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Shooting in Paradise: conflict, compassion and amateur filmmaking during the Spanish Civil War

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Abstract

Following the launch of Kodak's lightweight cine camera in c.1923, early amateur cine enthusiasts soon featured among the growing numbers of people able to afford overseas visits. As the Mediterranean rapidly regained its pre-war popularity as a travel destination, evidence of its more militarised character and strategic significance recur in the glimpses of veterans and uniformed service personnel, vessels, medals and border securities found in interwar amateur film footage. Deliberate filming of discord is much rarer and gives particular value to the focus here upon the work of an amateur filmmaker who visited Spain during the Civil War on behalf of the Society of Friends (Britain's Quaker movement). The article discusses scenes of relief work, people queuing at feeding centres and refugee movements, and places the footage within a wider consideration of filmic responses to the Civil War and international relief operations. The relevance of such amateur imagery for its contemporary home audience is also explored, in relation to prevailing perceptions of the Mediterranean and, more widely, within a context of socially engaged filmmaking that links to strong British documentary making traditions during the interwar years. Discussion forms part of a broader study of Mediterranean imagery shot by British home movie makers during the 1920s and 1930s and recently studied at the North West Film Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University and at the British Film Institute, London.



‘The tourist who goes south in winter with the swallows is the least hardy of all birds, and has almost deserted Tangier this winter. The few who remain congratulated themselves on their hardihood and twitter vaguely about the troubles over the war...’
(Spender, 1937:62)

Introduction

For a brief interlude between two world wars, the Mediterranean region regained its role as a leisure destination for affluent northern Europeans and transatlantic travellers. Cine photography soon augmented the pleasure of such visits. From the early twenties onward,

Kodak's promotion of lightweight, portable cine equipment and the option of an all in one package of camera, home projector and screen coincided with these new travel opportunities. Moving image offered amateur film-makers novel ways to show, share and present themselves and their travel experiences to family and friends back home. Specialist hobby literature encouraged the new enthusiasts too and, for the next fifteen years or so, the making and showing of amateur films flourished within a broader context of changing socio-cultural, material and economic trends that affected leisure, transport and the growth of interest in cinema ((Hollis, 1927; Brunel, 1936; Gale and Pessels, 1939; see also Norris Nicholson, 2003a, 2004).

But not all the annually increasing numbers of camera-touting visitors went merely to enjoy the Mediterranean's popular pre-war appeal as a playground for the rich. Purposeful filmmaking at home and abroad was encouraged by the specialist literature too. Championed by Rotha, Wright, Grierson and others whose names have become synonymous with Britain's documentary film movement, early amateurs were also urged record aspects of the world around them. They made films for varied religious, educational, civic, promotional, commemorative, humanitarian, work-related and other personal reasons. Inevitably, footage was sometimes tinged with the prevailing influence of a distinctively genteel and patronizing English form of middle class socialism, as found within written works of the same period, by such writers as Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender and George Orwell.

Such sentiments may be detected in advice offered to amateurs too. Suggestions for 'creating human stories which really matter', for example, prompted Buchanan (1937: 167) to include tips on filming in hospitals and on such current concerns as unemployment, housing and rearmament. Brunel's (1936: 4-7) appeal for 'fresh ground' likewise urges amateurs to tackle '*any* of the burning topics of the moment', including religious issues and war: 'Give us ordinary people, people we can be interested in and sympathize with... something that will move us and leave a lasting impression'. While it might be misleading to overstate the level of association between Britain's intellectuals, interwar documentary filmmakers and amateur enthusiasts, the connections being made

in the contemporary film literature do suggest that non professional activity should be viewed as an integral component of film history during these formative decades. Certainly, strong parallels exist between the widening amateur search for suitable non fictional film topics and the breadth of films made during the 1930s on documentary and educational themes as well as, in the words of Rachel Low (1979), ‘comment and persuasion’.

These opening remarks define a context for this exploration of amateur footage shot in the Mediterranean. I have written elsewhere on the rise of the amateur film movement in Britain, and considered its contribution to an understanding of identity formation, place representation and ideological meanings at home and abroad during the mid twentieth century. The links between travel and tourism history within Mediterranean settings are well explored elsewhere too (see bibliography). My present concentration is on recently located footage that shows relief work undertaken by the Society of Friends (SoF), sometimes known as Quakers, during the Spanish Civil War.¹ The process of analysis and interpretation connects with aspects of earlier writings on ethnographic film, travel and the politics of visualisation (see, for example, Norris Nicholson, 2002, 2004a, 2005, in press). Attention focuses upon footage that documents humanitarian activities undertaken by members of the SoF’s Spain Committee and related written texts spanning the period during which John Cuthbert Wigham (1869-1950), an active member of Britain’s Quaker movement, visited Spain.² Given the extensively researched nature of the conflict, this article examines the amateur filmmaker’s role in factual recording as well as the practicalities of filming in a war zone. The relevance of amateur imagery of the Spanish Civil War for its contemporary home audience is also explored, in relation to prevailing perceptions of the Mediterranean and more widely within a context of socially engaged filmmaking.

