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Ward, Paul

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James Mason, the English actor who appeared in about a hundred British and American films between the 1930s and 1980s, was born in the Yorkshire industrial town of Huddersfield in 1909. His relationship with the town of his birth, where his family continued to live after he left, was troubled and in 1947, when he arrived in America, he told journalists that he never wanted to return to Huddersfield. However, in 1972 he made a TV documentary for Yorkshire Television that painted an affectionate and nostalgic portrait of the town. An exploration of Mason's changing attitude to the town of his birth allows for examination of the relationship between a Hollywood star and the way in which he thought about his origins and allegiances. At the same time, it also allows for examination of British cinema-goers' attitudes towards stardom and Hollywood, since the people of Huddersfield formed their own impressions of Mason.

Andrew Higson has encouraged historians to lay 'much greater stress on the point of consumption' of films and 'an analysis of how audiences construct their cultural identity in relation to the various products of national and international film and television industries.'¹ This is what this article sets out to do, by asking two main questions exploring the sense of place of Mason and the cinema-goers of a town: what did James Mason, whose career was transatlantic, think of Huddersfield and what did Huddersfield think of James Mason? This enables consideration of the way in which audiences 'consumed' film stars in the mid and late twentieth century and how such consumption helped to shape attitudes towards the places in which audiences lived and viewed films during a period when the world was globalised largely under the guise of 'Americanisation'.²

¹ Andrew Higson, 'The concept of national cinema,' *Screen*, 30 (1989): pp. 45, 46.

² The literature on Americanisation is extensive but see especially Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have loved hated and transformed American culture since World War II*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005). Alexander Stephan (ed.), *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, diplomacy, and anti-Americanism after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). For cinema and Americanisation see Mark Glancy, 'Temporary American citizens? British audiences, Hollywood films and the threat of Americanization in the 1920s', *Historical*

Many actors in Hollywood films were born in Europe. This meant that cinema-going often involved a more complex exchange than the term Americanisation suggests. In these cases, there was not just a dichotomous relationship between America and Britain but an intricate negotiation between audiences, films and transatlantic stars. Factors such as gender, age and class were involved and furthermore, these identities were often played out in specific places, so that James Mason's class, gender *and* sense of place are all of significance in understanding him and his audiences. The research for this article has used fan magazines, film magazines and newspapers in order to establish the images of stars provided to film audiences. The chapter headings in Mason's autobiography, *Before I Forget* (1981), all refer to places he lived, worked and visited and it has been explored to ascertain the actor's attitudes towards Huddersfield and Hollywood.³ In addition, through an examination of the local newspaper, the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* and oral histories, it has been possible to consider how audiences in Mason's home town responded to the star.

Stars and Locality

Many British actors were drawn to Hollywood and they formulated a variety of relationships with their new place of work. Some were visitors, staying only for the duration of their film-making; others settled so permanently as to become indistinguishable from Americans. A film annual in the 1940s, for example, reported that

Bob Hope [born in south London in 1903] gets riled if he's referred to as an English comedian. Says Hope: 'I don't see how anyone could be much more of an American. I came here when I was practically a baby. I grew up here and was educated here. I married an American girl and have adopted two American children. I tell American jokes. I'm an American citizen, I live here and work here. What do you have to do to be called an American?'⁴

Others, such as Ronald Coleman, also remained in Hollywood, but instead cultivated their difference. Born in Richmond, Surrey, in 1891, he was, according to the theatre critic and biographer Sheridan Morley, 'perhaps the archetypal Hollywood Englishman'. He made forty-eight films between 1921 and 1958 without ever returning to Britain. Douglas Fairbanks Jr. said of Coleman that, 'I

Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 26 (2000): 461-84; Paul Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987) and Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey, "'Temporary American citizens: Cultural anxieties and industrial strategies in the Americanisation of European cinema,' *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 180-93.

³ James Mason, *Before I Forget: Autobiography and Drawings* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), p. 117.

⁴ *PIE's Film Book* no. 2, (London: Hutchinson, January 1947), p. 41.

think he led the perfect colonial life. The longer he stayed in California, the more English he got; but he never wanted to go home.’⁵ Other actors moved to Hollywood and then left again. As Bruce Babbington explains, ‘in the 1940s, at the height of British postwar film production optimism, James Mason, Stewart Granger and Deborah Kerr left [Britain], followed by Jean Simmons and Audrey Hepburn.’⁶ After moving to Hollywood, Granger later made a series of films in Germany, while Kerr moved from Britain to Hollywood, then to Switzerland and Spain, later returning to Britain. Mason moved from Huddersfield to Hollywood via Cambridge and London, returning to Europe in the late 1950s to live in Switzerland. Such geographical mobility complicated such stars sense of place.

At the same time, actors are always in a relationship with their audiences. Jackie Stacey has asked, ‘What do spectators bring to films from their own specific historical and cultural locations which then determine their readings?’⁷ As many historians and cultural commentators have recognized, people’s responses to films were complex and often contradictory. Stacey suggests that it is necessary to consider the specific geographical and historical location of audiences, which contributed to the shaping of social identity. These affected, though did not determine, how audiences viewed films and ‘consumed’ stars. Likewise Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby have drawn attention to ‘the activities of local agents accommodating and adapting Hollywood movies to the cultural topography of their immediate environment.’⁸

Watching British actors in American films changed the dynamic of the relationship between the audience and Hollywood, especially when the actor in question came from the same locality as the audience. Babington has raised the crucial notion of ‘indigenusness’ arguing that ‘British stars [in British films] give things to home audiences that Hollywood luminaries cannot – reflections of the known and close at hand ... intimate dramatisations of local myths and realities.’⁹ British films were not always popular with British audiences. J.P Mayer’s study of film preferences in the late 1940s showed the complexities of audience responses. Hence a thirty-year old female clerk told Mayer that ‘British films have never in all my life, made the slightest impression on me. They are dull, ugly, and

⁵ Sheridan Morley, *The Brits in Hollywood: Tales from the Hollywood Raj* (London: Anova Books, 2006), pp. 70-1. The notion of the Hollywood Raj – of a colony of British actors in California – emphasizes the cultural legacy of imperialism and the ‘British World’ even in the face of American cultural dominance.

⁶ Bruce Babbington, ‘Introduction,’ *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, ed. Bruce Babbington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 15.

⁷ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 49.

⁸ *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, eds Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 7.

