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Jill Craigie, Post-war British Film Culture and the British Film Academy

Abstract

This article seeks to locate the socialist feminist filmmaker Jill Craigie (1911-1999) within the British film culture of the post-war period. Long regarded in scholarly accounts of something of an outsider, a woman who was effectively shut out of the industry during the 1950s, this article seeks to position Craigie rather differently. While acknowledging the obstacles she undoubtedly faced, it details aspects of her achievements and her visibility in the British film culture of the immediate post-war period. Craigie's politically driven documentaries and realist film practice accorded with prevailing discourses of 'quality' and she acquired the status of what would today be termed a media personality who worked across film, radio, television and print media. Considering Craigie as a figure embedded in the British film establishment, this article gives particular emphasis to her role in the British Film Academy (BFA), arguing that the significance of this practitioner-led organisation has yet to be fully recognised in British film history. The argument draws on archives held at BAFTA to begin a discussion of how the BFA, and Craigie as the first woman to be elected to its Management Council, played its part in the development of British film culture.

Keywords

Jill Craigie, British Film Academy, post-war film culture, British film history, Women's Film History

Introduction

The socialist feminist filmmaker Jill Craigie (1911-1999) was a vocal advocate for the possibilities of film as a vehicle for change. She argued for the importance of independent production in the post-war British film industry, urging her peers to ensure that independents

had opportunities for effective distribution of their work, and to make space for new kinds of filmmaking (Dickinson and Street 1985: 207). Long regarded in scholarly accounts of something of an outsider, a woman who was effectively shut out of the industry during the 1950s, this article seeks to position Craigie rather differently. It explores her achievements, and her visibility in the British film culture of the immediate post-war period, giving particular emphasis to her role in the British Film Academy (BFA). In 1950 Craigie became the first woman to sit on the management council of the BFA, a position which indicates her standing in the film establishment of the day. Craigie's success and cultural visibility in the late 1940s and early 1950s is coupled, I argue, with her politically driven documentaries and realist film practice, a mode of filmmaking which accorded with prevailing discourses of quality.

The image reproduced in FIGURE 1 encapsulates some of the contradictions involved in considering Craigie's place and reputation in the post-war British film industry.¹ Taken in 1950, it pictures a group gathered round a dining table. While it is not a Council meeting, the occasion features many council and British Film Academy members. Gathered round the table are prominent filmmakers, writers and performers including Eric Ambler, Phil C. Samuel, Carol Reed, Ronald Neame, Peter Ustinov, Laurence Olivier, Roy Boulting, David

¹ The author would like to thank BAFTA's Sophia Hall for bringing this image to my attention and for her input on its date attribution. The image was displayed prominently as part of the 'Female Firsts' exhibition held at BAFTA in February 2018, an event which demonstrates the organisation's attempts to make the involvement of women throughout its history more visible. It is notable that the photograph is signed, though not by all depicted (Craigie's signature is absent, for example).

Lean, Roy Ward Baker, Brian Desmond Hurst, Anthony Asquith, Filippo del Giudice, Anatole De Grunwald and Herbert Smith. It is striking that Craigie is the only woman at the table. Her posture, leaning into the table while the men sit back, visually emphasizes her difference from the group. Nonetheless, it is evident from this photograph that the (male) British film establishment is gathered here with Craigie among their number.

The BFA had been established in 1947 as a practitioner-led organisation; an arts charity bringing together key personnel from the film industry, it would play an important role in the development of post-war British film culture. The Academy advocated for the industry, developed training initiatives and sought to promote wider awareness and understanding of film. There were close links between the Academy and the British Film Institute (BFI), founded in 1933, although their remits were distinctive.² It also provided a space for discussion among members of pressing issues to do with filmmaking practice and policy. At a 1949 Academy Discussion, for example, Craigie spoke on censorship, urging the industry to be bolder in its thinking about the possibilities of film as a medium. Many different voices and views were expressed in events organised by the BFA, and it would be misleading to suggest that Craigie's view was dominant. Nonetheless it seems clear that she used her involvement with the Academy to argue for a progressive mode of filmmaking, urging her peers to challenge what she saw as complacency and conformity in the national cinema.

