'Look behind you!': memories of cinema-going in the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood

Sarah Stubbings

Roger Bromley, in his study of British memory in the inter-war period, has written that: 'Memory is not simply the property of individuals, nor just a matter of psychological processes, but a complex cultural and historical phenomenon constantly subject to revision, amplification and "forgetting".'¹ This perspective reverberates through the conceptual underpinnings of this book. While personality and personal history affect the content, intensity and emotional tone of a memory, the social and cultural context of memory also exerts a substantial influence on its form and experience. This chapter explores formations of memory in a contemporary British context, specifically as it relates to memories of cinema-going that have been reproduced in local newspapers. Based on research into the memory narratives of a particular local city press, the study argues that personal memory of cinema is socially constructed by its context to create certain culturally sanctioned discourses, in this case figured around age, community, and city identity.

If the last two chapters raised issues of history and memory through particular historical and commemorative texts and events in the 1920s, this chapter moves the focus of concern to popular reminiscence for early cinema in the 1990s. Rather than consider the memory of particular films, it concentrates on the memory of cinema-going itself. This has become increasingly significant within forms of oral and questionnaire-based analysis. Annette Kuhn's questionnaire and interview-based study of the memory of cinema-going in the 1930s, for example, found that films were markedly less important to her respondents than the activity of going to the cinema.² Kuhn's work is part of a small but growing field investigating the personal memory of cinema-going, including work by Jackie Stacey, who is concerned extensively with women's recollections of

female stars.³ In contrast with the questionnaire-based methodologies of Stacey and Kuhn, utilising newspapers as source material directs research towards patterns of memory within media discourse rather than towards the solicitation and interpretation of memories from sample participants. This more closely examines how private memories are figured within recurrent themes and images of a sub-genre of memory narrative that has become increasingly significant within local newspapers. In broad terms, this methodology facilitates analysis of particular (generational) memories but also, and significantly, the role of the press in fostering, formulating and structuring these memories within the context of local discourse and in terms of particular commercial imperatives.

The examples of memory narratives discussed in this chapter are all taken from the local press of Nottingham and concentrate on generational memories of cinema-going in what has been discursively construed as the 'Golden Age' of cinema, a period figured around the Hollywood studio era of the 1930s and 1940s. As a medium-sized English city, Nottingham's cinema fans of the 1930s and 1940s could choose from over fifty cinemas and the city's current population includes a substantial number who remember trips to Nottingham's cinemas in their youth. Memory narratives relating to local cinema experience have been developed most significantly within the city's only daily newspaper, the *Nottingham Evening Post*. This trend began in the 1980s, when the memory or heritage imperative in British cultural life, described by critics such as Raphael Samuel and Robert Hewison, became acute.⁴ A significant additional source of local media memory, however, has been the occasional supplement of the *Evening Post*, called *Bygones*. As the name suggests, this supplement examines various elements of the city's past, and has, on a number of occasions, taken cinema as its focal point. The memory narratives contained in the *Nottingham Evening Post* and in *Bygones* are in the form of articles and letters based upon personal cinema reminiscence. These memories are of experiences between the 1920s and the 1950s, with those of the 1930s and 1940s forming the vast majority. Overwhelmingly, the period is remembered fondly, a 'Golden Age' where popular cinema and cinema-going were seen to be at their pinnacle.

While some memories of cinema in Nottingham's local press are generated in response to a particular news item, such as the closure or demolition of a specific cinema, as many are stand-alone items.

The memories that emerge in the letters and articles that I examine cover four main themes: identity, community, morality and decline. While there is necessarily some overlap between them, this chapter will examine these four areas in order to draw out their significance in terms of the process of framing memory in cultural terms. These themes all have a powerful social resonance, which partly explains their prominence and serviceability within the press. Not only do they provide the kind of human interest stories that James Curran and Jean Seaton⁵ suggest has become instrumental to British local press since the early 1930s, memory narratives are also strategic in commercial terms. Significantly, they have the function of appealing to an important sub-section of media readership in that of the elderly, the demographic audience towards whom the memory narratives are substantially geared. Additionally, however, memory narratives are cost-effective in terms of news production. According to Rod Pilling, the local press is 'largely staffed at reporter level by trainees' who 'typically undertake the greater part of that work in the office'⁶ due to low staffing levels. Articles comprising memories sent in by readers are ideal in this context for they are less labour-intensive than stories and features requiring active or investigative research.

