Arthur Rank's involvement as President of the Music, Art, and Drama Group reflected his benevolent enthusiasm for such activities and the magazine's role in helping to spread knowledge about what everyone did in the studios. As the following analysis will show, several themes ran through its

<sup>13</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 1.



**Fig. 6.2** 'Pass to the studios' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, August 1946, p. 1

pages, reflecting inward-looking activities including cultural and sporting pursuits, recurring issues affecting studio employees, as well as outward-looking reports on international themes, location shoots, and conditions in other film industries. The co-presence of these issues communicates something of the diverse range of activities the magazine covered in pursuit of its aim to spread knowledge amongst employees about areas with which they might not necessarily be familiar.



## TRAVELLING TO AND FROM WORK

One issue that was repeatedly raised concerned poor transport links to and from Pinewood. Situated in Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire, approximately eighteen miles West of central London, Pinewood was not very accessible for workers living in London who spent considerable time travelling during a five-day, 44-hour working week. In these circumstances it is hard to see how employees fitted in some of the social activities organised in the studios. Indeed, the transport issue was first linked to the ‘very poor’ response to an appeal in October 1946 for those interested in forming a Social and Sports Club. The transport problem was blamed in the ‘messages from the unions’ regular column which reported that employees were worried about getting home after Club events. A special meeting was held on Pinewood’s ‘D’ stage, and the issue declared to be ‘a canker eating into the minds of the Studio personnel’.<sup>15</sup> Rank promised to secure better bus transport and appointed a Transport Minister but the unions nevertheless concluded: ‘The fact remains that the transport position is unsatisfactory’.<sup>16</sup> A new bus timetable was agreed, adding additional journeys from Pinewood to Uxbridge, leading F. W. Lawrence of D & P Studios’ Transport Department, to conclude that travel conditions had improved. Tension between management and workers over the issue was however palpable and discontent persisted as a report from the unions urged: ‘We do feel that “time” is the major factor in the minds of our members. The Standard Studio Agreement covering travelling facilities must be amended to suit outlying Studios. Until this is done we contend that there will never be a “contented and happy feeling” amongst the rank and file workers at Pinewood; and, unfortunately, it must tend to have repercussions on Production generally’.<sup>17</sup>

Some employees were in favour of Rank building houses near Pinewood, an idea which chimed with a report (never implemented) published in 1945 which recommended re-planning Denham and Pinewood and co-locating a new town for studio workers.<sup>18</sup> An early advocate who worked in the electrical department, wrote a letter to the magazine making the case that a ‘Pinewood Settlement’ of houses and

<sup>15</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 13.

<sup>17</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Helmut Junge, *Plan for Film Studios* (London: The Focal Press, 1945).

shops would extend the community spirit that existed in the studios, ‘and altogether it could easily become a model of happy communal life’.<sup>19</sup> Another letter was published by G. Manders, shop steward for the drapery department, making the point that: ‘Many of us who have only rooms, and a considerable distance away at that, would gladly welcome a small house within easy distance of work, more especially as the surrounding country is so beautiful, and certainly beneficial from a health point of view. On top of all this, what a lot of lost time, late transport and sickness could be avoided’.<sup>20</sup> One carpenter wrote a letter to the magazine on the subject giving a heartfelt account of the difficulties he was experiencing. The journey to work took him 2.25–2.50 hours and the same time to get home:

Being on night shift I have to leave home at 5.30pm at the latest and do not get back until after 10am. At the most, I get in about 5 hours sleep. These travelling times are in normal weather conditions. With the present winter snow, I realise that I just could not make it, so stop away. I have hunted high and low for other accommodation nearer Pinewood, and during the past year even slept in a tent in the orchard by the gate. Is it any wonder that I arrive at work tired, sometimes (very often, in fact) late and lost time through being indisposed. Could not the studio provide somewhere for long-distance workers to sleep? It would repay them many times over in time saved. I am a keen sportsman and would wholeheartedly support the Sports Club, but cannot under the present conditions. I would like to add that I like my job and find D&P studios the best of them all – having tried the lot.<sup>21</sup>

Other employees, particularly workers in the Art Department, however, opposed living very close to the studios. They were not impressed with the Hollywood model or living with the same people they worked with day in and day out. One report quoted writer Evelyn Waugh who described studio workers in Hollywood as ‘a people apart. They are like monks in a desert oasis, their lives revolving about a few shrines – half a dozen immense studios – two hotels – one restaurant;

<sup>19</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 16. Pinewood’s original plans envisaged the studios as part of a wider housing development in Iver Heath that was possibly intended for studio employees.