⁹ Babbington, ‘Introduction,’ *British Stars and Stardom*, pp. 2, 10.

uninspired.¹⁰ Even when British films were preferred, some aspects grated on some of those watching, so a twenty-three year old housewife wrote to Mayer that 'I prefer good British films to American ones, because they always seem more natural, though a British film can be spoiled for me by a too devastatingly superior accent from the chief actress.'¹¹

For others, watching British stars in Hollywood films encouraged a sense of national association and pride. Another of Mayer's respondents told him that 'I also find that in most cases my favourite films have been British films or American made films with British stars.'¹² It was possible to enjoy vicarious adventure in the fantasy world brought closer by local links. Annette Kuhn has emphasised the importance of place in going to the cinema. *Where* people saw films mediated their experience. Kuhn argues that 'place is extraordinarily insistent in the memories of 1930s cinema goers,'¹³ who frequently used discursive memory maps, recalling streets, buildings and topography to reconstruct their experience. This method of remembering underpins the need to consider the locatedness of audiences as well as stars.¹⁴ In other words, audiences thought about *where they watched* films as well as the *where the film was set*.

There was an increasing nationalization and globalization of culture across the twentieth-century but the significance of locality and place remained. Cinema and later television brought the nation and the world into people's everyday lives in previously unimagined ways. The process of cultural nationalization was not complete or uniform and was related to, rather than distinct from, other allegiances, which contributed to the construction of Britishness. As Dave Russell has explained:

Regional and other local identities were seen as a part of a wider national identity. It seems that in many cases, local and regional identities provided the building blocks for national identity, that the local area or the region could be visualised as the nation to which adherence was given.¹⁵

People continued to watch films and television as citizens of their locality as well as being defined by nation, class, gender and age. Indeed, in the 1950s independent television in Britain was organised regionally. As cinema attendance

¹⁰ J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences: Sociological Studies* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 98. See also *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, eds. Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 41-136.

¹¹ Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*, pp. 203-6 for the whole letter.

¹² Mayer, *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*, p. 227.

¹³ Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 17.

¹⁴ Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, chapter 2.

¹⁵ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 17.

declined, Mason's persona, because of his long career, was increasingly displayed via the small screen. This essay therefore fulfils Babington's call to 'explor[e] the individualities of stars in relation to specific British contexts' by examining Mason's changing relationship with Huddersfield.¹⁶ It explores how local people thought of 'their' Hollywood star as an additional component in their loyalty to and pride in Yorkshire and Huddersfield. These regional and town identities complemented rather than competed with a British national identity.

The Deracination of James Mason

Cinema audiences often held a close relationship to stars from their own locality. Leslie Halliwell, in his memoir of cinema-going in 1930s Bolton, described the dual impact of a locally-filmed production and the familiarity of the star to local audiences:

Packed houses were ... the order of the day for *Sing as We Go* [1934], which was billed as 'Bolton's own film'. This civic proprietorship stemmed from the fact that scenes had been shot in local cotton mills, including the finale when Gracie Fields leads her unemployed workmates triumphantly back to the looms in the rousing final chorus of a song which makes no sense but still brings a catch to my throat:

Sing as we go, and let the world go by ...

If the film had been set in Timbuctoo, Boltonians would still have flocked to hear the performer we most loved. Born a few miles away in Rochdale, Gracie was one of us; and as J.B. Priestley's boisterous script unfolded, you could almost smell the tripe and onions. A great deal of the film was shot in Blackpool, which was only 80 minutes away by daily charabanc, two-and-ninepence return, and there were plenty of knowing chuckles at the boarding house sequences; we had all suffered during Wakes Week from landladies like that.¹⁷

Gracie Fields, like George Formby and Frank Randall, also from Lancashire, made films in the United Kingdom, played regional characters in their films, and fostered the relationship with their locality.¹⁸ Hence, when Fields signed a contract with Twentieth-Century Fox in the late 1930s, it stipulated that three of the four contracted films should be made in Britain.¹⁹ In contrast, James Mason, and other

¹⁶ Babington, *British Stars and Stardom*, p. 22.

¹⁷ Leslie Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts* (London: Grafton, 1986), p. 22.

¹⁸ See Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) chapter 9 for Lancashire film stars.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Macnab, *Searching for Stars: Stardom and screen acting in British cinema* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 90-2. Fields's popularity was severely dented by her decision to move to Canada to avoid her Italian-born husband's internment in 1940 when Italy entered the

actors like Ronald Colman, Ray Milland, David Niven and Rex Harrison upped and left Britain to settle, often temporarily, in Hollywood.²⁰ Whereas Fields and Formby stayed close to their origins, these expatriate actors often lost touch with their home towns. In the case of Mason, there was a deliberate attempt at distancing himself from his origins. Indeed, a narrative of his life grounded on sense of place suggests that until the late 1950s, by which time he was fifty, he saw locality and indeed nationality as being of minor importance in his identity.

In a largely working-class town, Mason was born into a middle-class family of textile merchants. This class background meant geographical mobility. He was educated at a preparatory school in the Lake District and then at Marlborough College in Wiltshire.²¹ It had been intended that James would return as an adult to Huddersfield to take a position in the family firm, but in the late 1920s his father was concerned that the business could not support all three of his sons. Therefore, James, the youngest, was sent to Cambridge University to prepare for a career in the Indian Civil Service. At the end of his first year he decided instead to become an architect and changed from studying Classics to Architecture, in which he gained a first class degree in 1931. While at Cambridge, Mason took up acting and on leaving university moved to London in the hope that he could make a living on the stage. In the mid-1930s, his acting career took a new direction as he found his way into 'quota quickies.' Concerned by the impact of Hollywood films on the economy of the British film industry and the morals of cinema-goers, Parliament had passed the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act which obliged cinemas to show a quota of British films. Film companies responded by making cheap films in Britain, and it was in these that Mason found a career in the 1930s.

The choices made for Mason by his parents and then his own decision to move to London distanced him from Huddersfield, to which he had no intention of returning. His detachment from the town echoes that of other parts of the middle class in the early twentieth century. As Simon Gunn has argued, 'the relationship between the middle classes and the urban altered between 1900 and 1939. In

war. Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 203.

²⁰ For the European context see Janet Bergstrom, 'Émigrés or exiles? The French directors' return from Hollywood, in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci, (London: British Film Institute, 1998), pp. 86-103.