Stacey's study of female fans in the 1940s and 1950s makes reference to 'the negotiation of "public" discourses and "private" narratives'.⁷ This sense of negotiation between the public and the private has direct bearing for memory narratives as they are used, framed, and published in local newspapers. Not least, individualised memories form, as they themselves are informed by, a sense of iconic recall. Visual and written memories of Nottingham cinema-going frequently coalesce into a hardened set of impressions: of cinema queues snaking down the street, of the respective merits of the flea pit and the picture palace, of the connotations of the back row. What might be called a 'genre of memory' is developed in the local press, a structured set of themes that work to include certain issues and that can frequently marginalise others. Aspects of cinema-going that are rarely discussed in Nottingham press narratives include, to name just a few, cinema smells, smoking, the unwanted advances from strangers (that fuelled moralists' opposition to cinema in the 1930s and 1940s) and the possibilities of sex and coupling enabled by the dark 'privacy' of the cinema.⁸ As referred to earlier, films and film stars are generally, although not exclusively, presented as a secondary part of the

experience. While all of this may not constitute a deliberate foreclosure of memory, a form of sanctioned reminiscence does emerge, based upon organising themes, images and memory topics.

In his book, *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton offers a persuasive account of the ways in which societal frameworks mould not only the form but also the content of social memory.⁹ The case of personal cinema memory, situated in the public realm of the local press, foregrounds a number of issues about the constitution of memory and identity for particular social groups. At one level, it can provide insights into the operations of memory and nostalgia as they are figured around the lived experience of cinema and the city. At the same time, memory narratives in the local press raise issues about the ways in which these forms of reminiscence are figured discursively. That is to say, the way they join, or are seen to inflect, contemporary debates in the present about issues such as criminality or the perception of declining moral standards. This chapter will now go on to consider the interconnection of personal and public memory as it relates to four key themes in the sub-genre of memory narrative heretofore described. To reiterate, these are identity, community, morality, and decline.

Identity and community

The psychologist Joseph Fitzgerald has argued that ‘personal identity is a culturally and historically specific notion’, which he locates within modern Western society. He relates the development of personal identity to the narrative mode used in literature, something that is ‘used extensively in the socialization process by which new members are taught the underlying themes and values of the group through “true” stories, fables and allegories’.¹⁰ I would suggest that film, as a dominant cultural medium, also offers a valuable means of studying identity formation or, in this case, memories of the process. Fitzgerald’s 1988 study of reminiscence found that, for all age groups, those surveyed reported that their greatest number of vivid memories (which he terms flash-bulb memories) were of events between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five – the period which is crucially important to adult identity formation.¹¹ This is also the age when cinema attendance is generally at its highest and the age that recurs most frequently in newspaper accounts dealing with Nottingham cinema memory. This section examines the causal connection

between memory, cinema and identity formation, measured through the lens of nostalgia. As sociologist Fred Davis comments, nostalgia is 'one of the means . . . we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities'.¹²

An important element of cinema nostalgia, foregrounded in newspaper accounts, is the fondly remembered imitation of film stars. This is specifically measured in terms of clothing, manner and hairstyles. So Margaret Corkill relates how she and her friends followed film stars closely and 'tried to imitate their hairstyles and make-up'.¹³ This theme is important to the fascinating and highly detailed reminiscences of Bill Cross in the *Nottingham Evening Post*. He recollects he and his friends 'worshipping' and copying the style of film stars as teenagers in the 1930s, particularly stars of gangster films such as James Cagney. For Bill, this even led to being able to recreate film star lifestyle at the cinema with a girl: 'You in your James Cagney outfit, she in her Joan Blondell dress, you were the stars of the screen for the night.'¹⁴ The surroundings were crucial to his depiction of reliving film star lifestyle at the cinema – he recounts dating as a young man at the plush, luxurious cinemas in Nottingham, the Adelphi and the Ritz, in contrast to his childhood haunt the Palace that 'had another name, the Flea Pit'.¹⁵ He clearly presents this development in terms of the lifecycle in which dating at a luxury cinema symbolises both adulthood and a rise in social status as a whole. So inside the Ritz, 'After the hard-up times as a boy you were a young man, nice clothes, money in your pocket and a lovely girl on your arm.'¹⁶

