

**The Wick Society's Intervention into Industrial Heritage:
Remaking Local Films for Future Historians**

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Films, moreover, constitute a new and valuable kind of historical document. They stand alone in their ability to record for all time all kinds of action, from the most epoch-making to the most personal. (Lindgren 1935, p. 66)

The far north of Scotland, in particular the town of Wick, can lay claim to being the subject of some of the oldest films in the *Scottish Screen* archive.¹ These films, known as Kinora reels and lasting little more than thirty seconds, document a fleet of fishing vessels entering Wick harbour in Caithness before the turn of the twentieth century. The images, filmed using moving image technology prior to the standardisation of 35mm, provide a unique glimpse of a local industry just before the widespread adoption of mass industrial fishing. Their very survival, over a hundred years later, is testament to the care with which they were preserved.

While these are the oldest known films of Wick, they are certainly not the only ones. Indeed, images of this area are surprisingly plentiful thanks to various amateur and voluntary local organisations over the years. In 2002 the *Scottish Screen* archive, based in Glasgow, completed negotiations for the depositing of over six hours of non-fiction films documenting the history of the town of Wick and its surrounding areas up until the late 1970s. The close study of these titles reveals a unique local narrative that this footage allows us to access. While there is an abundance of material it is clear that certain topics recur again and again, in particular the local fishing industry. Two amateur films on this subject will be discussed in depth: *Around Wick Harbour* (1937, 8.53 mins, colour/silent) and [*Around Wick Harbour 1974-1975 & Lifeboat Slipway Repairs & Tests*] (1974-75, 40.58 mins, colour/silent).² A symbolic image of the local industry and its workforce is created by these two films. This article aims to explain the connections

between these related titles, and also to reflect on what their example suggests for the study of amateur cinema.

The recent rise in scholarly interest in amateur film has been explained by pointing out that the “reality effect” is obviously what most people hope to find in amateur images and what explains their appeal for artists, film and exhibition makers’ (Kmec and Thill 2009, p. 11). While amateur fiction films are now increasingly the object of scholarly attention during the early phase of the study of amateur cinema, documentaries and related concerns of realism and social history have tended to be central to academic inquiries (Shand and Craven 2013). This interest in the indexicality of the image is certainly prominent in much of the work of scholars such as Heather Norris Nicholson, who asserts that amateur film was chiefly a realist film movement, ‘[d]espite vibrant alternative approaches attracting amateur attention during the 1950s, realism remained influential upon two generations of cine users and sustained local interest in films as a dominant strand of non-fiction amateur cinema’ (2012, p. 135-36). Indeed, the case study that follows confirms this perspective, as the two amateur documentaries have become a useful source of reference for historians of industrial change in Scotland. This connection between amateur filmmaking and the rise of film archives has become mutually productive, but was envisaged by journalists writing for the amateur film press as far back as the 1930s (Oakley 1932 and 1939; Malthouse 1948 and 1949). In fact, it seems Oakley was energised to write his articles on amateur cinema and heritage because he knew that there would be a national film archive to preserve such films. Amateur cinema was therefore part of a wider national film culture project during the 1930s, one that was highly sensitive to regional variation in international contexts.

While writing on amateur cinema may have been centralised to the South East of England, the actual production of amateur cinema was far more diverse and heterogeneous than these discourses would imply. This plurality of production can be seen in the films that have been deposited in the *Scottish Screen* archive. What can these films made in Scotland tell us about amateur cinema and heritage that the Ernest Oakley articles cannot? Following a survey of the production of both films, attention will turn to how Andre Bazin’s writings have continuing relevance to the study of amateur cinema.

The Caithness Film Club

The Caithness Film Club, which was founded in 1935, picked up where the filmmakers using the Kinora technology left off. During the 1930s this local cine-club turned their cameras on similar subjects to the early pioneers. Newly standardised 16mm equipment allowed this group to document civic life in the town of Wick in a way not possible since Kinora died out in 1914. Their organised activity transformed the cine-club's approach to the material. While so-called 'lone workers' tended to dedicate themselves to artistic productions, other individuals subsumed their filming into generalised family activity. Cine-clubs on the other hand, due to the inherent socialisation with people who are not members of their immediate family, tended to be pushed towards making films about community life. As Charles Tepperman has recently noted, 'During the 1930s, amateur activities expressed a utopian aspiration to move cinema making and watching beyond its theatrical settings and into non-theatrical contexts, in order to explore, in imaginative ways, the motion picture's relationship to working life and social problems' (2011, p. 291). This interest in documenting working lives in local contexts is certainly true for The Caithness Film Club, as can be seen from their surviving films.³

