

## **‘A British Empire of Their Own? Jewish Entrepreneurs in the British Film Industry’**

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### **Introduction**

The importance of Jewish entrepreneurs in the development of Hollywood has long been recognized, notably in Neil Gabler’s classic study, *An Empire of Their Own* (1988). No comparable investigation and analysis of the Jewish presence in the British film industry has been conducted.<sup>1</sup> This article provides a preliminary overview of the most significant Jewish entrepreneurs involved in British film culture from the early pioneers through to David Puttnam. I use the term ‘entrepreneur’ rather than ‘film-maker’ because I am analyzing film as an industry, thus excluding technical personnel, including directors.<sup>2</sup> Space restrictions have meant the reluctant omission of Sidney Bernstein and Oscar Deutsch because the latter was engaged solely in cinema building and the former more significant in the development of commercial television.<sup>3</sup> I have also confined myself to Jews born in the UK, thus excluding the Danziger brothers, Filippo del Giudice, Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, Alexander Korda, Harry Saltzman and Max Schach.<sup>4</sup> I should emphasize that my aim is to characterize the nature of the contribution of my chosen figures to the development of British cinema, not provide detailed career profiles.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that Jews controlled the British film industry surfaced most noticeably in the late 1930s when the undercurrent of anti-Semitic prejudice in British society took public forms; Isidore Ostrer, head of the giant Gaumont-British Picture Corporation (GBPC) was referred to in the House of Commons as an ‘unnaturalised alien’ (Low 1985: 243). Although this was an unfounded slur and much of the British film industry was run by gentiles, it is the

case that there are many Jewish entrepreneurs in the higher echelons of the British film industry and this article will explore why this might be the case. Part 1 discusses predilection of these Jews for entrepreneurial activities and analyzes the most important of the early Jewish pioneers who exploited the opportunities provided by a nascent, but rapidly growing, film industry. Part 2 considers their post-Second World War successors who operated in an established industry that had to face a long decline from its pre-war heyday and competition from television.

### **Part 1: The Pioneers**

Stephen Aris argues that the c.150,000 Jewish immigrants who settled in Britain between 1881 and 1914, were ‘particularly sensitive to the needs of the burgeoning mass market’ which they could supply without any great financial outlay (1973: 92). Jewish immigrants took a leading role in the ‘revolutionary consumer boom’ in Britain that, in the course of two generations, established the ‘whole machinery for feeding, clothing and entertaining the increasingly prosperous working class’ (ibid: 204). The film industry was a key area of this expanding consumerism and, in addition to requiring minimal financial outlay, its lack of cultural status in comparison with theatre or literature - ‘a poor relation, and, moreover, not a very respectable one’ (Low 1950: 138) - meant it was not circumscribed by hidebound tradition and class barriers. Being in the film business was also always more than a money-making activity: it was glamorous, exciting and highly stimulating. And, unlike many professions it had no entry barriers and therefore was open to Jewish entrepreneurs.

The outlook of even the humblest Jewish worker, it is claimed, ‘differed fundamentally from the British craft tradition; they saw themselves ... as potentially upwardly mobile, not as perpetual members of the proletariat’ (Alderman 1998: 184). As one

**Comment [N1]:** I've deleted this because it's unnecessary. Also, many Jews escaped for economic reasons, too.

notable entrepreneur, Bernard Delfont observed, the overriding desire to be independent, to be one's own boss, 'even if it meant working harder and earning less than many who were on a fixed wage' (1990: 5), fuelled Jewish ambitions. But it was the second generation, occasionally benefitting from their fathers' entrepreneurial dabblings, which really grasped the opportunities the film industry offered.