Many memories of cinema-going in local press accounts focus on cinema's role in key aspects of the lifecycle and key moments of identity formation, particularly in terms of courtship. For many, a trip to the cinema was their first date, and one couple even recalled getting engaged in the cinema.¹⁷ For girls, a date at the cinema also indicated the level of a boy's regard; if he really liked her he would arrange to meet outside and pay, otherwise the arrangement would be to meet inside so the girl paid her own way.¹⁸ For Audrey Booth, writing in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, her first date was at the cinema and the boy met her outside and asked her to give him the money as he didn't like girls to pay for themselves!¹⁹ This recollection is also significant with regard to the effect of nostalgia on the emotional tone of her memory, resulting in a rather humiliating experience being transmuted over time into something that she 'has had many a laugh about since'.²⁰

The same process is evident in Mrs Whittaker's defining memory of a Nottingham cinema, the Futurist. A film had been made at the factory where she worked, which included some footage of herself and a friend. On its release they excitedly went to see it, their anticipation piqued by the prospect of seeing themselves on screen. However, they found that they had been edited out. Mrs Whittaker claims 'We were so disappointed, but I often think back'.²¹ The implication of the 'but' is that her perspective has since altered, and this inference is borne out by the title of the piece, 'Happy memories of the Futurist'. The original disappointment has subsequently become wrought into nostalgia for the time as a whole, a sentimental memory of youth. As she describes, 'we were just 14 years of age!'²² Mrs Whittaker's remembered eagerness, hope and enthusiasm as a fourteen-year-old emerge as the key memory, the event at the Futurist a tangible means of accessing that former self and locating it within a specific time and milieu. The telling exclamation mark suggests an incredulity that she could ever have been so young and naïve. This indicates both a perception of her former identity and a nostalgic sense of how that identity has changed over time. As Davis claims, an important element of nostalgia is that it fosters the belief that 'we have in the interim "grown" and "matured" and are now better equipped to confront the considerably more challenging demands of the present'.²³

The further significance of this item is Mrs Whittaker's call to her friend and co-worker, and to other readers, 'do you remember?'²⁴ This indicates that personal memories are linked to ideas of collective experience and to the notion of community. Indeed, the invocation of community is central to many memory narratives in the local press and this functions on two levels. Firstly, there is an attempt to recreate a (lost) community of those who remember, as Mrs Whittaker aims to achieve. Secondly, there is an infusion of historical nostalgia in the recall of community life; memories of a shared leisure practice are often contrasted implicitly or explicitly with the individualistic tendencies of contemporary culture. Andrew Hoskins states that societies 'turn to the past, in an attempt to find some kind of anchor in the characteristically fragmented experience of modern life'.²⁵ Cinema memory invests in, and enables, a sense of community that frequently plays against the perception of social diffusion in the present.

This sense of community is expedient to the local press. Indeed, one of the key functions of the local press is in fostering communal

identities. For Pilling, local newspapers are successful when they make their readers feel part of a community.²⁶ As such, they will frequently instigate campaigns about issues such as transport systems, shopping facilities or social problems as a means of furthering the perception of the city as 'our' city. More importantly in terms of the commercial imperatives of the press, developing an imagined community at the local level provides a means of securing readership loyalty to 'our' local paper. In this way, city identity and press identity are inter-linked.

As a means of achieving this highly productive mutual dependence between city and press identity, many retrospective accounts of cinema-going in the local press close with an invitation for readers to write in and share their memories. In *Bygones* there is a special text box inviting readers to send 'any memories or photographs you want to share'.²⁷ This technique fulfils the important role of strengthening readers' loyalty by asking them to participate in the process and formation of city memory. On a wider level, the technique helps to foster a sense of ownership among the readers, a feeling that this is 'their' newspaper appealing to 'their' generation and interest group. The following quote from the *Nottingham Herald*, a rival city newspaper to the *Evening Post*, is typical in this respect. 'Do you remember the old Nottingham picture houses or have fond memories or experiences of a night at the flicks? If so, write to us'.²⁸ In this example, the newspaper clearly signals the type of anecdote it will print. Rather than memories of moral scandal or economic want, cinema-going is associated with all things fond, nostalgic and quintessentially communitarian.

