

The Impresario in British Cinema: Bernard Delfont at EMI

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Abstract

The article argues that Bernard Delfont played a significant role in the development of the British film industry in the 1970s as head of EMI's entertainment division that included film. In contradistinction to existing accounts, it is contended that Delfont provided dynamic leadership to the corporation's policies through the skills and knowledge he had developed as a highly successful theatrical impresario, even if he lacked a detailed understanding of the film industry. Delfont made a series of bold choices. The first was to appoint Bryan Forbes as Head of Film Production in an imaginative attempt to revitalise the British film industry using indigenous resources and talent. The commercial failure of this initiative occasioned Forbes's departure and a more cautious regime under the direction of Nat Cohen. Faced with a rapidly shrinking domestic market, Delfont decided that a thoroughgoing internationalism was the only way to sustain EMI's film business. He sidelined Cohen by appointing two young 'buccaneers', Michael Deeley and Barry Spikings in May 1976 to pursue a policy of investing in Hollywood films and producing 'American' films financed by British money. This radical strategy was controversial and reconfigured EMI as a 'supranational' rather than national film producer. This was intensified by Delfont's boldest move: establishing Associated Film Distributors (AFD) in July 1979, in partnership with his brother Lew Grade's Associated Communication Company, to distribute their companies' films and become a major Hollywood player. Its failure, after only 20 months, coupled with spectacular production losses effectively ended both companies as important film production units. Delfont's career demonstrates the wider significance of the risk-taking impresario in understanding British film as a business enterprise, the importance of the policies and tastes

of studio heads and the need to reposition the film industry as part of wider entertainment and leisure provision.

Keywords: Bernard Delfont; EMI; ABPC; impresario; showmanship; studio heads; production policies.

Introduction

Bernard Delfont played a major role in the development of the British film industry in the 1970s as head of the Entertainment Division of Electrical and Music Industries (EMI), which included film. He was responsible for EMI's film strategy, production policy and financial management from 1969 until his departure in 1980. Despite his importance, this is the first critical overview of Delfont's role at EMI based on existing accounts alongside a thorough examination of contemporaneous comment in newspaper and trade press publications and the EMI annual reports.¹ As will be discussed, Delfont's tenure marked a new dimension in the long-lasting debate about what constitutes a British film industry, how it should operate, what kinds of film it should produce and thus the form and function of a 'national cinema'. My account also contributes to the slender literature on the role of studio heads in the development of the British film industry.² As Alexander Walker remarks: 'The tendency to ignore the role of the producers or production chiefs has to be resisted if films are to make sense *as an industry* that can sometimes create art' (1986: 17, my emphasis).

Although this account understands the film industry as primarily a business, it also foregrounds the cultural agency of Delfont as a studio head. As has been observed: 'The British film industry did not develop though logic, but through the ambition and capabilities of many men – some drab some colourful – whose clash of aims and personalities produced the pattern of today' (PEP 1952: 66). Delfont was one of the more colourful, whose

showmanship and entrepreneurial drive derived partly from his background as a Jewish immigrant; as I have argued elsewhere, it is difficult to overestimate the contribution of Jewish entrepreneurs to the British film industry (Spicer 2012). However, the strategies he deployed at EMI were shaped through his showbusiness experience as a theatrical impresario in London's West End and the development of wide-ranging entertainment interests; therefore, this article also provides an account of his background and career before he was hired by EMI. Analysing Delfont's career illuminates the historical interpenetration of the film and theatre industries, which is often ignored or downplayed in accounts of British cinema, as well as demonstrating the importance of the impresario.³

Delfont had wide-ranging interests in the entertainment industry styling himself an 'impresario of pleasure' (quoted in Cotes 1994) and dubbed 'Lord Leisure' by the press, as noted by the *Telegraph*, 12 December 1982). In *The Origins of Modern English Society*, Harold Perkin identifies the impresario as an 'entrepreneurial ideal' who thrived on individual competition for 'wealth, power and social status' and was the real 'creative force, the initiator of the economic cycle', who 'bore the burden of risk' (2002: 221-3). In a broad sense, impresarios represent entrepreneurial rather than corporate capitalism in which the producer, whose background, experience and know-how is drawn from her or his own experiences within the industry, also manages the enterprise rather than relying on a bureaucratically organised firm in which decisions are taken by a board.⁴ Delfont defined an impresario as 'part-accountant, part-lawyer, part-clairvoyant and part-master-builder', whose core qualities were to gauge public taste and 'carry on undaunted' in the face of problems or failures and whose 'ideal course is to steer between caution and confidence' (quoted in Lewin 1969: 4; see also Inverne 2000: 10-15).⁵

Although the impresario is an entrepreneurial ideal, the dynamo who drives the 'business of pleasure', it would be misleading to assume he (very rarely she) was animated

solely by commercial values. Hugh ‘Binkie’ Beaumont – the general manager of HM Tennent Ltd who dominated West End theatre from the mid-1930s to the later 1950s – prided himself on his artistic taste for assembling the best talent in the most sumptuous settings money could buy. Beaumont deliberately shunned publicity and vulgar showmanship pronouncing: ‘I *loathe* the word “impresario”. I’m a theatre manager. That’s much more modest’ (quoted in Huggett 1989: 344; original emphasis). In the film industry there was a similar split between the showmen who believed they were in the entertainment business and those who had loftier aspirations. Michael Balcon, described by Rachel Low (1971: 108-9) as the foremost of the new tranche of film producers who changed a haphazardly artisanal ‘cottage industry’ into a modern business enterprise, praised Irving Thalberg, MGM’s head of production, as ‘no ordinary impresario, showman or businessman’ but a visionary film-maker uniting ‘commercial obligations’ with ‘ideas and ideals’ (Balcon 1936). Balcon’s ‘successor’ in the 1970s, David Puttnam, described himself as ‘an idealistic impresario’ (quoted in Barber 2013: 55). Balcon’s great rival was Alexander Korda, a flamboyant, free-spending impresario who cautioned: ‘Never forget we are in the showbusiness – and we should make a good show.’ (quoted in Kulik 1990: 333). Of course, in any entertainment industry commercial and cultural values are interwoven – Korda produced many outstanding films – but he understood that part of his role, as both producer and studio head, was to be a showman, to ‘bang the drum’, promoting himself, his company and his films. And, like all showmen, Korda was a gambler who took risks rather than play safe and who was avowedly international rather than parochial in orientation.

