

More to the UK than England: Exploring rural Wales' cinemagoing history through its showmen

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Abstract:

This paper explores the potentially unique factors of cinemagoing history that emerge when attention is focussed away from the dominant study of urban areas to that of a rural setting. It does so with the goal of not just comparing the rural to the urban, but also considering nuances of rural cinemagoing history on a globalised scale. As such, an example case study of Wales is undertaken, itself a country largely ignored within scholarship that claims to be of Britain, which highlights the impact of differing cultural contexts on rural cinemagoing history and experiences.

Keywords: new cinema history; rural history; archives; exhibition

The New Film History and the rural

Historically focussed studies of cinema audiences and cinemas as social spaces of film exhibition have burgeoned over the past thirty years. This is no coincidence, rather a conscious push from film historians to answer the call of Allen and Gomery for a revision of film historiography.¹ They argued that film historians had been guilty of approaching film texts as static aesthetic objects, frozen in time and meaning whilst presenting their arguments as 'a single, indisputable truth'.² This call-to-arms for scholars to revise their approaches was dubbed the New Film History, a tradition that encourages histories to move beyond the aesthetic: to examine a wide range of issues involved within the history of cinema and engage with an even wider range of evidence.³ Indeed, Elsaesser argues that the New Film Historian must become 'a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian' as they explore their topic of choice.⁴

Born out of the New Film History tradition is the New Cinema History, a progression that focuses scholarly attention on the history of cinemas and cinemagoing, rather than on

film texts. This offshoot tradition prominently foregrounds the utilisation of ethnographic methodologies, often mixed with the archival, in order to investigate ‘history from below’ and provide a voice to cinemagoers within film history.⁵ Such studies have considered, amongst other topics, audience memories, censorship, and the spatiality of cinema.^{6 7 8 9 10 11} Despite this broadening scope of investigation, there is a dominant focus on the urban within current film history scholarship. Rural studies are slowly emerging yet continue to be underrepresented within existing scholarship. As such, there remains scope for consideration of rural cinema histories within both localised and globalised contexts. For example, would perceptions of early touring cinema share more similarities across the memories of rural American and rural British audiences, than when compared with their urban counterparts? There has, over the past two decades, been a gradual growth in the number of works concerning rural cinema history. Katheryn Fuller-Seeley’s edited collection *Hollywood in the Neighbourhood* contains four chapters concerned with rural North American cinemagoing history, Dylan Walker and Karina Aveyard have both considered the perceptions of rural Australian audiences, whilst Meers, Biltereyst and Van De Vijver’s have explored memories of rural Belgian cinemagoing.^{12 13 14 15} More recently, Gennari, Hipkins and O’Rawe have published *Rural Cinema Exhibition and Audiences in a Global Context*, an edited collection that broadens the scope of rural audience studies to include Canada, China, Italy, South Africa, Czechoslovakia, Kenya, France, Sweden, Brazil Thailand and the Netherlands, amongst the more familiar Belgium, United States of America and Australia.¹⁶

There is, however, a gap in the consideration of rural British cinemagoing history. Aveyard’s *Lure of the Big Screen* considers rural English areas in comparison to her Australian case studies, though within a contemporary (rather than historical) context and with one primary English case study to every two in Australia. Indeed, these are notably *English* case studies, with her primary and secondary areas of study mostly being located within Norfolk and Suffolk and all within England. Rural Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are vastly underrepresented in this work and within the studies of audiences and cinema history more generally. Rural Scotland has received a modicum of academic attention through the published works of both Ian Goode and John Caughie, whilst Northern Ireland and Wales have been all but ignored in current scholarship.^{17 18} The recent edited collection *Cinema Beyond the City*, which aims to examine the role of cinemagoing in small-towns and rural communities across Britain, continues this trend.¹⁹ Other than the inclusion of Caughie’s chapter on small-town cinemagoing in Scotland, the United Kingdom is again represented by England. Indeed, the study of rural Scottish cinemagoing history, has received an increased amount of attention when compared to Wales or Northern Ireland. For example, Scotland is the only British nation to be found within Gennari, Hipkins and O’Rawe’s previously discussed edited collection. Yet, such a dominant focus on England within rural British cinemagoing studies has resulted in limited consideration for the socio-political and economic nuances unique to differing regions of rural Wales and Northern Ireland, and the impact of these factors on their localised cinemagoing history. Indeed, the burgeoning amount of attention paid to rural Scotland indicates that there is credence for

studying these less populous areas of the United Kingdom. As such, this article explores the formative history of cinemagoing and cinema exhibition within rural Wales (1894–1914), framed within a discussion of globalised rural comparisons to indicate the unique or shared issues that can be uncovered through the analysis of diverse rural settings. Furthermore, comparisons will be drawn with urban Wales – the history of which has been considered within existing scholarship – in order to reflect on the national and international differences found between rural and urban cinema histories.^{20 21}

The historiography of Welsh cinemagoing

The study of Welsh cinema history – both urban and rural – has generally been on the periphery of British cinema history. Books that claim to be about *British* cinema history almost entirely focus on industrial areas of *England*, with Wales either being mentioned by necessity due to audience statistics of the time (often amalgamating *England and Wales*), for the purpose of quickly crafting a broad context for the British cinemagoing landscape, or not being considered at all.^{22 23} There has, since the early 1990s, been a gradual development in the number of works dedicated to exploring a Welsh cinemagoing and exhibition history. However, these have mostly focussed their attention on the more populous and industrial southern area of the country, with the cities Cardiff and Swansea, along with larger mining towns such as Bridgend, receiving more attention than the largely rural Mid or North Wales regions. Both Dave Berry and Peter Miskell touch upon rural Welsh concerns in their work, though briefly and with less focus than the more urban Southern and North Eastern regions of the country.^{24 25}

In response to this, this article aims to particularly highlight the role and importance of auteur touring cinema showmen to the spread and evolution of cinema exhibition within rural Wales. In particular, this exploration will be focussed on an analysis of the activities of Arthur Cheetham, a pioneering filmmaker, touring showman, and opener of dedicated full-time cinemas. Cheetham's filmmaking, largely carried out during his touring period (1897 – 1905), and 1905 opening of a dedicated full-time cinema in Rhyl, likely Wales' first, are well covered in Berry's *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years*.²⁶ Berry also established Cheetham's celebrity status within Rhyl – then a palatial tourist town – and the North Wales area in general, which is largely rural. William Haggart, a contemporary of Cheetham, is also discussed by Berry, but with overwhelming focus on the films he produced rather than his South and West Wales fairground touring operations and later establishment of cinemas in the industrial southern mining valleys.