The first important Jewish pioneer was G.B. (George Berthold) Samuelson (1889-1947) who began by establishing himself in Southport as Britain's first film renter with the Royal Film Agency in 1910, before acquiring a studio, Worton Hall, in 1914, and founding the Samuelson Film Manufacturing Company. Described as the most colourful personality in British silent cinema (Anthony Slide in McFarlane 2008: 650), Samuelson was a showman with an infectious enthusiasm for films, producing over 90, including the highly successful pageant *Sixty Years a Queen* (1913), exhibiting a patriotism which, as Laurence Kardish argued about Michael Balcon, expressed 'a profound debt to the nation that had provided a haven for himself and other Jews and permitted social mobility' (1984: 44, 66). This patriotic fervour was not at odds with an international orientation: Samuelson tried to penetrate the huge American market by setting up a company in Hollywood, making six films there in 1919-20. However, his commitment to production, ever the most precarious side of the industry, meant that Samuelson was badly affected by the production slump of the mid-1920s. He sold Worton Hall in 1924 and ceased trading.<sup>6</sup>

Solomon 'Sol' Levy (1877-1929), the son of a furrier, was the leader of an 'adventurous group of young Jewish businessmen from Birmingham' (Josephs n.d.: 53), which also included Michael Balcon, Oscar Deutsch and Victor Saville, who were looking for new opportunities. Levy took a different route from Samuelson, cashing in on the boom in cinema building in the 1920s by opening a number of first-class cinemas in Birmingham. He established a small rental company, Sol Exclusives, which obtained the Midlands'

distribution rights of many American films, including those by D.W. Griffith, which Levy gambled successfully on being popular with British audiences. Levy was a philanthropic paternalist, considering that cinema could play a positive social role: 'It is a new experience for the ordinary family ... Instead of the old man going to the public house, he takes his children to the pictures and domestic life becomes happier' (ibid.). Both Saville and Balcon considered that, but for his death at the relative early age of 52, Levy would have become a major influence on the British film industry (Moseley 2002: 15-16; Balcon 1969: 11).

Much longer-lived was Phil Hyams (1894-1997), who learned the basics through an apprenticeship in a Stepney cinema, part-owned by his father, whose main occupation was that of a baker. Together with his younger brother Sid, quieter and more financially cautious, the ideal foil to Phil's brash showmanship, the Hyams took cinema exhibition to a new level, pioneering the concept of 'cine-variety', a packed evening's entertainment that usually consisted of two films, a newsreel, music (an 'organ interlude') and variety acts featuring top artistes, exemplifying the Hyams' philosophy: 'If you give 'em value for money they'll come' (Eyles 1997: 16). Part of the enticement was the provision of luxuriously appointed 'super cinemas' with palatial interiors in some of the dreariest inner London suburbs. The Hyams built six, including the Gaumont State in Kilburn, Britain's largest cinema with 4,004 seats. By this point, 1935, the Hyams had become directors in GBPC, operating their picture palaces through a subsidiary company run by their younger brother Mick. In a possibly ill-advised move, the Hyams sold out to the Rank organization, which had absorbed GBPC, in 1944. In 1947, ever adaptable, they launched a distribution company, Eros, which made money by reissuing hundreds of old Hollywood favourites, enabling the company to make some low-budget British films and the occasional first feature before being sold in 1961.

By contrast, C.M. (Charles Moss) Woolf (1879-1942) gained wealth and influence through taking the art of film distribution to a new level. In 1919, in partnership with S.

Freedman, he set up a small rental company, W & F Film Service, whose success came through distributing an astute mixture of mainly American but also French and German films. W & F was incorporated into GBPC in 1927 and Woolf became joint managing director in 1929. His promotion was due to his business acumen - Balcon judged him 'without doubt the finest and shrewdest film salesman of his time' (1969: 30) - allied to a single-minded ruthlessness. Woolf's formidable reputation derived from avoiding any projects that were commercially unsound and from his abrasive manner and acerbic tongue, commanding errant filmmakers to curb their profligate ways. His favourite phrase was, 'We won't be bugged about!' (Anthony Havelock-Allen in Macnab 1993: 24). Although, as Balcon noted, Woolf was not a film-maker 'in any sense of the word' and never visited studios (1969: 30), he encouraged producers whom he rated through financial investment and privileged forms of distribution. These included Balcon himself and also Herbert Wilcox, who regarded Woolf as a 'champion of British films when so many of his contemporaries "didn't want to know"' (1967: 74). Woolf could also be autocratic on occasions, requiring Balcon to re-edit Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1926) and demanding he sign up Wilcox's contract artists when the latter 'defected' from GBPC to United Artists in 1933.

