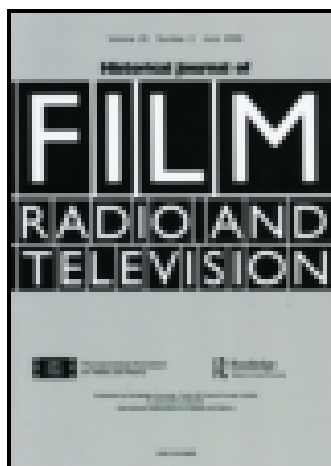


This article was downloaded by: [Senate House Library, University of London]

On: 14 November 2014, At: 05:46

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/chjf20>

Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey

Annette Kuhn

Published online: 02 Aug 2010.

To cite this article: Annette Kuhn (1999) Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19:4, 531-543, DOI: [10.1080/014396899100163](https://doi.org/10.1080/014396899100163)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/014396899100163>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution,

reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>



Cinema-going in Britain in the 1930s: Report of a Questionnaire Survey

ANNETTE KUHN, *Lancaster University*

Between 1994 and 1996, the Economic and Social Research Council funded 'Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain', a research project begun at the University of Glasgow in 1991 with the aims of investigating the ways in which films and cinema-going figured in the daily lives of people throughout the nation in the 1930s, and of situating cinema-going and fan behaviour in this period within their broader social and cultural contexts. This research is very much in the spirit of the studies of leisure and everyday life conducted by Mass-Observation in the late 1930s; in particular of the wide-ranging study proposed, but never completed, of cinema's part in the social life of the industrial town of Bolton ('Worktown'): preliminary studies of Bolton cinemas were made, interviews with several cinema managers conducted, some observer accounts of films and audience responses filed, and a questionnaire survey of Bolton cinema-goers conducted[1].

During the ESRC-funded period of 'Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain,' the greater part of work on the project was devoted to the historical study of engagements with popular culture and leisure activities, especially of cinema-going patterns and preferences, from the standpoint of those most closely involved in these activities—the cinema-goers themselves. This called for the conduct of 'memory work' with surviving film-goers of the 1930s, who by the mid 1990s were in their seventies and older. The project thus offered a final opportunity to gather the direct testimonies of a generation for whom 'going to the pictures' was an everyday, and perhaps for some even a formative, activity.

Memory work was carried out largely by means of in-depth interviews with thirties cinema-goers living in four UK locations[2]. In the quest for interviewees, the Cinema Culture project was publicized in a wide range of specialist publications directed at the elderly, as well as through local print and broadcast media. In consequence, the project received hundreds of letters, inquiries and offers of information from all over Britain, and it was apparent that the project had generated a great deal more interest than could be accommodated through interviews alone. Although not part of the original research proposal, those of our correspondents who could not, for various reasons, be interviewed were invited to take part in a postal questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire devised for this survey (see Appendix) was kept as short and as simple as possible, and designed—through the choice, framing and ordering of questions—to stimulate recall of events and experiences more than 60 years earlier. In order to minimize the time between the project receiving inquiries from would-be informants and their receiving a response from us, questionnaires were sent out in two batches:

TABLE 1. Year of birth

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1903–1914	6	(6.6)	10	(10.5)	16	(8.6)
1915–1924	51	(56.0)	59	(62.1)	110	(59.1)
1925–1934	34	(37.4)	26	(27.4)	60	(32.3)
Median y.o.b.	1923		1922		1922	
Range	1906–32		1903–34		1903–34	

129 in May 1995 and 97 in December 1995. Of these 226 questionnaires, a total of 186 were returned: a response rate of 82.3%, indicating some enthusiasm about the project on the part of our correspondents. Indeed, in addition to completing their questionnaires, 40 or so respondents also sent other material—lists of films, short essays and memoirs, comments on favourite stars and films, and suchlike. Many more had included material of this sort with their original letters to the project[3].