However, what Berry's work fails to account for is the impact and influence of the cult of personality attached to the most successful showmen, such as Cheetham, within differing areas of rural Wales; and, conversely, the impact of operating in differing areas of rural Wales on the showman's marketing and practices. The predominately rural areas of Mid and West Wales in particular are under-represented in both Berry's work and in wider Welsh cinema history scholarship. Indeed, the history of exhibition of rural Wales and Cheetham's accomplishments and impact within the region is relegated to a single

paragraph by Berry. In addition, while Miskell claims to investigate beyond the confines of South Wales, his discussions of issues unique to cinema exhibition in Mid or North Wales are fleeting. However, despite such gaps this existing scholarship does provide a strong base from which to develop and compare equivalent findings on rural Welsh cinema exhibition.

The Three Wales Model

In order for Welsh cinema exhibition history to shift away from a dominant focus on the South, a greater representation and understanding of the impact on exhibition and audience experience of socio-political and economic differences across Wales is required. My analysis will draw upon the 'Three Wales Model' as a means of identifying differing areas of Wales not just geographically but also culturally.²⁷ Based on the linguistic patterns, national identity and political party affiliation found within differing areas of Wales, the Three Wales Model was championed by Denis Balsom as part of a study in which he asked Welsh voters, as well as analysing equivalent data from the 1979 election, if they felt 'British', 'Welsh', or 'English'.^{28 29} On the basis of these findings, Balsom argued that there existed an interrelationship between political leaning, ability to speak Welsh and national identity, ultimately proposing that there are three groups of Welsh people: The Welsh-speaking, Welsh identifying group 'Y Fro Gymraeg', usually situated in North and West Wales; the non-Welsh-speaking yet Welsh-identifying group, 'Welsh Wales', usually linked to southern Wales; and the British identifying non-Welsh speakers found in the remainder of Wales and southern cities, the 'British Welsh'.³⁰

Though this model was designed in the late 1970s, it is largely applicable to Welsh cinema's formative period between 1894 and 1914, due to the political and linguistic makeup of the country at the time. The predominately southern areas covered in existing scholarship can be placed within the Welsh Wales and British Wales groupings, leaving both Y Fro Gymraeg and the British Welsh areas of Mid and North Wales as all but unrecognised within Welsh cinema exhibition history. Beyond a simple lack of rural representation – and the ability to compare rural Welsh histories and audience experiences with urban Wales or rural communities across the globe – our existing understanding of Welsh cinema history predominantly fails to account for political, linguistic, religious, cultural or economic issues that operate within Y Fro Gymraeg or British Welsh communities. Existing works have identified issues that are potentially unique to the Welsh Wales cinema exhibition context, such as the impact of the labour movement or the operation of mining institute cinemas.³¹
³² As such, this article will focus on an exploration of the rural Welsh showman as a means of considering whether there are issues that are potentially unique to the cinema exhibition context within Y Fro Gymraeg and British Welsh-populated areas of Wales.

Arthur Cheetham: the touring cinema showman

Touring showmen were far from unique to Wales or to moving picture exhibition. Both urban and rural Wales had long welcomed touring attractions such as fairgrounds, theatre

productions and Punch and Judy shows. Indeed, the Edison designed Kinetoscope – a pioneering peep-show style viewing device for short films shot with the Kinetograph – had toured both South and North Wales, most prominently from 1894 to 1896. As documented by Berry the Kinetoscope's Welsh debut was in Cardiff's Philharmonic Hall, as one of a number of entertainments available for audiences at Oswald Stoll's Panopticon event, before moving to a makeshift Kinetoscope parlour in a rented Swansea shop front in February 1895.^{33 34} The device made its North Wales debut in the border town of Wrexham in April 1895, before spreading along the North Coast to a number of rural towns through appearances at Orient themed fairs called bazaars.³⁵ Through attendance at bazaars, though not marketed as chief attraction, the Kinetoscope visited northern towns such as Caernarfon and Colwyn Bay.^{36 37} Despite Kinetoscopes in Britain, especially those exhibiting regionally, having been acquired and operated independently by exhibitors and entrepreneurs, it is Thomas Edison's name and international celebrity status that is prevalent within local Welsh newspapers' discussions of the device, rather than a showman.³⁸

It could be argued that the Lumière brothers and their international filming and distribution system established a global stage for the role of the moving picture showman. The Frenchmen employed representatives and tasked them with exhibiting the Cinématographe, their pioneering camera and projection device, as well as filming local scenes that could be shown in other territories.³⁹ Their representative for Britain was Felicien Trewey, who would oversee the Cinématographe's British debut on the 21st February 1896, in the Great Hall of the Polytechnic Institution, London.^{40 41} Projected cinema would shortly make its debut in Wales on the 10th April 1896, but not through the means of an official Cinématographe or under the stewardship of Trewey. Rather, it was the British-American inventor Birt Acres who showcased his projection system for the Cardiff Photographic Society on that day.⁴² By the time Trewey eventually debuted the Cinématographe in Wales on the 11th May 1896, he and the Lumières were clearly concerned about the impact that other projection systems could have to their brand name within the country. A local newspaper advertisement for the event highlighted that it was 'the original – not a copy' Lumière Cinématographe, as well as its operation by Trewey and the popularity of the device amongst audiences in the 'metropolis' of London.⁴³ However, their work to establish a difference between the Cinématographe and imitation devices was carried out in vain, with broad analysis of local newspapers from across Wales showing that the Anglicised term *cinematograph* was rapidly adapted as a ubiquitous term to describe projection units used by the country's touring cinema showmen. Indeed, it was such a 'copy' cinematograph unit that Arthur Cheetham would purchase in late 1896.