This discussion forms part of a broader investigation of Mediterranean-related travel footage held by the North West Film Archives at Manchester Metropolitan University and the British Film Institute in London, funded by the Kraszna-Kraus Foundation and

the British Academy. Qualitative in nature, the research involved the identification, selection and shot listing (ie detailed listing on a shot by shot basis) of relevant footage deposited at both archives. Contact with surviving family and friends, wherever possible, as well as the study of any associated paperwork, correspondence or other documents, pertaining to the footage, also informed the interpretation of film imagery. After setting a relevant background, this discussion considers the Spanish material as one example of amateur filming with social commitment that echoes better known uses of actuality reportage associated with Britain's documentary tradition filmmaking traditions. Imagery from war-torn Catalonia also contrasts with more frequent representations of the Mediterranean as paradise.

The broader picture: filming with a purpose

During the interwar years, despite the profusion of commercial films portraying Mediterranean settings - usually based upon fairly simple romantic, comic or melodramatic narratives - there was also an audience ready to attend public screening of non professional material. Britain's early amateurs were usually male, white and middle class, although exceptions exist. Such individuals tended to hold positions in local society that combined sufficient time and resources with relevant organizational skills and reputation necessary to attract an interested audience. The screening of home movies was not only a means to share a costly hobby with others. Putting self, family and sometimes friends on screen for public view conferred status and constructed collective and selective memories of being at home and elsewhere. Moreover, although primarily a male activity, the making and showing of films often involved other family members and processing (editing, titling, etc) at home. Amateur practice thus contributes to our understanding of middle class recreational activity during a formative time of patterns of leisure-orientated consumption and behaviour (Norris Nicholson, 2003a; 2004; 2006b; 2007 forthcoming). Arguably, it also indicates that, during significant years of cinema attendance, people were actively involved in creating and consuming alternative and more personally shaped forms of moving imagery about the world around them (Norris Nicholson, in progress).

The majority of early amateur filmmakers on holiday, like their modern day camcorder-holding counterparts in places where tourist safety is not unduly compromised, were probably indifferent to the tensions of their 'host destinations'. Uniformed or weapon-bearing personnel - whether police, army or emerging political factions - often prompted visual curiosity. Sometimes the filming was overt, as outside Mussolini's headquarters in Rome by a Lancashire doctor during the mid 1930s or the regimental movement of a predominantly black military unit plus equipment at Avignon a few years later.³ Of course, the filmic record only shows what was possible to film. The apparent indifference and often seemingly cursory inclusion of people in uniform as part of scenes ostensibly about something else - family members posed in the foreground for instance - may also indicate filmmakers' strategies in dealing with more sensitive subject matter.

From the outset, however, some members of Britain's emerging amateur film movement were concerned that their activities were taken more seriously. As the editors of *Amateur Films* wrote in the mid 1920s, they did not wish to be seen by professionals or the wider public as 'innocuous fans' or 'a set of screen aspirants'. George Sewell, editor of the same journal in 1927, argued that, 'amateur filmmakers, in their own way, are developing the art of cinema. They have the time and inclination to experiment; they can produce a film with other considerations in view than the box office appeal; they bring... a wealth of ideas' (Sewell, 1927: 253). A decade later, Basil Wright (1907-1987), an early leading figure in Britain's documentary film movement first who had first attracted Grierson's attention with an amateur short, also championed non professional filmmakers in *Amateur Cine World (ACW)*: '(for) most of us in the documentary movement, they represent a potential source of social and civic value' (Wright, 1938:9). His opinion was not unique. 'The splendid pioneer work of Mr John Grierson is evidently influencing the amateur field and building up future documentary producers' declared Wadley in a letter to *ACW* (1938:109). Some hobbyists became very proficient in the production of material that was, to quote one Yorkshire amateur, 'exciting, instructive, entertainment' (Norris Nicholson, 1997a:199). Some amateur films made on holiday, as discussed elsewhere, were sometimes made *primarily* to inform or commemorate a specific occasion, for

instance, the *Maiden Voyage of the Queen Mary* (1936), *Gallipoli Revisited, 1934. A Pilgrimage Cruise or Journey through the Balkans* (1934) (Norris Nicholson, 2006b).

Not all commentators on amateur cinematography – as the hobbyists termed their cine activity – were so convinced by arguments for its beneficial role outside the home. ‘I doubt very much whether the amateur is well-advised to paddle in the educational stream’, cautioned one reader, C.A. Robins, to *ACW* (1938:52). Discussion about what lay within or beyond the scope of the non-professional seemed to intensify as the changing political mood at home and abroad mood cast a sobering shadow across public and private life. ‘We do not regard the mission of the amateur filmmaker as the ennobling of the public intelligence’ advised *ACW*’s editor (Editorial, 1938:226). Prompted by the dominance of documentary over fiction films in the magazine’s prize list for the previous year, the same editorial continued, ‘*ACW* does not contemplate embarking on a crusade for the betterment of the world’. Notwithstanding these concerns, encouragement by Basil Wright and others within professional cinema (Wright, 1938:9) was seized upon by those enthusiasts who wished for ‘vital social purposes’ to be considered as desirable subject matter by the amateur filmmaker.