²¹ Biographies of Mason include Sheridan Morley, *James Mason: Odd Man Out* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989); Kevin Sweeney, *James Mason: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999); Eric Ambler, 'Mason, James Neville (1909-1984),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31418> (accessed 3 Nov 2008). See also Peter William Evans, James Mason: The Man Between, in Babington, *British Stars and Stardom*, pp. 108-19.

particular, the identity between elements of the middle classes and the particular urban place, which had been so powerful in the second half of the nineteenth century, began to fragment in the first half of the twentieth.²² Many middle-class people no longer saw themselves as local patriots, whose livelihood depended on their relationship with their town or city, but rather as national citizens. Furthermore, Britain's suburbanisation had distanced the bourgeoisie from urban identity. 'The gradual unravelling of the close identity between middle class and town,' Gunn argues, 'is one of the major themes of English urban history of the first half of the twentieth century.'²³ In Mason's case, educational and geographical mobility had lessened his attachment to the town of his birth and parents. The European economic crisis reduced business for his father's textile company and therefore James's material links to the town of his origin. The serendipitous encounter with acting enabled him to build a livelihood based on his new talent. Later he said, 'When I was young I had very little affection for this part of the country. In fact when I finished my schooling I couldn't wait to get away from the place.'²⁴ Historical forces and personal feelings coincided to dissociate Mason from Huddersfield. He did not want to identify himself with the north or Yorkshire. Yet, as this article explains, nor did he adopt a national identity.

Developments in Mason's personal life widened the distance between him and his family and in turn his home town. In the late 1930s he met Pamela Kellino, a married woman with whom he fell in love. After her divorce, James married Pamela in 1941. When the Second World War started Mason declared himself a conscientious objector. Huddersfield had quite a strong tradition of pacifism in the First World War, though there is no evidence of Mason's connection to that tradition. His pacifism seems to reflect the anti-nationalism of the Auden generation, signified in the motion carried in 1933 at the Oxford Union 'That this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country'.²⁵ Later Mason explained his opposition to the war in similar language to the Oxford Union:

How about King and Country? It was a phrase one never heard except in times of war and had by association lost some of its power to stir. And, much as I liked our royalty, the word Country had sometimes become confused with the more dubious words Nationality and Empire. In my earliest childhood I may have been stirred by the words 'red on the map' which

²² Simon Gunn, 'Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England, c. 1790-1950', *Urban History*, 31 (2004): 41.

²³ Gunn, p. 40.

²⁴ *Home James: James Mason Turns Again to Huddersfield*, directed by Patrick Boyle, Yorkshire TV, 1972.

²⁵ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: The Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002); Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and politics in England in the 1930s*, new edition (London: Pimlico, 1992).

illustrated the vastness of the British Empire but the feeling did not survive my schooldays.²⁶

He could see little reason to kill or be killed in such circumstances, though his profession as an actor found him placed in a 'reserved occupation' which protected him from conscription and conflict with the law. His brother Rex, who remained living in Huddersfield recalled: 'My parents were appalled at having a son who suddenly decided not to do his bit for the country; for eight years we none of us saw him and there's no doubt that it caused a real rift within the family. We still went to see his films, though at the time I never thought he was very good in them.'²⁷ Mason had therefore come into conflict with the morality and patriotism of his parents and much of the British population.

Mason's career continued to develop despite setbacks. Mason recounted that Noel Coward decided not to cast him in the patriotic film *In Which We Serve* (1942) because his conscientious objection might mar the propagandist intent of the film.²⁸ He did, however, appear in several other patriotic and propagandist films, including playing Leading Fireman Ted Robbins in the Ealing film *The Bells Go Down* (1943), an affectionate portrait of the Auxiliary Fire Service in the Blitz of 1940-1. But he found top-rank stardom in Gainsborough's historical melodramas, which were widely criticised for diverting attention away from the war effort.²⁹ Mason made his name in *The Man in Grey* (1943) playing the sadistic Lord Rohan in a film set in Regency England. He played similar parts in *Fanny by Gaslight* (1944), *They Were Sisters* (1945), *The Seventh Veil* (1945) and *The Wicked Lady* (1945). These Gainsborough films were particularly welcomed by often female audiences grown weary of war and who wanted moments of escapism to see the war through. Many middle-class critics saw the films as inaccurate, nauseous, melodramatic and banal.³⁰ Mason's pacifistic attitude to the war became lost in his popularity with audiences and high box-office receipts. These films, in which he played neither British hero nor traditional romantic lead, made him the top box office male star between 1944 and 1947.³¹

Stardom brought Mason to national attention. Information about what films were available and when was mediated through national and local media and the films

²⁶ Mason, *Before I Forget*, p. 117.

²⁷ Quoted in Morley, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 49-50.

²⁸ Mason, *Before I Forget*, chapter 10, 'Beaconsfield', pp. 172-4.

²⁹ See Pam Cook, 'Neither here nor there: National identity in Gainsborough costume drama', in *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 51-65. See also Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 42-56.

³⁰ For criticisms of the Gainsborough films see Antony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It! British Cinema in the Second World War*, second edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 158-60.

³¹ Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p. 162.

were viewed on local screens. National film magazines gave unceasing publicity to the lives of stars. Magazines like *Picturegoer*, *Picture Show* and *Film Review* reminded readers where stars came from.³² The stars were linked to their places of origin as a significant detail forming their personalities. In a biography of Mason written by a friend in the 1940s, it was suggested that, 'The fact that James Mason was born in Huddersfield on May 15, 1909, is perhaps so well known that I believe they must print it in the history books and teach it in the English schools.'³³ In the 1950s, *Picture Show and Film Pictorial* used the brief and standard biographical information about James Mason that he was born in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, and educated at Marlborough and Cambridge.³⁴

In Huddersfield, the local paper, the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* mediated between Mason and the town, in that it was the source of news about his visits and it reflected upon the attitudes of the people of the locality towards the star. The paper first drew attention to Mason in 1936, reporting that 'Huddersfield cinemagoers who have visited the Grand Picture House this week will be interested to learn that James Mason, who takes the main part in "Prison Breakers" ... is a Huddersfield man. He is the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Mason of Croft House, Marsh.'³⁵ It proudly announced at the end of 1944 that James Mason was Britain's top money-making star, and when he repeated the feat in subsequent years, the paper expressed the pride of the town, though noting that his links with the town were, by now, tenuous:

There is little doubt that a great number of Huddersfield people must have experienced a thrill of pleasure at reading that James Mason remains Britain's favourite film star and that in a recent international box-office poll held in America he tied for seventh place with Spencer Tracy. Such feelings are natural. Even though darkly handsome James Mason has nothing about him on the screen that one would point to as typical of the industrial West Riding, and Huddersfield in particular, no propagandist of Huddersfield is likely to permit the fact to be overlooked that the town which lays claim to so many first-rankers in industry and sport also lays claim to the first-ranking star of British pictures.³⁶

Attitudes to Mason in the town were not entirely positive. His objection to the war was seen as an act of treachery by some Huddersfield citizens. Taken to see the great local England cricketer George Hirst in the spring 1944 by the family to

³² See Glancy, 'Threat', 468-78 for the role of fan magazines in 'mediat[ing] the distance between the fantasy of Hollywood and the reality of British life', p. 474.