After acrimonious differences, Woolf broke with GBPC in May 1935 and, encouraged by J. Arthur Rank and several major City financiers who wished to see GBPC's power lessened, started a new renting company, General Film Distributors. Under Woolf's direction GFD acquired Pinewood studios as a production base and a substantial interest in Universal, developing into the leading British film production-distribution company. When GFD was brought into the expanding Rank empire in 1941, Woolf became joint managing director of the Rank Organisation because he had the insider knowledge and expertise J. Arthur Rank lacked. Under Woolf's direction, Rank became the pre-eminent British film company. His film-making policy was characteristically cautious, not to say unadventurous

and Rank concentrated on medium-budget comedies, musicals and spy thrillers. After Woolf's death in 1942 Rank switched to high-budget 'prestige' films designed to conquer the American market, which brought mixed benefits.

The most important Jewish entrepreneur in pre-war British cinema was Michael Balcon (1896-1977), whom historian Rachel Low considered the foremost of the new tranche of film producers who changed a haphazardly artisanal 'cottage industry' (Low 1971: 108-09, 166) into a modern business enterprise. With money from Woolf and Deutsch and working with Saville, Balcon formed Gainsborough Pictures in 1924 operating from Islington Studios. Gainsborough became part of GBPC in 1928 and by 1931 Balcon controlled a major operation, running both Islington and Gaumont's larger and better-equipped Lime Grove studios. But Balcon's ambitions were more than financial, deriving his elevated conception of a producer's role from MGM's Irvin Thalberg, whom he praised in an obituary for *World Film News* shortly after his early death in September 1936 as 'no ordinary impresario, showman or businessman' but a visionary film-maker uniting 'commercial obligations' with 'ideas and ideals'.

Balcon's great contribution was to promote the idea of a British national cinema that would be able to compete internationally with the finest from Germany or America: 'my ruling passion has always been the building up of a native industry with its roots firmly planted in the soil of this country' (1969: 48). To do this, Balcon gathered round him a team of creative artists, including Ivor Novello and Alfred Hitchcock, augmented by international talent, including Jewish refugees from Nazism such as producers Hermann Fellner and Josef Somlo. Balcon counterbalanced domestic productions at Gainsborough with more expensive and prestigious ones at Gaumont aimed at a world market. These were varied but Balcon's preference was for resonantly British subjects such as the forging of an Empire (*Rhodes of*

*Africa* (1936]). Less typical was *Jew Süß* (1934), which attacked anti-Semitism under historical guise.

Balcon was enormously hard-working and generally successful, but resented the increasing interference of Woolf and Maurice Ostrer (see below). In a bid to retain his independence, he took the role of Head of Production at MGM-British operating from Denham studios. Balcon thought the deal offered him complete autonomy, but his eighteen months at MGM were a deeply unhappy period, marked by frequent clashes with studio head Louis B. Mayer. Balcon made only one film, *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), very much an American view of British life. He continued to play a major role in British cinema during and after the war, as discussed in Part 2.