If we posit the showman and the idealist as orientations rather than antitheses then Delfont was the showman, through and through. He appreciated artistic qualities – like all showmen he wanted ‘the best’ – but this was always tempered by commercial considerations. However, in taking the post at EMI, the independent impresario became the company man –

answerable to EMI's Board of Directors and responsible to its shareholders. Delfont was also a theatrical impresario appointed to what became the most influential role in the British film industry who lacked any detailed knowledge and understanding of that industry. How these tensions played out is the substance of what follows.

Forging the impresario: Bernard Delfont and British commercial theatre

Delfont's family was part of the exodus of roughly 150,000 Jewish immigrants who came to Britain between 1881 and 1914, mainly from Eastern Europe where they were subject to anti-Semitic pogroms. The Winogradskys settled in London's East End in 1912 when he was three, anglicising their name to Grade. In addition to a pronounced patriotism – 'I came to this country as a refugee and I think it's a marvellous country and I just want to pay back some of the things I've got out of it (quoted in Davies 1981: 215) – Delfont ascribes his entrepreneurial ambitions to his Jewish origins, observing that he and his brothers Lew and Leslie were all driven by an overriding desire to be independent, to be their own boss, 'even if it meant working harder and earning less than many who were on a fixed wage' (1990: 5). His family had showbusiness roots: his father Isaac ran one of the very first picture houses in his hometown, Tokmak in the Ukraine, and his mother Olga was a semi-professional singer and actress (Grade 1999: 7). Both Lew and Bernard started as dancers, playing the variety halls during the Charleston craze in the 1920s, at which point Bernard changed his second name to Delfont to avoid any professional confusion with his brother.⁶ Although Delfont worked for a brief spell in his brother's talent agency, the two were instinctive rivals, 'too much alike to spend long in each other's company. Both outward-going personalities who enjoyed the limelight, we were natural competitors' (1990: 77; see also Grade 1987: 217). In a trade press interview Delfont reflected: 'I have always wanted to do better than Lew – and he has always wanted to do better than me. That is the drive we have. We are close friends

but arch-rivals.’ (quoted in Lewin 1969). As will be discussed, their competitiveness had far-reaching consequences.

Delfont had a brief career on his own as a talent agent but forged his main reputation as a theatrical impresario in London’s West End theatre which, before the introduction of subsidised theatre after the Second World War, was a market economy in which a belief in the virtues of free enterprise and individualism dominated (Cochrane 2011: 46). Delfont’s role model was Sir Charles Cochran (1872-1951), a ‘free-wheeling commercial buccaneer’, whose shows ranged from circuses, boxing matches and rodeo through revues and musicals to ‘serious’ theatre including Ibsen and Shaw (ibid.: 54). Cochran was expert at juggling half-a-dozen new productions simultaneously alongside running several theatres and being an indefatigable promoter of his shows (Harding 1988). Delfont displayed the same energy, eclecticism and enlightened risk-taking zeal as his mentor and was as tireless in promoting his shows. He was able to advance rapidly during the Second World War because, not having been naturalised, he escaped call-up, which enabled him to exploit what he called ‘an open market’ in the West End with a choice of theatres available at low rent (Delfont 1990: 77); by the conclusion of hostilities, he controlled seven of them. Although Delfont occasionally ventured into ‘legitimate’ theatre – he co-presented Garson Kanin’s *Born Yesterday* (1947), with Laurence Olivier – he had to survive in a tough and precarious commercial environment.

After the war, half the gross receipts from a West End production would disappear in rents, rates and taxation, leaving the independent impresario only the residue to pay off production costs and creative personnel. This made independents cautious and most would only risk ‘sure fire’ productions (Elsom 1976: 9). Under such constraints, Delfont generally played safe, making his name with revivals of light musicals and operetta such as *The Student Prince* (1944) or comedies including *Bless the Bride* (1951). However, he had the imagination and daring to bring the glamorous showgirls of the Folies Bergère revue from

Paris to London in the early 1950s in a show that ran for more than 2,000 performances and made him a profit of £600,000. By the mid-1950s, Delfont had established himself as one of the leading theatrical impresarios (Figure 1). In a typical season, ‘Bernard Delfont Presents’ appeared on up to fourteen West End shows together with fifteen ‘summer spectaculars’ at major seaside resorts using the prominent stars of the day. In 1958 Delfont achieved his ambition to open a major venue, remodelling the ageing Hippodrome Theatre on the corner of Leicester Square and Charing Cross Road into the Talk of the Town, a theatre-restaurant in partnership with the catering magnate Charles Forte. It offered ‘Dinner, Dancing, Spectacular Revues and International Cabaret Stars’, with shows produced by Robert Nesbitt.

Insert *Fig 1*: The restless impresario: Bernard Delfont planning his next venture in the mid-1950s. (Image courtesy of the British Film Institute)

Delfont’s success continued throughout the 1960s juggling more and more enterprises, ‘hopping in and out of his Rolls-Royce into his Prince of Wales headquarters with the mad dash of a hot Boy Scout’ as a *Times* reporter phrased it (quoted in Davies 1981: 157). Like Cochran, Delfont never dwelt on failure or success but kept moving relentlessly on to the next venture. Alive to the commercial possibilities of any new entertainment medium, Delfont transferred his stage successes to commercial television, producing *Bernard Delfont Presents* (1956-8) and *Bernard Delfont’s Sunday Show* (1959-62) for Lew Grade’s ITV franchise Associated Television (ATV). He became a familiar public showman through presenting The Royal Variety Performance. He was knighted in 1974 and ennobled in 1976 in Harold Wilson’s resignation honours list along with brother Lew, which, he contended, ‘was an unusual selection, mostly self-made men who had made their reputations less by background and inheritance than by their wits’ (1990: 199). Delfont thus understood his

honours as a recognition of entrepreneurial values against the claims of privilege; he took the title Lord Delfont of Stepney to proclaim his working-class East End origins.⁷ Always immaculately turned out and smoking the large cigar that symbolised commercial achievement, Delfont looked like ‘a film star, a Charlton Heston figure, with his lush grey hair, worn long and thick but carefully swept back and coiffured ... He has the substantial air of a man of the theatre, a grand impresario in the old style’ (Davies 1981: 168-6). Delfont had a fabled charm and affability, constantly smiling, seemingly anxious to get on with everybody but this bonhomie hid a ruthless business brain constantly calculating a venture’s likely commercial return. Although the three brothers had their separate spheres – Lew television, Bernard live entertainment and Leslie a highly successful talent agency – those interests also interlocked under the umbrella of the Grade Organisation. In May 1966, a *Sunday Times* investigative team profiled the Grades as the ‘Showbusiness Octopus’, mapping the web of interconnected organisations and cross-directorships that made them ‘the most powerful entertainment network in the world’.⁸