Neither Craigie nor the BFA are sufficiently recognised in British film history. Craigie has most often come to function as a cautionary tale, associated with potential unfulfilled or a

² The first issue of *British Film Academy Quarterly* (April 1948), for example, refers to a collaboration with the BFI and others on an Eisenstein memorial programme.

career truncated. The BFA is barely mentioned in accounts of post-war British film culture, despite its status as the key body which brought together film practitioners at a pivotal stage. Indeed, Emma Pett and Helen Warner's exploration of the development of BAFTA (of which the BFA was one originating organisation), dubs it an 'invisible institution' within British media history (Pett and Warner 2020: ADD PAGE). Here I aim to begin addressing both of these absences, using Craigie as an example of a filmmaker who voiced radical ideas in the context of a key body of the post-war British film industry.

Building on Jo Fox's discussion of women documentarians in wartime, and in particular her caution against 'prioritising gender as an explanatory factor in ways that undermine women's professional achievements' (Fox 2013: 586), this article argues that the retrospective construction of Craigie's filmmaking career in terms of failure and exclusion is illuminating but also partial. Such a narrative risks contributing to the neglect of Craigie's film work and needs to be contextualised in relation to the prominence, success and cultural visibility which she achieved in the post-war period. To be clear, I do not want to argue that the celebration of Craigie's visibility as a filmmaker, or her emergence as a media personality, should simply replace those accounts which emphasise the many obstacles she faced as a woman in a male-dominated industry. Rather, I argue that we need to consider together films, archive sources, historical and biographical accounts to produce a more nuanced narrative which takes account of Craigie's presence – and that of other women - in the British media industries of the post-war period.

Jill Craigie: filmmaker and media personality

Craigie sustained a relatively brief but nonetheless intense and rich career in both documentary and feature films from the mid-1940s through to the late-1950s. Her film work

as writer and director foregrounded prominent social issues of the post-war period including class, regional and gender inequalities. Influenced by socialist traditions of thought – she refers in interviews to writings by John Ruskin and William Morris - Craigie’s films advocated art for all, quality public housing and equal pay for men and women. Her comments, both at the time and subsequently, suggest that for Craigie filmmaking was intimately connected with politics as much as with entertainment. She was committed to the development of British cinema and indeed a British film culture that was political, and in turn bound up with contemporary definitions of film as art.

Craigie’s first involvement in film production was as a writer during WWII. She wrote film scenarios for the British Council, and then co-wrote the wartime drama *The Flemish Farm* (1943) with then husband Jeffrey Dell. Craigie wrote and directed her first film, the art documentary *Out of Chaos*, in 1944. *Out of Chaos* received mostly impressive reviews. Its production and then its potential for wider exhibition was supported by art critics and other influential cultural figures – including National Gallery Director Sir Kenneth Clark and Herbert Read. Bodies including the Artists International Association urged the Rank Organisation to distribute Craigie’s film more widely. Although it ultimately achieved only a limited release, *Out of Chaos* established Craigie as a director of promise (‘Miss Craigie is a director to watch’ wrote one reviewer). As Katerina Loukopoulou notes, Roger Manvell (who became the first Director of the BFA on its formation in 1947) would include the film in his catalogue for the Arts Council’s first exhibition ‘The Art of the Film’ in 1945. Loukopoulou writes how intriguing it is that the first ever exhibition organised by the Arts Council should focus on film, remarking in turn the surprising neglect of this exhibition by film historians (Loukopoulou 2019: 52). She reads the exhibition and the inclusion of Craigie’s art documentary in it, as a sign of a ‘new media ecology’, a post-war culture in which film

as/and art are central (Loukopoulou 2019: 56). Manvell's endorsement of *Out of Chaos* is also a sign of the visibility Craigie had achieved despite the limited distribution of her film.

Positive responses to *Out of Chaos* laid the ground for Craigie's second film and more ambitious film as director, *The Way We Live* (1946). This drama-documentary explored the plan to reconstruct Plymouth following the devastation of wartime bombing, setting official discourse alongside the experience of ordinary residents and placing a particular emphasis on women's needs. While Craigie's film met with the same distribution challenges as *Out of Chaos* a few years before, its fate was rather different as a result of a concerted campaign on behalf of critics ensuring a widespread release. Leo Enticknap (1999) details the campaign led by Observer critic C.A. Lejeune to secure a higher profile (indeed any) distribution for *The Way We Live*. The film achieved such visibility that it was adapted for BBC radio the year after its release, with many of the original participants taking part.³