Although no gender balance was planned or intended, respondents were divided more or less equally in terms of gender: Of the 186, 91 (48.9%) were male and 95 (51.1%) female. Some six in ten had been born between 1915 and 1924, the median year of birth being 1922 (Table 1). As many as one-third had been located in the South-east of England during the thirties, with the majority of all respondents having lived in larger towns and cities rather than in small towns and rural areas. By 1995, however, there had been a migration away from the South-east to other areas of England, most noticeably to East Anglia and to the South-west (Tables 2 and 3). The residence of respondents at the time of the survey is to some extent a reflection of the areas in which we were looking for people to interview for the project: this certainly explains the relatively high numbers of respondents living in East Anglia and the North-west of England; though, interestingly, not the sizeable cluster of respondents in Wales. (See Table 18 for details of how respondents heard about the project.)

Just over half of those who took part in the survey had finished their full-time education at the age of 14 or earlier—that is to say, at the minimum school-leaving age for this generation, for whom education beyond elementary school was a minority experience. The women in this group, however, were rather more likely than the men to have received a secondary education (Table 4). At the end of their full-time education, the largest single group of men and women (55.9%) entered jobs classified as skilled (Table 5): these include secretarial and clerical occupations (which together account for as many as 27.4% of all respondents) as well as certain types of administrative and craft jobs. A substantial additional group found work in sales occupations, and another in agriculture and other primary occupations[4].

At this early stage in their lives, women were more likely than men to enter managerial or technical work, and less likely to take up jobs classified as partly skilled or unskilled. The men and the women among our respondents diverge quite markedly, however, in their main occupations throughout life: the largest single group of women (46.3%) stated that they had been housewives for most of their working lives, while the majority of men (58.2%) had worked in skilled occupations of various kinds. The vast majority of both sexes had married and raised children (Tables 6 and 7); and the

TABLE 2. Region

	1930s		1995	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
SW England	14	(17.5)	30	(16.1)
SE England	61	(32.8)	31	(16.7)
East Anglia	34	(18.3)	45	(24.2)
Midlands	12	(6.5)	15	(8.1)
Yorks and Humberside	9	(4.8)	7	(3.8)
NW England	22	(11.8)	23	(12.4)
N England	5	(2.7)	4	(2.2)
Scotland	11	(5.9)	3	(1.6)
N Ireland	1	(0.5)	1	(0.5)
Wales	15	(8.1)	23	(12.4)
Unknown	2	(1.1)	3	(1.6)

TABLE 3. Settlement size (population in 1996)

	1930s		all		1995		all					
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F				
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%				
Village/small town (< 30k pop)	23	(22.0)	15	(15.8)	38	(20.8)	29	(31.9)	34	(35.8)	63	(33.9)
Town/small city (30–250k pop)	28	(30.8)	33	(34.7)	61	(32.8)	45	(49.5)	42	(44.2)	87	(46.8)
Large town/city (> 250k pop)	18	(19.8)	23	(24.2)	41	(22.0)	13	(14.3)	16	(16.8)	29	(15.6)
Greater London	20	(22.0)	23	(24.2)	43	(23.1)	1	(1.1)	2	(2.1)	3	(1.6)
Unknown	2	(2.2)	1	(1.1)	3	(1.6)	3	(3.3)	1	(1.1)	4	(2.2)

women's occupations are a faithful reflection of the dominant career pattern for this generation of women—to leave paid employment on marriage or the birth of the first child.

In general, the group of people taking part in this survey appears to be somewhat more highly educated, and to have worked in jobs requiring greater skill and/or more

TABLE 4. Terminal education age (TEA)

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
14 and under	51	(56.0)	45	(47.4)	96	(51.6)
15–16	24	(26.4)	20	(21.1)	44	(23.7)
17–18	12	(13.2)	22	(23.2)	34	(18.3)
Over 18	4	(4.4)	4	(4.2)	8	(4.2)
Unknown	0	(0.0)	4	(4.2)	4	(2.2)
Median TEA	14 yrs		15 yrs		14 yrs	
Range	13–24		13–23		13–24	