Berry's work establishes Cheetham's beginnings in Rhyl, North East Wales – having been born in Derby, England – as an 'electric healer', phrenologist, and organiser of live entertainments in which he would frequently cast himself.⁴⁴ Berry also discusses Cheetham's locally shot films, his time as a touring exhibitor, the aggressive marketing campaigns he would utilise as well as the opening of a dedicated cinema in Rhyl in 1906, likely Wales's first.⁴⁵ However, these discussions are largely focussed on Cheetham's

operations around North Wales – particularly Rhyl – and his exploits in Mid and West Wales, which include touring and the opening of Aberystwyth’s first dedicated cinema, are relegated to a brief paragraph. Yet, through analysis of local Mid and West Wales newspapers, Cheetham’s true significance to the social history of rural Wales is revealed.

As documented by Berry, and confirmed through further analysis of local newspapers, Cheetham toured northern villages and towns prolifically with his Silvograph system – the branding assigned to the combination of his camera, projector and screen – between 1897 and 1906. Whilst Berry was right to highlight the prominence of North Wales within his discussion of Cheetham’s career, the showman’s inaugural visit to Mid and West Wales came only ten days after his grand debut, which took place in Rhyl on the 19th January 1897.⁴⁶ As with the Cinématographe’s Cardiff marketing, Cheetham’s first newspaper advertisement highlighted that living pictures were the ‘rage’ in London, utilising the English capital as a marker for entertainment quality and audience taste [Fig.1].⁴⁷

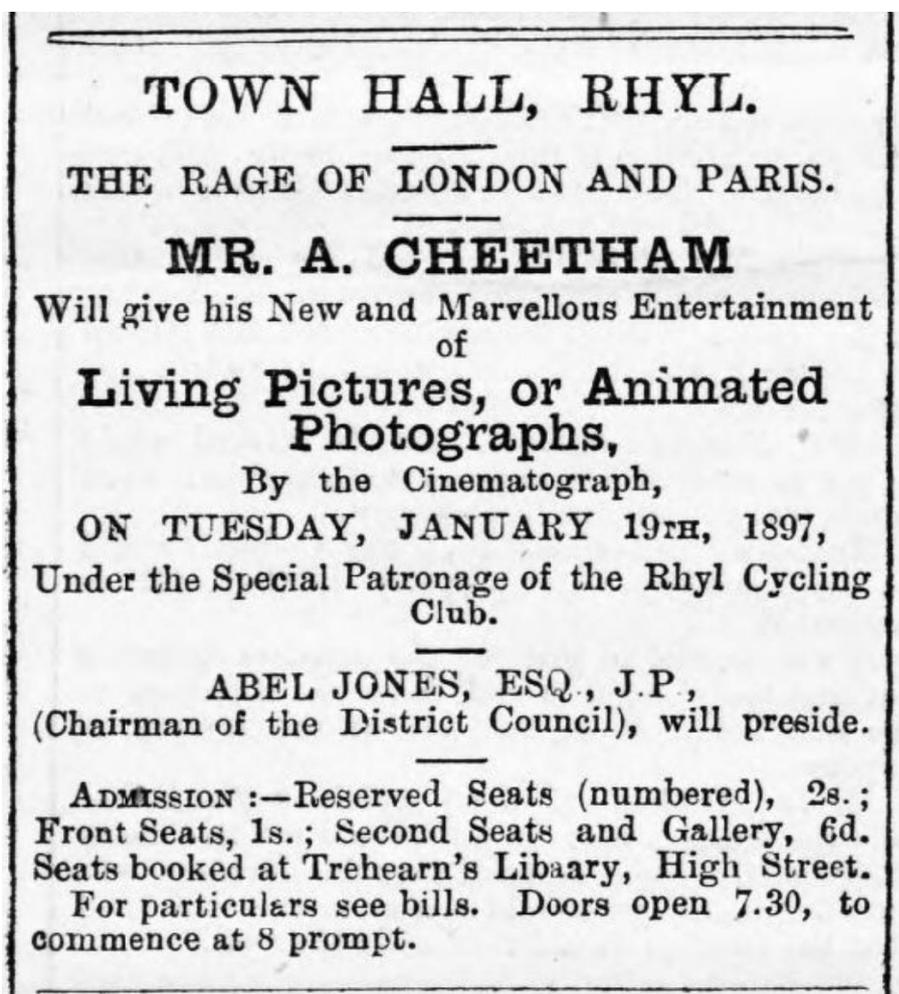


Figure 1: Advertisement for Cheetham’s Rhyl cinematograph debut.
Rhyl Record and Advertiser, January 16, 1897

Rather than the advertisement describing the inner workings of the device or the spectacle of the moving image, like that of Kinetoscope and Lumière advertising, Cheetham’s

marketing revolved around highlighting the quality of his image in comparison to competitors. The newspaper advertisements posted by other exhibitors during this time – most of whom operated in the urban south – consistently focus on the spectacle value of the cinematograph's name or, when championing why their device is an improvement on others, fail to do so with the type of marketing flair possessed by Cheetham. For example, advertisements for cinematograph shows in both Swansea and Barry provide no embellishment further than having 'cinematograph' in a large font and providing the dates and times of the event. This advertisement does highlight the 'great expense' of providing this entertainment, though the claim is in a small font and suggests more the financial clout of the theatre proprietor than of the quality of the device or its films.^{48 49}

Cheetham in Mid Wales

On 29th January 1897 Cheetham and his entourage of performers – as his touring show would also feature singers, dancers and comedy routines to supplement his purchased and original films – hosted a 'one night only' visit to the town of Aberystwyth, situated on the west coast of Mid Wales. Following Cheetham's Rhyl debut, local North Wales newspapers infer that the region was relatively well versed with projected cinema, which Cheetham used as an opportunity to advertise the Silvograph system as being a vast improvement over the 'inferior instruments' used by other exhibitors.⁵⁰ However, his marketing approach to Aberystwyth suggests that an existing knowledge or experience of such shows was minimal or non-existent.⁵¹ Indeed, I have been unable to find any mention of moving pictures visiting Aberystwyth prior to Cheetham, and a write-up of the event makes no comparisons to previous similar exhibitions, instead stating that the audience was 'accorded a treat which will not soon be forgotten', signalling a special and unique occasion.⁵² Cheetham would again visit Aberystwyth in April 1898, with his site of exhibition this time upgraded from the town's assembly rooms to the Pier Pavilion, a lavish new venue that was frequented by established and popular forms of entertainment such as theatrics, singers and military bands.^{53 54}