Craigie's directorial work is characterized by a coupling of drama and documentary, an intense interest in the lives of ordinary people, and an evident determination to depict women's as well as men's stories and concerns. For example, the space Craigie gives in *The Way We Live* to women's views on the environments in which they live and work, or the prominence of a young woman's aspirations to leave the Welsh mining community in realist drama *Blue Scar* (1949). She wrote approvingly in her obituary of Humphrey Jennings about his interest in and understanding of the day to day experience of miner's wives (Craigie 1950: 14). Craigie's work can be firmly situated within post-war realist movements in cinema – the use of actors and non-actors, for example, the use of location shooting and an emphasis on

³ For details of the broadcast see *Radio Times*, 24th January 1947, p.26

social context. Craigie's films are challenging in their themes, her work radical in its advancement of feminist causes and women's creative work.

Craigie's career as a filmmaker is also indicative of changing times with respect to production. Her first films were made within the framework of the mainstream British film industry: both *Out of Chaos* and *The Way We Live* were produced by Filippo del Giudice and his Two Cities company, itself located by this point within the Rank Organisation. William MacQuitty was associate producer for both films, and together they would set up an independent company, Outlook Films, which made Craigie's only feature as director, *Blue Scar* as well as her campaigning documentary arguing for equal pay, *To Be a Woman* (1951).

While Craigie's films are fascinating and politically charged, not least for the distinctive route they provide into the realist and documentary traditions so frequently centralized in accounts of British film history, they are rarely discussed in detail. A few accounts of Craigie's filmmaking as a whole are located within works exploring women filmmakers. Sharon Lin Tay (2009) elaborates the aesthetics of Craigie's radical filmmaking within a broader study of political film practices, and Stella Hockenhill (2015) focuses on Craigie's work as a screenwriter. Interestingly, and perhaps appropriately given Craigie's commitment to film as a medium for political advocacy, her films seem to be explored most often in the context of the issues that they addressed rather than within an authorial frame; so, for example, *The Way We Live* features in accounts of the post-war period foregrounding the significance of planning and the politics of reconstruction with which the film is concerned (Enticknap, 2001). Similarly, *Blue Scar* features in accounts of the history and representation of Wales, mining communities and the nationalization of the coal industry after World War II

(Berry, 1994; Ffrancon, 2007), while *Out of Chaos* is referred to as the first art documentary (Loukopoulou, 2019).

After *To Be a Woman*, Craigie found it difficult to secure opportunities to direct and her primary activities within the film industry were as a screenwriter.⁴ She wrote screenplays for *The Million Pound Note* (1953) and *Windom's Way* (1957), both directed by fellow BFA council member Ronald Neame.⁵ Certainly the failure to find directorial work was frustrating. Sue Harper draws attention to an extraordinary 1958 exchange of letters between Craigie and Ealing Studios head Michael Balcon; he dismisses both her suggestion that she was well placed to develop and direct projects targeting female audiences and that such films were needed or might succeed commercially. As Harper writes, 'Balcon's silence towards [Craigie's] impassioned cry is the loudest in British film history' (Harper 2000: 90). Later in her book she observes, apropos of her struggles with distribution, 'Small wonder that Craigie directed so few films' (Harper 2000: 192). It's hard not to agree. Yet it is also important to take account of the film projects that Craigie did manage to bring to fruition and indeed her place in the British film culture of the post-war period.

Craigie retained considerable media visibility through the 1950s. Not only did she work successfully as a screenwriter, but Craigie also authored regular columns for newspapers such as the London *Evening Standard*, as well as appearing regularly on radio and television. In

⁴ Craigie did direct for television in the 1960s, notably *Who are the Vandals?* (BBC, 1967), a return to questions of planning and public housing.

⁵ She wrote but subsequently refused a credit for Norman Wisdom hit *Trouble in Store* (1953).

1952, for example, she appeared regularly as a guest on the popular panel show *What's My Line?* Craigie's status as a media personality in the post-war period is indicated by her inclusion in a 1954 promotional film for Rediffusion as one of a number of 'well known personalities' who will present programmes as part of their new independent television service.⁶