TABLE 5. Occupational class

	First occupation						Main occupation					
	M		F		all		M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Professional	2	(2.2)	1	(1.1)	3	(1.6)	6	(6.6)	1	(1.1)	7	(3.8)
Managerial/technical	3	(3.3)	16	(16.8)	19	(10.2)	18	(19.8)	18	(18.9)	36	(19.4)
Skilled	55	(60.4)	49	(51.6)	104	(55.9)	53	(58.2)	24	(25.3)	77	(41.4)
Partly skilled	14	(15.4)	12	(12.6)	26	(14.0)	6	(6.6)	3	(3.2)	9	(4.8)
Unskilled	13	(14.3)	11	(11.6)	24	(12.9)	5	(5.5)	2	(2.1)	7	(3.8)
Armed forces	3	(3.3)	4	(4.2)	7	(3.8)	1	(1.1)	0	(0.0)	1	(0.5)
Housewife	0	(0.0)	1	(1.1)	1	(0.5)	0	(0.0)	44	(46.3)	44	(23.7)
Not stated/various	1	(1.1)	1	(1.1)	2	(1.1)	2	(2.2)	3	(3.2)	5	(2.7)

training, than would be the norm for their age group as a whole—which is perhaps to be expected in a self-selected sample.

The Cinema and Other Leisure Pursuits

The ages at which respondents made their first visits to the cinema (Question 3), range between 1 and 16 years, the median age at first visit being six. Respondents were also asked about the stage of their lives when they did most of their cinema-going (Question 4); and here the median ages range overall between 11 and 25 years, with women (median age range 12–24 years) showing a slight tendency to spend fewer years than men (10–25 years) immersed in the cinema-going habit. For the majority (68.8%) of respondents, the main film-going years began in the 1930s. Given all this, and given the age profile of our respondents, it is evident that ‘going to the pictures’ is remembered by most as an activity associated with childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood—and perhaps as something that ended at marriage. A substantial minority (43.5%),

TABLE 6. Ever married

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	83	(91.2)	85	(89.5)	168	(90.4)
No	8	(8.8)	9	(9.4)	17	(9.1)
Unknown	0	(0.0)	1	(1.1)	1	(0.5)

TABLE 7. Children

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	73	(80.2)	73	(77.7)	146	(78.5)
No	18	(19.8)	21	(22.3)	39	(21.0)
Unknown	0	(0.0)	1	(1.1)	1	(0.5)

TABLE 8. Frequency of cinema-going

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
More than 3 times weekly	8	(8.8)	13	(13.7)	21	(11.3)
2–3 times weekly	43	(47.3)	46	(48.4)	89	(47.8)
Once a week	32	(35.2)	31	(32.6)	63	(33.9)
Less frequently	8	(8.8)	5	(5.3)	13	(7.0)

though, did continue their filmgoing into the 1950s and beyond, possibly suggesting a slight cinephile tendency within this group.

Asked how often they went to the cinema in the 1930s (Question 6), nearly 60 per cent of respondents recalled going twice weekly or more (Table 8)[5]. The finding that virtually everyone participating in this survey went to the cinema at least once a week does not exaggerate the extent of the cinema-going habit in the 1930s. Going to the pictures was a normal everyday activity, particularly for young people at this time. Our respondents remember it, too, as a sociable pastime: they went to the pictures most often with family or peers, somewhat less frequently with sweethearts, and relatively rarely on their own. There is a noticeable difference between men and women here, though, with women more likely to recall going to the cinema in the company of others, and with family members in particular (Table 9).

At a time when even the smallest town had several picture houses, there was nearly always a choice of films to see, even for the most avid cinema-goer. When it came to choosing films, our respondents—especially the women—remember being guided most of the time by their favourite stars, though substantial numbers of men and women were influenced by posters, advertisements outside cinemas, and similar publicity (Table 10). Nearly a third of all respondents admitted to going to see whatever film was playing—an observation which connects with the fact that nearly all respondents had their favourite cinemas, places whose names and locations are readily recalled at a distance of 60 years and more. In making the choice of which film to go and see, the place—a particular cinema—figured more importantly for many than what was actually showing there.