Against this background, it is not hard see how filmmaking prompted by interwar political concerns also occurred overseas and specifically within a Mediterranean setting. Sir Leonard Behrens, for instance, a leading public figure in Manchester’s liberal politics and later the United Nations Association, took his cine camera to Italy and elsewhere in the early 1920s.⁴ Having worked with the Serbian Relief Fund during the Balkan wars, his lifelong commitment to humanitarian concerns found expression in his personal record of attending early League of Nations’ meetings.⁵ Without detailed study of still unsorted papers, Behrens’ grainy and untitled footage has little intrinsic value as it comprises mainly of successive images of elderly men in suits. It is indicative, however, of an individual’s early attempt to document significant non-domestic occasions on moving image. Newsreel reportage was obviously influential too and international news-gathering facilities set up by *Pathé*, *Fox Movietone*, *Metrotone*, *International Newsreel* and other companies proliferated during the later 1920s (Katz, 2001:1010). Perhaps the

legacy of associating moving imagery with supposedly factual recording from late nineteenth and early twentieth century exploratory and expeditionary contexts also helped to maintain audiences for amateur footage (Norris Nicholson, 2003b:93-95). Certainly, quasi-documentary styles were well-established forms of visual representation well before the emergence of Britain's so-called documentary film movement in the 1930s.

Shooting cine film to record more discordant aspects of life in the Mediterranean thus finds a recognisable niche in early amateur film practice. Discontent was rarely far below the surface as peoples, regions, and places adjusted to the imperatives of enduring domination or newly imposed boundaries, identities and affiliations in the aftermath of the First World War. Geo-political tensions underpinned by diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and colonial variables existed in all parts of the region and war-time memories were not very distant for some of the earliest amateur filmmakers. Medal-wearing veterans encountered in public gardens along the French Riviera recur in holiday footage.⁶ Eye contact seems to register a stoical acceptance of the cinematic gaze rather than outright displeasure. Naval vessels passed out at sea or lying at anchor off-shore also attract attention, as do the Lascars crew members whose presence on board pleasure cruisers was another legacy of Britain's Asian imperialism (see also Norris Nicholson, 2006, forthcoming).⁷

Border controls provoke visual interest too, particularly at the disputed British imperial outpost on Gibraltar, and also in the Balkans. During cruises, passport formalities – the un-revoked wartime contingency measure that symbolised modernity's loss of freedom to some travellers - usually occurred on board ship. By contrast, instances of how frontier crossings punctuate, and particularize specific journeys occur mainly in films about overland travel. Generally, the filmic record of the comfortable middle class traveler omits any detailed reference to evidence of conflict, unless, it happened so long ago that it had acquired an aesthetic stripped of its former suffering. Only when cineastes went in search deliberately does their footage offer reminders of the Mediterranean as a more contested zone.

John Cuthbert Wigham and the Spanish Civil War

John Cuthbert Wigham was one such cineaste, traveling with his camera to Spain at least three times between 1936 and 1939, to report on relief work undertaken by the Spain Committee of the Society of Friends (hereafter SoF). Following the death of his wife in 1928, Wigham's commitment to SoF activities intensified and he continued to serve on many committees for the rest of his life. His support of humanitarian work overseas had begun prior to the First World War and by the mid 1930s, Wigham had attended Quaker 'fields of service' in Russia and eastern Europe, Palestine and Syria, Madagascar and East Africa, taking his camera with him. Quaker relief work was already well established in Spain by the time Wigham made his first visit. Given the extensive study of the Civil War and also the well-known role of the SoF as peace-workers, this discussion concentrates upon the activities of Wigham as an amateur filmmaker within a war-zone. Reference to wider aspects of the Civil War are inevitable in that they are the context and rationale for Wigham's visits and camerawork but there is no attempt here to replicate historical overviews that exist elsewhere. Background material on SoF's ideological involvement in the conflict is similarly offered only where it relates directly to Wigham's imagery or to associated writing.⁸

The SoF had representatives in Spain when tensions erupted into the military uprising of July 1936 (Jacob, 1936a:410). Eye-witness reports from refugee areas and Barcelona were published weekly in *The Friend*, a Quaker newspaper from late summer onwards. Browne (1996: 43-47) suggests that the battle over control of Madrid and its eventual fall caused destruction and displacement and also helped to internationalize the conflict. The SoF, however, was already monitoring rapidly changing circumstances. From early on, Quakers helped to alleviate local need and assisted relief work among the thousands of internal displaced people and refugees crossing the Pyrenees into France (Harvey, 1936:917). Finding practical ways to raise support at home provoked much ingenuity among fund-raisers as they sought to 'stir the imagination of many who might not be touched by the ordinary type of appeal' (*The Friend*, 1936: 1214). Quakers voiced concern about the need for visual evidence to promote international concern about the

severity of conditions repeatedly during the early autumn. The lengthy reports by volunteers, detailing the rapidly changing and complex conditions in Catalonia and elsewhere, testify to the wider absence of visual imagery available at this stage in the Civil War.⁹

As the SoF distributed food and care via canteens and temporary accommodation, the need for financial assistance and supplies escalated. 'The refugee problem is of such a magnitude that we need no longer ask about the exact magnitude, nor worry about whether we are sending anything not needed' wrote Alfred Jacob, the Barcelona-based SoF representative after a visit to Valencia in November.¹⁰ Among the immediate needs for transport and supplies of infant foods, marmite, Bovril, cod liver oil, rice, milk and sugar, soap, shoes and clothing, Jacob stressed the need to document the scale of humanitarian problems. His decision to stay in Barcelona contrasted with 'the general exodus of foreigner sympathisers' (Harvey, 1936: 972-974) and ensured that SoF worked practically alongside the *Save the Children Fund* and the *Red Cross*. SoF's commitment to child welfare also prompted direct involvement with various children's relief schemes run by the government in Catalonia: '...the sufferings of the children, as helpless as they are innocent, present a picture of overpowering tragedy. Something must be done to help them both now and in the terrible winter months to come.' (Littleboy and Noel-Buxton, 1936, 1108).