Like their earlier counterparts, members of the Caithness Film Club obsessively returned to the harbour as a source of dynamic material for moving images. This would have seemed like an obvious choice, as the harbour was the heart of employment and activity for the town during the 1930s and 1940s. Wick was then the centre of the fishing industry on the east coast and the harbour was the centre of most livelihoods, a situation later fictionalised in Neil Gunn's novel *The Silver Darlings* (1941). It was common to hear Norwegian and Russian on the streets of Wick at this time, with fishing being the locus of a massive international exporting trade around Europe. Reflecting this, the Caithness Film Club made numerous films of harbour life, including *Wick Harbour and Foals* (1937). However, another film made around the same time, *Around Wick Harbour* (1936, 12 mins, colour/silent), now stands apart from the Caithness Film Club productions on the same topic for a number of reasons. Superficially, in synopsis, it resembles elements of *Drifters* (1928): it enacts a basic narrative of industrial capitalism

common to documentary films of this era as it documents the transportation, gutting, packing and auctioning of herring at the height of its international trade. The whole film takes place on land, expanding a small section of *Drifters* (part four) out to encompass an entire short film. It is therefore possible to think of this film as a localised remake of the Grierson film. As Heather Norris Nicholson has confirmed:

Members of Britain's documentary film movement championed amateur activity repeatedly during the interwar years and beyond, as shown by their regular role as judges and adjudicators at events and their readiness for their comments to appear in print. Grierson, Wright and Rotha were of particular importance for their encouragement and, in turn, the amateur movement paid tribute to the quality of their own work (2012, p. 71).

Indeed, the title card from part of *Drifters* could almost be describing Wick as it was at the end of the nineteenth century, 'And the sound of the sea and the people of the sea are lost in the chatter and chaffer of a market for the world'. It was a place that attracted workers from all over Europe to earn a living. In many ways *Around Wick Harbour* represents a celebration of these processes and the workers who toil away in their particular division of labour. There was at least one other film made of local fishing industries in Scotland around this time, entitled *Fishing Fleet* by J. Evans Gordon from Edinburgh. This documented the Lossiemouth fishing industry and was, like *Around Wick Harbour*, entered into the 1940 Scottish Amateur Film Festival (S.A.F.F.) held annually in Glasgow; winning the Victor Saville Trophy for best non-fiction film (Anon 1940, p. 3).⁴ Indeed there were enough fishing subjects so that the *Scotsman* film critic Forsyth Hardy, who served as one of the four adjudicators that year, criticised 'hackneyed subjects, such as fishing' saying 'there were other things in Scotland besides trawlers' (Anon 1940, p. 3). Yet given that fishing subjects were sufficient in number to warrant such comment, why is *Around Wick Harbour* significant?

Firstly, *Around Wick Harbour* was 'highly commended' at the 1940 S.A.F.F. Therefore, it was recognised as being of superior quality even at the time

of production, which is significant given that in that year, the ‘festival, which was organised by the British Film Institute (Scottish Film Council), attracted an entry of 54 films on a wide range of subjects. There were 23 from Scotland and 31 from England, the total being only ten less than in the previous year, when conditions were more favourable’ (Anon 1940, p. 3). Secondly, unlike the other films made by the Caithness Film Club and *Fishing Fleet*, it was filmed in colour at a time when that stock was more expensive to purchase than black and white. As a historical document this is invaluable. Thirdly, *Around Wick Harbour* is evidently a product of what R.A. Stebbins’ calls ‘serious leisure’, compared with the ‘casual leisure’ of the other films on Wick harbour and the fishing industry (Stebbins 1992, pp. 1-19). *Around Wick Harbour* was made by a young professional photographer, Alexander Johnston (1909-2011), who is responsible for many of the defining photographic images of the local herring industry in Wick (Sutherland 1983, p.8).⁵ As an art school graduate and third-generation photographer, Johnston imbues the film with remarkable sophistication in the photography and editing. The amateur’s potential to match or surpass professional standards is fully evident in this particular work and it would not be obvious that it was an amateur film if the title card celebrating its award at the S.A.F.F at the beginning of the film was removed (Figure 1).