Asked what it was they liked about their favourite cinemas (Question 10), the vast majority (91.2%) of respondents used words suggesting such qualities as comfort, space, luxury, modernity—all of which suggest a contrast with the mundane realities of daily life (Table 11). For a substantial number, though (45.4%), the favourite cinema

TABLE 9. With whom went to cinema (%s are of cases)

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Alone	37	(40.7)	25	(26.3)	62	(33.3)
Friends of own age	61	(67.0)	58	(61.1)	119	(64.0)
Family	48	(52.7)	77	(81.1)	125	(67.2)
Boyfriend or girlfriend	41	(45.1)	52	(54.7)	93	(50.0)
Others	2	(2.2)	5	(5.3)	7	(3.8)

TABLE 10. Choice of films (%s are of cases)

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Whatever was on	29	(31.9)	30	(31.6)	59	(31.7)
Recommendation	25	(27.5)	24	(25.3)	49	(26.3)
Favourite stars	61	(67.0)	79	(83.2)	140	(75.3)
Notices in magazines/ newspapers	33	(36.3)	28	(29.5)	61	(32.8)
Cinema posters, etc	46	(50.5)	53	(55.8)	99	(53.2)

embodied more homely qualities: convenience of location, value for money, friendliness, a sense of belonging.

In letters and notes enclosed with questionnaires, respondents frequently draw a distinction between luxurious picture palaces on the one hand and downmarket 'fleapits' on the other. It is clear from these accounts that both types of picture house were enjoyed for different reasons, and that many of the writers retain vivid memories of the look and feel of these favourite places:

Cycling home from Kensington to Croydon each Sunday evening I had the choice of an Odeon, ABC or Granada for the big programmes (plus stage show) or the lesser 'bughouses' and 'fleapits' for the lesser films.

One of my memories of the Astoria was the French chocolate nougat that they sold. Never, nowhere have I tasted sweets like it, heavenly. ... Moving from the Astoria ... was the Magnet: this was the bug hutch. It was housed in the basement part of a slum tenement, and the admission was 1d. ...

Manchester city centre was in walking distance to visit the 'Picture Palaces', and they were indeed 'Palaces'—our home was rather drab, but clean—and to enter the 'Gaumont' or the 'Odeon' ... was a revelation: spacious foyer, grand staircase, and decoration reminiscent of 'Arabian Nights', and lovely upholstered seating ...

There were three cinemas in a town further up the valley and they were always full. One of them called the Hanbury was fairly new and so very posh [compared?] to what we had in our own cinema. I can remember the word got round that the Hanbury had new curtains. ... Everyone went there to see, and we were all thrilled to see a beautiful white satin curtain with scallops which was drawn up before the show started. ... [6]

TABLE 11. Favourite cinema keywords (%s are of cases)

	<i>n</i>	%
Comfort/space/luxury/modernity	156	(91.2)
Location/value for money/friendliness	76	(45.4)
Good films, acoustics, etc	44	(25.8)
Singalongs, clubs, live acts, music, etc.	26	(15.2)

TABLE 12. Other leisure activities

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Wireless listening	73	(83.0)	80	(85.1)	153	(84.1)
Reading	67	(76.1)	84	(89.4)	151	(83.0)
Sports/outdoor activities	51	(58.0)	52	(55.3)	103	(56.6)
Music hall/plays/theatre	43	(48.9)	58	(61.7)	101	(55.5)
Indoor hobbies	37	(42.0)	45	(47.9)	82	(45.1)
Church, chapel	33	(37.5)	45	(47.9)	78	(42.9)
Dancing	17	(19.3)	54	(57.4)	71	(39.0)
Courting	29	(33.0)	41	(43.6)	70	(38.5)
Youth club, scouts, etc.	39	(44.3)	30	(31.9)	69	(37.9)
Jobs around house/garden	23	(26.1)	39	(41.5)	62	(34.1')
Other clubs, societies	11	(12.5)	12	(12.8)	23	(12.6)
Political activity	3	(3.4)	3	(3.2)	6	(3.3)
Others (various)	9	(10.2)	3	(3.2)	12	(6.6)