Although Jacob made an international broadcast in English from Barcelona and also managed to send a photograph to London in early December, the SoF only published its first photographs in *The Friend* in January 1937. The images depict children in Barcelona Stadium which had been converted into temporary accommodation and classrooms for young refugees who awaited relocation to safer rural settings. They also include some scenes of children being cared for in Quaker-sponsored colonies in different parts of Catalonia. An accompanying report comments on the problems associated with obtaining visual evidence (Alexander, 1937: 6-8). The involvement of Barcelona's Commissar of Propaganda made available both an official photographer and transport. Such practical problems were to recur when Wigham made his own films.

One month later, Alfred Jacob's call for filmic coverage arrived in London: 'We have been wondering whether the time has come to take a cine film of our work here and whether it would be worth the price of the film' (original emphasis).¹¹ Wigham's experience as a filmmaker among the needy at home and abroad seemed to personalise the directive. Resolving the practicalities of traveling to Spain became an immediate concern. Queries about the availability of film stock and gaining authorization to travel with a camera punctuate the correspondence over the following weeks. Jacob advised Wigham 'to bring the camera as far as he can and bring sufficient film for any pictures he wants to take.'¹² Even if he has to leave the camera at the frontier, if he has the film it is practically certain that he will be able to borrow or hire a camera here, though not to carry around with him.' Jacob pointed out that Wigham might need to hire cine equipment in each locality, given the various political factions operating in adjacent regions where he might wish to film but remained optimistic. 'But if he has the film, the rest can be managed somehow.'

Wigham went by train to Spain in March 1937. In Paris, he showed films of Quaker mission work to members who also contributed to the costs of running children's colonies outside Barcelona. Once in Spain, he documented the humanitarian work being coordinated by Alfred Jacob and his helpers. Although neither his own record nor the resultant film of his first visit seem to survive, a reliable picture may be evoked from comments provided by other SoF volunteers who traveled to Barcelona. As details survive of his second and third visits, it seems likely that Wigham's first film covered many of the same subjects – SoF activity at various distribution and feeding centres, accommodation units and transfer arrangements for newly arrived refugees displaced by both the recent fall of Malaga and by Franco's own re-launched offensive on Madrid. Wigham's visual focus on alleviation of children's needs seems likely, given frequent references made by Jacob and other witnesses to the need for medical supplies and dietary supplements, shoes and clothing and food, especially milk.¹³ Although night-time filming was, by this time, possible with amateur equipment, Wigham's own circumstances probably prevented it and thus meant he could not document when

volunteers were often at their busiest. Cocoa, donated to the Quaker relief effort by Cadbury Brothers, provided hot drinks for all refugees who arrived in Barcelona, even as Jacob was seeking to find drivers and vehicles for onward movement of up to two hundred new arrivals at one time during the night (*The Friend*, 1937: 200).

After his visit, Wigham combined committee work with film shows and much consultation with H.D. Watson, chairman of the *Save the Children Fund*. Concern about the widening conflict prompted the setting up of more children's colonies and maintained large-scale evacuation of children to other European countries, including France, Belgium and Scandinavia. Wigham's correspondence with Watson was part of a broader discussion about the feasibility and desirability of overseas evacuation and adoption as effective child welfare strategies. Written reports on conditions in and around Murcia, Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia reached London on an irregular basis during the summer months and testify to the increasingly stretched humanitarian provision offered through the combined efforts of international and Spanish agencies.¹⁴

Between Wigham's first and second visits, considerable changes occurred as a result of political shifts that arose from new policies aimed at returning Spain to republican normality. The government's new centralizing thrust and perceived abandonment of the revolution prompted factional unrest (Browne, 1996:57-59). Barcelona, the SoF's administrative base and centre of relief operations was directly affected by the split between militias of, on the one hand, the CNT – the anarchist federation that had emerged as the major left wing movement and POUM, a Marxist anti-Stalinist party – and, on the other, the PSUC, a Soviet-influenced Communist grouping of pro-Stalinist Catalan Marxists and the UCT, the socialist trade union. Historians interpret the political significance of the so-called Barcelona May Days differently, but oral evidence (Fraser, 1979:309) and Orwell's (1938) descriptions concur with Quaker observations on how life in the city changed profoundly during 1937. Against the broader unrest, the struggle to sustain humanitarian relief efforts continued as Jacob reported: 'I wish I could give you more publicity material but the nature of the service makes it unspectacular.'¹⁵

Wigham's observations during his second visit combined detail and encouragement with continued requests for aid (Wigham, 1938a:10; 1938b: 53). He compared the sight of 'houses wrecked by shells and bombs, mainly in the working class districts' of Barcelona with conditions on his earlier visit. He commended the 'splendid work' undertaken in many canteens functioning in and around the city and acknowledged the scale of need among four thousand refugees scattered among villages and hospitals in Murcia.¹⁶ He urged for donations of fuel supplies and blankets to assist refugees displaced from Bilbao and Santander and currently housed in former convent buildings and spoke of 'no sign of either side being ready to give in. His report also indicates that additional SoF volunteers were joining existing workers to help 'feed some 20,000 in 70 canteens and 10 colonies in various parts of Catalonia and Andalusia' (Jacob, 1938:705). At the time of Wigham's visit, Jacob stressed the high infant mortality, and shortly later, official figures from the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain estimated that 250,000 children were in 'urgent need' nationally (Pye, 1938:519).