Figure 1

The panning is slow and steady, which marks it out in terms of quality from many other cine club productions, and the editing has a rhythmic quality that is not only suggestive of mechanical processes but also the natural pulse of the sea and the waves. A few sequences however stand out. The film opens with an extreme long shot on a cliff top, before cutting to a medium shot on the pier, to finally a close up as a boat passes the panning camera. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that footage of at least two boats has been edited together in order to suggest the movement of one boat journey into dock. This substitution of various boats to suggest the idea of a single boat entering the harbour is what Noel Carroll refers to as ‘nominal portrayal’. This is quite rare in amateur films that tend to specialise in physical portrayal (recording units instead of expositional units) as the dominant aesthetic strategy (Carroll 1983, p. 28). Pragmatically it is understandable why this combination was necessarily, but its successful implementation is revealing of a creative approach to direction. The middle of the film also reveals some unusual

creative choices. When filming the auctioneer Dan Stewart, and his attempts to sell a fresh box of herring to an assembled crowd, Stewart looks directly into the camera (Figure 2).



Figure 2

As the prices increase, it is obvious that he is enjoying his performance as the film cuts to a large close up. A complete negation of the observational style of filming, this sequence makes it clear that advanced amateurs did not think that an artificial authorial distance was always necessary in their documentaries. Moments such as when a woman gutting fish looks up to smile at Alex Johnston's camera (Figure 3), give the film an intimacy and charm lacking in more distant anthropological attempts at capturing the working-class on film typical of professional filmmakers. Overall, *Around Wick Harbour* successfully guides us through a visual journey using techniques that most professionals would recognise as reaching industry standards. This film captures the harbour at a key moment of its

history and preserves it for succeeding generations. Yet the influence of this film did not end in 1940. Over thirty years later its example inspired a local organisation to recreate its scenario during quite different socio-historical circumstances.



Figure 3

The Formation of the Wick Society

The Wick Society was set up in 1971, its initial objective being to save buildings designed by Thomas Telford, one of the original architects of Wick, on the lower Pultneytown side of the town from demolition by the council. Iain Sutherland, a local historian and founder member of the society, described town officials as ‘hooligans masquerading as architects’, a statement that clearly sets up the opposition between heritage and modernisation on the ground level.⁶ In this regard, what happened in Wick was consistent with a wider revival of interest in issues of heritage from the 1970s onwards, as many post-industrial towns sought to position

themselves as being in possession of a unique account of the national past in order to aid tourism to the area (McCrone et al 1995). In the face of an economic downturn in mass industry, such schemes helped make the best of a difficult situation. However it must be remembered that during the 1970s it was volunteers, not business people, who formed most of these organisations, coming out of a genuine personal connection to their local heritage. Indeed, local journalist Noel Donaldson explained, 'Mr Sutherland's passion for local heritage was fired by his grandfather Jim Baikie, of Barrogill Street, Wick, who used to regale the young Iain with tales of Wick's halcyon herring days'. Sutherland added that, 'The fascination never left me' (2006, p. 5). Sutherland, an archivist at Dounreay Nuclear Power Station, had no interest in making money from his support for local heritage and he gave up his own leisure time to contribute to the cause. Donaldson also noted that Sutherland, 'stressed that his commitment to local heritage had been fuelled by the love of the task and his conviction that it was important that the past should be preserved for the future, and not by any thought of public reward' (Donaldson 2006, p. 5). Unlike other parts of the country where the dominant form of heritage preserved with government grants were aristocratic country houses, in a town such as Wick the primary concern was with a more egalitarian form of preservation. These were workers' houses, not country mansions.