But going to the pictures was by no means the only thing our respondents did in their spare time. Asked whether they had enjoyed any leisure pursuits besides cinema-going (Question 16), all but four said 'yes'. Most remembered being involved in a number of activities, with listening to the wireless and reading referred to most often (Table 12). Men, who on the whole recalled fewer extracinematic activities than women, mentioned sports, youth clubs, scouts, and suchlike, more often than women; while women more readily admitted to taking part in the 'frivolous' pursuits of courtship and dancing.

Preferences and Fan Behaviour

Of the 186 respondents, 173 admitted to having a favourite film star or stars (Question 11), between them mentioning the names of 122 individuals. Top ranking favourites were Deanna Durbin and Clark Gable, each of whom received 31 votes, with Gary Cooper and Ronald Colman close behind (Table 13). Men, though almost as likely as women to claim they had favourites, tended to mention fewer actual names. Gary Cooper, though, emerges as a particular favourite among our male respondents. The highly acclaimed Deanna Durbin, interestingly, has almost as many male as female followers in this group. These findings bear interesting comparison with—and indeed generally support—data on popular thirties stars culled from box-office returns and other contemporary sources[7].

Respondents were asked whether they could recall any films which made a strong or lasting impression on them (Question 12), and 171 (80 men and 91 women) answered 'yes', mentioning a total of more than two hundred film titles, not all of them from the 1930s. By far the largest number of films which made an impression belonged to the category of adaptations of books or plays: 127 such titles were offered, ranging from *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935) to *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Film musicals, which enjoyed greater success at the box-office in the thirties than literary adaptations [8], were in fact mentioned by fewer, but still by a substantial minority of, respondents; with historical films and epics, war films, comedies and horror films each having smaller followings (Table 14).

TABLE 13. Favourite stars: rankings (percentages are of cases)

	M		F		all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Deanna Durbin	13	(16.0)	18	(19.6)	31	(17.9)
2. Clark Gable	11	(13.6)	20	(21.7)	31	(17.9)
3. Gary Cooper	13	(16.0)	9	(9.8)	22	(12.7)
4. Ronald Colman	6	(7.4)	15	(16.3)	21	(12.1)
5. Nelson Eddy	2	(2.5)	18	(19.6)	20	(11.6)
6. Robert Donat	6	(7.4)	12	(13.0)	18	(10.4)
7. Astaire/Rogers	4	(4.9)	12	(13.0)	16	(9.2)
8. Jeanette MacDonald	2	(2.5)	13	(14.1)	15	(8.7)
9. Errol Flynn	5	(6.2)	10	(10.9)	15	(8.7)
10. Shirley Temple	3	(3.7)	11	(12.0)	14	(8.1)

As for specific films, the most frequently mentioned title was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), a film equally popular with male and female respondents and a preference reflecting the age profile of this group of people at the time of the film's UK release. The Gary Cooper film *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) comes in at second place and, like its star, is mentioned more often by men than by women. More popular with women are *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and *Cavalcade* (1933), with *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) mentioned by nine men and just two women (Table 15). Other films which respondents remember as having made an impression include (in descending order of preference): *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), *Rose Marie* (1936), *Victoria the Great* (1937), *Lost Horizon* (1937), *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Robin Hood* (1938), *The Ghost Goes West* (1936), *39 Steps* (1935), *Maytime* (1937), *San Francisco* (1936) and *Three Smart Girls* (1936).