The Civil War had entered its final phase by the time of Wigham's third visit in January and February 1939. For months, *The Friend* had published frequent reports on refugee movements across the Pyrenees and volunteers had filed personal accounts on specific localities. Despite the written testimony, there were also renewed requests for visual coverage. One example is compelling in its repetition: 'nobody in England could bear to see these children hungry if they could actually see them. It only needs that the people of England realize that these children do exist even though they can't be seen, and that the hunger that they feel is just as acute as the hunger that children in England would feel if there was no food, and that their bones stick out through their skin just as much even though you can't see them...[...] ... unless relief (money, clothes, shoes, books) comes on a very large scale before the winter, the situation may well develop into wholesale starvation' (*The Friend*, 1938, 771-772).

Third Visit to Spain 1939 is an eight minute long 16mm silent film shot in black and white, except for the final colour footage of Wigham's homecoming. Its unpretentious

titling format, the direct informative tone of each caption, in camera-editing and the absence of fades, cut aways or other linking shots denote its purely functional role as mimetic tool. Although inter-titles identify location and key individuals, other information is minimal, suggesting Wigham gave a spoken commentary. The film's understated tone is apparent from Wigham's contemporary written account and perhaps further illustrates the difficulty of filming in a war-zone. The opening peaceful image of woodland stream and mountains, filmed en route, leads into scenes of loading supplies onto trucks at a depot in Barcelona. During his first week, against a background of heavy bombing, Wigham recorded the arrival by road and rail of food and clothing supplies from France and its distribution, particularly to approximately 75,000 children in Barcelona and an equal number 'scattered all over Catalonia' (Wigham, 1939).

In contrast to the deserted Barcelona backstreet where one child with a hoop watches the activity at a supply depot, successive exterior and indoor scenes capture the atmosphere at canteens on the way to Tarragona where large numbers of children eat and drink as they stand singly or in small groups. Many ignore or look past the camera, unsmiling faces concentrating on the enamel cup or tin utensil in hand. Resignation, passivity and despair recur through these scenes, occasionally alleviated when the camera catches a fleeting smile or relief as someone returns with a handout. Sometimes tracking shots disclose long queues of hunched figures, huddled in coats, shawls or sacking, stretching along pavements or around a corner, comprising mainly of children and women. Most wait motionless. Some elderly women knit, seemingly oblivious to the camera. Waving palm fronds behind ornate gate grilles are reminders of a western Mediterranean setting that jars incongruously with these grainy images of destitution.

Wigham's brief sequences of Alfred and Norma Jacob at their home and during relief work personalize the Quaker contribution to humanitarian aid. The fleeting images of off-duty informality contrast with the film's dominant serious mood. Wigham also acknowledges the individual endeavours by medical and other volunteers. An eye-witness account, written by Richard Ellis who was one of the doctors in Wigham's film, detailed 'the appalling evidence of malnutrition (and) the consequently high incidence of

infection (at one canteen with 460 children on the books, 175 were too ill to attend)' (Ellis, 1939:92). Footage records conditions at different colonies during visits that combine medical checks with delivering supplies. The inter-title, 'Breaking up pine cones to get at kernels' introduces a sequence in which scantily clad young boys at Rubi use stones to gather the nutritious seeds. Inside a smart house with garden, children consume soup in orderly but cramped conditions. Wigham records Ellis during a physical inspection of approximately fifty children as they exercise singly and in pairs on a roof terrace at Amatella colony. Elsewhere, scenes of children during meals or involved in gardening, washing and other domestic tasks capture the stability and purposeful activities and typify how the Quaker colonies and *Assistencia Infantil* cared for these displaced children.

Wigham's visit coincided with the taking of Tarragona and the Nationalist advance. He wrote that 'we began to receive urgent requests to send our lorries to evacuate children from various parts near the front'. After a 'general mobilization order had been issued (...) four of us had an interview with the Prime Minister to request (that) key Spanish male workers were allowed to stay (Wigham, 1939.) Spanish relief trucks, with lettering to denote their participation in the *Servicio Ingles* or *Ayuda a los ninos de España* or other mission, disappear from later scenes as loaned government vehicles were requisitioned for military purposes and 'more than half the remaining drivers and warehouse porters were mobilized' (Ellis, 1939:92). Wigham was thrust into the task of moving children from the colonies filmed the previous week.

The caption 'Evacuating the children in danger from actual fighting' introduces Wigham's return visit to transfer eighty children from La Nogera near Manresa. Footage shows some children with bedrolls and boxes sitting in an open truck waving goodbye to others waiting, presumably for another vehicle. The process was soon interrupted as the next caption reads 'Re-embarking the children after watching an attack on Manresa' and children are seen scrambling back into the truck. The unexpected assault was too sudden to film as Wigham recalls: 'Some men, to whom we were giving a lift shouted a warning, and Robert, understanding what was wrong, called, "Get down into that ditch, quick." I

did! And just in time. The bomb fell behind our lorry, killed a mule, lacerated an old woman's arm and a bit of the bomb went through the woodwork of the cab....shattering the windscreen.' Wigham was more restrained in his titling than in his subsequent notes: 'Was I frightened? No, I hadn't time to be! It was all over so quickly but one's knees did not seem to be behaving with Quakerly quietness for some time afterwards' (Wigham, 1939). The incident prompted a rare judgmental outburst: 'On our way home we saw from a distance four planes circle three times round the town. On each circle, they let off a belt of machine gun ammunition. Manresa is a small town of no importance and with very little is anything in the way of ammunition works. The attack was purely for terrorizing the people' (Wigham, 1939).