<sup>20</sup> *PMGR*, May 1947, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *PMGR*, February 1947, 1.

their sacred texts are their own publicity and the local gossip columns'.<sup>22</sup> The issue rumbled on inconclusively and complaints about poor transport persisted. Inconvenient bus timetables often resulted in workers having to walk considerable distances to alternative stops; inconsistent numbers of buses meant some became full too quickly at the end of the day. A humorous poem entitled 'The Charge of the Home-bound Brigade' published in the January 1947 issue captures something of the strong views and emotions involved in the housing issue including the lines: 'Out of the studio gate, Quickly they rush – then wait! That is their horrid fate, Poor old Six Hundred! Theirs is not to reason why, Theirs not to make reply, Theirs but to wait and sigh, Hopeless Six Hundred!'.<sup>23</sup> While items such as this invested the issue with humour it was nevertheless the case that the magazine articulated the contours of debate about a grievance that was clearly very deeply felt. The accumulation of pressure for action percolated outwards with varying results. A new bus shelter designed by John Evendon, formerly of the art department, was erected at the studio entrance. Evendon had won a prize for this work which was the result of a competition.<sup>24</sup> While this item indicates employee involvement in some aspects of transport, it is somewhat ironic that a new shelter was a way to make waiting for buses more bearable. C. E. Ayers, Operating Superintendent at London Transport, visited Pinewood and agreed to additional buses and some adjustments to timetables.<sup>25</sup> By May 1947 transport for studio workers was being considered by the British Film Producers Association (BFPA), and the Regional Transport Commissioner was asked to help. A positive development was securing travel ticket concessions for workers at Pinewood and Denham and the BFPA agreed to subsidise fares for employees on lower salaries.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *PMGR*, May 1947, 17.

<sup>23</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *PMGR*, April 1947, 18.

<sup>25</sup> *PMGR*, April 1947, 15.

<sup>26</sup> *PMGR*, May 1947, 15.

## SPORTING AND OTHER CLUBS

Despite these difficulties some employees were able to join the various sporting clubs organised from the studios, as evident from the magazine's reports on a host of competitive activities including football, tennis, cricket, table tennis, and a rifle club. As Hill has noted, such often overlooked recreational pursuits provide fascinating insights into the social history of twentieth-century Britain.<sup>27</sup> While Hill documents leisure provision in a variety of commercial, voluntary, and state sectors, the existence and significance of such pursuits in a film studio context have not previously been documented by scholars. In this respect the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* brings to light an aspect of film studio life that has been obscured by the prominence film production has understandably been given as a studio's major concern. While it is not clear how many workers were able to fully participate in Pinewood's sporting teams and clubs, matches, and competitions were organised both between studio employees and playing against teams in other studios. In this sense the activities gesture outwards, chiming with what was clearly a trend in the early post-war years when workers were either returning to studio employment or employed as new entrants to the industry. An emphasis on communal bonding was perhaps more intense as workers sought in a different context to recreate something of the camaraderie they had experienced during the war, particularly while serving in the Forces. Re-orientating film production in peacetime thus involved more than increasing British film production. It required galvanising a disparate workforce while making the sector an attractive one in which to work. While these aims were shared by the state, management, and workers, a focus on the nature and extent of leisure pursuits organised by Pinewood's employees provides rare glimpses into 'bottom-up' studio culture. Such activities were viewed by management as productive, and the BFPA covered the expenses of clubs in all studios.<sup>28</sup> A sense of a communal identity was also encouraged by opening Pinewood's review theatres to studio personnel when new films were completed.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> *PMGR*, September 1946, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, announcement on back of the issue's front cover.

Not helped by the logistical issues concerning poor transport, it clearly took time to establish a thriving leisure culture. A report noted that the Pinewood 'Sparks' football team lacked supporters at their matches. When they played Denham's 'Sparks' team on their home ground located on the Pinewood backlot in December 1946, there were only two supporters present. Denham fans were better represented, and they beat Pinewood by six goals to five.<sup>30</sup> Yet it seems that branding was all-important to inculcating the team spirit necessary for sports competitions with other rival studios. Pinewood's team colours were white shirts with green cuffs and collars and the three pine trees of D & P's (Denham and Pinewood) trademark on the pocket. These activities were made possible because of the extensive exterior lot at Pinewood and hosting activities there undoubtedly conferred on them a sense of place and identity. As well as a football pitch the tennis courts in the gardens were converted for netball, and boxing marquees were erected in the paddock.