Delfont and EMI

Although some commentators expressed reservations about the extent of ‘Gradeopoly’, Delfont’s ability to run a wide range and variety of leisure interests – in addition to controlling the Talk of the Town and four other West End theatres he had a stake in ‘30 other companies covering property, television films, recordings, and music and theatre productions in Europe, America, Australia and South Africa’ (Noble 1969: 96) – made him highly attractive to EMI, which was looking to restructure from a leading record label and electrical equipment manufacturer into a global entertainment conglomerate that could compete with the US giants such as Radio Corporation of America. EMI already had an interest in West End theatre with a twenty per cent share in Tennents and Delfont had been made an EMI

executive when it acquired the Grade Organisation for £7.5 million in 1968. The transformation from free-wheeling impresario to corporate executive was a challenge for Delfont, who reflected: 'I was not a company man but an independent' (1990: 173); it was a full year before he made the move from his office in the Prince of Wales Theatre to EMI's headquarters on Golden Square (ibid.: 181). However, Michael Grade thought his uncle 'loved the internal politics and the power-play, and for the first time in his life had financial security' (1999: 67).

This ambivalence manifested itself in different ways and at different moments. Initially he was tempted by the 'unrivalled opportunities to build up [EMI's] leisure division into a major company in its own right. There was no shortage of investment money and I would have virtually a free hand on how to spend it. It was an offer I could not resist' (1990: 174). He was also allowed to continue as a theatrical impresario and contended that some of his most ambitious and successful productions were mounted during his time at EMI (ibid.). His new role afforded Delfont the chance to realise a longstanding scheme to revitalise Blackpool by acquiring, from Charles Forte, Blackpool Tower Company, all three of Blackpool's piers, the Winter Gardens with its ballroom, restaurant, bars and Pavilion Theatre, the Grand Theatre, a circus, aquarium, zoo and the Central Beach Amusement Park, making it the largest entertainment complex in Britain. Although the redevelopment Delfont masterminded was controversial, it had a transformative effect on Blackpool as a leisure resort (Walton 1998: 152-3).

However, Delfont made a more significant move to expand EMI's entertainment empire by purchasing the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC). He oversaw the acquisition by Warner-Seven Arts of a 25 per cent share in the company as the prelude to making a bid for the whole organisation. After an aggressive corporate battle, ABPC was acquired for £63 million in January 1969.⁹ ABPC was a prime target for EMI as the second

largest British film concern after the Rank Organisation, with a large studio at Elstree that had nine sound stages, an extensive distribution network and, most importantly as a commercial target, a circuit of 267 cinemas. ABPC also had a half share in Thames Television and wide-ranging leisure interests, including health and fitness clubs, night clubs and bars, bowling alleys and squash courts, a disco chain, London hotels, Angus Steak Houses and the Empire Ballroom in Leicester Square. The takeover was investigated by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which ruled that although EMI could retain its Thames Television stake, it had to dispose of its interest in the Grade Organisation in order to avoid the company operating as a cartel of theatre, film, television and agency interests. Commercial interests always trumped family loyalties and Delfont ensured that in disposing of the Grade Organisation, EMI retained ownership of the Shipman and King cinema circuit, which merged with the ABC chain.

The success of ABPC's film-making operation, which in 1968 generated a profit of £2 million that accounted for ten per cent of EMI's profits, convinced EMI's Board that this activity should be expanded. Its Managing Director, John Read, reorganised the company into four divisions to reflect that realignment: Gramophone Records, Electronic and Industrial Operations, Television, and Entertainment, which included film and was led by Delfont with the expectation that he would increase EMI's film undertakings (Moody 2018: 12-13). Although Delfont knew little about the film industry, he knew almost everything about exhibition and showmanship and deployed the skills he had honed as a theatrical impresario revitalising the ABC cinema chain. Highly critical of current film exhibition practices, Delfont argued that the way forward was to have fewer cinemas with split screens. Under his direction, EMI embarked on a £10 million programme to upgrade and modernise the ABC (now renamed EMI) cinema circuit with an extensive programme of twinning or tripling as part of an effort to make 'cinema a place of glamour ... with restaurants and bars attached',

creating an entertainment complex that did not rely on the programmed feature film as the sole attraction (Delfont 1971: 5). He also sold off unprofitable cinemas and made a typical impresario's move to establish a new showcase: the Saville Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue (Eyles 1993: 102-3). His tactics were successful as revenue from individual EMI cinemas increased during this period (A. Walker 1985: 115).

Reviving British cinema

Although Delfont felt confident to reorganise EMI's cinema exhibition, he was astute enough to recognise that he needed expert help to increase film production. Although Delfont had an incumbent producer, Nat Cohen, discussed below, in April 1969, he appointed Bryan Forbes as Head of Film Production, a move that was bold, imaginative and risky, the choice of the impresario rather than the corporate man. Forbes had no direct experience of running a major studio and was uncompromising in his demands, announcing in *The Times*:

I want total involvement with films, not with business deals. I want to encourage the filming of ideas which is also entertaining, which is adult, which does not pander to the lowest common denominator, which does not depend on violence for its spurious shock value or sex for its transient excitement. (Forbes 1969)

However, Delfont was prepared to back someone who claimed that 'he knew how to make quality British films for mass audiences. I thought it was time he had a chance to put his ideas to the test' (1990: 183). In August 1969, only four months in, the press was invited to the opulent setting of the Grosvenor House ballroom at which Forbes, sitting alongside Delfont, detailed a programme of fifteen films that Delfont described as

probably the most ambitious programme ever to be undertaken by a British organisation and reflects the determination of EMI ... [to become] the most powerful film force anywhere in the world ... It goes some way to filling the vacuum caused by

the partial withdrawal of the American film making companies from Britain. (Quoted in the *Guardian*, 13 August 1969).

This was both the impresario's grand gesture and a demonstration of his grasp of the need for significant change. One guest, *Sight and Sound*'s editor Penelope Houston, noted with approval Forbes's emergence as the 'new impresario' that British cinema sorely needed, one who might forge 'a new studio image for the 1970s' after ABPC's 'drab and dismal' record over the previous decade.¹⁰ However, she also reflected on problems of Forbes's ambition 'to sell to the Americans, when the intention is plainly to go for neither sensation nor superstars' (1969: 183; see also Eves 1970: 53).¹¹ According to Forbes, his programme was to be an entirely British affair, using a £4 million revolving fund for 'films to be made in-house, employing [Elstree's] permanent studio staff, distributed by EMI and shown in their chain of cinemas' (1992: 63).