Cinema-going from the 1920s to the 1950s is almost decidedly remembered as a collective experience. One of the activities that audiences frequently shared, and that is duly recalled, was that of singing along with the musical interludes. Vocal participation in Nottingham's Ritz cinema is especially remembered due to its well-respected and nationally broadcast organist in the 1930s and 40s, Jack Helyer. Kath Price recounts 'Memories of Jack Helyer and our sing-songs during the interval when he came up through the floor of the stage on that wonderful Wurlitzer organ and we sang from the song sheet hanging down from the ceiling'.²⁹ The organist was both a spectacle (his appearing through the floor with its resonance of a magical apparition and the splendour of the organ itself) and a symbol of audience participation, giving everybody the opportunity

to sing together. Indeed, a letter in the Nottinghamshire Archives states that Helyer's 'forte was singalong medleys' which 'created the special atmosphere that is unique to community singing'.³⁰

The place of community within the activity and process of cultural recall has been taken up by theorists of memory and nostalgia. Davis suggests a generational sense of community in his discussion of 'the powerful generation-delineating properties to which nostalgia lends itself so easily'. For Davis, 'images from our past . . . seem to iconically bestow an age-graded distinctiveness'.³¹ And for Robyn Fivush, Catherine Haden and Elaine Reese, 'joint remembering, or reminiscing, serves a very special purpose, that of creating interpersonal bonds based on a sense of shared history'.³² Raymond Williams refers to generational identity in his theory about structures of feeling. In writing of the social links that produce emotions, Williams suggests that 'what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period'.³³ Cinema in its Golden Age, the time of its largest audience base, is a valuable means of illustrating such structures of feeling at work. For those who remember cinema through the local press, reminiscence is a discursive means of community-building. While any city newspaper will have different readership constituencies with potentially competing investments in the idea of community, memory narratives are a means of courting and displaying a generational sense of community that, in a wider capacity, can enrich a broad-based notion of the city's lived experience.

Some articles and letters about cinema's past offer a strong sense that going to the cinema was instrumental in forging, and not simply hosting, community sensibilities. An article in the *Nottingham Evening Post* comprising a selection of readers' memories about cinema in their youth states that 'local cinemas played such a vital part in bringing communities together'.³⁴ A factor in this is that many cinemas between the 1930s and 1950s were in residential areas around the city. These, rather than cinemas located in the city centre, feature most in readers' memories in the local press, unless the coverage relates to a specific city centre event. For the large number of suburbs built in the 1930s, a cinema tended to be the only leisure or community facility. In Nottingham there were few pubs in these suburbs as most of the housing built in Nottingham in the period comprised council estates that were almost always refused

that provision. There is some evidence, then, that for those who moved to a new estate in the period, going to the local cinema was the only way of mingling socially with others of that new community. This included children, enticed by the popular children's clubs that began in the 1930s, where 'millions of youngsters spent their Saturday mornings marvelling at the wonders on screen in their local picture palace'.³⁵

The fact that cinema was a dominant mass medium in the 1930s also bears upon the centrality of community in many memory narratives. As the *Nottingham Evening Post* makes clear, 'going to the pictures was very much a shared experience' which offered 'the sheer pleasure of roaring with laughter amidst a thousand others'.³⁶ In all of these ways, cinema is often remembered as the place where the cinema-goer met others from his or her neighbourhood, where s/he belonged in a club as a child, where s/he sang along with the accompaniments, shouted advice to the stars, and shared all the powerful emotions that films of the 'Golden Age' could invoke. Cinema-going is invariably linked with powerful impressions of community in the memory narratives of the local press, a sense of remembrance that not only helps foster and secure a particular readership but that also plays off and within contemporary figurations of city identity and cultural value. In the following section, I will examine questions of value as they relate specifically to narratives of morality and decline.

Morality and decline

In the memory narratives of *Bygones* and the *Nottingham Evening Post*, films of the Golden Age are remembered as being fervently moral in nature. This morality is recalled fondly as a secure touchstone. As a respondent to an oral history interview in Nottingham so effectively phrased it, 'In those days films were black and white both in terms of colour and their morality'.³⁷ As in particular memories of community, the overriding sense amongst the elderly generation is that morality has declined since their youth. For many respondents, the morality on screen in the Golden Age was evidence of values in the society as a whole, values that have subsequently declined.