The location of space and facilities for sports and clubs within Pinewood's interior and exterior complex tied such activities to a work-play ethos rather than experienced as separate spheres. Having activities taking place in locations that were further away from Pinewood might have conferred on them a greater sense of freedom as leisure time that was more physically and psychologically removed from everyday employment. A strategy to increase interest in the team sports was, however, through organising events that took place in larger locations that were more easily accessible to participants and supporters. Clubs and societies were being organised in other studios and a British Film Industry Sports and Gala Day was held at Uxbridge RAF Stadium in September 1947.<sup>31</sup> Ealing won overall, and the report noted 'many exciting races' took place. The runners-up were Technicolor, with Denham third, and Pinewood, one point behind, came fourth. A further note comments on the event's convivial, social function: 'The prevailing spirit of friendly rivalry encouraged competitors and spectators alike to meet and mix with colleagues from other studios'.<sup>32</sup> A fun fair and open air dancing in the evening concluded the Gala Day. In November 1947 a swimming pool gala was open to all studios, production offices, companies

<sup>30</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 15.

<sup>31</sup> *PMGR*, October 1947, 14.

<sup>32</sup> *PMGR*, October 1947, 14.

and works connected with the film industry. Sporting activities organised at the studios were representative of sport's social role as one of Britain's most powerful civil cultures. Works-based sports had advantages for both management and workers, although their existence could arouse suspicion that they were encouraged only to inculcate company loyalty.<sup>33</sup> Judging from the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, studio workers did however value these pursuits especially when one considers that being able to participate was voluntary and required considerable time, energy, and commitment. Even though the magazine was considered by some as insular, as far as its reportage on sports and social events involving other studios was concerned, this was not so pronounced.

### SOCIAL MIXING, THE CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME, AND GOSSIP

The opportunity for social mixing within film studio complexes appears to have been somewhat limited. Both Denham and Pinewood had restaurants that were generally used by management for entertaining important visitors and film stars, but these were separate from the canteens used by studio workers. It seems however that stars and employees found other ways to mix outside of their working commitments. The darts section of the Sports and Social Club had the biggest following of Pinewood's clubs. A competition held in May 1947 involved a stars' team playing *The News of the World's* visiting team. Cecil Parker threw the winning dart that won the competition for the stars.<sup>34</sup> Valerie Hobson presented the trophies at the Sports and Gala Day noted above; the event was attended by other stars including Jean Simmons and Dermot Walsh.

Stars also attended a Christmas pantomime organised by employees in October 1946 (Fig. 6.3). Pinewood's Music, Art, and Drama group prepared a production of *Cinderella*, to be performed in one of the studio theatres' smaller stages. It was an ambitious production, involving sixty studio employees including riggers, make-up artists, stagehands,

<sup>33</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures in Britain, 1918–51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 332, 380.

<sup>34</sup> *PMGR*, May 1947, 13.

hairdressers, carpenters, and lighting and effects specialists.<sup>35</sup> Some interesting Pinewood employees were involved including Geoff Woodward of the art department who wrote the script and lyrics, and a few years later worked as frame supervisor on several films produced using the Independent Frame, a time-saving production technique developed at Pinewood. The pantomime was produced by Adele Raymond, a casting director who had cast several of Powell and Pressburger's films. Film publicist Lillana Wilkie played the Prince, in addition to assisting Valerie Turner in directing the pantomime, and production secretary Cynthia Frederick acted the part of Cinderella. In playing a prominent role in producing the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* and occupying central roles in such activities, women in the studios were at the forefront of promoting a shared workplace culture.

The pantomime encouraged staff to try their hand at doing a job they were unfamiliar with: 'Although many of the people taking part are "professionals", it can truly be said that *Cinderella* is a show in the best tradition of amateur theatricals – as the distribution of parts and jobs has been so arranged that no professional takes part in his or her own professional field'.<sup>36</sup> This would appear to be the case although the décor and costumes were by Bill Holmes, an assistant art director on *In Which We Serve* (Noël Coward and David Lean, 1942), and draughtsman in the art department for *Great Expectations* (1946). The production was the most ambitious undertaking by the recently formed Music, Art, and Drama Group which had J. Arthur Rank as its President and D & P Studios' managing director Spencer Reis as Vice-President. The Group had 100 members, or 10% of studio personnel, and as well as performances activities included gramophone recitals held fortnightly in one of the studio theatres when free, and exhibitions of drawings in the picture gallery of the Club House. Members included well-known names such as musical director and composer Muir Mathieson; cinematographer Ronald Neame; art director Teddy Carrick, and film stars Deborah Kerr and Valerie Hobson.<sup>37</sup> There was clearly an 'all hands on deck' culture around the event's preparation, something film employees would have been

<sup>35</sup> *PMGR*, December 1946, 16.

<sup>36</sup> *PMGR*, December 1946, 16.