Responses to questions about films seem less clear-cut, though, than those concerning cinemas and film stars: respondents do not always distinguish between films

TABLE 14. Favourite films: categories (percentages are of cases)

	n	%
Films of books or plays	127	(73.0)
Musicals and dance films	75	(43.1)
Epics, historical and adventure films	62	(35.6)
War films	49	(28.2)
Comedy	32	(18.4)
Suspense and horror films	32	(18.4)

TABLE 15. Favourite films: rankings (percentages are of cases)

	M		F		all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Snow White</i>	11	(13.7)	12	(13.2)	23	(13.2)
<i>Lives of a Bengal Lancer</i>	12	(15.0)	5	(5.5)	17	(9.8)
<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	5	(6.3)	10	(11.0)	15	(8.6)
<i>Cavalcade</i>	3	(3.8)	10	(11.0)	13	(7.5)
<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i>	9	(11.3)	2	(2.2)	11	(6.3)

TABLE 16. Why film(s) made an impression (percentages are of cases)

	n	%
Good acting/liked stars	65	(40.6)
Content: stories/morals/subject matter	56	(35.0)
Music and/or dancing	42	(26.3)
Fantasy/escape/captivating	29	(18.1)
Realistic/true/identified with story/characters	28	(17.5)

released during the thirties and those which came out later; there were relatively few replies to the question asking *why* the film or films made an impression, and even these have a rather vague or superficial quality (Table 16). Written material enclosed with questionnaires suggests that in cinema memory the act of going to the pictures—where and with whom you went—and, to a lesser degree, the personalities of film stars, stand out over and above the merits of individual films:

My preference was for musicals and my favourite stars were Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy whose beautiful voices blended so well together. ...

Lives of a Bengal Lancer was one of the films I recall seeing at the 'Majestic' which had a continuous programme during the week. Starting at two o'clock and continuing till late evening. I enjoyed *Bengal Lancer* so much that I sat through it twice. My mother going berserk when I got home. ...

When I was a little older I used to go on a Friday night with my mother and sister to the same cinema. ... We always went to see the musicals, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald and also skating star Sonja Henie all in black and white [9].

Cinema-going, for this generation certainly, appears to have been less about particular films, or even films in general, than about experiences surrounding and part of the activity of 'going to the pictures,' about the place of this activity in the context of their daily lives, interactions with family and friends, and comings and goings within and beyond the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Going to the pictures, and even following the fortunes of favourite stars, are remembered alongside and as part of other social activities, hobbies and leisure pursuits.

To take just one example, reading film magazines would have brought 'the pictures' into the everyday worlds of home, school or work. A majority of our respondents (130 or 69.9%, of whom 57 were men and 73 women) do remember having sometimes looked at film magazines, their preferences being precisely for the top four titles of the period: *Picturegoer*, *Picture Show*, *Film Pictorial* and *Film Weekly* (Table 17) [10].

Collecting stars' photographs and autographs is a step closer to fan worship; but only a minority of our respondents (68 or 37%, of whom 23 were men and 45 women) recall doing this. For the largest single group of collectors, moreover, this activity had nothing to do with following a particular star: 26 respondents said they collected photographs and/or autographs of numerous individuals. Of respondents who were interested in individual personalities, seven mentioned Deanna Durbin, five Nelson Eddy, and four each mentioned Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald and Robert Taylor. The extremes of fan worship, then, are by no means a feature of this group. Only four (2.2%) of the respondents belonged to star fan clubs, one each for Durbin, Eddy and MacDonald, and one for Patricia Roc, a star of the forties.

TABLE 17. Readership of film magazines (percentages are of cases)

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Picturegoer</i>	48	(84.2)	66	(90.4)	114	(87.7)
<i>Picture Show</i>	25	(43.9)	34	(46.6)	59	(45.4)
<i>Film Pictorial</i>	17	(29.8)	24	(32.9)	41	(31.5)
<i>Film Weekly</i>	13	(22.8)	10	(13.7)	23	(17.7)
<i>Film Star Weekly</i>	6	(10.5)	8	(11.0)	14	(10.8)
<i>Boys' Cinema</i>	8	(14.0)	0	(0.0)	8	(6.2)
<i>Girls' Cinema</i>	1	(1.8)	3	(4.1)	4	(3.1)
Others (various)	7	(12.3)	8	(11.0)	15	(11.5)