Although proclaimed as a radical break, Forbes's determination to employ studio staff on British made films was a direct continuation of the strategy employed by ABPC since the coming of sound (see Porter 2000; 2001).¹² However, ABPC's output had been characterised by its cautious, cost-conscious approach playing to known audience preferences, whereas Forbes's films were an eclectic assortment that reflected his personal tastes. They offered directors, including those making their first film, artistic freedom and were not dictated by a film's likely box-office appeal. It was the portfolio of an 'impresario idealist', which led to clashes with Delfont whose tastes were more conservative and commercial. Delfont, having appointed himself the 'final arbiter' of what films were to be shown on the EMI circuit, vetoed the release of the satire *The Breaking of Bumbo* (1970), which he regarded as 'a messy and unwatchable piece of military hokum' (Delfont 1990: 184). According to Forbes, Delfont did not appreciate the qualities of *The Raging Moon* (1971), the one film Forbes directed himself during his tenure, which received neither a premiere nor a full circuit release (1992:

108; Walker 1986: 435). Forbes also actively championed Joseph Losey's *The Go-Between* (1971), which he thought 'represents to me the sum total of what I hoped to achieve when I first started to formulate *our plans*' (quoted in Barber 2013: 53, my emphasis). However, despite this appeal to a shared vision, Forbes had to arrange surreptitiously for the film to be entered at Cannes, where it won the *Palme D'Or* and was picked up for American distribution by Columbia (Forbes 1992: 220-1). However, in true showman's style, Delfont was quick to exploit the publicity potential of this accolade, arranging for a royal premiere and suggesting Losey arrive with the Queen Mother; Losey declined (Moody 2018: 67).

However, Delfont's problem with Forbes's production programme ran deeper than differences of taste. *The Go-Between* had been made by MGM-EMI, formed in April 1970 when the American studio wound up its British operations and closed Borehamwood Studios. According to *Variety*, 26 April 1971, MGM guaranteed £175,000 a year to co-fund more ambitious British productions. Delfont was unwilling to jeopardise this source of income by opposing MGM's hard-nosed President James T. Aubrey, the 'smiling cobra', who considered the film uncommercial (Moody 2018: 65-66). More significantly, although Delfont had hoped that Forbes's ambitious programme would revitalise British cinema, his first four films – *And Soon the Darkness*, *Eyewitness*, *Hoffman* and *The Man Who Haunted Himself*, all released in 1970 – were commercial failures. The radically uneven *Mr Forbush and the Penguins* (1971) flopped and *A Fine and Private Place* had to be abandoned. Forbes's only major hits, at least in the domestic market, were *The Railway Children* (1970) and *Tales of Beatrix Potter* (1971). In the absence of substantial commercial success, and judging that 'EMI film production was losing its sense of direction and morale was low' (1990: 185), Delfont felt unable to back Forbes's thoroughgoing plans to modernise Elstree Studios nor to increase his production budget for the more ambitious films he wished to make

(Moody 2018: 22-4). Feeling frustrated and unsupported, Forbes resigned in March 1971, thirteen months before his contract ended.

In his autobiography Delfont opined: ‘My heart was with Bryan Forbes. I wanted him to succeed’, but as an EMI director his responsibilities were to the ‘shareholders and the workforce’ (1990: 185). I see no reason to doubt the sincerity of Delfont’s hopes. Forbes was, after all, his appointment and the Grosvenor House announcement was a very public declaration of his endorsement. Their initially close relationship was alluded to by Forbes when he reminded Delfont of ‘our plans’ and is confirmed in Forbes’s memoirs (1992: 31). Although Forbes complained that Delfont ‘never had the courage of my convictions’ (ibid.), he places greater blame on the EMI Board’s corporate capitalism, which he characterises as consisting of old men set in their ways who showed no understanding or appreciation of his attempts to experiment (ibid.: 99). Forbes also retained a liking for Delfont and appreciated his discomfort at being a corporate functionary answerable to a board, one who ‘wished he had never got involved with a public company. “I never minded losing my own money”’ (quoted in Forbes 1992: 227). However, as a businessman, Delfont’s judgement was that Forbes’s idealistic and ambitious programme was ‘was out of all proportion to the likely return ... I was rather more inclined to back the market I knew to exist, in other words, to go the way of Nat Cohen, than to chance all on a long-odds bet.’ (1990: 185). Although the press sided with Forbes, even his supporters such as Alexander Walker concede that this was more than a simple clash between the artist and the capitalist. Walker acknowledges that Forbes’s films were rather insular, parochial and out of step with contemporary tastes, and that his ‘Thalbergian’ gesture in announcing such an ambitious programme in advance limited his ability to adjust to changing circumstances (1986: 431, 440).

After Forbes’s departure, Nat Cohen took over entire responsibility for EMI’s film production. Cohen was a fellow Jewish impresario, though not a showman, who, in

partnership with Stuart Levy, had run Anglo-Amalgamated, a low-budget production-distribution company, since 1945. Cohen had sold half of Anglo to ABPC in 1962 and, after Levy died in 1967, a further 25 per cent to EMI in November 1968 when it took over the company. Delfont, judging that 'Nat's track record was strong enough to beef up our production schedule' (1990: 183), had no hesitation in purchasing the remaining 25 per cent share in Anglo-Amalgamated in March 1969. Cohen became Managing Director of the renamed Anglo-EMI, a wholly owned production subsidiary, and joined EMI's board. Delfont thought Cohen a safe pair of hands, 'the sort of film maker who knew all there was to know about popular demand' and the 'universal appeal of lowbrow humour' (ibid.: 182). He therefore did not interfere in Cohen's choice of films, even if some of the 'lowbrow humour', such as *Percy* (1971), about a man with a penis transplant, did not quite accord with the 'family values' Delfont espoused. In contradistinction to Forbes, Cohen was guided by an 'instinct for what I feel the public wants', as he was quoted as saying in an article in the *Telegraph*, 7 December 1973, and his instincts were generally commercially sound. He enjoyed a major box-office success with the television comedy spin-off *On the Buses* (1971) – made for £90,000 and garnering a profit of over a million (Walker 1985: 114) – and its sequels.

Part of Delfont's managerial strategy was a policy of divide and rule and he ensured Cohen's operation was kept entirely separate from Forbes's, thereby encouraging, albeit indirectly, a rivalry between the two, engendering a mutual suspicion that it was the other who enjoyed more support, more generous funding and preferential marketing. Forbes suspected that Cohen expected to be offered his post; Cohen that his films were being used to subsidise Forbes's profligacy (see Forbes 1992: 62, 173; for Cohen's comments, Walker 1985: 114). There is no evidence that Cohen and Delfont were close; indeed, they appeared to have had a more distant relationship than Delfont initially enjoyed with Forbes, but Cohen

triumphed because his films made money. And, in all likelihood, it was Cohen's steady box-office success that persuaded Delfont to back his riskier projects, which included Ken Loach's *Family Life* (1971). In an unprecedented gesture, Delfont arranged for letters urging the public to see a film that 'could change the way you think' to be sent to more than 350,000 homes in the districts where it was to be shown (Moody 2018: 128).