The Wick Society was unsuccessful in saving the Telford buildings, yet continued into other areas of local interest, such as the Wick Heritage Centre, which opened in 1972 (Donaldson 2006, p. 5). A non-profit organisation run by a group of volunteers, the centre acquired many items of historic value such as clothing and furniture and made exhibits of period recreations. Links were gradually established between the Wick Society and the local council. The financial support that resulted from this mutually beneficial relationship was crucial in expanding operations. The council could then be seen as encouraging an organisation whose efforts would be of great interest to returning emigrant families and interested tourists from all over the world. One of the Wick Society's most significant interventions was the rescuing and preservation of the vast collection of photographs from the Johnson archive: a family photography business that as well as specialising in portraiture, also took many still photographs of the local fishing industry.⁷ Around one hundred thousand glass slides and negatives were taken over three generations of the

business between 1863 and 1975, from the beginnings of the local industry to its decline in the post-war years. In this respect, they form a much more complete and comprehensive record of activity in the town than moving image photography has achieved. A display of a selection of these photographs was subsequently incorporated into an exhibition in the Wick Heritage Centre along with a reconstruction of the Johnston family shop that was located in the High Street.⁸ In short, the Wick Society's mission became one of recording and preserving a vanishing local culture.

For our purposes, one of the most crucial developments in this process was the acquisition of the negatives of the Caithness Film Club. The former secretary of the club also passed on the original 16mm camera that was used during their production. The Caithness Film Club had dissolved in 1939 during the Second World War because of film rationing. It had never reformed, yet the films were stored away and remained in remarkably good condition. When they were later in the possession of the Wick Society, the films were locked in a bank vault, as a centralised national archive was only just in the process of being formed.⁹ However, these films were occasionally screened as part of a programme which was of interest to local and sometimes national audiences. It was within this context that two founding members of the Wick Society, Iain Sutherland and Ian Mackenzie, started producing their own non-fiction films of the area.

Historical Echoes

So the old yards fell silent for the last time. In common with its smaller neighbours, who had earlier felt the cold hand of failure, Wick's herring trade passed over the horizon between reality and memory. (Sutherland 1983, p. 80).

As Iain Sutherland's history of the demise of Wick's herring trade ends on that elegiac note, this story continues. Just how exactly was that 'horizon between reality and memory' negotiated, and what role did he, and the organisation he set up, have to play in this process of remembering?

The original motivation behind re-making films of contemporary life in Wick was for the benefit of future fishing historians. He has stated that, 'Our main purpose was to record the fishing fleet of the time, in the way that Alex Johnston had done, to compare the methods of the 1970s with those of the 1930s. The secondary objective was to preserve for fishing historians, details of the styles of boats in use in the transition period of the 1970s, which covered a much wider range of vessels than the 1930s.'¹⁰ The move from preservation to production was a step towards a more dynamic form of activity than was perhaps typical of similar heritage organisations around the country. Most heritage organisation activity is centred on preserving artefacts that already exist, not producing new material for the future. This makes the Wick Society films especially curious in many respects.

The very idea of remaking past productions using the same equipment is extremely unusual. The remake may be firmly established as a practice in the professional cinema industry, yet it is extremely rare in an amateur sector consisting of a non-standardised product. The motivations behind these particular remakes were altogether different from those of a professional film producer. These remakes were not intended to capitalise on an already existing property but rather to exist alongside it. The films were companion pieces to the originals made in a spirit of generosity. Produced outside of the contexts of cine-club culture and never intended for entry into the S.A.F.F, it is not surprising that the films are very different from their predecessors.

If a film such as *Around Wick Harbour* could be said to be the product of 'serious leisure' activity, its remake *Around Wick Harbour 1974-75* is more typical of trends towards 'causal' leisure, albeit made for serious purposes (Stebbins 2001, p. 305). The images that Sutherland photographed of both industry and leisure are marked by a less rigorous approach towards photography and editing. Sutherland admitted that the 'film really consists of 3 un-edited documentaries but as we had to do our editing in the projector I could not be bothered, as Alec Johnston had done with his.'¹¹ However, rather than dismiss these films as somehow inferior copies of the originals from the 1930s, we should instead try to understand their production within a quite different civic culture of the 1970s.

First of all it should be noted that these films were made by a couple of individuals rather than an organised group. In this regard it is worth remembering

that amateur cine clubs were more than just people who made and shared films. They also spent their time experimenting and learning their craft. The 1970s productions were instead made using minimal resources and personnel, but despite this, many interesting works emerged out of the fractured nature of the cine culture of this era. These films required considerable perseverance over a long period of time. Despite this commitment, filming would process intermittently, even casually, when the opportunity presented itself. It is within this context that an amateur film such as *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75* should be considered.