³³ Jno. P. Monaghan, *The Authorised Biography of James Mason* (London: World Film Publications, 1947), p. 7.

³⁴ *Picture Show and Film Pictorial*, 21 Sept 1957.

³⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 12 June 1936.

³⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, n.d. [December 1945]. From the *HDE's* cuttings file.

whom he had been billeted as an evacuee, Jim Podd, then aged eleven, remembers that the father stopped outside a house and 'Here Mr Morton, a usually restrained man and, I believe, staunch Methodist, could barely contain himself. He condemned the "local hero" as a coward and a disgrace, I cannot, unsurprisingly, recall his exact words but I do recall his furious contempt[....] It is interesting to compare and contrast his (Mr Morton's) reverence toward the great sportsman, with his deep felt disgust for the actor.'³⁷

Odd Man Out: Mason in Hollywood

During his early career, Mason increased the distance between himself and his nation by not keeping his negative opinions on the British film industry to himself. In a magazine article in 1945, he declared that he found 'precious little glamour in British pictures'.³⁸ The article provoked a bitter response from film makers and unions alike. The Association of Cinema Technicians sent Mason a letter saying his article was unfair, copying the letter to the trade press and the Ministry of Information, and the British Film Producers Association warned that they would take action against him if he wrote any more such articles.³⁹ Morley explains that, 'at a moment when, with the coming end to the war, British studios were attempting to get back on their feet and to fight off the continuing American invasion of local cinema screens, James's writing seemed like the act of a traitor.'⁴⁰ Dangerously for his career, he extended the attack to the Rank Organisation, Britain's biggest film maker and distributor, and was quoted as saying that Rank 'was the worst thing that could have happened to the British film industry.'⁴¹ As Paul Swann has argued, Rank wanted to develop a British star system to take advantage of Mason and his co-star Stewart Granger, 'who were essentially matinee idols very much along American lines, and who were the first British male leads to ever list above American leading men in the polls of audience preferences.'⁴²

Mason took the view that the British industry in the mid-1940s was not big enough to sustain his career in high quality films and that going to America was

³⁷ Letter from Mr Jim Podd to the author, 28 January 2009.

³⁸ See Mason, *Before I Forget*, pp. 156-9.

³⁹ Clive Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason (with some second thoughts by James Mason)* (London: LSP Books, 1975), p. 21. 'Ban facing Britain's leading film actor,' *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 14 September 1945.

⁴⁰ Morley, *Odd Man Out*, p. 64.

⁴¹ Mason, *Before I Forget*, p. 156. For Rank see Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴² Paul Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 75.

the next logical step.⁴³ Like Auden and Isherwood in 1939, Mason abandoned Britain at a moment of crisis. In August 1947 the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, said that Britain was facing a 'Second Battle of Britain', this time on the economic front, caused by the outward drain of sterling. He announced that American companies would only be allowed to export 25 per cent of their receipts from film rentals to British cinemas. Within days, the Motion Picture Association of America agreed a blanket embargo of films to Britain, which was to remain in force until compromise was reached in March 1948.⁴⁴ Mason's departure at this moment was seen by the press and film magazines as unpatriotic and anti-national.⁴⁵

Yet even before he set foot in America, Mason was involved in a law suit. He had gone to the USA to avoid studio contracts but had signed a letter of intent to work with one particular agent, who seemed then to want to sign Mason to a studio. The suit prevented him from working in California, allowing the fame secured in the Gainsborough films and the intense drama of *Odd Man Out* (1947), in which he compellingly played an Irish nationalist gunman, to dissipate. Mason also fell foul of American journalists by refusing most interviews and in one he gave to *Life* magazine shortly after his arrival, it was reported that 'Mason prefers not to remember [Huddersfield]. When he is forced to recall it, his family and his life there with them, he dismisses Huddersfield and all its associations with a silent shrug or, when pressed to speech, with the cruel remarks that he does not like his family, has not revisited the town for years, has not seen his father for as long and has no wish whatever to do so.'⁴⁶

Once the law suit was resolved, in Mason's favour, he moved to California but did not settle well. As Kevin Sweeney explains, 'From the start, Mason resisted fitting into the mould of an earlier generation of expats in Hollywood, the Cary Grants and Ray Millands who dropped all traces of being British and became quintessential Americans. At the same time, he wouldn't be caught dead playing the "professional Englishman" like David Niven or Rex Harrison.'⁴⁷ Mason identified as neither British nor American. Mason's first films in the States received mixed responses in Britain. The *Daily Express* described *Caught* (1949) as 'a turgid, gloomy piece of nonsense' and the *Daily Mail* condemned *One Way Street* (1950) as 'an arid, pointless little film.'⁴⁸ On the other hand, *Reckless Moment* (1949) was better received, with the *Manchester Guardian* saying that it 'Comes near to being outstandingly good. James Mason is given his first distinguished role since

⁴³ Mason, *Before I Forget*, p. 154.

⁴⁴ Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film*, chapter 6.

⁴⁵ Morley, *Odd Man Out*, pp. 74-5.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Sweeney, *James Mason: A Bio-Bibliography*, p. 22. The American press and public were deeply interested in the local origins of celebrities.

⁴⁷ Sweeney, *James Mason: A Bio-Bibliography*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, pp. 86, 94.

he went to the States.⁴⁹ In 1951 he was cast as Field Marshal Rommel in *The Desert Fox*. Mason played Rommel without adopting a German accent. As he explained later, 'German accents would be out of place, since the entire cast consisted of British and American actors pretending to be Germans.'⁵⁰ This had the effect of normalising Rommel only six years after the end of the Second World War. Mason's sympathetic portrayal of a leading German military commander provoked protests from Allied ex-servicemen.⁵¹ One reviewer considered the film 'Brilliantly made, fiendishly well-acted, tremendously exciting, but there were moments when I wanted to stand up and throw hand grenades at the screen. It made me *that* angry.'⁵² Nonetheless the film brought him to the golden period of his Hollywood years.⁵³ Across the mid and late 1950s he starred in a number of high profile movies, including *Julius Caesar* (1953), *A Star is Born* (1954), and *North by Northwest* (1959) to much critical acclaim.