The morality evinced by films of the Golden Age is taken by many readers to explain the widespread level of audience participation. So, according to an article of cinema reminiscence in one Nottingham

paper: 'to the hero we shouted in unison "Look behind yer!" or if he hesitated to shoot, "Shoot! Shoot!" we chanted'.³⁸ This type of reminiscence evokes the sense that good and evil were clearly differentiated on film as in life; no memories recall any grey or uncertain characters or plots onscreen. The audience as a whole, we are told retrospectively, felt the same, so 'Good always triumphed over evil and there is no doubt whose side we were on'.³⁹ In the memory of audience response, there is an insistence that everyone felt the same and responded in the same way, reflecting a broader set of shared values (as well as cinematic expectations). This implied sense of a strong moral compass amongst Nottingham cinema-goers of the 1930s and 1940s is particularly significant in the context of the 1990s, where issues of morality were frequently discussed in relation to urban criminality. In a time where crime waves were being seized upon in local news coverage – largely provoked by Nottingham's higher than average crime-rate, made conspicuous by national surveys rating crime such as burglary, car theft and mugging⁴⁰ – the inclusion of personal memories helped generate perspectives about city identity in the past and for the future. More specifically, memory became a news strategy for maintaining the stake and readership of the elderly as it responded to community dramas in the present day.

Memory of cinema's inherent morality in the Golden Age extends from the films to the experience of cinema-going itself. The role of authority in the Golden Age and the attitude of cinema-going children and young people are central to this form of recall. The commissioner and doorman are remembered as the representatives of cinema's vociferous policing of behaviour: they were the people who disciplined any rowdy children in the Saturday children's clubs. Their smart uniforms are especially remembered as central to their unarguable authority. Hence the following quotes are representative: 'the commissioner was in control in his peaked hat, his smart uniform in gold braid, military style' and 'the commissioner or doorman would keep us all in order . . . very smart in his uniform adorned with gold braid'.⁴¹ Another respondent remembers 'commissionaires in military-style uniforms . . . controlling the queues' and adds the interesting personal reflection that 'I was always rather disappointed when I saw these power wielding people out in their ordinary clothes – they didn't look at all important then'.⁴² If the increasingly militarised 1930s and 1940s were a period where uniforms became a powerful signature of authority, a

sense of regimental discipline carried forth into the cinema clubs inhabited by Nottingham's children.

While the behaviour of children at the cinema is often remembered to be rowdy and noisy – some letters even refer to children as hooligans – there is an overwhelming sense that behaviour was never a serious threat or danger. One respondent recalls that after eating bananas, pranks would begin. He writes: 'you see we were hooligans in those days as we slung the skins over the balcony!'⁴³ And another that 'When one of us had no money to get in we all kept guard while he or she sneaked in, but we always got caught. Oh such criminals!'⁴⁴ Both of the exclamation marks that end these reminiscences and their overall tone are typical of this group of memories. The recollected 'hooliganism' and 'criminality' are seen more as high spirits or as minor misdemeanours. Either way, such infringements were always dealt with effectively by the uniformed cinema staff or by parents, and those reminiscing seem pleased that order was maintained. The memories are comic rather than threatening or frightening; none of the memories tell of any violence, vandalism or danger inflicted by Golden Age audiences. Who would dare? As local cinema historian, Rick Wilde, recalls, boisterous children were dealt with firmly, 'law and order was enforced with a rod of iron'.⁴⁵

For the press, this type of memory is often utilised to fuel debate about youth and criminality in the present day, inflecting a discourse of social change, especially as it bears upon manners of behaviour and levels of youth discipline. For those who proffer memories of cinema-going in the local press, a picture of decline frequently emerges, set in relation to relaxed expectations of personal probity and against a more aggressive and materialistic contemporary milieu. These rather clichéd notions of social decline are not uncommon within structures of personal and cultural nostalgia. As Davis claims about nostalgic reminiscence: 'present circumstances and condition . . . compared to the past are invariably felt to be . . . more bleak, grim, wretched'.⁴⁶ However, certain incidents and events can mobilise a focused sense of decline, related to particular news issues that may invoke youth (mis)behaviour, or that may relate more broadly to manifestations of corporate infiltration in the city sphere.