With reduced transport provision and the urgent need for evacuation, some canteens to the south west of Barcelona had to close although American supplies helped to boost SoF's continuing work within the city limits. Wigham films scenes of bread and flour being offloaded at school gates. Their long awaited arrival attracted many bystanders and some excitement among some of the boys who hitch lifts on trolleys in a rare display of improvised play captured on camera. Ellis observes that American bread and biscuits became part of 'the fresh provision (that) had to be made for the continual stream of refugees from all over the villages in the line of the advance' (1939:92). Dealing with new and existing needs necessitated the SoF to divide its volunteer unit. Some stayed in Barcelona and Ellis describes how the 'refugees trudged into the city on foot, or came on little farm carts piled high with household gear; not one in fifty wore shoes but sandals made from old motor tyres, bits of wood or even plaited palm leaves (Ellis, 1939).

Wigham travelled towards the French border filming the refugee movement. 'Gerona, 60 miles north of Barcelona. A busy road' introduces crowded scenes of people walking among heavily-laden animal drawn carts, trucks and saloon cars filmed from an upper window. The congestion prevented effective distribution of food supplies. 'We left on the Tuesday, but the conditions got so bad, the roads so impassable because of the endless procession of refugees in country carts and... petrol was so short, and there was so little possibility of getting any more food in that we decided to evacuate the party' (Wigham,

1939). Again, Wigham's brief captions understate the situation shown by his imagery and the emotional response evident in his written notes: 'The memory of those unfortunate people - old men, women, children, wounded soldiers just evacuated out of hospital - trudging along carrying all their possessions or being transported in carts and lorries is indelible' (Wigham, 1939).

Unlike other SoF reports from mountain border crossing where only paths continued into France and 'there were pitiful cases of women and children lost in a snow storm and being picked up half frozen' (Pye, 1939: 155), Wigham's group continued together by lorry through la Jonquera to the frontier at Le Perthus. Scenes of displaced people waiting at frontier posts, now all too familiar, are poignant in their capturing of collective and anonymous suffering. Alone and in family groups, people wearing a mix of tailored clothes and improvised garments of sacking and blankets, sit and stand with waiting for permission for onward travel. Haunted faces half hidden by canvas flaps on parked trucks or standing packed into open vehicles register uncertainty and fear. Shoving and jostling groups by open windows denote tensions. Racial issues strained relations at the border too; several Quaker volunteers comment on how the French Senegalese border patrols seemed to provoke hostility among the refugees who perhaps associated them erroneously with the North African presence in the Nationalist Army and their subsequent derision in anti-fascist posters as 'the beast' - a hideous Moorish figure bearing monarchical and clerical emblems' (Harvey, 1936:972; Pye, 1939: 155).

Wigham records his own convoy's bumpy onward movement beyond the barriers and then a brief stop where he films a long pan across snowy peaks. The mountain solitude contrasts with the crowds of preceding scenes. He shows a lone woman walking down the rough road into a desolate and otherwise empty foreground. The caption, 'Perpignan, 20 miles inside France. Real coffee and sleep' signals the refugees' arrival and welcome. Wigham's filmic record is complete except for a few images in colour of his return by train, lingering shots of flower sellers, pedestrians, advertising boards and fast moving traffic in Paris and spring blossom in his garden. Such reassuring images re-assert normality as he - and his viewers - return to the familiarity of home.

Discussion

Pastoral scenes and close-ups of orange blossom, oleander or bougainvillea, despite their subsequent monotone viewing, are recurrent images in early black and white amateur imagery shot in Mediterranean settings. Family and friends often pose among details of nature and selectively framed landscapes untouched by modernity as cameras capture their brief holiday sojourns in an Eden evoked by tourist literature. In contrast, Wigham offers glimpses of crushed pine kernels and half hidden palm trees and any associative uplifting or restorative effects of nature occur only in his opening and final sequence. For all that Quaker interest in Spain in early 1936 was prompted in part by perceived 'opportunities for liberal religious freedom' (Jacob, 1936a:410) and a belief 'that a new world may be built in our time' (Jacob, 1936b; 1009), Wigham's final sequence evokes the safe haven of his own home – the basic human need missing from the lives he had filmed. Staged scenes of arrival and departure were a frequent amateur editing device that contributed structure and used up left over film. For Wigham and his viewers, the images of wartime winter destitution in Catalonia – 'in normal times... a wine growing area' (Pye, 1938:645) – contrast with notions of paradise repositioned for Wigham and his viewers into a southern English garden approaching spring.