Craigie was already a celebrity of sorts by the late 1940s, appearing on and writing for radio and television. Her expertise on subjects such as town planning was welcomed, as was her input on matters relating to contemporary women. Thus Craigie forms one of a panel addressing 'the present controversy' of the 'longer skirt and the new silhouette' in a 1947 BBC television programme entitled 'Women's Changing Shape.'⁷ The following year she features as part of a BBC schedule 'Designed for Women'. She is the only participant pictured in the *Radio Times* listing – under the title 'Making a Film'.⁸ On New Year's Eve 1948, Craigie took part in a BBC radio 'round-table conference' on 'picture-making' (alongside Peter Ustinov and Noel Langley) under the heading 'Rebels Corner'.⁹ In contrast to accounts which tend to emphasise exclusion and marginalisation, these examples point to Craigie's success as a filmmaker, her reputation for radical views and her association with other media forms – print journalism, radio and television – in the post-war period. In March 1951 the BBC would air Craigie's play *The Women's Rebellion*, based on the suffragette movement. A full page in that week's *Radio Times* was given over to a piece by Craigie,

⁶ Thanks to Adele Tuilli for drawing my attention to this footage.

⁷ See *Radio Times*, 10th October 1947, p.31

⁸ See *Radio Times* 1st October 1948, p.27.

⁹ See *Radio Times*, 24th December 1948, p.27

‘Honourable Gaol-birds’, which addressed the history of the movement and its significance for women of the day.

While *Blue Scar* did not achieve the same critical success as her earlier work, it nonetheless affirmed the realist trajectory of Craigie’s filmmaking. An examination of reviews of Craigie’s 1940s work show a filmmaker championed by critics eager precisely for a ‘quality’ cinema linked to a realist aesthetic and a sense of social purpose. Highlighting the significance of female film critics (such as Lejeune, a key supporter of *The Way We Live*) Melanie Bell notes that the governing frame for British film criticism in this period coupled discourses of quality and realism. She writes that these ‘were the critical watchwords of the day and were frequently set in opposition to notions of excess, flamboyance and spectacle’ (Bell 2010: 707). Craigie drew on such discourses in her own realist film practice and in her comments on what should be valued in the cinema even as was committed to making her work entertaining and sought to reach wider audiences. Her alignment with a realist aesthetic and her commitment to cinema with a questioning social purpose thus linked her with an important strand of British film culture in the post-war period, one that she argued for in the context of the BFA.

In his autobiography, *Straight from The Horse’s Mouth*, Neame describes his first meeting with Craigie thus: ‘While attending a board meeting of the British Film Academy I was introduced to our future screenwriter, Jill Craigie. She was one of a handful of female film directors in England – her credits, in the documentary field, included the well-received *Out of Chaos*, *The Way We Live*, and *Blue Scar*’. Neame goes on, refreshingly, to refer to Michael Foot as ‘Jill’s husband’ and to describe her art collection and political motivation. He continues: ‘When we met for a coffee some time after the Academy meeting Jill told me she

wanted to write features and voiced an interest in our project. We decided to let her have a go' (Neame, 2003: 140).¹⁰ Here Neame not only indicates the esteem in which Craigie's film work was held at the time but also underlines how membership of the council allowed her to develop productive professional networks with key figures in the industry. Before turning to Craigie's involvement in more detail, the next section gives a brief overview of the BFA as a key but overlooked organisation within post-war British film culture.

The British Film Academy: discourses of quality and practice

When Jill Craigie attended her first meeting of the Academy's management council in April 1950, outgoing chair Michael Balcon, handed over the role to vice-chair, Ronald Neame. The other members of the council at this time were also well known figures across feature and documentary film production, namely Thorold Dickinson, Sidney Gilliat, Anthony Havelock-Allen, Frank Launder, Basil Dearden, Charles Frend, David Lean, Michael Powell, Carol Reed and Paul Rotha.¹¹ While her outlier status as the sole female Council member is striking, Craigie was evidently part of the British film establishment.¹² As a practitioner-led

¹⁰ Neame also praises Craigie's abilities in delineating character, describing how they both worked through the script with star Gregory Peck to advise on performance in the context of comedy.

¹¹ Of course not all of these men were present at every meeting, with records suggesting varied degrees of engagement among members.

¹² Craigie was not the only woman in the room since Academy librarian and noted film historian Rachael Low was often in attendance. Yet she was the sole female member of the Management Council throughout her three-year term. Betty Box joined the Council as Craigie left, but the two did not overlap.

organisation, the BFA was distinct from bodies such as the British Film Institute (established in 1933) and the Arts Council (established in 1945 from the wartime organisation CEMA).

The concerns of the BFA reflected its status as centred on practitioners, although some of its aspirations – such as increasing awareness about the cinema as a distinctive art form - were held in common with those other bodies.