The birth of his daughter in 1948 began Mason's reconciliation with his family and in the spring of 1953 he made his first visit to Huddersfield since 1938. He described the visit in his diary, which reads as if he was a first time visitor rather than a returning native:

Genuinely moved by the scenery. Denby Dale, Cawthorne. Trees hunched against the heavy weather, huddling in copses, sheltering in tiny valleys, beginnings of spring buds, heavy beads left by the rain, bright green lichen. The country houses square stone boxes, the heavy blockhouses of lodgates. Little isolated neatly dressed people walking. The drama of Cawthorne Park ripped open by outcrop coal mining.... Skelmanthorpe, another name we pass through, then Farnley Tyas, Woodsome, Almondbury.⁵⁴

Across the next decade Mason's relationship with his place of origin continued to develop. There were rumours in the late 1950s that he would take American citizenship, as his wife did, but he retained his British passport. In the wake of the collapse of his marriage, a cardiac arrest and his continuing unhappiness with Hollywood, he was looking for ways to return to Europe.

⁴⁹ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 99.

⁵¹ For an analysis of the film in the context of Anglo-German relations see Patrick Major, "'Our Friend Rommel': The *Wehrmacht* in Postwar British Popular Culture,' *German History*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 520-35.

⁵² Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 99.

⁵³ Morley, *Odd Man Out*, p. 92.

⁵⁴ Mason, *Before I Forget*, pp. 239-40.

The *Examiner* had reported Mason's departure from Britain and his critical comments about the town and his family in the 1940s, and there was potential for these to form the basis of people's attitudes towards the star.⁵⁵ Mason's rejection of Huddersfield in his interview with *Life* magazine led to a cooling of the paper's pride in the star and in the early 1950s its reports were of the unfulfilled hopes that he would visit his family. His return in 1953 was reported with excitement. Mason was a major international film star, and even if his career was erratic, the *Examiner* was keen to share in his success, reminding its readers of his origins. Mason's change in attitude towards the town led to positive local press coverage. In 1956 the *Examiner* reported him as saying, 'I think Huddersfield is a bright, attractive, progressive city. I was eager to get away from the place when I was young, but it is good to come back again. It is so picturesque; even the dark mills have a great grandeur, a great dignity.' The *Examiner's* headline declared: 'James Mason: Huddersfield is Bright and Attractive.'⁵⁶ In such a way, the paper used Mason's approval to assert a positive view of the town.

The new Northerner?

In 1960 Mason returned to live in Europe, moving to Switzerland for tax reasons.⁵⁷ His move coincided with the developing interest of the British film industry in 'realism' that took the north of England to provide the background for authenticity.⁵⁸ Mason commented upon this movement to a Huddersfield reporter and aligned himself with the north:

James Mason, the film star who was born in Huddersfield in 1909, and whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Mason, live in Marsh ... flew from

⁵⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 26 February 1947. Local newspapers were not read by everyone within the locality, and many people in Huddersfield were uninterested in film in general and Mason in particular, hence interviews undertaken for this project exaggerate the extent of the town's interest in the star. In the pursuit of interviews, I was often met with a lack of awareness that Mason came from Huddersfield, indeed some people did not know that he was British at all, seeing him as a transatlantic figure, neither British nor fully American. Those who were interviewed responded to a request for impressions of and information about Mason published in the *Examiner* in October 2008. Interview recordings are held at the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Visual and Oral History Research.

⁵⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 27 August 1956.

⁵⁷ Mason, among other actors, was named in the House of Commons by Geoffrey Howe as a talent lost to Britain due to high tax rates under Labour. *HC Deb 10 May 1978 vol 949 cc1188-362* http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1978/may/10/charge-of-income-tax-for-1978-79#S5CV0949P0_19780510_HOC_204

⁵⁸ See especially Andrew Higson, 'Space, place, spectacle: Landscape and townscape in the 'kitchen sink' film', and Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and stories in 1960s British realism', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views*.

Manchester yesterday, talking to one of my correspondents in the airport lounge. [He] praised the up and coming generation of 'North stars.' 'There seems to be a better attitude here than in the South,' he said. 'It has produced Albert Finney, Shelagh Delaney and John Braine, and some very good comedians. People in the South seem to spend too much time worrying about Britain's position in the world of literature – in the North they get on with it.'⁵⁹

Stephen Wade has designated the writers associated with new realism in film in the late 1950s as 'new Northerners.'⁶⁰ The label might tentatively be applied to Mason, as he asserted his allegiance to the region for the first time, though in 1960 he was almost certainly jumping on to a band wagon. Mason had just made *A Touch of Larceny* (1959), set and filmed in Scotland. It was well received by British film critics. The *Daily Sketch* called it 'A sparkling British picture . . . it not only wipes out those dull Hollywood years giving him [Mason] full stature again. We see Mason with new eyes, as a light comedian in the top rank.'⁶¹ *Lolita* (1962) was filmed in Britain (despite being set in America) and this led Mason to spend 'a longer period than usual' in England⁶². Again, this challenging film, based on the Nabokov novel, was well received, with Dilys Powell, in the *Sunday Times*, calling the film 'James Mason's acting triumph.'⁶³ Mason wrote later that spending so much time in England making the film meant that 'I felt European again and that California could no longer contain me.'⁶⁴

The Huddersfield *Daily Examiner* continued to report on Mason's career and to a lesser extent his personal life. The paper enjoyed constructing the view that Mason was comfortable in Huddersfield and that Huddersfield was comfortable with Mason, so it described the prosaic nature of his activities when visiting the town:

A man in a light-coloured raincoat and tweed cap stepped out of a small Ford car in Huddersfield Market Place on Saturday afternoon, walked down the road and into a shop, and no-one took a second look at him. Yet on the screen millions know him well and admire him – for James Mason, the Huddersfield-born actor has been making films for twenty-three years both in this country and the United States.⁶⁵

In April 1963 the paper asked 'Did you see James Mason in town today?' and in August the same year it revealed that he was spending 'a quiet and wet week-end

⁵⁹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 16 November 1961.