<sup>37</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 16.



**Fig. 6.3** The Christmas pantomime at Pinewood, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, January 1947, p. 8



familiar with although for some, being involved in a theatrical production was a novel experience. Due to scheduling issues the ‘Pinewood Pantomimers’ had to bring forward their performance by a week to the end of December. The shorter preparation time meant that ‘production had to be speeded up, rehearsal efforts doubled – and everybody put generally on their toes to get the show knocked into shape’.<sup>38</sup>

Even though the emphasis was primarily on fun and enjoyment, there was clearly more than a touch of professionalism evident when the ‘enthusiast’ ballet dancers were taken as part of their training for the pantomime to see the Ballet Rambert perform *Giselle*. This outing clearly made an impact since in January 1947 during the ‘revelry’ of the Pinewood’s New Year’s Ball, ‘the Pinewood Ballet took the floor to give a repeat performance of their excerpt from the Pantomime, and earned unstinted applause’.<sup>39</sup> The piano accompaniment was provided by Vivian Shaw of Cineguild’s Art Department, which he followed up with an impromptu selection during the band interval. The ballet was choreographed by sketch artist Ivor Beddoes. The pantomime’s audience consisted of members of the Music, Art, and Drama Group, other Pinewood employees, and their friends. Valerie Hobson and her mother attended, along with Spencer Reis and his wife. Illustrations were drawn of ‘Baron Nobubble’, played by Bill Holmes, and ‘The Talking Picture’ on a wall by Phil Shipway who had been second unit assistant director on *Great Expectations*. A report in the *Kinematograph Weekly* noted how working in a film studio was incorporated into the production: ‘No one in the studio escaped the wit in Geoffrey Woodward’s script, which this art department man made to follow a film business background. First crack was about studio manager Hector Coward and Cinderella’s turkey was naïvely labelled: “Shot by Rank”’.<sup>40</sup>

In view of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*’s short lifetime, the pantomime seems to perfectly represent the communal aspirations of employees to band together for something that was most definitely not a film production. This achievement was impressive considering the exceptionally harsh winter and fuel crisis at the start of 1947. Consumer goods were in short supply and rationing persisted. Employees skated in

<sup>38</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 16.

<sup>39</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Kinematograph Weekly*, 9 January 1947, 26.

Pinewood's gardens, and because the studio had its own power supply work continued despite the difficulties caused by the adverse weather conditions.<sup>41</sup> Yet it must have been difficult for workers to resist the temptation to go home at the end of the working day rather than stay longer at the studio for pantomime rehearsals. The latter can perhaps be seen as a marker of the extent to which an active leisure culture had been established. This was also evident when Pinewood's social calendar included the Paint Shop's outing to Southend in November 1946 which was organised by shop steward Bert Tabor. This social event was much desired and popular, judging from the considerable efforts made by the workers to finance the trip. Funds were subscribed by the painters themselves and enlarged with proceeds from raffles, cash forfeits from bingo and darts games held in the paint shop, a dance, and by private donations.<sup>42</sup> In July 1947 there was a joint Denham and Pinewood daytrip to Margate. The party travelled in coaches and the attractions included lunch at 'Dreamland', tea and an all-star variety show in the evening.<sup>43</sup>

The magazine's tone could at times be effervescent, especially in regular features such as the Pinewood log and gossip section. These established an 'at home' culture which shared a range of different experiences and humorous incidents. One such item reported: 'The Fitting Room cat recently produced four kittens who considered the lathes, drills and milling machines ideal playthings. General relief is now felt by all in the Shop – the kittens have been distributed among less dangerous departments, with their tails intact!'.<sup>44</sup> Another shared a welcome by-product of a recent production: 'Anybody feeling that the English summer has let them down, can borrow tropical clothes and sit under the Bamboo trees that have been made for *Black Narcissus* (1947). Rumour has it that the men working on these models have been nicknamed "The Bamboo-zleers!"'.<sup>45</sup> Another item publicised employees' hobbies, occasioned when a large colony of bees swarmed onto the roof of Pinewood's covered way. Bill Creighton, who worked in the carpenter's shop, was called in to help since it was known he was a bee enthusiast. Clad in protective headgear

<sup>41</sup> *PMGR*, December 1947, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *PMGR*, May 1947, 14.