The three central elements of the film industry, production, distribution and exhibition, came together in the formation of the GBPC, the first and for a period the most powerful of the major corporations that dominated but also sustained the pre-war British film industry. GBPC owed its existence to the business acumen of Isidore Ostrer (1889-1975), one of five brothers. The origins of Isidore's fortunes are rather obscure (Ostrer 2010: 30-42) but by the end of the First World War he had set up a private commercial bank on Moorgate together with brothers Mark (1892-1958) and Maurice (1896-1975). Their capital enabled the A.C. and R.C. Bromhead, who ran Gaumont-British, to buy out French interests in 1922 and operate as an entirely British company with studios at Lime Grove in Shepherd's Bush (Low 1971: 43). When the Cinematograph Act requiring exhibitors to show a guaranteed percentage of British films was passed in 1927, Isidore seized the moment to expand. He moved rapidly, reorganizing the company as the first British vertically organized film combine with two production companies, Gaumont-British and Gainsborough, two distribution agencies, Ideal and Woolf's W & F, and exhibition interests through the Biocolour circuit and, shortly afterwards, the 96 cinemas of Provincial Cinematograph

Theatres that were well-situated, large and popular (Eyles 1996: 22-9). When the Bromheads, opposed to an alliance with Twentieth Century-Fox that Isidore argued was essential to obtaining additional finance and supply of films, resigned, Isidore assumed direct control in 1929. Mark became vice-chairman and Maurice joint managing director with Woolf. Lime Grove studios were rebuilt and expanded and eventually the Gaumont-British circuit numbered 350 cinemas. At its height, GBPC controlled 68 subsidiary companies that included British Acoustic Film Ltd that developed and manufactured the sound equipment GBPC used for the new 'talkies' (Ostrer 2010: 160, 234).

Despite its size and expensive productions, GBPC failed to make much impact on the American market, suffering severe losses in 1936-37, forcing the temporary closure of Lime Grove. Isidore showed his financial brilliance during this difficult period by circumventing an attempted takeover by Twentieth Century-Fox, then persuading Fox and MGM to block an aggressive bid for control by ABPC. However, the sharp entrepreneur who enjoyed the planning, scheming and manipulation necessary to create a business empire, was only one side of Isidore who was also an art connoisseur and collector, poet, intellectual and Labour party supporter, described as a 'financial genius who despised money except as an economic factor, a mystic who dreamed of a world made better for the worker and his wife' (in Low 1985: 128). No showman, Isidore shunned publicity, remaining largely unknown to the general public beyond film circles. Mark was the public face of GBPC, attending premieres, entertained visiting celebrities and acting as the envoy and negotiator in deals with Hollywood (Mason 1982: 144). When Isidore sold GBPC to Rank for £13m in 1941, Mark was retained on the Rank Board and Maurice, always more directly involved in film production, took sole charge of Gainsborough Pictures, producing a highly successful series of bodice-rippers including *The Man in Grey* (1943) until he was ousted in 1946.<sup>7</sup>



Thus although Jewish entrepreneurs did not control the pre-war British film industry, they did much to help shape it, providing the energy, ambition, financial acumen, willingness to take risks and vision essential in building a modern industry that was, despite severe difficulties, sufficiently robust to survive ferocious American competition.

## **Part 2: The Successors**

Those Jewish entrepreneurs who made their mark after the war encountered a rather different film industry. The cinema-building era was over, cinemagoing as a social and cultural activity peaked in 1946 before entering into a period of gradually accelerating decline with television emerging, from the late 1950s, as a newer and more dynamic commercial arena. In this rapidly shifting terrain, entrepreneurs had to forge new alliances and raise finance from different sources. The partial exception was Balcon, already established as major producer, who had become Head of Production at Ealing Studios in 1939. Ealing was a relatively small studio over which he could exert direct control, surrounding himself with a hand-picked group of writers and directors who were loyal and worked solely for Ealing and who were accorded considerable autonomy because their basic viewpoint mirrored his own: 'I don't believe in producers who put themselves up as impresarios and try to gather around them as many well-known names as possible. I personally always look for people whose ideas coincide with mine' (qtd. in Porter 1983: 183).