A comparison between the 1930s and 1970s versions of *Around Wick Harbour* shows that in many respects they are similar. In fact, certain shots are even repeated, such as the opening sequence when the fishing vessel enters the harbour. Like the 1936 film, the 1974/5 version starts with a long shot from an overlooking cliff, before cutting to a medium shot filmed from the harbour pier. As we again follow a boat into the inner harbour to be unloaded of its catch, the changes that have taken place over the last forty years become more apparent. There has been a vast reduction in the workforce, as can be seen when the fishermen unload and gut the fish, before packing the produce themselves (Figure 4): rather than following a strict division of labour that we can see in the 1936 version.



Figure 4

During the height of the international trade of herring at the beginning of the twentieth century, lines upon lines of women were employed to gut herring, a process shown at high speed in the Johnston film. By contrast, the Wick Society film depicts the decline of the industry that resulted in the workforce becoming exclusively male. The strength of this film as a companion piece to the 1936 version of *Around Wick Harbour* now becomes obvious. The Wick Society consciously re-made the Johnston film so that a compare and contrast model of examination could be attempted.

The remake of *Around Wick Harbour* could be considered overly long, featuring much repetition of subject matter and digressions from an exclusive focus on the fishing industry. It may also look formally naïve: when for instance the camera seems to aimlessly follow local men walking around the harbour area and chatting in groups. However, these seemingly random and unmotivated shots actually serve to highlight the changes that have occurred in this particular geographic area over

time; these artistic ‘flaws’ are its strength as visual evidence. The potential benefits of studying this material from a historical and ethnographic perspective are great because the film attempts to document a town in economic decline during the downturn in North Sea fishing since the 1950s. Instead of a film of fevered industrial activity, the remake presents an image of relative inactivity. Men who would have been working hard as fishermen when the industry was in good health have experienced a vast reduction in potential income as the stocks of the North Sea have dramatically decreased. This is partly as a result of over fishing by the generation filmed with such awe and admiration in the first *Around Wick Harbour*.

The effect this economic downturn was having on the lives of the local fishermen is apparent twenty minutes into *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75*. In a sequence with no equivalent in the Johnston version, the film documents the events of the local fishermen’s strike during what became known as the ‘Cod Wars’ of the 1970s. A handwritten sign announces ‘Fisherman’s Meeting: All Requested to Attend’, but what actually happened at this meeting is not shown. Instead, what we see is a scene reminiscent of the Lumière Brothers’ *Sortie de L’Usine* (1895) only this time it is fishermen leaving a meeting in the Assembly Rooms in Wick. This is filmed by framing the entrance to the hall and letting the camera run for two minutes; a steady procession of fishermen of various ages walk into the frame, some acknowledge the camera, some do not, before they walk out of shot (Figure 5).



Figure 5

The length of this shot strives to be comprehensive as a historical record of who exactly was present. Indeed, Sutherland has confirmed that the meeting ‘was attended by every fisherman in Caithness at the time’.¹² The film is silent, but inter-titles are never used for explanation. An answer to our questions about what we have just seen is provided forty seconds later, when we are shown a number of boats blocking the entrance to the inner harbour. This blockade was motivated by Iceland closing its waters to British boats within a twelve-mile radius, and the Wick fishermen complained that foreign fish landings were undercutting local prosperity. Therefore, this protest was retaliation to sanctions that threatened the fishermen’s livelihood. Fishermen such as Sutherland’s brother James took part in this three day protest: an event into which the Wick Society’s cameras give us a privileged insight (Figure 6). This kind of action is in stark contrast to the internationalism that was a feature of the fishing industry in the area during the 1930s, but this is perhaps a consequence of an industry in decline.



Figure 6

The sequence described above would have been explained during Sutherland's lectures at the screenings he regularly organised. As a local historian and writer, he was in a perfect position to put the events projected on screen into an appropriate context by providing a running commentary. He has previously stated that, 'I have shown the main films about 150 times in Wick over the last 30 years. They have been shown all over Scotland from Lerwick to Glasgow'.¹³ Sutherland would act as a mediator between the past onscreen and the contemporary audience who had come to see the screening in town halls and public spaces across the country. Therefore, the remakes become the visual 'evidence' of Wick's past that is only completed by Sutherland's historical explanations. The Wick Society films are then best understood as lecture films made as part of the more egalitarian side to the various heritage movements of the 1970s. The films are thus, an aid to personal and community memory.