<sup>44</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

Creighton was hoisted up to the roof where he secured the queen-bee, 'and the rest of the workers followed her meekly into a box which Bill had taken up with him. The whole colony is now thriving nicely under Bill's expert care at home'.<sup>46</sup> Creighton wrote an article on beekeeping that was published in the September 1946 issue.<sup>47</sup> The sharing of leisure pursuits outside the studio was similarly evident when a worker in the machine shop who had worked at Pinewood since it opened, was keenly interested in Football Pools. His offer to help employees complete their forms was advertised with enthusiasm.<sup>48</sup>

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND LOCATIONS

Even though the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* primarily focused on domestic matters at Pinewood, it certainly was not insular or uninterested in following developments in other studios and film industries. An article on Marc Allégret, a French director who arrived in Pinewood straight from a French studio in January 1947 to direct *Blanche Fury*, is a case in point. This highlighted some of Pinewood's advantages, such as having its own powerhouse. Allégret recalled how in France working hours were restricted owing to an acute shortage of electrical power. This meant increased night work because the drop in industrial and domestic consumption meant that more power was available. His comparison between current conditions in French studios with those prevailing at Pinewood were instructive, for example, his observation that when faced with a 'rain' shot British electricians had less reason to worry about the very real possibility of severe electric shocks since their cables were less aged and worn than those in French studios which should have been scrapped. Allégret also claimed that Pinewood's floor units were not forced into inactivity by the acute shortage of equipment affecting studios in France. Another difference was the lack of heating in French studios which meant cameramen were forced 'to add insult to injury by making their shivering subjects suck ice cubes during "takes" in an effort to minimise fog caused by warm breath meeting frost-cold air'.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *PMGR*, August 1946, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *PMGR*, September 1946, 10.

<sup>48</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 4–5.

Despite these problems Allégret noted that the French studios were still making good pictures, referencing the success in London of *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Marcel Carné, 1945). Allégret's comparative knowledge in these respects was useful, especially since he had previous experience of working in Britain on trick shots in the 'flying carpet' sequence in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). The report closed with an interesting comment on studio methods, and the exchange of ideas between workers and managers:

The equipment and material here has impressed him tremendously - but equally so did the men who use it and their methods. Soon after he arrived here Marc attended a meeting of the Studio Works Committee; he came out full of enthusiasm for what to him, was a new and thrilling departure in the business of picture making. In French Studios there exists no such system whereby the employee and employer can meet for the express purpose of exchanging ideas for the improvement of their industry. He has already written to France, urging them to adopt a similar system in studios over there. Perhaps this is the forerunner of the inter-change of talent and ideas he so earnestly hopes to see develop between his country and ours.<sup>50</sup>

This comment reflects the great instability in employment for French technicians in 1947–1948 when there were mass redundancies. Workers were in discussions with unions, but the quick turnover of employment from studio to studio meant it was difficult to establish dialogue with managers in terms of improving working methods.

When George Busby, production manager and assistant producer for *The Archers*, returned to Pinewood after a trip for location scouting in France and Italy, the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* reported on his impressions of studios he had visited including Cinecittà which was being used as a camp for displaced persons. He found the studios in Rome to be very well-equipped 'although the employment of tubular scaffolding for set building has only just been introduced. Hitherto wood has been in plentiful supply'.<sup>51</sup> This was considerably later than in Britain where tubular scaffolding had been used for some time, a trend that was accelerated by timber shortages, as well as using plaster as a wood substitute.<sup>52</sup> Busby

<sup>50</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 4–5.

<sup>51</sup> *PMGR*, December 1946, 6–9.

<sup>52</sup> *PMGR*, February 1947, 2.

considered the studios in Nice to be well-equipped, ‘with sets of a quality second to none’, and he witnessed the first colour film in the post-war period being processed in Agfacolor. In Paris, Busby visited Pathé and the old Paramount studios. Another issue featured an article on Arab films by British matte painter and storyboard artist Ivor Beddoes.<sup>53</sup> The first Cannes Film Festival was attended and reported on by Anthony Dowling, an assistant director of publicity.<sup>54</sup> When productions were shot using overseas locations, such as *The Red Shoes* (1948), the local conditions, atmosphere, transport, equipment, and collaborations with other technicians were detailed in various articles, providing interesting perspectives on the trend for location shooting.<sup>55</sup> Such incidents and reports opened-up the magazine’s content to international film news.

### ARTWORK AND CARTOONS

The magazine was well-produced, featuring cartoons by studio employees. These provided amusing visual commentaries on several themes. One cartoon (Fig. 6.4) was titled ‘Pinewood Phantasmagoria!’.<sup>56</sup> The full-page feature contained eight sketches of people who worked in the studios. Their names, located underneath each sketch, were spelt out with missing letters so that readers had to work out who the person was by studying the sketch. The figures included production designer Alfred Junge, depicted towering over some tell-tale decorations with the caption: ‘The Genie of *Black Narcissus* sets’. Another cartoon (Fig. 6.5) was titled ‘Pinewood Fashionotabilities’, a full page of humorous illustrations featuring the many different types of costume seen at Pinewood.<sup>57</sup> While the artists are not generally credited, one line drawing by H. Hale entitled ‘Art Director’s Dilemma’ (Fig. 6.6) was a graphic comment illustrating the tricky issues of perspective and a wry comment: ‘That fly on the ceiling isn’t in true perspective’.<sup>58</sup> A visual commentary on the work of carpenters working on the busy studio exterior lot was also reproduced

<sup>53</sup> *PMGR*, September 1946, 15.