At Ealing, Balcon was able to rebuild his idea of a national cinema though it had shed its internationalism concentrating initially on using ex-documentarists such as Harry Watt, to produce realist films, for example *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), which expressed the democratizing ideology of the People's War. Balcon's conception of a national cinema had far-reaching effects, leading to a 'long-lasting critical emphasis on realism as the destiny and duty of a truly British cinema, in contra-distinction to Hollywood tinsel' (Wollen 1998: 131).

This increasingly insular Englishness, continued post-war in films 'reflecting Britain and the British character', some of which, perhaps ironically, have entered the pantheon of quintessentially British films: *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948), *The Blue Lamp* (1950) and such comedies as *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951).

Balcon's status enabled him to negotiate a very favourable deal with Rank from 1944, which accorded him 'complete production autonomy and independence' by providing at first fifty and later seventy-five per cent funding, and a circuit release backed by an American distribution deal (Balcon 1969: 154-55, 180). However, when financial controls became tighter in the 1950s, Balcon found himself at odds with Rank's Managing Director, John Davis, and he left in 1955 when the studios were sold to the BBC. Although his subsequent career as a producer was chequered, Balcon remained a hugely influential voice in the British film industry, having already been knighted in 1948 in recognition of his contribution. He served on endless working parties and committees, acting as an adviser to the National Film Finance Corporation, chairing the Group 3 initiative (1951-54) to train young talent on low-budget films and also the BFI's Experimental Film Fund (later Production Board) from 1951-72, which supported avant-garde and alternative film-making.

Nat Cohen (1905-88) had also established himself in the pre-war period, having built a small circuit of cinemas in the 1930s' boom. In partnership with Stuart Levy (1907-66), an experienced distributor, Cohen founded Anglo-Amalgamated in 1945, which was highly successful in spotting the potential of the 'B' feature market, mainly through dual-purpose series, including the 60 minute Edgar Wallace adaptations (1960-64), for cinema screening and broadcasting on American television. The huge success of *Carry on Sergeant* (1958) and its follow-ups - before Rogers transferred the series to Rank in 1967 - transformed the company's fortunes, allowing Cohen to take risks on emerging directors, notably John Schlesinger and Ken Loach, but Cohen's financial nous kept Anglo-Amalgamated solvent,

eventually merging with Electrical and Music Industries (EMI) in 1968. When he took over as head of production for the whole of EMI's film division in 1971, Cohen became the most powerful producer in the British film industry, profiled in the press as 'Britain's only movie mogul ... rich, powerful and Jewish par excellence. He carries it gracefully, neither modest nor boastful but simply assured of inexorable success' (Nicholl 1973). He encouraged the production of the hugely successful Agatha Christie adaptation *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and two sequels as a counter to 'all the doom and gloom in the country' (in Walker 1986: 129), but as the decade wore on his conservative commitment to the family audience looked increasingly outmoded and his boss at EMI, Bernard Delfont, replaced him with younger talents, Michael Deeley and Barry Spikings.

John Woolf (1913-99), son of C.M. Woolf and thus a third generation immigrant without the same need to work his passage, disavowed Cohen's populism in favour of a more upmarket strategy. A shy, softly-spoken man who looked more like a local bank manager than a flamboyant showman (Pearce 1979), Woolf left the Rank Organisation in 1948, characteristically objecting to being 'a small cog in a large wheel' (McFarlane 1997: 613), to become a pathfinder for an emergent generation of independent producers. With his half-brother James (1920-66) who had connections in Hollywood, he formed Independent Film Distributors (IFD) and Romulus Films. The latter eschewed what Woolf considered to be the stifling parochialism of British cinema by making films from successful novels or plays with internationally recognized stars and an established director, notably *The African Queen* (1951). Equally successful was *Room at the Top* (1959), starring their contract player, Laurence Harvey. After James's death, John enjoyed further success with *Oliver!* (1968), and continued to be at the forefront of independent production by exploiting the newly-signed Anglo-French co-production deal to make two popular Frederick Forsyth novels, *Day of the Jackal* (1973) and *The Odessa File* (1974). After this, Woolf concentrated on his investment

trust, British and American Film Holdings whose success was further demonstration of Woolf's financial abilities.