The announcement that the city centre Odeon (Britain's first split-screen cinema) was to close in January 2001 is a marked example of the latter, inspiring letters to the *Nottingham Evening Post* mourning what one writer saw as a general decline in the city's sense of

heritage and identity. She wrote: 'We know changes to our city centre are inevitable through the years but are they really for the better?'⁴⁷ Another letter by a man who used to work at the Odeon commented that 'I was very upset to hear about its closure. It was *the* cinema in Nottingham.'⁴⁸ These comments are part of a wide sense among older generations that the city centre is being devalued. Significantly, this can be set in relation to new forms of city investment, most notably an inner-city urban entertainment complex that emerged in 2001 that combined brand bars and restaurants with a fifteen-screen Warner Village.⁴⁹ While the opening of the complex was met with considerable news fanfare, especially honed for the young professional and middle-aged target users, elderly respondents often saw it as a white elephant. As one letter stated: 'who is going to fill the many bars and cinemas during the week?'⁵⁰ To many elderly respondents, the mall-like complex was further evidence of Nottingham's perceived decline, and was contrasted with the individual splendour of the Ritz in the 1930s.

For many, the Odeon functioned as a signifier of certain standards and values, and has been mourned in the same way as the demise of Nottingham's high-class shops, such as Pearson's department store and Burton's food shop. In addition, the closure of the Odeon, along with that of the original *Evening Post* Building and the long-standing Co-operative store, is seen by some to mark a deterioration of the city's architectural heritage. A further letter on the subject of the Odeon's closure wrote: 'It has tried to compete with the noisy monsters that now go under the name of cinemas where there is no personal service any more.'⁵¹ A cinema's closure and the re-use or demolition of the building can make people protective of their memories. In this case, local press narratives are infused with characteristic phrases such as 'they can't take my memories away'. While Davis claims that for the elderly there is 'the apparent *unquestioned* belief that the past was better, that one's belief to that effect is a true reflection of *real* change in the world',⁵² memories can often function discursively in response to tangible change, in certain cases bearing upon the restructuring of the city's public space and leisure culture.

Either stated or inferred, the past is constantly referred to as superior to the present. So Margaret Corkill remembers people eating fish suppers, pork pies and oranges in the cinema but 'Curiously enough I don't remember these old cinemas being grubby or littered'.⁵³ Interestingly, for some, in tandem with recollections of the

palatial grandeur of the old cinemas go recollections of them being flea-ridden and of the usherettes going down the aisle spraying air freshener. Any sense of tension between these two perceptions is invariably absent. For the elderly, today's cinemas have far less atmosphere than the ones that live on in memory. For one man, 'One can only look back and marvel at the wonderful entertainment these movie palaces gave us'.⁵⁴ For most, the films too have declined since their heyday: 'The films are not as good now . . . we never come away saying we'd enjoyed because we'd had a good cry!'⁵⁵ Equally, the expense of recent trips to the cinema is often resented, especially as the price is for just one film, whereas in the Golden Age there would be two full-length films, plus a supporting short film.

This notion of decline is further represented by a recurrent sense that the past had a vigour and vividness, in contrast with the present's bureaucratic and staid character. In large part, this observation bears upon the age of those reminiscing. For the elderly, health problems and a general 'slowing down' often restrict activity and liveliness and, therefore, the relative perception of vigour. In general terms, many kinds of reminiscence state that past times were 'good old days'. This not only forms a sense of the superiority of the past over the present, but also helps cement generational commonalities in belief, experience and attitude. Such discussion of the past is beneficial to the local press for it encourages readers to write in with their views, and can lead to in-depth features on the state of the city. While notions of decline may be endemic to the experience of nostalgia, and to memories of cinema-going in particular, these can be used to enrich and democratise news discourse as it negotiates issues of city life for, and in response to, its various demographic constituencies.

Conclusion

The cinema-going past lives on in the local press. This chapter has tried to present various patterns of memory that emerge in a specific city context, suggesting that the relationship between memory and popular film is just as much about social activity as it is about specific movies. For *The Nottingham Evening Post* and its supplement publication *Bygones*, memory narratives are one of the ways in which members of the ageing population are maintained among its readers. All the memories of cinema reproduced in the local press evince a very positive attitude to that past experience, often locating

it as one of the activities that helped people through ‘hard times’. There are no examples of memories that live on as unpleasant reminders. Again, this bias may be attributable to the memories being situated in, and sanctioned by, the public realm of the press – both the city of Nottingham and the individuals concerned are placed in a favourable light. The press needs to build up a positive image of the city (to which it is inescapably linked) and memory narratives are a key means of highlighting the history and heritage of city life, even as these memories may contribute discursively to ideas of contemporary decline. Memories have the social function of affirming, in a public forum, themes and issues such as community, city building, leisure practice, and social behaviour, and bring together those who reminisce about emotions and experiences that may have receded into the past. The press benefits substantially from each of these, both in raising perspectives that inform local city debate (memory as news) and in securing the readership of a growing sector of the population (memory as niche-market).