Cheetham had now introduced cinema – albeit in its fledgling form – to one town in Mid Wales, however these screenings were limited to just Aberystwyth. Cheetham, it would seem, initially took a reserved approach to the area, especially in comparison to the extent of which he had travelled North Wales by 1898. These first two visits were arguably designed to gauge the interest in cinema exhibition in an area that had not experienced it before, with a low risk benefit due to the relatively large population in Aberystwyth compared to other rural communities in the region. Ultimately, Cheetham would not return to the area for another two years, potentially having not seen attendance that would behest the long journey from the North Wales to the area. Yet, during Cheetham's two-year absence another showman, Fred E. Young, not only exhibited films in Aberystwyth but also across the wider Mid Wales region. His touring operation was comparable to the scope of Cheetham's in the North, with Young visiting towns on the English border, such as

Welshpool, to rural satellite communities of Aberystwyth, such as Aberaeron and Talybont.⁵⁵ I argue that Cheetham likely discontinued visitations to Mid Wales due to the enterprises of Young, rather than any sort of lack of enthusiasm for the medium from Mid Wales audiences. This argument is reinforced by the timing of Cheetham's return to the area in 1900, which shortly followed Young's 1899 appointment as manager of a new recreation facility in Pwllheli and subsequent retirement from touring exhibition.⁵⁶

Regardless of Cheetham's infrequent touring of Mid Wales during this period, his influence could be felt through Young's exhibition choices and marketing techniques. Like Cheetham, Young's advertising would highlight his own auteur or showman status through the sheer prominence of his name in comparison to the list of films and entertainments on show.⁵⁷

Early rural Welsh taste

Touring showmen of the period, including Cheetham and Young, made clear efforts to legitimise their entertainments and appeal to the Christian morals and etiquette of the time, with religion and churchgoing being a dominant factor of rural Welsh life at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ As such, Young and Cheetham would often forgo their usual entertainments on a Sunday, instead hosting 'sacred concerts'. Local newspaper write-ups for these concerts indicate that they consisted of the showman delivering sermons and leading songs of praise. Similar concerts were also evident within the repertoire of American moving picture exhibitors, particularly amongst similarly rural or religious audiences. Cara Caddoo notes the important role of such sacred concerts as part of exhibitions for black audiences within rural states such as Maryland and Georgia.⁵⁹ For Cheetham and Young, the replacement of their usual itinerary with a sacred concert on a Sunday highlighted their understanding of audience taste, and was just one method used in an attempt to elevate the fledgling medium of cinema above being a crude novelty. For Young in particular, this sense of legitimacy was heightened on occasion by evoking famed Welsh Punch and Judy showman Richard Codman's practice of using the self-assigned title of 'professor' in his advertising, adding a faux-scientific quality to his work [Fig. 2].⁶⁰ It is important to note that this period of cinema history was unregulated in Britain and it would not be until the introduction of the 1909 Cinematograph Act that safety, censorship and licensing regulations began to impose legal requirements on UK showmen. As such, Cheetham and Young were voluntarily replacing Sunday screenings with sacred concerts, further indicating their savvy in reflecting the desires and morals of their audience.

Other than Berry, Helen Richards' work is unique within Welsh cinema history scholarship in discussing the marketing and exhibition practices of Welsh touring showmen.⁶¹ However, her exploration of the early cinema history of Bridgend, a southern mining town which falls within the Welsh Wales grouping, makes no mention of sacred concerts or exhibitors highlighting the moralistic or refined qualities of their shows. Richards' work predominantly uses the local *Glamorgan Gazette* newspaper to gather archival evidence in order to create part of an 'official' history of the town's cinemagoing

past.⁶² My work also heavily draws on local newspapers to collect primary source data and it is from these local press studies that the prevalence of West, Mid and North Wales showmen marketing their moral qualities and sacred concerts was uncovered. It would seem then, from the evidence presented by Richards, that sacred concerts or appealing to moral tastes was not of paramount concern within this industrial area of Wales. Indeed, one advertisement illustrated within her work comes from the Crecraft touring family who invited audiences to attend their 1910 fairground entertainments, with a selection of films over three days being the chief attraction. This three-day period began on Good Friday, yet films were to run then and on Easter Sunday. Other than a brief mention of one of the films on show being a passion play, there is little in this advertisement that discusses taste, morality or the significance of this religious day. Indeed, as Richards notes, ‘entertainment value was the emphasised attraction’ of this advertisement.⁶³