Michael Klinger (1921-89) was another independent producer who became important in sustaining a fragile indigenous industry in the 1970s. The son of a tailor's presser, Klinger had no connections in the industry, using the burgeoning 1960s sex market – he owned a Soho strip club, the Gargoyle - to lever his way into films. In October 1960, in partnership with fellow Jewish entrepreneur Tony Tenser (1920-2007) who had worked for a distribution company Miracle Films and was a talented promoter, Klinger established a small, vertically-integrated company, Compton, which owned the Compton Cinema Club, distributed foreign sex films and made a series of low-budget 'sexploitation' films beginning with *Naked as Nature Intended* (1961). Tenser was content to stay in this market, but Klinger, having enjoyed critical success through financing Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) and *Cul-de-Sac* (1966), harboured greater ambitions.<sup>8</sup> After the partnership ended in October 1966, Klinger used the cultural capital acquired through his association with Polanski to establish himself as a risk-taking producer who championed new talent. The success of Mike Hodges' first feature, *Get Carter* (1971), funded by MGM, gave Klinger the status to make further films aimed at an international market. Like Woolf, Klinger attacked the parochialism of British cinema, but his 1970s' oeuvre was a judicious mixture of domestic sex comedies (the *Confessions* series), mid-Atlantic action-adventure (*Gold*, 1974 and *Shout at the Devil*, 1976) and more innovative films including Hodges' *Pulp* (1972).<sup>9</sup>

Lew Grade (b. Louis Winogradsky, 1906-98) came into the film industry in his sixties, having made his fortune as a talent agent in partnership with his brother Leslie (1916-79) then through Associated Television (ATV), which gained one of the first four ITV franchises.<sup>10</sup> Commercial television was the emerging industry for the Jewish entrepreneur and Grade became the most powerful, as well as the most flamboyant, of the new television

moguls, playing up to the caricature of the ‘cigar-chomping, language-fracturing’, Jewish vulgarian whose man-of-the-people philistinism – ‘It must be art. It certainly wasn’t entertainment’ – hid a ruthless determination. Despite his overwhelming success in television, Grade was motivated to go into film as he had to retire as Chairman of ATV at 70 (1977) and he was intoxicated by Hollywood glamour, which he saw as the ultimate measure of success.

Grade became chairman and chief executive of a vertically-integrated holding company, Associated Communications Corporation (ACC), with studios at Elstree, a distribution agency and the 130-screen Classic cinema circuit. This new titan rivalled EMI (which had absorbed ABPC) and eclipsed the ailing and inactive Rank empire. Grade’s approach to films was to create an enticing ‘package’ of fast-moving action dramas, international stars, bestseller writers and big-name directors pre-sold on the Grade brand of ‘quality’ merchandise, exploiting the worldwide credibility of ATV as guarantor. Grade was not a film-maker, he was a deal-maker, as he admitted himself: ‘As far as I’m concerned, it’s the *deal* that counts. For me the fun of business is making the deal’ (Grade 1988: 35, original emphasis). Once he had assembled the package and given his famous hand-shake on the deal, Grade left it to the professionals to make the film. His films, formulaic, conservative and aimed at the American market, were witheringly dismissed by Alan Parker as occupying a ‘mid-Atlantic no man’s land’ (in Falk 1987: 2). Grade had occasional hits, notably *The Muppet Movie* (1979), a spin-off from the television series, but these became rarer as budgets escalated. *Raise the Titanic* (1980), which had cost a staggering \$33 million, prompted the classic Gradeism: ‘It would have been cheaper to lower the Atlantic’ (1988: 262). ACC’s production losses were compounded by the costly attempt to set up a North American distribution agency in direct competition with the Hollywood majors. Its crushing failure

weakened Grade's position and he was ousted by the Australian tycoon Robert Holmes à Court.<sup>11</sup>