However, Cohen's successes were in the domestic market, which was not enough to silence the continual anxieties of EMI's Board about its film operation, which were exacerbated when MGM withdrew from the co-production agreement in September 1973. Delfont had expressed his confidence in the future growth of British cinema in an article in the *Guardian*, 11 August 1967, and had reaffirmed that conviction on Forbes's appointment, but he was faced not only with the withdrawal of American finance but the seemingly inexorable shrinkage of the domestic market. Annual admissions had declined from 214.9 million in 1969 to 134.2 million by 1973 and continued falling to 101 million in 1980,¹³ which made cinema exhibition less profitable and thus less able to subsidise film production. By this point, losses on Elstree studios were estimated at £900,000 a year and there were press reports that the studios were going to close (Barker 1973: 5). Delfont even made the radical proposal to concentrate UK production in one studio, which, he argued, should be Pinewood as that had the largest facilities and an extensive backlot, a move that the unions opposed (Barker 1974: 8). Elstree was kept open by halving its workforce and making three of the sound stages available for outside productions (*EMI Annual Reports*, 1974, 1975). Whereas both Forbes and Cohen regarded 'overseas sales as a bonus', the contracting domestic market convinced Delfont they must become central; EMI films 'had to be international or it was no business at all' (1990: 184, 188).

Conquering the international marketplace

Thus, although Cohen continued to oversee the production of modestly budgeted films for the domestic market, his main energies went into creating a ‘Hollywood’ film: *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), budgeted at £1.5 million, which EMI’s 1974 *Annual Report* proclaimed to be ‘the most ambitious feature film ever to be made and wholly financed by a British company’ (1974: 33). A lavish production, replete with an all-star cast and crisply directed by Sidney Lumet, *Murder on the Orient Express* grossed over £200 million worldwide, making it, at that time, the most financially successful British film ever produced (Moody 2018: 137).¹⁴ However, Delfont realised that, for the film division to become profitable, EMI needed a succession of such productions rather than the occasional hit. Cohen had little experience of making international films and by the time of *Murder*’s release he was 69. And, as Alexander Walker notes, following that success, the programme of films Cohen announced in 1975 ‘was all very, very cautious. To some it looked parochial’ (1985: 141). Delfont was astute enough to understand that realising the full potential of the global market required the energies of younger men.

At the 1975 Cannes Festival he approached Michael Deeley (aged 41) and Barry Spikings (aged 34) who had made a success of running British Lion through a strategy of pre-selling films in ‘strategic territories’, especially the United States (ibid.: 123). Deeley and Spikings were aspiring entertainment impresarios, mounting pop concerts, gambling on the property market and raising finance from Italian banks based in London rather than from the traditional sources of British venture capital (ibid., pp. 117-27). Both men were recognised in the press as smart operators – ‘Spiky-Dealings’. As an article in the *Mail*, 24 February 1979, described Spikings: ‘In the great tradition of entrepreneurs, audacity was always part of his psychology’, which could have been applied equally to Deeley. Delfont recognised them as fellow entrepreneurs who, unlike the ever-cautious Cohen, would have the imaginative boldness to make EMI a real force internationally. Deeley recalled: ‘I got the impression

Bernard Delfont welcomed “young buccaneers” like Barry and myself, but had to proceed cautiously so as not to offend the “old guard” (quoted in Walker 1985: 142). Delfont bought British Lion in May 1976 solely to acquire their services, although he ‘haggled skilfully well aware of British Lion’s weak financial position’ (Deeley 2008: 129) in order to get the lowest price for the deal. Deeley and Spikings were made joint Managing Directors of EMI Film Distributors, and Cohen Chairman of EMI Films, with Delfont assuming the position of Group Director of Entertainment. Rather than sack Cohen, Delfont, described by Forbes as a ‘killer who hates the sight of blood’ (1992: 182), ensured that Cohen was sidelined by this manoeuvre that was conducted without his knowledge: ‘I was not consulted and it was beyond my power to influence the decision’ (quoted in Walker 1985: 142). Although he stayed on at EMI until December 1977, Cohen was never ‘quite sure where I was supposed to be; and rarely finding people available when I wanted to consult them’ (quoted in *ibid.*: 207).

Before their appointment to EMI, Deeley and Spikings had persuaded Delfont to invest, alongside British Lion, in Columbia’s *Nickelodeon* in 1976. Sensing a major opportunity, Delfont flew to New York and, using his existing high-level US connections with Columbia’s President Alan Hirschfield ‘who was well known to me’ (1990: 192), negotiated further EMI investment in Columbia’s productions: *The Cheap Detective*, *The Deep*, *The Greatest* and *The Silver Bears*, all released in 1977. However, their profits were eclipsed by Delfont’s inspired speculation on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), which grossed over \$300 million, making EMI a profit of over £5 million on an initial £1.2 million investment. Delfont also purchased music publishing division of Screen Gems from Columbia in July 1976, which provided a rich resource of recording artists’ titles. In the same month he opened a US subsidiary (EMI Films Inc.) and masterminded the company’s move into American television by purchasing Tomorrow Enterprises, which was transformed into EMI Television Programmes. Thus although Delfont’s decision to internationalise EMI’s film production was

part of a general consensus within the industry – both the Cinematography Films Council and the Film Producers Association advocated producing films with international appeal (Barber 2012: 16-17) – it was the scale and extent of EMI's internationalism that was innovative in its the radical strategy of using British finance to fund American films, thus reversing the dominant paradigm of the previous decade.