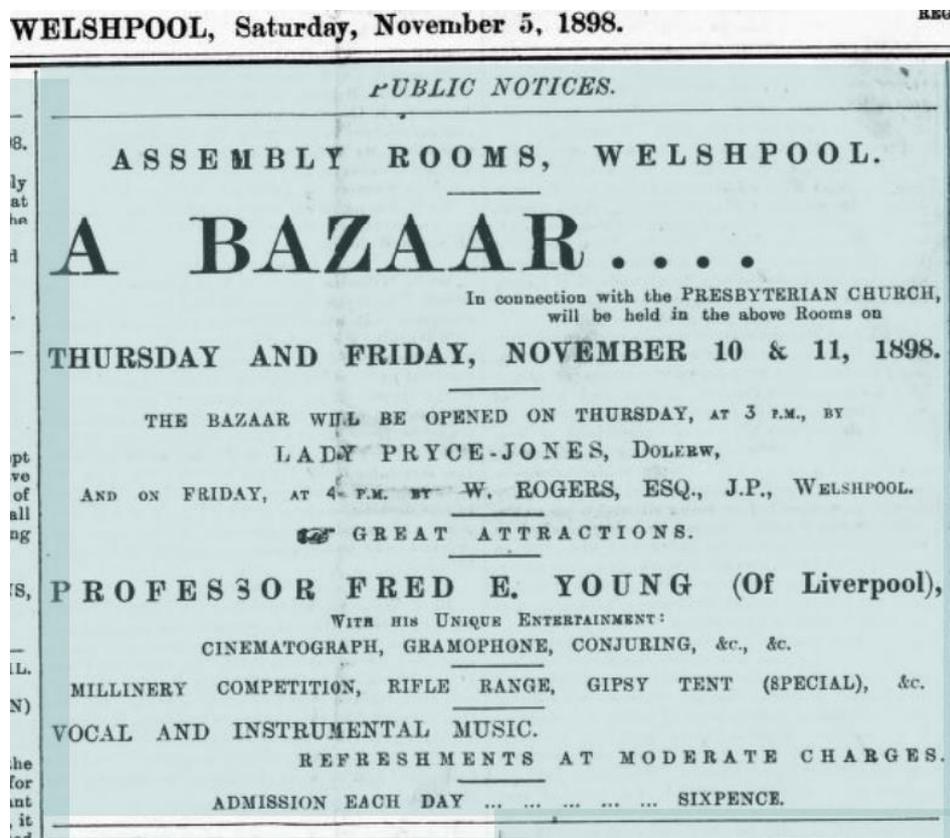


Figure 2: ‘Professor’ Fred E. Young advertisement. *The Montgomery County Times*, November 5, 1898.

This emphasis on entertainment over strict observation of religious morals or traditions is evident in other working-class Welsh Wales mining communities and their cinema histories. A notable example is of William Haggar, a Wales based filmmaker and showman who, like Cheetham, transitioned from a touring career to opening dedicated fixed-location cinemas. Haggar, who opened one such cinema in the prominent mining town of Aberdare, would run screenings on Sundays until the local council banned the practice in 1912.⁶⁴ This

decision to show films on the Sabbath was seemingly popular with local audiences, with Berry describing the showman as being ‘brimstone proof’ by 1911, due to his charitable nature and Sunday entertainments.⁶⁵ Haggar’s popularity within the local community was showcased when a fundamentalist Christian made complaints against the showman’s Sunday screenings, which resulted in members of the community writing to the local paper to defend Haggar’s actions.⁶⁶ Aberdare, like Bridgend, falls within the Welsh Wales grouping, seemingly pointing towards audiences from this group considering cinema as worthy Sabbath entertainment, or of religion having less impact on cinema scheduling than in the Mid Wales or Y Fro Gymraeg areas. Jessica Whitehead notes a similar case of exhibitors meeting audience desires in relation to Sunday opening in the remote Canadian town of Timmins. Here, midnight screenings were used to negate Ontario’s Sunday opening ban, which particularly appealed to teenage audiences, especially for courtship.⁶⁷ Differing audience expectations in relation Sunday openings are not just visible between Y Fro Gymraeg and Welsh Wales. Cheetham’s advertising of his fixed-location Rhyl cinema has been described by Berry as being ‘a sop to’ the dominant middle-class audiences of the then regal tourist destination, made up of the British Welsh and English tourists.⁶⁸ One such advertisement from a 1909 newspaper prominently promises ‘no vulgarity’ and ‘no Sunday show’, followed by a purported bible quote of ‘six days shalt thou labour’.⁶⁹ This ‘sop’ to the middle-class tastes is further indicated within the advertisement by a boast of being the ‘premier entertainment’ in Rhyl, suggesting that Cheetham saw theatres and music halls as his competition, rather than just other providers of cinematic entertainment. The role of class and a localised economy could also explain Haggar’s decision to open his Aberdare cinema on Sundays. As a working-class mining town, long working days of manual labour would have been the primary form of employment in the area. Accordingly, Haggar perhaps realised the value of opening on a Sunday to provide entertainment and relief for such a hard-working community. He ran advertisements specifically for his Sunday showing, which promised warmth literally, through the provision of continual fires, and symbolically, through the self-assigned description ‘Old Haggar’. Whilst Cheetham abstained from Sunday showings for his Middle-Class British Welsh and English tourist demographic, ‘Old Haggar’ offered his working-class Welsh Wales audience a comfortable escape, suitable for all the family, on their day of rest [Fig. 3].⁷⁰

It is arguable, of course, that Sunday opening policies should be analysed with more nuance than simply by applying the admittedly quite broad Three Wales Model. Towns like Aberystwyth, especially at the turn of the century, complicate the model by having demographic and economic similarities to British Wales, yet being located within a region that is strongly associated with Y Fro Gymraeg. This complication is, in turn, reflected within the marketing of its first dedicated cinema, opened by Cheetham in 1910.⁷¹ Aberystwyth is situated on the west coast of Wales, an area that, along with sections of Mid Wales and a large amount of North Wales, is the heartland of the Y Fro Gymraeg grouping. Yet Aberystwyth, benefitting from a direct rail link to the English Midlands, was both a tourist destination and housed the oldest university in Wales, though the wider area retained its

traditional agricultural and maritime economy. The town's audiences had also seemingly been starved of moving picture entertainment prior to 1910, with an article published in *The Aberystwyth Observer* calling for someone to host 'amusing' cinematograph shows as an alternative to the 'dull' dramatic circles and theatre performances more typically found within the town.⁷² Similarly, the newspaper had previously published a letter from an English visitor who expressed surprise that there was 'no cinematograph entertainment in the town' and that there was 'too great a similarity in the class of entertainment now given'.⁷³

SUNDAY
IN THE
MARKET HALL

Another Splendid
Pictorial Entertainment
By HAGGAR'S BIOSCOPE Co.,

Presenting an entire New Series of Superb
ANIMATED PICTURES

Including a New Series of "**THE PRODIGAL SON**," the whole Bible Story portrayed in **Full Natural Colours.**

Also a Trip to the Great White Sea Fisheries, and the splendid coloured subject, "**Preparation of Condensed Milk.**"

Also by Special Desire our great picture entitled, "**A Fair Exchange**," and other subjects.