Notes

- 1 Roger Bromley, *Lost Narratives, Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 1.
- 2 Annette Kuhn, ‘Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19: 4 (1999), 531–43.
- 3 Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing, Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: New York, Routledge, 1994).
- 4 See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994) and Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen, 1987). Samuel offers a detailed and wide-ranging study of some of the ways in which memory is preserved in British society, arguing that ‘the last thirty years have witnessed an extraordinary and, it seems, ever growing enthusiasm for the recovery of the national past’ (p. 139). Hewison argues that the heritage industry has developed in the United Kingdom in response to the widespread perception that the nation is in decline. This perceived decline is evidenced in both the economy (with the heritage industry functioning as a substitute for the manufacturing industry) and across society as a whole. He believes that when studying the past we should ask ‘what kind of past we have chosen to preserve, and what that has done to our present’ (p. 47).
- 5 James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 49.

- 6 Rod Pilling, 'The Changing Role of the Local Journalist: From Faithful Chronicler of the Parish Pump to Multiskilled Compiler of an Electronic Database', in Bob Franklin and David Murphy (eds), *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 184–5.
- 7 Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 63.
- 8 An article by Alan Bennett on his memories of cinema offers an interesting variation on the fare provided by the local press. He recounts a man groping his leg in the cinema when he was a child and his realisation that: 'this must be what Mam's mysterious warnings had been about'. I would suggest that while this theme may be acceptable for a well-known and well-respected figure in a literary journal, it is not common or generally favoured by local newspapers. See Alan Bennett, 'Seeing Stars', *London Review of Books* (3 January 2002), 12–14.
- 9 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 10 Joseph Fitzgerald, 'Reminiscence in Adult Development', in David C. Rubin (ed.) *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 370.
- 11 Fitzgerald, 'Reminiscence in Adult Development', pp. 367–9.
- 12 Fred Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 31.
- 13 'Double Seats and Savoury Snacks', *Nottingham Observer* (March 1984).
- 14 'Guys and Molls in Back Row', in *Bygones* supplement to *Nottingham Evening Post* (7 February 1998).
- 15 'Guys and Molls in Back Row'.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Nottingham City Library newspaper holdings.
- 18 Evidence from oral history research project, February 2000.
- 19 *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 'Happy Memories of the Futurist', *Basford Bystander*, 34 (Nov–Dec 1991).
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 45.
- 24 'Happy Memories of the Futurist', *Basford Bystander*, 34 (Nov–Dec 1991).
- 25 Andrew Hoskins, 'New memory: mediating history', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21: 4 (2001), 333–47.
- 26 Pilling, 'The Changing Role of the Local Journalist', pp. 187–8.
- 27 *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- 28 *Nottingham Herald*, 18 July 1996.

- 29 Nottingham City Library newspaper holdings.
- 30 Nottinghamshire Archives, DD 2117/4/4.
- 31 Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 102.
- 32 Robyn Fivush, Catherine Haden and Elaine Reese, 'Remembering, Recounting, and Reminiscing: The Development of Autobiographical Memory in Social Context', in Rubin (ed.) *Remembring Our Past*, p. 341.
- 33 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 131.
- 34 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6 March 1996.
- 35 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 April 1993.
- 36 *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- 37 Interview for Nottingham oral history project, February 2000.
- 38 *Basford Bystander*, November 1989.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 For the most recent figures see, for example, www.guardian.co.uk/graphic/0,5812,344426,00.html
- 41 *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- 42 *Nottingham Observer*, March 1984.
- 43 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6 August 1996.
- 44 *Bygones*, 7 February 1998.
- 45 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 10 April 1993.
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- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 For a discussion of the possible impact of the Warner Village on Nottingham's city centre, see Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, forthcoming).
- 50 Nottingham City Library newspaper holdings.
- 51 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 27 October 2000.
- 52 Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday*, p. 64. Italics in original.
- 53 *Nottingham Observer*, March 1984.
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