TABLE 18. Mode of contact

	M		F		all	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Personal contact	5	(5.5)	8	(8.8)	13	(7.1)
Local radio	2	(2.2)	2	(2.2)	4	(2.2)
Newspaper						
(e.g. <i>Manchester Evening News</i>)	39	(42.9)	36	(39.6)	75	(41.2)
Specialist press						
(e.g. <i>Mature Times</i>)	33	(36.3)	29	(31.9)	62	(34.1)
Local history/film society	4	(4.4)	0	(0.0)	4	(2.2)
Unknown	8	(8.8)	16	(17.6)	2	(13.2)

Conclusion

The self-selected sample of 186 men and women who completed and returned a postal questionnaire about their film-going in the 1930s is probably reasonably representative of 'ordinary' picturegoers of their generation. The typical respondent would have been in adolescence during the thirties, living in a town or city, and still at school or recently started work in a clerical, sales or craft job. Going to the pictures two or three times a week in the company of friends or family, our picturegoer would have gone to see whatever film was showing at a local picture house, especially if the star was a favourite; only very occasionally would a particular film make a lasting impression. While sometimes glancing through a film magazine like *Picturegoer*, and in general culturally competent in matters cinematic, she or he did not belong to any star fan clubs nor collect star photographs or autographs. For the typical young cinemagoer of the thirties, then, going to the pictures was part of daily life: easy, sociable, pleasurable—and still fondly remembered.

Correspondence: Annette Kuhn, Institute for Cultural Research, Bowland College, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YT, UK. Fax: + 44 (0)1524 594273; e-mail: a.kuhn@lancaster.ac.uk

NOTES

- [1] An account of the Bolton cinema-going study appears in Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London, 1987), Part I. The questionnaires are held in the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex: M-O A, Worktown Box 35; the observer accounts in M-O A, Worktown Box 36, Folder B. A separate national study, in which Mass-Observers completed day diaries and time charts of their activities, gives a sense of how cinema-going slotted into people's daily routines in the late 1930s: see M-O A, Day Diaries (1937–38); Graham Thomas and Christine Zmroczek Shannon, 'Reconstructing old times: problems and possibilities of a quantitative use of Mass-Observation's diaries', Mass-Observation Archive Working Paper, December 1981.
- [2] Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain (CCINTB), ESRC project R000 23 5385. For further details of and extracts from interviews, see Annette Kuhn, Memories of cinemagoing in the 1930s, *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 2 (1999), pp. 100–120.
- [3] The questionnaire was designed by Annette Kuhn, and coding and analysis performed by Callie Perks. Other assistance was provided by Lorraine Dobbs, Valentina Bold and Joan Simpson.
- [4] Although calculated on a different basis and covering a wider age range, Guy Routh's data on occupational classes in 1931 suggest that in comparison with their generation as a whole, white collar workers may be somewhat over-represented, and professional and partly skilled workers under-represented, among our respondents. See Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Britain, 1906–60* (Cambridge, 1965), Table 1.
- [5] This figure tallies almost exactly with the findings of the only controlled statistical research into cinema audience figures carried out during the 1930s: see Simon Rowson, *The Social and Political Aspects of Films* (London, 1939). See also Nicholas Hiley, 'Let's go to the pictures': the British cinema audience in the 1920s and 1930s, *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 2 (1999), pp. 39–53.
- [6] CCINTB 95–76–1a, Ralph Jeffrey, Sale, Cheshire; 95–133–10, John Fowler, Sudbury, Suffolk; 95–145–16, Megan Neeson, Hyde, Cheshire; 95–135–1, Hilda Moss, Hengoed, Mid Glamorgan.
- [7] Annette Kuhn, Researching popular film fan culture in 1930s Britain, in J. Gripsrud and K. Skretting (eds), *History of Moving Images: Reports from a Norwegian Project* (Oslo, 1994); Annette Kuhn, Cinema culture and femininity in the 1930s, in C. Gledhill and G. Swanson (eds), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1996). See also John Sedgwick, The comparative popularity of stars in 1930s Britain, *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 2 (1999), pp. 121–7.
- [8] A. Kuhn, Researching popular film fan culture in 1930s Britain.
- [9] CCINTB 95–228–1a, Joan Bice, Plymouth; 95–232–1d, Raymond Aspden, Accrington, Lancs; 95–135–1, Hilda Moss, Hengoed, Mid Glamorgan.
- [10] W.N Coglan, *The Readership of Newspapers and Periodicals in Great Britain, 1936* (London, [1936]); Nicholas Hiley, 'British cinema fan magazines in 1936' (Unpublished manuscript, 1991). In the mid 1930s, these magazines had a combined weekly circulation of more than 300 000 copies, suggesting a readership in excess of a million.