It was within this framework that Deeley and Spikings developed their own particular 'low-risk' strategy in which they would commit to production only if they had secured American backing: 'If I could not get from a US major a guarantee yielding 50% of the budget plus a commitment to provide the full costs of prints and advertising in their territory we would not produce the picture' (Deeley 2008: 134). Deeley claimed that 'this method allowed EMI to produce much bigger pictures at almost no risk, provided we had the discipline to stick to the rules' (ibid.). Although Delfont had given Deeley and Spikings a revolving fund of \$8 million to begin pre-production and develop an attractive proposition, it was up to their American partners to decide which subject might work in the US market; this was the antithesis of Forbes's production policy. However, once approved, the American distribution guarantees 'brought prestige to the non-American buyers of the film' (ibid.), which was crucial in negotiating additional pre-sales in the other major territories – Japan, France, Italy and Germany – so that 90 per cent of the budget would be covered. Although these films were British-financed, Deeley pronounced pugnaciously: 'No one could tell the difference: to them and their audiences, it looked to be a wholly American movie' (quoted in Walker 1985: 194). Deeley thought of EMI as 'a vast supranational group' rather than a purely British concern (quoted in ibid.: 195), a view endorsed by Spikings (see Falk and Summers 1977: 6). In pursuit of this strategy, each of Deeley and Spikings' initial three films released in 1978 was co-financed with a different Hollywood studio: *The Deer Hunter* with Universal; *Convoy* with United Artists; and *The Driver* with Twentieth Century-Fox.

Delfont was fully behind Deeley and Spikings' strategy and flew to Los Angeles to support retaining the full-length version of *The Deer Hunter* despite Universal's misgivings (Moody 2018: 155). This demonstrates that Delfont could recognise – at the time rather than in retrospect – artistic qualities even if, as in this case, a running time of 183 minutes meant reduced exhibition opportunities. However, although the pair enjoyed virtually complete autonomy in choice of subject, Delfont, as with Forbes, was prepared to reject their choice if it offended his sensibilities. He overruled their decision to invest £2 million in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979) because he considered the film to be blasphemous (1990: 190). However, unlike Forbes, Deeley and Spikings were commercially successful: all three of their 'American' films made a profit. It therefore came as a shock to both when Delfont flew to Los Angeles in July 1978 to announce that EMI would not finance any further films even though, according to Deeley, their division had a forecast profit of £20 million with a further five films waiting to go into production (2008: 185). In Deeley's account, the reasons given by Delfont were the severe losses that EMI had experienced caused by declining record purchases and because sales of its anticipated money-spinner, a 'revolutionary' diagnostic body scanner, had been blocked by the US government in order to allow American companies to produce their own rival machines. EMI's profits had tumbled from £65 million in 1977 to £11 million in 1978 (Walker 1985: 206). Delfont casts a veil over the episode in his autobiography, but Deeley contends that it was Lew Grade who engineered their dismissal in order to make way for the creation of an American distribution company, Associated Film Distributors (AFD), co-funded by Grade's Associated Communication Company (ACC) and EMI (see Falk and Prince 1987: 65-6). Deeley, who had a handsome compensation package, returned to independent production in September 1978, while Spikings, without a safety net, accepted Delfont's offer to take over his role as head of the film division. Deeley (2008: 135) contends that Delfont was shocked that the pair were prepared to separate, but it seems more

likely that Delfont continued his policy of divide and rule: ousting the somewhat bullish Deeley and retaining the more tractable, if less experienced, Spikings.¹⁵

Delfont, Grade and the American Eldorado

Before turning to the details of AFD, its creation needs to be understood historically as the latest in a series of attempts by British film companies to ‘conquer’ the American market. In his overview of the relations between British cinema and Hollywood, Tom Ryall observes that an ambitious ‘assault’ on the American market appears to be an inevitable outcome when British companies reconfigure as large corporations. Previous attempts had been made by Gaumont-British, the most powerful combine in the 1930s, and in the late 1940s when the Rank organisation was at its height (2001: 76-106).¹⁶ This ‘assault’ always involved setting up a distribution network, which would both guarantee a sizeable American release and obviate having to share the profits with an American renter. Deeley estimated that in the mid-1970s the American market counted for 60 per cent of overseas sales (2008: 134), making an effective US release more important than ever. However, as Rachel Low had observed of an earlier era, not only did the American studios discourage competition but, in order to succeed, British producers had to ensure a steady supply of high quality films and not just the occasional hit. The expense that this involves can be justified only if a producer is ‘sure of a big market not just for isolated films but *as a matter of course*. The Americans had one and the British did not, and underlying the history of the British film industry is its struggle to come to terms with that fact’ (Low 1971: 270, my emphasis).

The main impetus behind the formation of AFD was Lew Grade who, having been compulsorily retired from running ATV in 1970 when he reached 70, had turned his undimmed energies to film production, no doubt spurred on by wanting to outdo his brother’s success at EMI; by October 1978, when AFD was first announced, Grade’s company ACC

had produced nearly 100 films. Delfont noted that his brother had become ‘convinced that British films were given a raw deal by American distributors’ (1990: 193) and therefore establishing AFD would ensure that all the profits made by British productions would be returned to ACC/EMI rather than shared with an American distributor. Although Grade and Delfont had clashed over their rival productions about the Titanic, each understood that only in combination did their companies have the resources to challenge the American majors. Delfont waited a year to see the results from his brother’s initial foray, which was backed by the Boston-based General Cinema Corporation: ‘What had been achieved in such a short time was impressive. Lew established a working relationship with the cinema chains, and he was on the verge of leasing a showcase cinema in New York. Why not I thought?’ (1990: 194). Delfont’s ingenuousness hides, one suspects, his own competitive desire not to be outdone by his brother and must have envied his apparently untrammelled freedom as head of his corporation – ‘If I wanted to make a film, that was it: we made it’ (quoted in Walker 1985: 197) – which would have made him eager to prove that he had similar autonomy and control. By May 1979, through the continued overall success of the leisure division and some adroit boardroom manoeuvring, Delfont had become EMI’s CEO and was therefore able to pursue this ambitious and expensive enterprise without corporate constraints. For both brothers, establishing AFD must have seemed the culmination of the impresario spirit that had driven their whole careers: seizing the moment when they felt strong enough to challenge the might of the Americans to which they had always been in thrall, and, in the process, to become global power-players.