Established as a Limited Company, the primary goal of the BFA, as expressed in the organisation's 1948 Memorandum of Association was: 'To advance the art and technique of motion pictures in every way and in particular by stimulating exceptional creative work and by encouraging experiment and research in every branch of the motion picture and film industry'. Other goals included fostering an understanding of cinema, establishing a library, supporting the study of film in Universities and establishing an awards programme. The Academy's concern to advance the medium of film involved it in reporting to its members and organising events on a diverse range of issues – regulatory, financial and cultural. The organisation supported exhibitions and events, serving as consultants on a *Film in Britain* exhibition organised by the British Council in 1949. BFA Director Roger Manvell worked in collaboration with both the British Council and British Film Institute. In 1950 Manvell lectured and showed extracts from British films in France at the invitation of the British Council. Welcoming Denis Forman as the new Director of the BFI the July 1949 issue of *BFA Quarterly* noted that 'Members of the Academy and Institute staffs meet regularly to ensure that the maximum co-operation between the two organisations is maintained and developed'. The editor observes for example that 'Members of the Academy and the Director are assisting again this year as lecturers at the Institute's annual film appreciation course at Bangor.'

We might speculate that the close connection between the Academy and other bodies concerned with culture, and cinema specifically, have obscured rather than highlighted the importance of the organisation for film historians. Pett and Warner (2020) note the virtual absence of the BFA – or indeed its successor organisations – in scholarly accounts of British film industry. They argue that the BFA’s independence from the state and the centrality of industry workers to its operation makes the organisation both distinctive and significant. The character of the BFA as practitioner-led – Pett and Warner highlight its commitment to training - is also crucial in thinking about the networks in which Craigie was involved, and the extent to which her role in the BFA gave her a platform.

My observations here draw on minutes of Management Council meetings and publications for members, notably the *BFA Quarterly* which included features and records of Academy events. These records provide evidence of the connections between the Academy and other cultural organisations as well as the varied character of the debates that took place under its auspices. For example, the first issue of *BFA Quarterly*, published in April 1948, describes the organisation’s sponsorship of the Festival of British Documentary to be held at the following year’s Edinburgh Festival, refers to an exhibition of work by British film designers at the Victoria & Albert Museum, and gives details of books received and gramophone records of film music, concluding with a summary of the Anglo-American Film Agreement proposed by Harold Wilson as President of the Board of Trade. Subsequent issues included more on events held at the Academy and venues such as the British Council film theatre. These included ‘Can the Scientist help the Film Producer?’, summary of a presentation by Sir Robert Watson-Watt with a subsequent discussion chaired by David Lean (*BFA Quarterly* 2, July 1948), and ‘The Censor and the Film,’ a report of an Academy discussion between Frank Launder and ATL Watkins, Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors (*BFA Quarterly* 4, January 1949). The Academy organised multiple events and film screenings each year,

providing opportunities for its membership to discuss issues to do with the film industry and the craft of film. Discourses of ‘quality’ – what today we would typically frame in terms of cultural value - were clearly at work in the activities of the BFA. The newsletter includes appreciations of filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Griffiths, for example. Manvell’s lecture tour of France, mentioned above, involved the screening of extracts from British films such as *Brief Encounter*, *Scott of the Antarctic*, *The Red Shoes* and *Hamlet*. In addition to considerations of potential commercial appeal to European audiences, these titles demonstrate the diversity of contemporary ideas about ‘quality’, a category encompassing realist modes, lavish technical achievement, and literary adaptation. Although there is not space to interrogate this question in detail here, understandings of ‘quality’ British cinema are subject to considerable change and debate within film criticism, and rather differently within film studies (Chapman, 2017). As a body of practitioners which organised screenings, debates and events, the BFA served as an important institutional site for the development of ideas about cultural value in British cinema.