Annette Kuhn is Reader in the Institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University, England. Her books include: (as author) Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909 to 1925 (1988), (as editor) Queen of the Bs: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera (1995) and (as co-editor, with Jackie Stacey) Screen Histories: A Screen Reader (1998).

Appendix

Answer as many questions as you can, but do not worry if you cannot answer all of them. Simply tick the appropriate box(es) or write your answer in the space provided. If you wish to add to any of your answers, please feel free to do so, writing your comments on a separate sheet of paper.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Are you | Male
Female |
| 2. In which year were you born? | 19 __ |
| 3. How old were you on your earliest visit to the pictures? | About __ years |
| 4. At what stage of your life did you do most of your cinema-going? | Between the ages
of __ and __ years |

Questions 5 to 16 are about your main cinema-going years, as indicated in your answer to question 4. If you have been a regular cinema-goer for many years of your life, your answers should refer to *the 1930s only*.

5. Where did you live during your main cinema-going years? (state city, town or village, and county or district)

6. On average, about how often did you go to the pictures?

More than 3 times a week

2 or 3 times a week

Once a week

Less than once a week

7. When you went to the pictures, did you often or usually go (please tick as many as apply to you)

On your own

With friends of about your own age

With family members

With a boyfriend or girlfriend

Other(s) (please specify) _____

8. How did you choose which films to go to? (please tick as many as apply to you)

I saw whatever happened to be on

Recommendations by friends/family

Favourite stars

Notices in newspapers, magazines, etc.

Advertisements outside cinemas, posters, etc.

9. What was your favourite cinema? (please state name of cinema and village, town, suburb, or city district) _____

10. What did you like about this cinema? (use up to *three* words to describe it)

My favourite cinema was _____

11. Did you have a favourite film stars or stars

Yes

No

If yes, who were they? (up to *three* names)

12. Do you recall any films that made a particularly strong impression on you?

Yes

No

If yes, which ones were they? (up to *three* titles)

13. Did you ever look at any film magazines?

Yes

No

If yes, which? (please tick as many as apply to you)

Film Pictorial

Film Star Weekly

Film Weekly

Boys' Cinema

Girls' Cinema

Picturegoer

Picture Show

Other (please state) _____

14. Did you collect stars' photographs or autographs? Yes
No
 If yes, whose? _____
15. Did you belong to any film star fan clubs? Yes
No
 If yes, whose? _____
16. In your main cinema-going years, did you enjoy any spare-time activities apart from going to the pictures? Yes
No
 If yes, what were they? (please tick as many as apply to you)
- Reading
 - Dancing
 - Music hall, plays or other live theatre
 - Listening to radio
 - Church-going, chapel-going, etc.
 - Youth club or organizations (e.g. Scouts)
 - Political activity
 - Other clubs or societies
 - Sports and outdoor activities
 - Indoor hobbies
 - Jobs around the house and/or garden
 - Other (please state) _____

Your answers to these questions about yourself will provide us with useful background information. If there are any which you prefer not to answer, please leave a blank.

Your name and address:

Where were you born?

Have you ever been married? Yes
No

Do you have children? Yes
No

At what age did you finish your full-time education? _____ years

What was your first job?

What has been your main occupation through life? (please state 'housewife' if applicable; and if you have had several occupations, please say what they were) _____

How did you find about this project?

NOW PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO US IN THE ENCLOSED REPLY-PAID ENVELOPE Thank you for your help