AFD, capitalized at \$38.5 million, was to manage \$175-200 million worth of production on an initial slate of 22 films: both companies guaranteed to make twelve films a year for four years (Pollock 1978). It was to distribute both its own films and others that it might pick up (Walker 1985: 201). The showman brothers launched AFD with a glamorous

and hugely expensive fanfare at Hollywood's Beverley Hills Hotel in July 1979 designed, in Grade's words, to 'convince them we're here to stay' (quoted in Falk and Prince 1987: 61). However, to be an effective challenge, AFD needed a consistent series of high-quality productions. EMI had relocated its production base to Los Angeles and Spikings had a budget of \$70 million to cover the costs of producing a slate of 'Hollywood productions' – *Can't Stop the Music*, *The Jazz Singer* and *Times Square* – all released in 1980, which were designed to appear as American as possible, never betraying their British origins. Spikings stated he was not interested in making 'little local movies' but ones that would become 'part of the American market' which, in the long run, would encourage American investment in British films (quoted in Falk 1981). Delfont justified the policy by emphasising that although 60 per cent of EMI's film budget was spent in America, 100 per cent of the profits would be returned to the UK and that making international films was the only way to generate the revenue to support a domestic industry. However, as these films were made in America with largely US crews, this policy did nothing to secure employment at Elstree, and by 1979 its workforce had been reduced to a mere 48 (Warren 1981: 156). Unfortunately, Spikings's initial trio proved to be expensive flops, eclipsed only by EMI's now legendary commercial disaster, *Honky Tonk Freeway* (1981), that, at \$25 million was \$7.8 million over budget yet barely grossed \$700,000 (Moody 2018: 175, 178). Spikings had ignored the 'discipline' of Deeley's system: *Honky Tonk Freeway* was a satire made to English tastes rather than a film in which the Americans had confidence, and Spikings had failed to step in when the inexperienced producer, Don Boyd, effectively lost control of the production. The film was disliked by Universal, which did little to promote it.

Honky Tonk Freeway was distributed by Universal because AFD had already folded. All its first eight films had performed poorly, except for *The Muppet Movie* (1979). In hindsight, Delfont acknowledged that its triumphalist launch had been a mistake because the

American studios took it as a 'declaration of war'. Even in combination, ACC/EMI failed to produce sufficient volume of high-quality films and was not credible enough to be taken seriously by American producers, leaving AFD with what the other distributors did not want (1990: 194). AFD was shut down in March 1981 with EMI liable for 40 per cent of the estimated loss of \$62 million (Walker 1985: 212). Don Boyd considered that the Delfont/Spikings 'policy of trying to compete with the American majors and getting to a point where the whole system took [EMI] seriously was worked out, intelligent and brave' (quoted in J. Walker 1985: 31-2). From a more objective viewpoint, Kenneth Maidment, President of the British Film Producers Association, observed that: 'When they set up on their own everyone thought it was a great thing. And indeed it was. But a distribution organisation really needs to have a certain volume of product, and it needs to have some profitable pictures too' (quoted in the *Guardian*, 3 March 1980). Deeley, who felt most aggrieved, contended that this 'giant self-delusion' (quoted in Falk and Prince 1987: 88) was the result of Delfont and Grade's ignorance about how the film industry worked, seduced by the prospect of bonanza profits and ignoring the risks. The veteran film-maker John Boulting argued that it was the brothers' lack of historical knowledge that lured them into what he regarded as a 'calamitous mistake' (quoted in Walker 1985: 212). AFD's collapse coincided with the huge financial disaster of Grade's *Raise the Titanic* (1980) which, as Walker comments (*ibid.*: 203), gave journalists the perfect metaphor with which to describe what became Grade's own spectacular demise when he was ousted from his communications empire in a boardroom coup in 1982.

Delfont's departure

Delfont fared rather better. Although he admitted at the time that the failure of AFD and the huge losses of *Honky Tonk Freeway* were the result of 'overreaching' (quoted in Walker

1985: 214), a nicely emollient phrase, Delfont had left Spikings to attend to film production while he focused on the rest of EMI's leisure division, which, he claimed, had generated a pre-tax profit of nearly £20 million by 1979 compared to the £1 million when EMI took over the Grade Organisation (1990: 201). Thus, the collapse of AFD was a failure, but not one that undermined Delfont's overall credibility at EMI. However, the success of the leisure division as a whole was not enough to save the ailing EMI corporation, which was taken over in November 1979 for £169 million by Thorn Electrical – a manufacturer of television sets, hi-fis, videodiscs and communication satellites – to create a new conglomerate: Thorn-EMI. Delfont was made head of Thorn-EMI Entertainment and Leisure. However, having been informed by its CEO, Sir Richard Cave, that it was company policy to retire directors at 70 (1990: 210), Delfont left in November 1980, by which time he had arranged the sale of the company's theatre and leisure holdings to Trusthouse Forte for £16 million. He became the CEO of Trusthouse Forte Leisure, although continuing as a non-executive director of Thorn-EMI. Revealingly, Delfont had shed any involvement in films, which remained with Thorn-EMI, leaving him without that encumbrance to run a company whose interests included three West End theatres, restaurants, amusement parks and the Chichester Marina. Ever restless and still looking to be independent, Delfont led a £37.5 million management buyout backed by London Merchant Securities, Lord Rayne's property empire. From 1 January 1983, he became Chairman of the First Leisure Corporation, where he oversaw the refurbishment of two theatres, the Prince of Wales and the Prince Edward. Delfont's career seems to follow the inexorable pattern of the entertainment impresario – compare Korda, Sydney Box or John Woolf – in which 'making the deal', the more complex the better, becomes their main source of pleasure.¹⁷ Delfont admitted: 'I do like making deals. Putting together a sale or a merger or a take-over is very exciting' (quoted in Davies 1981: 211). It was a way in which the

independent impresario could double as the company man, the two becoming indistinguishable.

Conclusion

Delfont never had the same emotional investment in film as he had the theatre: ‘With a live show you can get involved, but with a film, once it’s in the can, it’s finished’, he was quoted as saying in an article in *The Sunday Times*, 27 November 1977. However, my argument has been that although film was always one facet of his overall responsibility for EMI’s leisure division, and not necessarily the most important one, he took seriously his responsibilities for film at EMI – production, distribution and exhibition. Although he acted within certain constraints – at least until he became CEO and forged ahead with AFD – and was conscious of the need to secure EMI’s continued commercial prosperity, his instincts remained those of the risk-taking impresario rather than the cautious corporate man, and his film policy at EMI was far more dynamic than ABPC’s had been. Schooled in the different arena of the West End theatre, Delfont recognised that his impresario’s instincts and abilities were not matched by a secure grasp of how the British film industry worked, although his modernisation of EMI’s circuit cinemas was effective. He therefore relied on others to execute his production policy. Appointing Forbes to reinvent a wholly British cinema – which still seemed possible in 1969 – was both a bold move and popular with commentators. A more cautious person would have appointed a less combative person than Forbes and may well have been inclined to give the position to Cohen as the safe option. However, after the commercial and, to an extent, artistic, failure of Forbes’s tenure, Delfont evolved a strategy that attempted to offset the dwindling revenues available from the domestic market by concentrating on producing films for the international, that is, American, one.