Jill Craigie and the British Film Academy

Just as the BFA has been virtually absent from histories of British cinema, Craigie’s role in the organisation is never particularly prominent in accounts of her career. She doesn’t talk about the Academy at all in her later interviews, for example, rather emphasizing the lack of connection and support from leading figures in documentary filmmaking such as John Grierson and Paul Rotha, both of whom were involved in the Academy to different degrees.¹³ Carl Rollyson’s biography of Craigie contains only one reference to the BFA, foregrounding

¹³ Along with Michael Balcon, Thorold Dickinson and Paul Rotha, Grierson was appointed to a committee to judge the UN Award at the meeting held on 9th February 1949.

the social dimensions of the organization: ‘The Film Academy board met once a month, and Jill often stayed on to join a “warm, friendly” group of three or four at a pub’ (Rollyson 2005: 140). Rollyson also notes Craigie’s encounter with Ronald Neame, writing that he had ‘welcomed her into an organization that had few places for women and that needed her energy and experience as a young and enthusiastic documentary film-maker modest about her accomplishments and eager to learn’ (Rollyson 2005: 140). As I’ve noted above, Craigie’s relationship with Neame was key to opening up opportunities for her as a screenwriter in the 1950s suggesting the professional importance of the Academy for Craigie more generally.

Approaching the BFA archives with these comments in view, my initial assumption was that Craigie’s involvement with the Academy was minimal. However, minutes and publications for members dating from the period of Craigie’s involvement with the BFA demonstrate her complex position as both an insider and an outsider in the post-war British film industry. The Academy seemed to provide her with a platform as well as being an organization through which she was able to network and forge new opportunities such as her working relationship with Neame. My goal here is to discuss Craigie’s involvement in the BFA in a way that highlights some neglected aspects of both the filmmaker’s career – a period in which she is in many ways at the heart of the British film establishment – and the BFA itself as an important practitioner-led body which played an important but underexplored role in the development of discourses of British film culture in the post-war period.

Craigie’s involvement with the British Film Academy pre-dates her election to the Management Council in 1950. Records from this period reveal Craigie’s involvement in the activities of the Academy both before and during her period on the council. She became an ordinary subscribing member within the first year of its establishment, her membership duly

noted (along with director Betty Box) in the January 1948 minutes. In June 1952, Craigie was invited to take on the role of Vice Chair of the Management Council, an opportunity that she - along with two others – would decline (Carol Reed was ultimately appointed to the role). Craigie retired from the council at the March AGM in 1953 along with Balcon and Neame. Her membership eventually lapsed in 1958 suggesting an increasing distance from the BFA, perhaps as her media career had shifted more to journalism.

The April 1949 issue of *BFA Quarterly* gives a flavour of BFA activities and of Craigie's involvement. The issue includes a report on 'Two Academy Discussions'. The first, exploring the question 'Has British Comedy Declined?' featured presentations from Peter Ustinov and the writer and MP Benn Levy. The second, held on 1st March 1949, under the title 'The Freedom of the Screen' consisted of presentations from Craigie and the influential film critic Dilys Powell; their remarks and key points of the discussion were summarised for the newsletter by the Chair, Roger Manvell. Before turning to Craigie's contribution, it is worth reflecting on the position accorded to Powell in this discussion. Bell has noted the frequently unremarked extent of women's involvement in British film criticism and commentary through the late 1940s and 1950s with Powell, film critic for the *Sunday Times* from 1939 to 1960, just one of a group of journalists who commanded a significant readership. She argues that 'A study of film criticism can shed light on a nation's wider film culture and in the post-war period this aspect of film culture cannot be fully understood without considering women's contribution' (Bell 2010: 705). Bell's comment has a wider application when we consider the way in which women's vital contribution to developing discourses of film culture more broadly have so often been overlooked.

Powell and Craigie evidently interpreted the topic of the freedom of the screen in rather different ways, with Powell suggesting that literature rather than film was the appropriate medium for avant-garde experimentation. For her the role of film is to ‘raise gradually the level of public receptiveness’. Craigie’s stance was more combative: ‘Jill Craigie followed up with a direct attack on the conditions with which filmmakers were faced’. While Powell favoured the current censorship regime and a gradual acculturation of audiences for more challenging films, Craigie condemned a context for feature films in which there was ‘freedom only for those who had nothing to say’. She also berated Central Office of Information (COI) films for adopting what she termed the ‘squeamishness of the civil servant outlook on issues since the war’.¹⁴ Conceding the need for ‘all kinds of entertainment in the cinema’ Craigie expressed the view that ‘we’ (by which we can assume she refers to the filmmaking community of the Academy) ‘have lost our warmth of contact with the community since the War’.