⁶⁰ Stephen Wade, *In My Own Shire: Region and Belonging in British writing, 1840-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), chapter 8, 'The new Northerners'.

⁶¹ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 145.

⁶² Mason, *Before I Forget*, p. 317.

⁶³ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 152.

⁶⁴ Mason, *Before I Forget*, p. 322.

⁶⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 30 March 1959.

in his home town,' visiting his parents.⁶⁶ The paper presented Mason as just another Huddersfield citizen but it was pleased to report that he said he felt 'equally at home' in both Huddersfield and Beverly Hills.⁶⁷

Home James

Mason continued to make films in America as well as Europe and played characters of a variety of nationalities: German in *The Blue Max* (1966), Austrian in *Mayerling* (1968), Chinese in *The Yin and Yan of Mr Go* (1971), and aristocratic English in his last film for cinema, *The Shooting Party* (1985). There were, though, a number of films in which he played northern characters. In 1966 Mason starred in *Georgy Girl*, for which he was nominated for an Oscar. While the film was set in 'swinging' London, Mason played a well-off northern business man. As Lyn Redgrave, who played Georgy, remarked, 'in the end we got it made because of James's enthusiasm for the quirkiness of the story, and the chance it gave him to go back to his Yorkshire accent.'⁶⁸ As with Robert Donat, it can be said that Mason's 'popularity was determined as much by hearing his voice as seeing his image on screen.'⁶⁹ Vicky Lowe argues that Donat's continuing trace of Manchester accent was a part of his star appeal.⁷⁰ Mason's voice was an 'idiosyncratic blend of Yorkshire and Cambridge respectability,' according to Peter William Evans, allowing audiences to engage with it in a variety of ways.⁷¹ The distinctiveness of his voice also gave him the versatility to play a wide range of character and nationalities. He was as convincing playing Rommel as he was playing Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1962). He could be sinister and foreign in films like *North by Northwest* (1959) or American, as in *The Verdict* (1982), for which he received his third Oscar nomination.

Georgy Girl did much to restore Mason in the eyes of British film critics as a British actor. By the end of the 1960s, Mason had fully discovered the 'romance' of the north. He convincingly played the part of the father in the film of Bill Naughton's *Spring and Port Wine* (1970), set and filmed in Bolton. The *Evening Standard* praised 'A grizzled and grave James Mason [who] plays dad and it's a

⁶⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 26 April, 5 August 1963.

⁶⁷ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 30 March 1959.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Morley, *Odd Man Out*, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Vicky Lowe, "'The Best Speaking Voice in the World": Robert Donat, Stardom and the Voice in British Cinema', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 1 (2005): p. 185. See also Wendy Webster, "'The Whim of Foreigners": Language, Speech, and Sound in Second World War British Film and Radio', *Twentieth Century British History* (2011): 1-24.

⁷⁰ Lowe, 'The Best Speaking Voice in the World', p. 186.

⁷¹ Evans describes Mason's voice as an 'idiosyncratic blend of Yorkshire and Cambridge respectability', James Mason: The Man Between, p. 112. For the comedian Eddie Izzard, it is the voice of God.

performance that surely draws a tap-root strength from the star's own Huddersfield background.⁷² As a journalist in the *TV Times* noticed, as Mason got older his Yorkshire accent became more pronounced, and when he visited Huddersfield now 'he is more likely to enthuse about Miss Parrott's junior school, a new factory chimney or the local chapel.'⁷³ Such local enthusiasms were visually and poetically portrayed in a programme Mason made for Yorkshire Television in 1972 called *Home James: James Mason Turns Again to Huddersfield*.⁷⁴

Mason's turn to television was timely. Cinema attendances declined considerably in the 1950s, with the introduction of commercial television initiating further decline.⁷⁵ The BBC and ITV both saw regionalism in television broadcasting as important, even if, to some extent, this was motivated by the reach of television transmitters. A 1955 memorandum by Frank Gillard, Head of Programmes in the BBC's West Region, suggested that 'a healthy national culture is based on healthy regional culture.'⁷⁶ The new commercial companies were, therefore, organised regionally and in 1968 Yorkshire Television was established east of the Pennines. The company sought to develop regional programming and a sense of regional identity through its main news programme, *Calendar*, and series such as *Emmerdale Farm* (1972), *Follyfoot* (1971-73), *The Children of Eskdale* (1973) and *Too Long a Winter* (1975). As the TV critic Philip Purser wrote, this was 'a perfect example of a regional company striking gold in its own backyard'.⁷⁷ One national success from Yorkshire TV was *Stars on Sunday*, presented by Jess Yates. Mason appeared on the programme twice in 1970, five times in 1971 and twice in 1972. He also appeared in the final edition in 1979. Mason said 'Most English people in their middle years now sit stolidly in front of their television sets and never go to the cinema. I liked reminding them I was alive.'⁷⁸

⁷² Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 207.

⁷³ 21 May 1970, quoted in Sweeney, *James Mason: A Bio-Bibliography*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ The programme is available as a special feature on some DVD versions of *Odd Man Out* (1946) and *The Seventh Veil* (1945).

⁷⁵ See for example John Spraos, *The Decline of the Cinema: An Economist's Report* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962) and Barry M. Doyle, 'The Geography of Cinema Going in Great Britain, 1934-94: A Comment', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 23 (2003): 59-71.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 624. See also Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁷⁷ Quoted in Jeremy Potter, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 4 Companies and Programmes, 1968-80* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.90. See also Russell, *Looking North*, p. 190 for the north and television in the 1960s.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Morley, *Odd Man Out*, p. 156.

It was in this context that *Home James* was made, combining Mason's international stardom with an association with Yorkshire.