<sup>54</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 4–5.

<sup>55</sup> *PMGR*, July 1947, 4–7.

<sup>56</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *PMGR*, January 1946, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *PMGR*, October 1946, 15.

in cartoon form.<sup>59</sup> Photographs were reproduced in a ‘still of the month’ feature such as Cornell Lucas’s dramatic shot of two silhouetted figures standing in the foreground with a lighting set up casting light on the stage floor to illuminate scaffolding in front of them.<sup>60</sup> The magazine’s interest in creative pursuits further extended to reporting exhibitions organised by the Art Group which were displayed in one of the studios’ corridors.<sup>61</sup>

These examples in particular show film studios as places in which leisure/social activities exuded a somewhat playful, carnivalesque atmosphere. The extent to which these operated under the radar of managerial oversight is unknown, but the effervescent ethos of the *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* gives an impression of excess and enthusiasm despite the adverse circumstances experienced by the film industry at the time of its publication. This resilient spirit communicates something of the studios as a partially separate sphere from their financial control and management which, as we have seen from Chapter 5, operated from central London. While there are photographic records of J. Arthur Rank visiting Pinewood and he clearly had a personal investment in the studios’ success, his offices in Park Lane were some distance from the studios. The managerial controls he sought to put in place were frustrated in part because they were perceived as outside interference. While the drive towards economic production was harnessed within Pinewood’s culture of survival many of its creative aspects, as documented in Chapters 3 and 4, were more the result of filmmakers’ ingenuity and expertise. The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* provides additional evidence for this impression, with its focus on filmmaking practices and insights into a leisure culture that was irrepressibly creative.

## CELEBRATING PINEWOOD’S HISTORY AND SPACES

Respect for Pinewood’s history and the people who worked there in the past was another consistent feature. Some reports highlighted employees whose contributions are not normally recorded such as Ben Goff, General Foreman of Messrs. Boots, who was engaged in construction work in the studios. Goff had been employed as a brick-layer foreman when Pinewood

<sup>59</sup> *PMGR*, September 1946, 12.

<sup>60</sup> *PMGR*, February 1947, 15.

<sup>61</sup> *PMGR*, November 1947, 16.

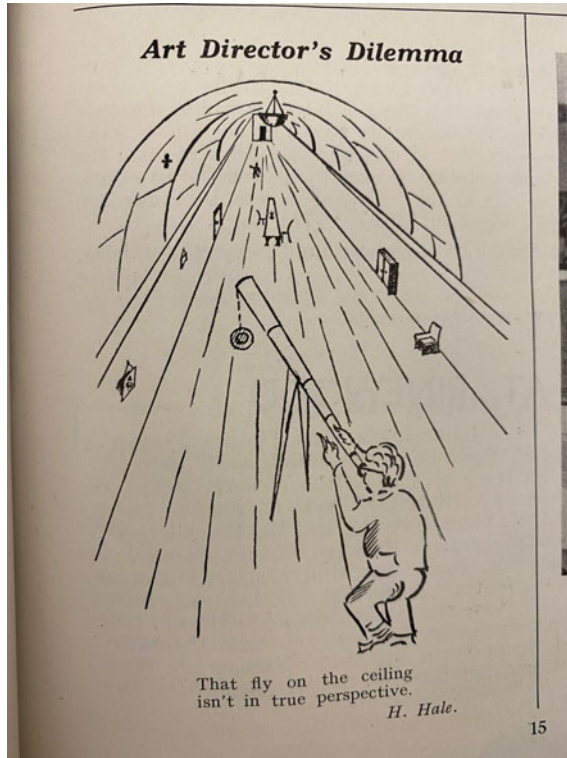






Fig. 6.5 'Pinewood Fashionotabilities' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, January 1947, p. 14





**Fig. 6.6** 'Art Director's Dilemma' cartoon, *The Pinewood Merry-Go-Round*, October 1946, p. 15

was being built. He was back at Pinewood in October 1946 supervising construction work with four colleagues who worked with him when the first bricks were laid in the studios. He recalled that the first brick was laid by Mrs Spencer Reis, wife of Charles Boot whose engineering and building company designed and constructed the studios following Boot's purchase in May 1935 of extensive parkland and Heatherden Hall, a country mansion, located at Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire.<sup>62</sup> Frank Ellis, first camera assistant on *Green for Danger* (1946), worked on the