Mr. CYRIL YORKE will recite "**The Wreck of the Stella**," illustrated with 40 splendid pictures.

Miss LILY HAGGAR will sing "**Kiss Daddy good night**," beautifully illustrated.

The whole programme will form the Best Entertainment yet presented.

Good fires will be kept all day to warm the building.

Time, &c., as usual,

Don't forget
OLD HAGGAR'S
Pleasant Sunday Evenings.

Figure 3: Advertisement for 'Old Haggar's' Aberdare cinema. *The Aberdare Leader*, February 12, 1910.

Logic dictates that Cheetham would continue his practice of closing on Sundays and utilising a marketing campaign that focussed on moral quality within Aberystwyth. Not least due to town's location within Cardiganshire (later to become Ceredigion), a county that generally matched the Y Fro Gymraeg grouping's prevalence of non-conformist religion, first-language

Welsh speakers and political dominance of the Liberal party, However, his Aberystwyth cinema's first newspaper advertisement not only indicated that the cinema would be open every day, but also saw a return to his touring-era marketing style of highlighting the spectacle of his technology and films above all else. When touring, in both the British Wales Rhyl area and Y Fro Gymraeg regions, Cheetham used newspaper advertisements to hype the quality of his Silvograph system, with superlatives of the spectacle and visual quality being far more prominent than information about the films on show. Whilst a similar lack of information about current films was present in his early Rhyl fixed-location cinema advertisements, presumably saving on submitting a change advertisement every week, the adjectives used in describing his venue and films are far less hyperbolic and much more refined. There is, for example, the promise of 'no vulgarity' and that 'premier entertainment' is on show in a 'nice room'.⁷⁴

In comparison, the inaugural advertisement for the Aberystwyth cinema evokes, and even borrows from, his early days as a touring showman. Simply described as 'The Silvograph' in Rhyl advertising, the Aberystwyth cinema is dubbed a 'picture palace and electric theatre', evoking grandeur and post-industrial revolution modernity [fig. 4].⁷⁵ Cheetham also borrowed from his old touring marketing style in using London audiences as a marker of taste and quality by stating that visitors from the capital had described their experience at the venue as 'superior to any in London'. This slight change in advertising tack and Sunday opening policy in comparison to both his and Fred E Young's previous Y Fro Gymraeg marketing, as well as a noted difference to his previous permanent cinema, indicates a complication in the application of the Three Wales Model on early Welsh exhibition practice and audience expectations.

Audience choice in early Welsh cinemagoing

Cinema exhibition in larger areas, such as the southern British Welsh city of Cardiff which housed multiple cinemas by 1910 allowing audiences a choice of venue, demonstrate elements of the marketing and exhibition practices discussed in this article on a venue-by-venue basis. When the advertising section of the local newspaper *The Evening Express* is analysed, it becomes clear that each cinema had a differing marketing strategy to their competitors, with some positioning themselves as a more luxurious venue, with a focus on the reputable nature of the films and venue, much like Cheetham's Rhyl cinema.⁷⁶ This is visible within the advertising of Oswald Stoll's Empire theatre, with Stoll's name being the nearest comparison to the showman celebrity attachment for any of the Cardiff cinemas. Though Stoll likely had far less impact on a daily basis in comparison to either Cheetham or Haggart – as he was more entrepreneur than entertainer – he had a desire to use his Empire chain of theatres to showcase how the music hall could be a more 'reputable' source of entertainment.⁷⁷ This is reflected in the events available at his Cardiff venue and the refined discourse of its newspaper marketing. Beyond simply showing films, this venue hosted a number of performances ranging from singers to gymnasts, and audiences were expected to pre-purchase tickets through a box office.



Figure 4: Early advertisement for Cheetham's Aberystwyth cinema.
The Cambrian News, September 9, 1910.

Stoll's Empire, however, treats film as a supplementary part of its diverse artistic programme, with more advertising attention paid to live performances and their quality than for its films. In comparison, the Panopticon cinema does for films what Stoll clearly wanted to achieve for the music hall, by making films and their 'high-class' nature the focus of its newspaper advertising. The only cinema here to detail the films on show (though the Empire did detail live performances in a similar fashion), with films such as *The Wooing O'T* described as a 'refined comedy' and *Under the Apple Tree* as 'a story of heart interest'.

Others, much like Haggar's Aberdare cinema, focused on the comfort of the venue and the conveniences available to its patrons over the content of films, an example of which is clearly evident in the newspaper advertising of the New Cinema Theatre. Promising daily continuous screenings between two in the afternoon until eleven at night, the advertisement does not mention details of the films on show. Yet, it prominently highlights the availability of free afternoon tea, cloak and bicycle storage as well as discounted prices for children. Unlike its competitors, there is no advertised option to pre-purchase tickets through a box office and it is the only one to state ticket prices. Through the continual showing of films, and a move away from the box office format, this cinema is appealing to the more habitual cinemagoer, rather than those concerned with the film's content or a variety of supposedly reputable entertainment, such as offered by the marketing and practices of the Panopticon and Empire respectively. Moreover, much like Haggar's

Aberdare cinema, it also arguably targeted a more working-class family audience through its focus on pleasantries, discounted children's prices and all-day running time.

Ticket price, choice and the class-system within rural Welsh cinemas

Ultimately, the people of Cardiff had a choice of cinema, one that did not necessarily revolve around cost but rather by the different experience offered by the venue, which would appeal to certain sections of audience taste and preference. Fixed-location cinema ticket prices were fairly standardised across Wales during this period, with analysis of eighteen venues across the country between 1909 and 1911 indicating that they were mostly charging three-pence, six-pence and one-shilling tickets for varying degrees of seat quality.⁷⁸ Though scholars have discussed the first run, second run and flea pit cinemas within the post 1930 Golden Age of Welsh cinemagoing, this period within Cardiff's history has arguably more in common with urban cinemagoing of the mid-twentieth century across Britain, where taste and preference of venue dictated choice of cinema.^{79 80} In terms of the Three Wales model, it could be argued that the relatively vast population of such an urban area negates the model's emphasis on one dominant political, moral or economic perspective per grouping. It is also arguable that, due to the lack of the auteur showman within this cinema exhibition landscape, with large chains such as Stoll's Empire being prevalent, there was less pressure on an individual or brand to represent particular audience sectors, needs and desires.