At the head of the other major film corporation, EMI, was Grade's brother Bernard (b. Boris Winogradsky, 1909-94). The pair had been rivals since childhood, Bernard changing his name to Delfont because they were competing dancers on the same circuits. Delfont's route into film-making was through his activities as a successful theatrical impresario, acquiring the lease on his first theatre in 1949, backed by the Hyams. His experience and contacts convinced EMI's Board to appoint him Chairman and Chief Executive of its film and entertainment divisions and in 1969 he persuaded the board to take over ABPC which owned Elstree studios, the ABC cinema circuit, a distribution agency and a stake in Thames Television. Delfont thus controlled the most powerful film corporation in Britain. Like his brother, Delfont did not concern himself with actual film-making which he left to others – Cohen or Deeley and Spikings – but his corporate wheeler-dealing, and EMI's production programme resembled his brother's: 'films made in America, by Americans, with Americans as stars' (Walker 1985: 194). EMI financial difficulties in the late 1970s were compounded, ironically by Delfont's decision to co-operate rather than compete with his brother in his attempt to establish American distribution agency. After Thorn, the electrical conglomerate, bought EMI and sold the entertainment division to Trust House Forte in 1980, Delfont, with investment from John Woolf, led a management buy-out in 1983, becoming chairman of First Leisure Corporation.<sup>12</sup>

The Grades' attempt to rival Hollywood had thus ended by the early 1980s with British cinema at its lowest ebb. It was revived by television money (Channel 4) and a new generation of adaptable and imaginative entrepreneurs, the most important of whom was David Puttnam (b. 1941), whose mother was Jewish. Puttnam astutely exploited the new forces that were re-shaping British culture, working first for a photographic agency then in

advertising. In 1969 partnering fellow Jew Sandy Lieberman, Puttnam founded Goodtimes Enterprises whose key films exploited the new synergies between the film and music industries. *That'll Be the Day* (1973) and its sequel *Stardust* (1974), financed by Anglo-Amalgamated and an American record company, were the first films to have their soundtracks released simultaneously. In contradistinction to the populist, deal-brokering Grades, Puttnam disavowed showmanship - 'deep down there's a bit of me that despises show business' (in Yule: 471) - conceiving cinema as a social and moral force: 'the medium is too powerful and too important an influence on the way we live, the way we see ourselves, to be left solely to the tyranny of the box-office or reduced to the sum of the lowest common denominator of public taste' (in Walker 1985: 58). The concomitant was an exulted idea of the producer as the moulding force in a film's creation: 'I don't just want to be a banker to someone else's ideas and execution. I need a sense of ownership' (in Park: 119). Puttnam expected and demanded complete loyalty from the directors who worked for his production company, Enigma.

In this way, as in many others, Puttnam strongly resembled his idol, Balcon, whom he praised as 'a beacon to those of us who dreamed of a regeneration of the British film' (1984: 8). Both men shared fundamental characteristics in addition to their Jewishness: a suburban middle-class ordinariness, grammar school work ethic, high moral tone and sense of mission that bordered on the evangelical. Like Balcon, Puttnam believed in creating a stable British cinema capable of nurturing fledgling talent and, like his mentor, his awareness that film was an inescapably international industry was tempered by a staunchly patriotic, occasionally 'little Englander' mentality, fed by his desire to make films that reflected 'a British view of the world' (Britton 1991: 53). *Local Hero* (1983) was an Ealingesque comedy, while *Chariots of Fire* (1981), a huge success, was a Balconesque paean to team spirit and the

moral destiny of the British, the two runners, - the ambitious Jew, Harold Abrahams, and the conscience-driven Scot, Eric Liddell - expressing the twin sides of Puttnam's personality.