<sup>62</sup> *PMGR*, November 1947, 16. See Chapter 1 for further detail on Pinewood's building and construction.

first camera ever to turn at Pinewood. Before the studios were officially opened in 1936 an acoustic test was arranged by the Hon. Richard Norton, and Ellis came over from Elstree to assist. Another former worker was Robert J. Blackburn, Chief Electrician, who had worked at Pinewood from 1936 to the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>63</sup> This honouring of personnel encouraged the impression that employees, past and present, belonged to a Pinewood family. One report emphasised the persistence of key issues affecting the film industry. When veteran film producer Cecil Hepworth was shown around Pinewood in November 1946 by his old friend Tom White, a production manager for Independent Producers, a major point of discussion was the export of British films, a topic the magazine reflected on by publishing choice enthusiastic quotations from American publications about the British films spearheading Rank's post-war export drive.<sup>64</sup>

The *Pinewood Merry-Go-Round* showed how Pinewood's working spaces, corridors, and exterior lot could easily be adapted for purposes other than filmmaking. The studios' expansive layout clearly had potential for use by the various clubs and sporting activities reported in its pages such as darts matches in the workers' canteen, exhibitions in the corridors, and trade union meetings held in the stages. For some, the sprawling complex could be difficult to navigate, as when a visitor reported getting lost in 'the maze of narrow stairways and passages of the Old Club House', and the incongruity of 'huge and starkly utilitarian [administrative] blocks married to a dignified Georgian mansion'.<sup>65</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, the co-presence of old and new architecture was a distinctive feature of Pinewood's physical infrastructure, in contrast to Denham's overall more overtly modernist design which can be seen to express much of its character as a studio.<sup>66</sup> When a visitor got lost when looking for the offices of Wessex Films he encountered a cleaner polishing a balustrade on one of the long corridors who told him of her great fondness for the building, having worked at Pinewood since 1936.<sup>67</sup> Such interest in

<sup>63</sup> *PMR*, August 1946, 2.

<sup>64</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 2–3. Tom White featured prominently in the discussions of post-war technical developments featured in Chapter 2.

<sup>65</sup> *PMGR*, April 1947, 4–5.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Street, 'Designing the Ideal Studio in Britain', *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 348–9.

<sup>67</sup> *PMGR*, February 1947, 16. The cleaner referred to the studio as 'a lovely old place'.

the studios' physical architecture reflects public curiosity about the work of film studios. The magazine noted that the 1947 Ideal Home Exhibition held at Olympia, London, featured thirteen exhibits from British studios, three of which were from Pinewood. The Archers sent a replica of Sister Clodagh's bedroom in the palace set from *Black Narcissus*; a model of an Irish cottage from *Captain Boycott* (1947), and designs for *Take My Life* (1947) which showcased the work of the art department directed by production designer John Bryan.<sup>68</sup> As noted by Hollie Price, such exhibitions were designed to illuminate 'the world behind the silver screen', featuring miniature reconstructions of sets from contemporary films which showed a variety of periods, styles, and locales produced by skilled craftsmen in the studios.<sup>69</sup>

### WINDING DOWN THE *PINEWOOD MERRY-GO-ROUND*

In December 1947 the last issue of the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* was published. The reasons given were continuing paper shortages and the amount of time it took to produce each issue. In the context of continuing post-war austerity, the editors decided to cease publication on the grounds that: 'We cannot argue that [the magazine] is really essential'. This verdict was not without regret since its purpose had helped to 'create a good spirit all round' the studios, and 'we can look forward to its return when the crisis is over'.<sup>70</sup> Appreciative statements praising the magazine's achievements by some key figures in the film industry were published. Sidney Gilliat reflected on its community ethos: 'It was nice to have a place of our own where flashlight-conditioned producers and stars could play second fiddle to Bill Sparks' brand new twins, or Joe Chippy's silver wedding, or the Pinewood F.C. [Football Club]'s tiring out yet again one man short'.<sup>71</sup> Ian Dalrymple regretted its passing, commenting that 'it should have been the last economy', and Michael Powell said it had readers 'all over the world', perhaps referring to how it reached overseas through staff passing it around when working on location. For Emeric

<sup>68</sup> *PMGR*, March 1947, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Hollie Price, *Picturing Home: Domestic life and modernity in 1940s British film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 137–8.

<sup>70</sup> *PMGR*, December 1947, 18–9.