Though audiences in Aberystwyth did not have a choice of cinema at the time of Cheetham's cinema opening in 1910, there were choice to be made in terms of which level of seating one could purchase. As Brad Beaven writes, it was common across Britain for social distinction to be 'preserved' within the setting of a single auditorium, with ticket prices and the quality of seating – a combination of location and comfort – being the dividers.⁸¹ However, it did prevent cinemagoing as a pursuit from becoming an activity that was exclusive to just one social class, important for a lone cinema in a less populated area in maximising its potential attendance draw.

Differing ticket prices had existed during Cheetham's touring operation, with a couple of choices available for his 1906 visit to Aberystwyth's palatial Coliseum theatre, a then newly built theatre with floor seating and two tiers of surrounding balconies.^{82 83} Indeed, Fred E. Young's 1899 exhibition in the town's Pier Pavilion had a more extensive array of ticket prices than the established 1910 Cheetham Cinema.⁸⁴ However, the touring trade represented special and infrequent visits, especially within Aberystwyth, including a variety of entertainment, whereas the permanent cinema's goal was to promote habitual visitation. Thus, ticket prices were lowered by necessity when Aberystwyth's dedicated cinema was opened, as a means of attracting a habitual audience.

From the opening of Cheetham's cinema in 1910 to March 1913, cinemagoing audiences in Aberystwyth had only one choice in relation to their cinemagoing habits: how much they would pay for a ticket, which both decided the quality of their view and the seat itself and reflected upon, or made a conscious statement about, their social class. In terms

of the quality or style of the venue and films available, this was at the mercy of Cheetham and his procurement. Throughout this period the showman also consistently ran the same advertisement weekly on page four of *The Cambrian News*, only changing when screenings fell from three to two times a day and a new eight-penny ticket was introduced. Indeed, the advert was still emblazoned with 'NOW OPEN', nearly four years after the cinema had first debuted. Short articles published in the newspaper over this period of monopoly frequently praised Cheetham personally for the entertainment he hosted, with his name also having a prominent place within his weekly advertisements. His local celebrity status as a showman was now seemingly established within Aberystwyth, as it long had been within Rhyl.

However, cinema was rapidly developing, both as an industry and as an art form, with the number of permanent cinemas across Britain booming since the introduction of the 1909 Cinematograph Act. This act imposed safety regulations surrounding the types of venues that could host film screenings – partly due to the flammable nature of early film stock – and granted local councils the power to issue cinema licenses.⁸⁵ A by-product of this influx of regulatory power granted to councils was greater scope for censorship and control over the content shown within films at the cinemas in their licensing area.⁸⁶ The impact of this can be witnessed in the inaugural *Kinematograph Year Book*, which has six pages dedicated just to listing cinemas that opened during 1913, as well as numerous pages of film rental companies, equipment providers and hundreds of listings for existing cinemas.^{87 88} Of course, other factors influenced this growth in dedicated cinemas, as Cheetham himself and many others had opened venues prior to the Cinematograph Act, arguably as a natural evolution of the touring industry, the rising popularity of the medium and demand from audiences.

The growth of cinemas as an art form also impacted exhibition within Wales, especially with regards to demand for competition. Formally an attraction based around thrills and the novelty of real-life scenes – often locally filmed, within the context of Wales and Cheetham – film now appealed to audiences through a combination of subjective artistic quality, genre, and the fledgling star image of the first generation of film stars. Cinema had come of age, many filmmakers had produced hundreds of films during the attractions period and were becoming increasingly more proficient with film 'grammar and rhetoric'.⁸⁹ Advancements in editing facilitated longer and more complex films, as well as artistic and narrative possibilities that Eisenstein would later popularise as 'montage theory'.⁹⁰ Particularly, as Bryony Dixon argues, British audiences took to the increasingly more complex and sophisticated narratives of Hollywood comedies by the end of World War One.⁹¹ Whilst Cheetham was still advertising his cinema with the now three-year old quote from London visitors – noting the superiority of his attractions era films over those shown in the English capital – D W Griffith had begun production on the \$18,000 four-reel feature film *Judith of Bethulia* (1914).⁹²

Cheetham's monopoly was both an advantage and a potential disadvantage, despite more nuanced films and genres were being produced, his procurement still had to cater to as much of his potential audience as possible, which is illustrated by the neutrality of his

1910 – 1913 advertising. On the 7th March 1913, *The Cambrian News* proclaimed – on the same page as Cheetham’s weekly advertisement – that Aberystwyth’s own Charles Fear would be hosting films at the lavish Coliseum theatre over the Easter period.⁹³ Again, the impact of religion on screenings seems to have been eschewed within Aberystwyth, despite being located in an area that had previously necessitated sacred concerts. Fear quickly established his own auteur showman image based around the artistic quality of the fiction films he procured. Indeed, his newspaper advertisements echoed those for the Coliseum’s theatrical events, with the prominence and talent of the, often European, film actors being the focus of this marketing.