Enigma was closely aligned with Goldcrest Films whose collapse in 1985 led Puttnam to accept the position of head of Columbia in June 1986, the first non-American to take control of a Hollywood studio. As with Balcon at MGM-British, Puttnam thought he had creative autonomy, but found that his desire to make the studio system less corporate, encouraging independent talent to make culturally valuable films rather than aiming solely for box-office success was too radical and he left after eighteen months. On his return, Puttnam scaled down his involvement in active production, but continued to campaign vigorously for the creation of a stable British film industry that could nurture talent. Again like Balcon, Puttnam was a tireless servant on public bodies: a director of the National Film Development Fund, a member of the Cinema Films Council, governor, latterly Chairman of National Film and Television School and Chairman of the General Teaching Council from 1999. His was one of the most influential voices in shaping film policy and the role of cinema in recognition of which he was knighted in 1995 and ennobled in 1997.

## **Conclusion**

The Jewish entrepreneurs analyzed in this article were a varied group, spanning a continuum from the brash, populist American-orientated showmanship of the Hyams or the Grades to the moral sobriety of Balcon and Puttnam with their European conception of the producer as a moral and artistic creator. Some, such as Michael Klinger, occupied an uncertain space between a European art cinema and the Hollywood blockbuster. Others, including Isidore Ostrer were ambivalent personalities: ruthlessly astute financiers and Socialist philanthropists for whom money was a necessary evil. Underneath these differences were certain fundamental characteristics that could be traceable to their Jewish origins: a restless, dynamic



energy and ambition; a willingness to take risks in order to succeed; a fierce desire to be independent; a deep-seated patriotism that saw commercial interests as compatible with a deeply felt loyalty to the nation that had provided a home and was anxious to create a sustainable and vibrant film industry rather than for Britain to become a Hollywood colony; strong family loyalties, albeit tempered by commercial judgements.

Considered as a group, their contribution to British cinema, from the beginnings to the present, has been huge. The pioneers were decisive in helping to transform a ramshackle industry into a modern business enterprise with the Ostrers controlling one of the three main companies; their post-war successors helped sustain an industry that seemed often to be on the brink of collapse. Overall the shape and contours of the British film industry are inconceivable without Jewish influence, which needs to be acknowledged and celebrated, as well as studied in greater depth.

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<sup>1</sup> There is some discussion in Gough-Yates (1992) and Abrams (2010), but this article represents the first detailed and systematic analysis.

<sup>2</sup> These film entrepreneurs often had extensive television interests, but a consideration of their role in the television industry falls outside the scope of this study.

<sup>3</sup> There is no room to discuss Jewish producers whose careers were more circumscribed, including Daniel Angel, Monty Berman, Bernard Cohen, Guido Cohen, Norman Cohen, David Deutsch, Anatole De Grunwald Jerry Jackson, and Sanford 'Sandy' Lieberman.

<sup>4</sup> Del Giudice is discussed in Drazin (1998), pp. 13-42, Golan and Globus in Yule (1987) and A. Walker (2004: 38-56); for Schach see Collinson (2003). Korda's Jewishness is the focus of the article by G. Walker (2003). There are no detailed studies of the Danzigers or Saltzman.

<sup>5</sup> Details on most of these figures can be found in the standard reference works: the *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, David J. Jeremy (ed.), *Dictionary of Business Biography 1860-1980*, 5 vols. (London: Butterworths, 1984-86) and McFarlane (ed.) 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Samuelson's four sons all entered films. Sydney Samuelson, a cinematographer, was the most prominent, knighted for his services to the industry in 1995. His sons Peter and Marc became active producers in the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> Bertram Ostrer (1913-86), son of the eldest brother, David, became a modestly successful producer of low-budget films in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of Tenser's career see Hamilton 2005.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of Klinger's career see Spicer and McKenna, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie was the first Grade to go into film production, in the 1960s including the Cliff Richard films, *Sparrows Can't Sing* and *The Servant*, both 1963.

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<sup>11</sup> The full details are given in Falk and Perry (1987).

<sup>12</sup> Leslie's son Michael Grade carried on the family tradition of flamboyant showmanship, but his activities were almost solely in television rather than film.