Home James begins with Mason, travelling by train through the Pennines, recanting his youthful attitudes towards his home town:

I was born in Huddersfield. When I was young I had very little affection for this part of the country. In fact when I finished my schooling I couldn't wait to get away from the place and try my luck in London, but recently for family reasons I've been returning here more and more frequently and in the process being more and more won over by it. My growing enthusiasm has made me as bad as any other sort of convert. I imagine that to the casual traveller Huddersfield is practically indistinguishable from half a dozen other northern industrial towns but when you really get to know it, you find that it has a personality that's quite unique – very seductive.⁷⁹

His arrival by train is that of a returning native and through the fifty minutes of the film, he sketches an impression of the things in Huddersfield that he has so taken to. He considered that Huddersfield had 'a unique isolation', both geographical and emotional, and that this had produced a distinct local identity. Of course, Mason drew out those values that he prized, and then illustrated them with themes associated with the town and its surrounding villages. The people of Huddersfield, he said, had an elusive character, were blunt, uncompromising but gentle too. They were sober, thrifty, industrious, conservative and God-fearing. Throughout the film, he emphasised that Huddersfield did things in the old way, continuing traditions formed during its industrialisation during the nineteenth century. He spent time considering textiles, and particularly the skill involved in the processing of worsted. He condemned rationalisation and modernisation, criticising David Brown tractors for their conveyor belt-approach to production, which he considered, ironically, 'more Detroit than Huddersfield.' Mass production, associated with America, he said, was the antithesis of what Huddersfield stood for. The film also celebrated social harmony, with the feeling that it could be attributed to people like his own family, 'the rich are as much part and parcel of the town as anyone else,' he declared and an exploration of the lives of leading Huddersfield businessmen form the central part of the programme. Essentially, Mason was making the case for his affiliation to the town, arguing that families such as his were key to its social harmony and prosperity.

The last third of the film explored aspects of culture that Mason considered made Huddersfield unique. Rugby League and league cricket are shown, but Huddersfield's musical heritage is portrayed as the town's essence. As Mason says, 'there is no passion more indigenous to Huddersfield than its music.' He then listed its musical societies, including six church choirs, sixteen brass bands,

⁷⁹ *Home James: James Mason Turns Again to Huddersfield*, directed by Patrick Boyle, Yorkshire TV, 1972.

one madrigal society, three light opera societies, one women's choir, three male voice choirs and two symphony orchestras. Mason concluded that to him Huddersfield people are 'the people who are rooted here, the people who reject as new-fangled what others call progress, who cherish as solid virtue what others no longer believe in. It's a good life, I like it. I'm glad to have been part of it.'

Mason had therefore come home – as the title of the programme explained. But he had not, many suggested, come to the Huddersfield of the early 1970s. The film portrayed none of the changes taking place in the town's geography or demography, and was hostile to its changing economy. As well as the criticism of David Brown, the ICI chemical plant in the town was described dismissively as 'computerised'. The extensive redevelopment of the town centre in the 1960s was ignored, as was the diversification of the town's ethnic make-up following immigration. An editorial in the *Huddersfield Examiner* reflected upon 'Mason's seductively beguiling film about his old home town of Huddersfield.'

Mr. Mason set out to make a nostalgic film about the town he said he had grown to love, not about the new town springing up all around us but which he has never really known, and he succeeded most admirably We saw nothing of the town's new buildings, and nothing of the town's new people, and not much of the town's industries which have grown up to challenge wool's pre-eminence since Mr Mason was a lad.⁸⁰

Yet as the paper noted over the next couple of days, 'The majority of letters [from readers] were in favour of the Mason memory of the good old days. The conditions may not have been as good as today, but in many ways it would appear the people were at least as happy.'⁸¹ Mason's return to Britain and to Yorkshire gave him a sense of fulfilment. He told a *Guardian* journalist in 1969 that 'In a way I feel younger now than I felt when I went to Hollywood. I feel a sort of re-birth ... I now regard myself as a happy and well-adjusted man.'⁸²

Of course, much of Mason's appeal had nothing to do with his origins in Huddersfield and was down to his sexual attractiveness. He was intriguingly handsome. As *Picturegoer* reported in 1943: 'James Mason, whose latest study in villainy can be seen in "The Man in Grey", is in the opinion of many film-goers in danger of making screen villainy too attractive.'⁸³ In the 1940s, *Time* magazine's film critic predicted that Mason playing Lord Rohan in *The Man in Grey*, 'Swaggering through the title role, sneering like Laughton, barking like Gable, and frowning like Laurence Olivier on a dark night, he is likely to pick up many a

⁸⁰ The Santillana of the North, *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 23 September 1972.

⁸¹ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 25 September 1972.

⁸² Interview with Catherine Stott, *The Guardian*, 26 November 1969.

⁸³ *Picturegoer*, 4 September 1943. For sadism as an element in Mason's attractiveness see Evans, 'James Mason', pp. 112-15.

feminine fan.⁸⁴ Particularly after *The Seventh Veil*, Mason's fan mail was international, and when a James Mason Appreciation Society was established it was because of acting ability and erotic appeal and not his origins. Nonetheless, as Pearl Jephcott pointed out in her study of teenagers in the late 1940s, working-class girls and young women were influenced substantially by their immediate localities and place mattered in their lives.⁸⁵ Such was the case with Hazel Fletcher, a teenager in Leeds in the mid-1940s. Mason appealed to her for his sensuality and sexuality. As she recalled:

The first time I saw him was in British films: *Man in Grey*, *The Wicked Lady*, *The Night Has Eyes* ... and at the time, I would have been about 14, going on 15, starting to grow up, you know, starting to notice other things, and when I saw *Man in Grey*, it was on for three nights at the local cinema, they used to do two shows a night, and after the first scene of that film I went back the other two nights and sat through the whole two shows of both nights and ... each night I cried myself to sleep because I was so much in love with him, it's embarrassing now to think about it. But that's how it was.⁸⁶

A few years later, having married and had a child, Fletcher moved to Huddersfield, to Croft House Lane, where Mason's family lived. She met him unexpectedly when her young child ran down the drive to Mason's parents' house and fell over. A man who she thought was the gardener picked the boy up, and turned to her, revealing, to her surprise, that he was James Mason. Fletcher's relationship to the star therefore took on a new dimension based on proximity. But she assigned even greater importance to sense of place than this, as she explained that 'when he went to America I was very disappointed at losing him to the American films, because I didn't like American films. I didn't like the fantasy of it all, dancing down the street with an imaginary orchestra around ...'⁸⁷ Despite Mason's success in the 1940s being associated with Gainsborough melodramas rather than films about everyday life, Mason's localism was an important component in Fletcher's admiration for him and outweighed her dislike of fantasy. Mason's origins and 'indigenouslyness' were important to her.