As Jack Ellis notes, the increasing length of films and technical proficiency of filmmakers provided further parallels with theatre as a medium, with companies such as Film d’ Art taking advantage of such developments to produce cinematic adaptations of successful plays and casting well-known stage actors.⁹⁴ Fear clearly capitalised on the reputation of the Coliseum as a theatre by choosing films and employing a marketing scheme which complemented what the venue already encapsulated and the audiences it attracted. In doing so, he created an image for the Coliseum as a film venue, one that catered to dramatic quality and acting talent over sheer spectacle, in comparison to Cheetham’s stagnant advertisement that, with a choice now available to the audiences of Aberystwyth, lacked any unique selling point. This was noted by the local press, with *The Cambrian News* praising Fear and the Coliseum’s films as being ‘artistic and expensive’, with the following week’s article noting that the films are ‘specially selected’ by Fear.^{95 96}

This approach was clearly a success, with Fear opening his own dedicated cinema in the town’s former skating rink in June 1913. This new venue maintained the film procurement, advertising policy and positive response from local press that had made his time at the Coliseum a success.⁹⁷ However, in the very same edition of the *Cambrian News* that unveiled this cinema, a vastly altered new advertisement for Cheetham’s cinema was debuted. This new advertisement highlights three unique selling points; the first is its status as ‘Aberystwyth’s Original Picture Palace’, followed by a brief description of the cinema’s history and role as the ‘first and only entertainment’ in the town to run all year round. Secondly, the advert twice mentions the location of the cinema as being Market Street – presumably to avoid any confusion from the location of Fear’s cinema – and claims that it is ‘the home of the perfect pictures’, suggesting superiority over his competition. Finally, Arthur Cheetham’s own name is prominently located just above ‘cinema’ to emphasise his ownership of it. Notably, the Silvograph brand name was removed, perhaps too representative of the success of the antiquated touring trade period. The power of his name is also used to represent his experience as cinema operator, though it does not achieve this by referring to his fame, as previous examples of the showman’s marketing had done. Rather, the advertisement acknowledges his cinemas in Rhyl, Colwyn Bay and Manchester, England. From this point, Cheetham’s advertisements would frequently change and often included details of the films on show that week, highlighting their spectacle value or ‘exciting’ nature.⁹⁸

By 1914, despite arguably sitting within the Y Fro Gymraeg region, the exhibition landscape of rural Aberystwyth – now altered by competition and the impact of the economic and artistic evolution of cinema – quite similarly represented marketing techniques and exhibition practices found within the urban British Welsh city of Cardiff. Furthermore, the exhibition of films seems vastly less impacted by religion compared to the touring operations of Young or Cheetham within the region, with both cinemas opening over religious periods akin to their Welsh Wales counterparts. Though the North Wales British Welsh middle-class town of Rhyl quite clearly convinced Cheetham to appeal to a devout clientele and their morals surrounding Sunday opening and the types of films he procured. It could be argued, that differences found between these areas of Wales, especially post the 1909 Cinematograph Act and economic expansion of the business, are impacted upon more heavily by geography and local economy than politics, religion and language.

The heavily working-class Aberdare required the promise of comfort and pleasantness attached to both the cinema as well as the showman Haggar, despite opening on Sundays. Rhyl, then a middle-class tourist town with rail links to North England, for those who could afford holidays, saw Cheetham directly compete with traditional entertainments as well as evoking a devoutness by closing on Sundays and promising no vulgarity amongst his films. Aberystwyth could be seen as an economic mix of both Rhyl and Aberdare in many senses, due to the middle-class influence of its relatively modest tourist trade and university, as well as the working-class influence of the pre-existing local community and its remote West Wales location. Cheetham's Aberystwyth cinema opened every day, including Sundays, which his competition-era advertising emphasised as a key selling point, with the focus on entertainment and visual spectacle evoking Haggar's Aberdare cinema or Cardiff's New Cinema Theatre. As a counterpoint to this, Fear's focus on artistic quality and taste at the Coliseum, and later the Rink Cinema, show similar business strategies to Cardiff's Empire and Panopticon cinemas.

The difference, however, between these examples of an urban and rural multi-cinema landscape is the prominence of the showman within the rural. It is possible, for these smaller communities, that there was an intrinsic quality of localness associated with a cinema being tied to a personality. To this end, Gregory A. Waller argues that the showman is integral to the small-town cinema and its 'abiding appeal' as a local venue.⁹⁹

For Fear this is clearly vocalised by *The Cambrian News*, in an article that highlighted the benefits of 'local support given to Mr Charles Fear's local enterprise'.¹⁰⁰ Cheetham's response can be observed in his updated marketing, which reminded audiences that in 1910 he had filled a void in entertainment within the town, and by his increased involvement with local charitable pursuits. In November 1913, when Cheetham hosted a benefit screening for the Senghenydd colliery disaster, it was reported that the town mayor urged audiences to 'support Mr. Cheetham as he has supported the fund' and that the exhibitor had always 'given them the very best'.¹⁰¹ A charitable nature was also displayed by Haggar, who would also host benefit screenings and free films for Sunday School children, all of which aided his

star image as 'Old Haggar'.^{102 103} In comparison, the cinemas of Cardiff during this formative period marketed themselves solely on their entertainment, not their proprietor, with some, such as Stoll's Empire, being part of a large corporate chain.

Conclusion

Though not all aspects of the Three Wales Model can be applied productively to the practices of early Welsh cinemas or the demands of their audiences, its true value lies in the way it enables areas of the country to be distinguished by drawing on cultural factors, as well as the geographic and linguistic. That is, by considering the socio-political nuances of Wales through the application of this model, unique factors that have impacted on Welsh cinema history can be identified and compared within a globalised context of rural cinema history. For example, within a rural context we have seen the role and importance of the showman within fixed cinemas, yet this is not witnessed within analysis of Cardiff's early cinemas. By tracing the operations of Welsh based showmen in the differing Three Wales Model areas, it has been possible to identify factors of cinema exhibition – both in the touring and early fixed-location eras – that are defined by certain socio-political contexts. For example, within the touring era and cinema's fledgling period as an art form, there is a desire for showmen within the Y Fro Gymraeg area to highlight the reputable nature of their shows and observe the Sabbath by holding sacred concerts.

This practice is observed within United States tourers operating within devout areas, such as southern black communities as discussed by Caddoo.¹⁰⁴ Yet, as Helen Richards' work identifies, the working-class mining communities of South Wales welcomed touring entertainment over religious dates, with showmen whose marketing focussed on entertainment over reputability. There is much work to do, in terms of Welsh cinemagoing scholarship and the wider pursuit of rural cinema history, to overturn the dominance of urban scholarship within historical cinema studies. Yet it is clear, by identifying factors of exhibition and audience that are distinctive to particular rural areas, that there is both localised and globalised value in such study as a means of furthering our understanding of the relations between space, place, society and cinema history.

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