What was and is the value of such amateur material today? Wigham made his films to fulfill a need for visual material. Public exposure to mediated imagery of suffering existed through well-established forms of photojournalism yet the SoF material suggests that there was still limited access to war coverage in moving imagery. The requests for pictures suggest that people needed to be able to see the relief work taking place. 'Images transfix. Images anaesthetize', wrote Sontag (1979: 20) when discussing the impact of 'concerned' photography. She observes how repeated exposure to the 'vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice' (Sontag, 1979:20-21) creates a familiarity that deadens the conscience. Wigham's three visits to Spain suggest that simple unobtrusive amateur recording could still contribute to people's understanding and humanitarian responsiveness. Notwithstanding Sontag's suggestion that photographs 'may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow'

(1973:17), the strength of Wigham's visual testimony often lies precisely in the camera panning along his 'line-up(s) of misery' (Wigham's inter-title) that wrap around corners of buildings or extend into the distance of a wide-angle shot. Such images seem to convey his belief that the scale of need could not be contained within the fixed frame of a still photograph.

Wigham's footage is a tribute both to the victims of war and the people who offer assistance and it seems likely that such footage assisted in fund raising. Certainly, many instances of screenings organized to raise money for churches, hospitals, children's homes abound from the later 1920s onwards. In some respects, neither the purpose nor the subject matter of Wigham's material were unusual on film as much professional footage with sound, sometimes made for fund-raising too, as well as better quality newsreel, was also produced during the thirties. Yet, the SoF material complements the wide range of other surviving visual, written and oral sources related to the Spanish Civil War in various ways. For instance, *Modern Orphans of the Storm* (1937), a co-production by Basil Wright and Ian Dalrymple was made for the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (Aitken, 1990:181; Low, 1979a:133-134; 1979b:164). Its focus and purpose - fund-raising for young Basque refugees - was not unlike SoF's own use of film and may even have been influential, particularly since Wigham referred directly to relief work by both organizations during his second visit. The 'shortage of action pictures' at this stage of the war (Low, 1979b:188) clearly concerned the SoF but Wigham's difficulties of filming in war conditions were also not unique. *Modern Orphans of the Storm*, like some other contemporary professional films, inserted footage from different productions to convey the effects of bombing (Low, 1979b:164).

When hostilities began, many Spanish film-makers turned to non-fiction filmmaking (Nowell-Smith, 1996:327) and British, Dutch, American and other film crews similarly sought to document the war, particularly but not solely, in support of the Republican cause. In Britain, Ivor Montagu's Progressive Film Institute with the help of personnel from the GPO film unit, made such films as *Defence of Madrid* (1936), *News From Spain* (1937), *Crime against Spain* (1937), *Spanish ABC* (1938) and *Behind Spanish Lines*

(1938). Aitken (1990:182) queries how many people actually saw much of this civil war film footage, because of its predominant association with 'leftist-leaning organisations'. Wigham's materials offer an instance of impartial documentation, characterized by, to borrow words from *The Friend* (Jacob, 1937:8), the 'neutrality of active intervention on behalf of those whose chief enemy was war'. It also seems that British amateur cine footage shot in Spain is unusual in contrast to the survival of still imagery taken by medical and other volunteers.¹⁷ Among eight catalogue holdings at the Imperial War Museum, only one entry refers to footage filmed by another amateur in non combatant role. The other non professional footage is all taken by naval personnel. The quantitative difference suggests not only the practicalities of combining voluntary and photographic activity, as identified earlier, but perhaps also the relatively still limited availability of cine equipment.

Amateur emulation of seemingly factual reportage does not seem unduly surprising given the increasing adoption of film for varied promotional activities during the 1930s. Early use of moving image by the Empire Marketing Board, GPO, Ministry of Transport and a fast growing range of local government departments, commercial companies and public utilities, including Shell, Imperial Airways and the Travel and Industrial Development Association occurred from the later twenties onwards (Low, 1979a:80; see also Lebas, 1995). Manchester Waterworks and Manchester Film Society cooperated on a film that documented the history of the city's water supply and elsewhere, similar collaborations occurred with other local groups (ACW, 1938:308). Although some amateur filmmakers experimented with fiction and animation, much attention thus concentrated on non-fiction that was, practically, more straightforward to film.

How to make 'the camera earn its keep' (Lawrie, 1933: 96) as well as what, where and how to film were not the only tips from writers eager to offer practical advice. Reaching new audiences was another frequent concern. Some enthusiasts, particularly in the industrial cities of northern England, screened their own material, including holiday film and local news 'topicals', at social events organized for their employees and other sections of the local community (Norris Nicholson, 2003: 153-154). Such events possibly

hint at enduring forms of paternalism and the legacies of magic lantern slide shows and other improving forms of nineteenth century rational recreation. Making films on wider social concerns or with an educational value may also have helped some owners to legitimize their own privileged pastime. At the very least, it enabled filmmakers to reach audiences outside the family home and provided scope for emulating the public screening of varied information, commercial, travel and 'interest films' that occurred during the interwar period (Low, 1979b:90ff).