<sup>71</sup> *PMGR*, December 1947, 18.

Pressburger, the magazine's high quality meant that a 'shabby', cheaper version was out of the question.<sup>72</sup>

The magazine was never revived, so the existing record cannot be compared with a later publication from Pinewood.<sup>73</sup> For the years 1946–1947 it however provided many insights into what it felt like to work in a studio and how workers socialised outside of working hours. As well as documenting a wide range of activities the magazine had drawn attention to novel uses of Pinewood's spaces such as an Art Exhibition staged in the South Corridor, and training for a forthcoming boxing tournament carried out in a marquee erected in the paddock area. It maintained a light touch, even when the business of filmmaking took up more of its pages, such as a regular feature initiated in November 1946 entitled 'Dispatches from the Floor' which provided monthly surveys of shooting progress. The reports could be detailed, such as for *Take My Life*, which included information on back projected scenes, a model tunnel, set constructions, and obtaining close-up shots of railway engines.<sup>74</sup> Saving time and the importance of achieving production efficiencies were highlighted in the report on *Captain Boycott*.<sup>75</sup>

An essay competition inspired by a 'studio talk' by Ronald Neame sought the views of 'Pinewoodians' on what sort of films should be made at Pinewood. The winner, Jean McLellan of the scenario department, emphasised the importance of British films that delivered 'something other than mere entertainment', citing *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) as an ideal example. McLellan also argued that films based on English literature and history would be well received abroad, and that these films need not be too costly. In view of this result, it is perhaps no surprise that the competition's judges were George Archibald, chair of Independent Producers, and David Lean.<sup>76</sup> In this respect the magazine reflected current trends in the immediate post-war years, trends the Rank

<sup>72</sup> *PMGR*, December 1947, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Sports and social activities clearly continued at Pinewood as well as in other studios, as reported in *The Cinema Studio*, a supplement to *The Cinema News and Property Gazette* published weekly from March 1948 to November 1951. This publication was far less lavish than the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* and did not cover social activities at the studios in great detail.

<sup>74</sup> *PMGR*, November 1946, 12.

<sup>75</sup> *PMGR*, January 1947, 16–7.

<sup>76</sup> *PMGR*, November 1947, 3.

Organisation sought to accelerate as the production crisis deepened. Yet the publication undoubtedly was a vehicle for a wider range of issues, including trade union commentaries on matters such as film quota legislation, transport and providing a forum for debate on issues such as the need for a shorter working week. It also publicised the contingency fund which provided relief for studio workers experiencing 'hardship' or 'distress'. Co-funded by contributions from employees, D & P Management, and Independent Producers, the fund was administered by representatives of the ETU, ACT, and D & P Management.<sup>77</sup> The aim of spreading knowledge about employees' work was important in studios as large as Pinewood. An extended feature, for example, was run about night staff.<sup>78</sup> It was illuminating about the very different atmosphere in the studios as many key activities continued into the night, and its tone encouraged respect for workers active in unsocial hours who were presumably less able to participate in the clubs and sports activities.

The publication's convivial tone reflects studio employees' energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity about each other's lives and work in the shared enterprise of British filmmaking at a crucial time in its history. Such features evidence the pride and pleasure studio workers took in their work. A similar trend can be observed in other occupations, as well as how fostering a sense of loyalty to a particular workplace was largely a positive experience for employees.<sup>79</sup> This is not to imply that there were no conflicts or recurrent pressure points which tested those very loyalties. When Pinewood was officially re-opened after the war a ceremony and exhibition were held to mark the occasion, but 'while the delegates were being shown around the studios, a token half-day strike was staged by workers who had assisted in preparations for the opening, as a protest against the fact that they were not invited to the ceremony'.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, a report noted that 25.3% of day workers and 32.7% of night staff were absent on 5th March 1947 for reasons that were 'unclear' beyond the persistence of transport problems and the abnormally harsh weather conditions.<sup>81</sup> This supports Hill's argument that interpreting the

<sup>77</sup> *PMGR*, April 1947, 10.

<sup>78</sup> *PMGR*, February 1947, 10–11.

<sup>79</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures in Britain*, 128.

<sup>80</sup> *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 April 1946, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *PMGR*, April 1947, 6–7.

social functions of sport and leisure purely as forms of social control fails to recognise them as more complex processes ‘which themselves have a determining influence over people’s lives’.<sup>82</sup> While they did not necessarily confer a culture of satisfaction with the workplace, their existence and vitality as recorded in the pages of the *Pinewood-Merry-Go-Round* nevertheless convey a sense of their supportive role in the working lives of film industry employees.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



<sup>82</sup> Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 2.