Fletcher was disappointed at losing Mason to America and saw British films in opposition to American films, echoing the contrast described by Michael Balcon as 'realism and tinsel.'⁸⁸ Others fans were thrilled about his Hollywood films and were proud of him. One such fan to whom I spoke travelled by bus to see Mason repeatedly in films in the 1950s and 1960s. Mrs Beacroft watched each film first in Huddersfield, then the smaller town of Holmfirth and finally in the village of

⁸⁴ Hirschhorn, *The Films of James Mason*, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Pearl Jephcott, *Rising Twenty* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 32.

⁸⁶ Oral history interview with Hazel Fletcher, 17 November 2008.

⁸⁷ Oral history interview with Hazel Fletcher.

⁸⁸ Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, p. 31.

Honley. She was pleased that he came from the town but liked his American movies: 'We were thrilled about these Hollywood films ... We were very, very proud of him. He was wonderful.'⁸⁹ She recounted every detail of the star's life and films to her fellow bus passengers. Jackie Stacey has explored motivations for fans liking particular films and actors. Some cinema-goers wanted 'The Great Escape', hence one of her interviewees explained that 'The stars in Hollywood films were all very glamorous, their costumes were beautiful and it was like being in a different world, especially after the restrictions of the war.... I preferred stars with glamorous clothes and looks.'⁹⁰ At the same time, an ability to identify with stars was important for other fans, hence Stacey analyses connections to particular stars through femininity and age. In Huddersfield, place also mattered. One James Mason fan interviewed, Mrs Wragg, a former mill worker and cinema usherette, painted pictures of all the town's cinemas, in an act of assertion of cultural ownership and local pride.⁹¹

It is certainly the case that there has been some ambivalence displayed in Huddersfield's appreciation of its home-grown star. Public commemoration is quite limited. In 1994, the town's best known hotel, the George (where rugby league was founded) named one of its meeting rooms after him. There is a plaque outside the town's library, unveiled in 1996 and in 2000 a very small cul-de-sac off Croft House Lane was named James Mason Court. Yet, there was concern by the James Mason Appreciation Society that the town had not done enough. The society was founded in 1993 outside the town, with its first meeting in London.⁹² Despite a bust of Mason being placed in the Lawrence Batley Theatre (unveiled by Mirfield-born actor Patrick Stewart), there was no public statue of the star, yet the Appreciation Society pointed out that the town of Morecambe had erected one to its famous son Eric.⁹³ There remains much interest in Mason locally. His films have featured in festivals at Holmfirth and Bradford and audiences for events associated with my research have been large, including a full house and regional TV coverage (on *Calendar*) for a showing of *Home James*. Most recently, in 2011 large photographic banners of James Mason have appeared in the town's major shopping centre under the slogan 'Made in Huddersfield'. Audiences have, though, retained their critical edge. There is pride that Mason came from

⁸⁹ Summary of oral history interview: Mrs Beacroft. The interview took place over the phone and was not recorded.

⁹⁰ Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 111.

⁹¹ Oral history Interview with Mrs Wragg, 20 November 2008.

⁹² *Late Extra Special Supplement* (newsletter of the James Mason Appreciation Society), Oct 1998.

⁹³ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 May 1994. Patrick Stewart has developed a close relationship to Huddersfield, acting as chancellor of the University and making regular visits to the town.

Huddersfield but many remain unhappy that he did not return to live in Britain. He died in Switzerland in 1984.⁹⁴

Conclusion

American films have often been seen as agents of Americanisation, as the national press in the nineteenth century was seen as a force nationalising British culture. James Mason's career as an actor seems to support such a trajectory, from inhabitant of a locality to transatlantic star. Likewise media audiences have also been seen as following a similar journey, figuratively speaking, as they transported themselves to America via their seats in the cinema and living rooms. Hence Pearl Jephcott concluded:

What influence has the cinema, this ... entirely new form of recreation, had on the girls? It has obviously helped to Americanize them both in appearance and language. They ... have been made to look at the sentimental myths of one particular people and have become acclimatized to 'its underworld, its lovers, its thieves and murderers, and its comedians.'⁹⁵

Yet while British people viewed America on screen, their vision was mediated by their gender, age, class and place identities, as well as their personal taste. Richard Pells has argued that Europeans have 'loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II,' and that while they have consumed American products they have not 'absorbed' America in the process, and such a conclusion can be applied both to Mason and his viewers in Huddersfield.⁹⁶ Watching Hollywood films could provide a sense of escape from the everyday, but could also entail a sense of local patriotism. The indigenouslyness of stars mattered, whether they represented local and regional identities on screen as George Formby and Gracie Fields did, or even if they did not, like James Mason. Mason prompted a sense of Yorkshireness in his audiences who saw him at the same time a Hollywood star, a romantic figure of desire *and* a citizen of Yorkshire and Huddersfield. Cinema-goers in the town were acculturated to be proud of where they lived and of the people it had produced, and Mason's transatlantic success enhanced civic pride in the town.⁹⁷ He drew attention to the town within Britain, focussing the eyes of the national media there when he achieved success. This

⁹⁴ There was a long-running family dispute over his ashes, which were 'laid to rest' there in 2000. For the complexities of the case see 'James Mason's ashes finally laid to rest,' *Daily Telegraph*, 25 November 2000, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1375863/James-Masons-ashes-finally-laid-to-rest.html> (accessed 16 September 2011).

⁹⁵ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, pp. 155-6.

⁹⁶ Pells, *Not Like Us*.

⁹⁷ See Brian Jackson, *Working-Class Community* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 154 for the pride of teenage girls in the town in the 1960s.

happened even though Mason distanced himself from the town until the late 1950s. He did not acquire a sense of commitment to the nation, as it has been argued other middle-class did. Nor did he go native in America. His career was transatlantic but his allegiances were not. He spent much his life feeling separate from those around him. From the late 1950s he re-established his relationship with Huddersfield. He thought better of it and in return Huddersfield people thought better of him. The case of James Mason was clearly atypical, yet as his life progressed he yearned for a sense of rootedness in locality. He lived, for various reasons, including tax avoidance, in Switzerland. While he held a British passport, he was not fully a British citizen. His regional and civic affiliation, to Yorkshire and Huddersfield, enabled this gap. Mason may have acted globally but increasingly he thought locally. In turn, many in Huddersfield admired him for that reason, as Mrs Fletcher explained:

He never lost his accent though, did he? He didn't take on an American accent or anything like that [...] He was Yorkshire, born Yorkshire, and that's how he should stay. Proud of being Yorkshire. Whether he liked Huddersfield or not, he should have been proud of his origins. I think he was.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Oral history interview with Hazel Fletcher.