Craigie’s remarks also touched on questions of social responsibility and on the significance of finding distribution arrangements for a range of types of film material. Coupling different discourses prominent in this period, Craigie appeals to an idea of film culture as both popular and challenging: ‘the ordinary people of this country should be seriously as well as dramatically represented on the screen, and trivialities such as crime melodrama should not be allowed to remain the distributor’s sole measure of excellence.’ In later interviews Craigie would recall the transformative effect of reading as a young woman Shaw’s *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism & Capitalism*, first published in 1928. There is more than a

¹⁴ Craigie had recently made her only COI film, *Children of the Ruins* (1948), a documentary short promoting the recently established UNESCO.

trace of Shaw's hostility towards the 'alluring advertized (sic) pleasures' (Shaw 1937: 81) of popular leisure practices in her remarks here.¹⁵

While the discussion that followed Craigie's presentation included a defence of the COI as delivering sponsored films and 'socially important' films for 'specialised audiences', there seem to have been others in attendance equally frustrated with the limitations posed by the 'old-fashioned views of distributors on public taste and the practice of script-vetting by distributors'. From a contemporary vantage point it is evident that Craigie's frustration with systems of distribution and exhibition would be a persistent feature of her film career and shaped the views she presented at the Academy (at the time she and MacQuitty were attempting to secure distribution for *Blue Scar*). In his summing up from the chair Roger Manvell emphasised the importance of independent cinemas and the value of sessions such as this in which film makers and critics came together to explore these fundamental issues.

The BFA had begun discussion of 'Academy screenings' early on in a meeting held in January 1948. The regular programme, it was suggested, would include foreign films (including from the United States). At its meeting held on 5th July 1950 the Council resolved to set up a viewings sub-committee which would oversee the feature element of the Academy's screening programme. Craigie would take on the lead role of the sub-committee which also included Thorold Dickinson and Charles Freund. The committee's remit was to populate a varied programme:

¹⁵ Shaw has little directly to say on the cinema although he is scathing about 'the thousands [of women] whose political minds, as far as they can be said to have any political minds at all, have been formed in the cinema' (Shaw 1937: 164).

In any six-week period, the meetings should be divided as follows:

- 3 feature viewings
- 1 documentary viewing
- 1 Fellow's lecture (starting 1951)
- 1 Ad hoc meeting (lecture, viewing, etc.)

Almost two years later in an editorial entitled 'Tuesday Evenings' across the first two pages of *BFA Quarterly* 11 (January 1951) Craigie writes as Chairman of the Meetings and Viewings Sub-Committee to encourage attendance at the Academy screenings and to urge members to be more adventurous in their tastes, extending to documentary and experimental films as well as features: 'Are we really such an unimaginative lot?' she asks:

Are we so sure that we know so much about our craft that it will profit nothing to hear David Lean, for instance, telling us some of his difficulties in conveying thought on the screen? Are we so well up in the history of our own industry that we have nothing to learn from a pioneer such as Cecil Hepworth? And are we so unconcerned about the future of our industry that we think it is of no importance to express our point of view to members of the press and politicians when they pay us an occasional visit?

Here Craigie seeks to mobilise a shared professional identity, the 'we' of the British film industry/members of the Academy urging against complacency and for an engaged approach to the business of making, distributing and watching film. The piece ends with a renewed commitment to experimentation and Craigie's appeal to the value and distinctiveness of the BFA in its work for the British film industry:

Despite the apparent preference for a free seat for an American film, the Council will try again this year a number of experimental programmes. If those who stayed away from the first two retrospective programmes will only come to the next one, we are

convinced they will begin to see what they have been missing. They might also find they will be given a short cut to knowledge which distinguished directors have acquired through years of trial and error in the studios.

Later in this issue appears a record of meetings held between September and December 1950 with details of some of the sessions to which Craigie's feature refers. [FIGURE 2]

Reproduced in Figure 2, this record points to a mixed programme sponsored by the BFA. On the one hand there is a commitment to an authorial approach and to discourses of 'quality,' on the other the screening of American feature films such as *The Asphalt Jungle* and *All About Eve*. One week consists of a Brains Trust style event chaired by Jack Beddington with Craigie's husband, member of parliament Michael Foot on the panel. This snapshot of the schedule of meetings and events on one hand, Craigie's appeal to members to attend *all* events and not just the popular American films on the other, indicates both the aspirations of Craigie and the Management Council and the – sometimes conflicting - interests of members. There is here an evident commitment here not just to screening a diverse range of films but also to fostering understanding, to developing a British film culture in a fuller sense than production. These brief observations suggest that the BFA and its members were involved in developing and complex discourses of value in respect to British cinema, and not simply comfortable ideas of 'quality'. Craigie concludes her editorial style feature by appealing once more to the industry as a collective body:

The British Film Academy is literally the only organisation which tries to cater for the interests and strengthen the comradeship of the creative members of the industry. It can become an organization with immense prestige when all its members bring virility and imagination to its activities.