Making and watching amateur films of comment and persuasion was not, of course, restricted to middle class liberal circles. Socially committed film-making had become well-established on the British Left during the twenties. Aitken (1990:181), for instance, points to the strong links between leftist filmmaking organisations and the documentary movement. Writers including Hogenkamp (1979), Ryan (1980), Marris (1980), Macpherson (1980) and others have examined the relationship between the labour movement and oppositional cinema although, due to the politics of class related struggles, the term 'amateur' tends not to occur. Notwithstanding the short-lived nature of some initiatives on the left, the making, showing and distribution of socially engaged films proliferated through the twenties and thirties. Articles, in such diverse publications as *World Film News*, *Kino News*, *Close up*, *The Plebs* and *The Daily Worker* stress film's political value repeatedly and refer, in particular, to the ideological use of cinema in the Soviet Union. 'Benn', writing in *The New Leader* (3 May 1925), claimed that Britain's emerging amateur film movement merited 'the greatest praise and encouragement' for its 'reaction against the all-devouring power of the gigantic Film Trust', although he still felt that its members 'had brains steeped in capitalist conceptions and traditions'. He would have been heartened to learn that ACW itself would later publish correspondence about the positive potential of film 'as a social weapon' (ACW, 1938:109).

By the later 1930s, audiences were sophisticated viewers of moving images. Newsreels, feature films and documentaries - as well as colour prints and advertisements - offered the public a wide repertoire of Mediterranean imagery. The survival of interest in making and watching amateur movies filmed abroad thus

remains an intriguing component within the history - and geography - of the desire to collect, consume and construct visual meanings. In the commercial cinema, the filmic portrayal of real localities helped to valorise and exoticise specific Mediterranean landscapes and locations at the cost of others. Perhaps, inevitably, as the hobby literature and advertising encouraged amateurs to emulate professional cinematography, repeated views of particular localities recur in amateur footage. Indeed, advice on shooting personal versions of paradise often became quite formulaic as writers suggested how and how not to frame particular views.

Some amateurs did not observe such guidance. They chose to ignore or were unaware of the increasingly available hobby literature. Such practitioners were also often independent of the cine club networks that developed to support amateur activity from the 1920s onwards. Their choice and handling of footage is more subjective even if at times less technically sophisticated or overtly instructive. Sometimes, competence and personal engagement combine to produce, despite the experts' warnings, memorable imagery. I suggest Wigham's reportage from Spain is one such instance. Amidst the plethora of personal written or oral accounts that were and are still published, Wigham's reporting on relief work retains an emotional impact that outweighs the capacity of old images merely to aestheticize past pain. Children play amidst the very tasks of survival. Relief workers involved in food distribution pose during their own lunch break. Both are also reminders that human experience and place identities, like myths, comprise oppositional elements. Perhaps therein lie their more enduring quality and interest as our own lives routinely straddle many forms of contradiction.

Amateur moving pictures, during the interwar period, helped to circulate visions of the Mediterranean that were highly nuanced, subtle and complex as prisms for looking south. Their production and subsequent consumption by family, friends and wider audiences, constitute an important source of visual imagery in particular socio-cultural milieus for approximately four decades. Their framing of subject matter extends beyond conservative artistic convention and popular nostalgia to offer individual perspectives on events and situations. In interwar Britain, amateur filmmakers could offer alternative imagery visual

that might inform, shape and sometimes even challenge public understanding. Similarly, paradise, wherever it is located, can have shaky foundations too. From this exploration of amateur film practice, the Mediterranean's twentieth century metamorphosis into a tourist pleasure garden was no exception. As Spender's words suggest at the start, conflict, apart from those that went in search deliberately, was more preferably kept at a distance.

End notes

¹ British Film Institute. John Cuthbert Wigham Personal Film Collection. Title ref. *Third Visit to Spain, 1939*.

² Society of Friends Library Spanish Civil War files. Catalogue ref. FSCR/R/SP.

³ North West Film Archive. Dr John Barker Scarr Collection. Accession number RR229/16 *Mediterranean Cruise, SS Arandora Star, May 1934*; Accession number RR229/22 *Europe as we saw it, June 1938*.

⁴ NorthWest Film Archive. Leonard Behrens Collection. Accession number. RR16/23-25 [untitled Behrens films, 1926].

⁵ L. Frederick Behrens, 1890-1978 (biographical details) Manchester Central Library and Local Archives. Obituary notices, *The Guardian* 15 March 1978, p.16; *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 March, 1978 p.16; *Manchester Evening News*, 14 March 1978, p.5.

⁶ NorthWest Film Archive. See, for example, Dr John Barker Scarr Collection. Accession number. RR229/16 *Mediterranean Cruise, SS Arandora Star, May 1934*

⁷ See for example, British Film Institute. John Adrian Weller Personal Film Collection. Title ref. 579229 (1929); North West Film Archive. Sidney and Harold Preston Collection. Accession number. 1967D (c.1928/31-32/35).

⁸ Biographical details obtained from files relating to the Friends Service Council, Society of Friends Library.

⁹ Society of Friends Library. *Reports and correspondence from Spain, 1936-1939*. Catalogue reference, FSCR/R/SP1/1 – 5.

¹⁰ Society of Friends Library. FSCR/R/SP1, 24 Nov. 1936.

¹¹ Society of Friends Library. FSCR/R/SP1, 24 February 1937.

¹² Society of Friends Library. FSCR/R/SP2, 17 March 1937

¹³ Society of Friends Library. *Correspondence and reports...*, FSC/R/SP2 [1937].

¹⁴ Society of Friends Library. *Correspondence and reports...*, FSCR/R/SP1.

¹⁵ Society of Friends Library. FSC/R/SP2, 18 October 1937.

¹⁶ Society of Friends Library. *Correspondence and reports...*, FSC/R/SP2- FSC/R/SP3 [1938].

¹⁷ See note 3.