He pursued this strategy with the ruthlessness, albeit indirect, that characterises all the great impresarios, manoeuvring the cautious Cohen out of the way in order to pursue the radical policy of investing in American productions and in making ‘American’ films with British finance. In Deeley and Spikings he appeared to find the perfect instruments through which this strategy could be implemented and create what Deeley labelled a ‘supranational’ company rather than a ‘British’ one. Whether their approach could have continued to be profitable, as Deeley contended, is doubtful given Spikings’ later failures. In the event, the brothers’ risk-avoiding strategy was overtaken by sibling rivalry. Delfont could not sit back and watch his brother reap the rewards of establishing a distribution company in America that would return all the profits of ‘British’ films to the UK and make AFD rather than EMI a truly global film player. However, historical precedent, and the basic realities of the domestic film industry, were against them. Delfont’s boldest and most controversial move, the gamble of the risk-taking impresario over the company man, was his most expensive failure. In retrospect it was an extraordinary moment, in which the entrepreneurial ambitions of two showbusiness brothers could determine the fate of almost the entire British film industry, which had to reinvent itself on a very different basis in the 1980s.

Delfont was a showman, a commercially driven impresario and not an ‘idealistic’ one. He did not have a Thalbergian ‘vision’ for British cinema or any specific programme of films – hence the clash with Forbes. His film policies were based on commercial considerations, and artistic triumphs – *The Deerhunter*’s five Oscars – were a bonus rather than the objective, which was to create entertaining and profitable films. To some, most vociferously Alexander Walker, Delfont’s ‘supranationalism’ was a ‘betrayal’ of British cinema – whose responsibility was to portray indigenous subject matter, locations, cultural concerns and home-grown stars in a national cinema rather than an international one – in favour of ‘British-financed but US-made movies using Hollywood talents as his “mercenaries”’ (2004:

36). And, as discussed above, Delfont's policy did nothing to retain Elstree's staff, nor did it nurture or support emerging talent in the British film industry, as both Forbes and Cohen had done. However, in the face of a shrinking domestic market and the absence of any government encouragement or support to create a 'national' film industry as Walker conceived it, Delfont concluded that there was no alternative: film had to be international, otherwise it was 'no business at all'. Any assessment of his tenure at EMI needs to keep those commercial realities in mind. By attempting to understand Delfont's production policy and the constraints within which they were pursued, this article has demonstrated his importance to the story of EMI and the wider importance of the impresario in shaping the British film industry.

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Notes

¹ The existing overviews of British cinema in the 1970s by Higson (1994) and Harper and Smith (2012) both seem to downplay the importance of Delfont. Harper and Smith are too reliant on the autobiographical accounts by two of the producers he hired, Bryan Forbes (1992) and Michael Deeley (2008), which clearly have old scores to settle; Barber (2013) almost elides his role altogether by referring to the company, EMI, as an agent. The most thorough account is Moody (2018), which considers Delfont's role in some detail but from a different perspective from the one taken in this article. As often with 'production chiefs', the

most perceptive analysis is Walker (1985, 1986) but his account deals solely with Delfont's film career. There is a Delfont archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre Collections that I have consulted but this is limited to his role as a theatrical impresario; see <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb71-thm/300>.

² For an overview see Spicer (2018).

³ Basil Dean was another figure who moved from theatre to film, founding Associated Talking Pictures in 1929. However, it is hard to imagine someone more different from Delfont, as Dean was stubborn, inflexible, autocratic and looking to make 'high art'. In his autobiography (1973: 3), Dean describes himself as 'a producer with an incurable ambition to improve upon standards already achieved'. However, he also reflected: 'I realise now that I tended to regard film-making as an extension of my work in the theatre. This was a fundamental error which did not affect the organisation and running of the studios at all, but did influence my choice of subjects and general approach to what is basically a different art.' (ibid.: 257).

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this phenomenon in more detail. The classic account is Chandler (1962). In the entertainment industries – theatre, music hall (variety) and film – this entrepreneurial form of capitalism persists for longer and more strongly than in other areas of the economy; see Crowhurst (1997).

⁵ For the origins of the theatrical impresario see Rosselli (1984).

⁶ Details of Delfont's life are drawn from his autobiography (1990), and the accounts by Davies (1981), Grade (1982), Grade (1999) and McFarlane (2004).

⁷ Delfont's honours were in recognition of his 'services to the entertainment industry' but also his work for many showbusiness charities. The proceeds of the Royal Variety Performance went to charity.

⁸ Davies (1981: 158-9) reproduces the *Sunday Times* grid that mapped the Grades' interlocking network. Although in his autobiography Delfont maintained that he had never suffered from anti-Semitism in his business career, there seems to be a distinct undertone of this in the *Sunday Times* profile, which amounts to an exposé.

⁹ See the detailed account in *Today's Cinema*, 31 January 1969, pp. 1-5, and also 5 March 1969, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ For an overview of ABPC in the 1960s and Anglo-Amalgamated, see Petrie (2019: 42-9).

¹¹ A report in the *Guardian*, 13 August 1969, noted the 'strong double act, Forbes quietly enthusing ... Delfont tough, blunt and taking seriously the part of the boss of the £200 million EMI empire', and, like Houston reflected on the ambition of 'trying to forge a new British film industry on the sort of money Hollywood would happily pour into one spectacular'.

¹² As Porter's analyses of ABPC make clear, the company was founded by John Maxwell and then managed by Robert Clark, both of whom were prudent Scottish businessmen who represented corporate capitalism not risk-taking entrepreneurialism. Their aim was to keep the Elstree studio staff in permanent employment even at the cost of the 'drab and dismal' output of films that Houston bemoaned.

¹³ Available at <https://www.cinemauk.org.uk/the-industry/facts-and-figures/uk-cinema-admissions-and-box-office/annual-admissions/>

¹⁴ For an informative account of its production and other Christie adaptations see Street (2008).

¹⁵ As far as I am aware, Spikings has never commented publicly on this matter.

¹⁶ In *Transatlantic Crossings*, Sarah Street discusses Michael Balcon's international strategy at Gaumont-British in the 1930s (2002: 75-8) and Rank's attempts in the 1940s (96-115) and the 1950s (148-54), and also the attempt by Goldcrest in the 1980s (200-4). For additional

details about Rank's attempt in the 1940s see Murphy (1983), and for Goldcrest see Eberts and Illot (1990). It can be argued that the most successful attempts to make British films that succeed in America are those by Eon Productions with the Bond franchise and Working Title; for the latter see Townsend (2018). In each case, the British company partnered with an American studio.

¹⁷ For Korda, see M. Korda (1980: 105, 346, 416-18; for Box see Spicer (2006); for Woolf, see Spicer (2012: 123). Lew Grade had never been a producer of shows and so was a deal-maker throughout his career.

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