Craigie's argument on the part of the Academy here seeks to emphasise the value of the organisation for filmmakers. The piece also tells us something about the diverse interests of the practitioners it represented and, crucially, Craigie's status in relation to a key professional body.

Conclusion: narrating (women's) film history

In interviews given later in life Craigie describes herself as an outsider whose socialism and feminism presented obstacles to her film career. For example, she claimed that she had 'wanted to get in on that series like "The March of Time" but my socialism didn't help me, actually'. In the same interview, given in 1995, Craigie couples accounts of her socialism with a self-deprecatory attitude to her film work: 'If I had been a good little Tory, and perhaps better at my job, I'd have got a job with the Rank Organisation, I'm sure'. She also expresses frustration at the lack of training opportunities available to women at that time, and remarks that she had eventually drifted out of the film industry, a professional retreat which 'shows I can't have been any good'.¹⁶

Scholarship on Craigie's film career understandably takes a cue from such interviews, along with documents such as the Balcon correspondence discussed by Harper (2000), or the negotiations with the Rank organisation detailed by Geoffrey McNab (1994) around the production of *The Way We Live*. Such accounts rightly highlight Craigie as an anomalous figure, a woman who experienced significant challenges in securing distribution for her films and, later, opportunities to direct films at all. Charles Drazin, who had interviewed Craigie for his research on the British cinema of the 1940s, expresses regret at potential unfulfilled.

¹⁶ BECTU History Project, Interview 369.

He writes: ‘*Out of Chaos* would have announced the arrival of a gifted and sensitive filmmaker had any company been willing to distribute it. [...] The lack of support is a major reason why Craigie, who was a fine film-maker, is so little known as such today’ (Drazin 1998: 209). Although Drazin is undoubtedly correct with regard to distribution and its significance for Craigie’s subsequent reputation, I’ve shown here that *Out of Chaos* established Craigie as a figure to be reckoned with in post-war British cinema. Moreover, her second film as director, *The Way We Live*, was celebrated by mainstream reviewers and even, albeit somewhat grudgingly, by the editors of the *Documentary Newsletter*.¹⁷

Craigie’s position within post-war British film culture, as suggested by contemporary responses to her films and her role in the BFA stands in marked contrast to her subsequent neglect. Indeed, the Jill Craigie who emerges from documents of the immediate post-war period – both her own writings and reviews of her film work - is quite at odds with the self-deprecating Craigie of the 1980s and 90s. This disjuncture highlights a persistent problem with the narration of film history, and perhaps film histories of marginalised groups in particular: so much is forgotten or erased, and researchers must work with care to contextualise the documents on which we rely. But it is also the writing of film history that plays an important part in who is and is not known today: critical reputations, textbooks and curricula are developed over time and their shape and character is never neutral. Viewed from this perspective, a lack of attention to Craigie’s film work risks perpetuating an exclusionary history of British cinema’s documentary and realist modes as the domain of men.

¹⁷ See ‘Documentary Goes to Town’ *Documentary Newsletter* 6 (54) 1946, p.50. The newsletter had roundly mocked Two Cities’ promotional materials for Craigie’s first film *Out of Chaos* and the claims it made for Craigie as a pioneer in documentary filmmaking.

Jill Craigie's films consistently foreground women's voices and perspectives through documentary and realist modes which were bound up with discourse of cultural value in the post-war period. Craigie's visibility within the British film culture of the post-war period suggests that there are very different stories to tell about her place within histories of British cinema. Craigie's role within the BFA and participation in multiple media forms, highlights a cultural visibility – even a celebrity – too easily forgotten. This article has focused on two interlinked absences, highlighting Jill Craigie's prominence as a figure within post-war British film culture and the British Film Academy as a neglected institution. I have suggested that we can take Craigie's position on the BFA Management Council as a marker of the regard in which she was held. The piece has also argued for the importance of looking anew at the BFA as a key, practitioner-led institution which played a part in shaping the discourses of value – aesthetic, cultural, social and economic – that were developing rapidly in this period of British film history.

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