At the end of the remake of *Around Wick Harbour*, the viewer is presented with a 360-degree view of the town from a high vantage point. Sutherland explained, ‘the views from the top of the lighting tower at Wick harbour were modern versions of scenes which were shot from the spire of Bridge St kirk in 1937’.¹⁴ Consideration of the ‘view’ aesthetic, as has been developed by Tom Gunning in relation to early non-fiction filmmaking, allows a better understanding of the motivation behind a sequence such as this.¹⁵ Gunning notes:

The camera literally acts as a tourist, spectator or investigator, and the pleasure in the film lies in the surrogate of looking [...] In a “view” the world is presented to the camera, and therefore to the spectator (1997, p. 15).

In this idea of the camera acting as ‘tourist, spectator or investigator’ there is a resonance to what is happening in the Wick films. Their ‘view’ aesthetic was part of an almost scientific effort towards a comprehensive ‘mapping’ of the people and the landscape. Here the camera captures the changing geography of the town, including its suburban developments out towards the coast, as its sweeping pan freezes the image in time. These films then represent a bridge between their present and the retrospective viewer of the future (Figure 7).



Figure 7

What were intended as companion pieces to the Caithness Film Club and Alex Johnston titles, in fact, through their idiosyncrasies, build on and develop the latent historic and ethnographic impulses of the originals. Together these films give fascinating insights into the civic culture of two distinct decades. The importance of the 'local' landscape, industry and culture runs through these films and opens the work up to the viewer in a way that is unusual in a professional film. The titles themselves say as much. The spectator is invited on a visual journey around this particular area in a way that would be inappropriate in a similar film made for a mass audience. The geographical specificity of the work is highly significant, but it also reveals much about the potential of amateur documentaries in relation to issues of heritage.

Amateur Documentaries and Heritage Cinema

There is a fundamental ontological difference between a professional heritage cinema and an amateur heritage cinema. While the professional heritage cinema involves the re-construction of period detail after the fact, the amateur heritage cinema involves the filming of events as they are happening. The former is primarily the concern of professional cinema, which tends to work within the fictional mode. This type of cinema has been clearly identified and detailed in the writings of Andrew Higson. His work located this tendency within British film production from the 1920s onwards (Higson 1995 & 2003, Hill 1999). Sarah Neely has extended the heritage debate into Scotland by identifying recent films such as *Mrs Brown* (1997) as using similar iconography as the English heritage films (Neely 2005, pp. 241-45). However, some have argued against the narrow definitions within which these debates are located (Goode 2003) These on-going re-definitions of what a 'heritage' cinema includes continue as this article demonstrates that the exclusion of non-fiction films from this debate is somewhat limiting. As the Ernest Oakley articles referenced earlier indicate, the amateur sector was extremely sensitive to ideas of inheritance, both cultural and industrial, as far back as 1932. The inclusion of non-fiction film within the re-definition of heritage cinema broadens the debate, yet at the same time it suggests theoretical problems of its own. Therefore, the conclusion of this article is devoted to proposing a methodical framework to consider these amateur heritage films. How can we account for the ontological difference between a fictional heritage cinema centred on reconstructions of the past and a non-fiction heritage cinema centred on capturing the present on film before it disappears into the past?

An early theorisation of the tension between cinema as performance and cinema as a form of record is Andre Bazin's famous essay, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. In this essay Bazin proposed that cinema inherits a fundamental impulse to capture reality as it appears to the human eye, an impulse that can be traced back to Egypt. He made the audacious connection between the ancient practice of embalming the dead and the eternal human desire to transcend physical death. This, he called the 'mummy complex'. He explained:

The religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus, by providing a defence against the passage of time it satisfied a basic psychological need in man, for death is but the victory of time. To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life (1967, p. 9).

Therefore, over time various artistic practices were developed to allow the continued existence of certain elements of physical reality that can then be handed on to succeeding generations. In ancient Egypt, the only things being deemed important enough to survive were the pyramids and the bodies of its royalty as mummies. However, over time various other mechanisms were developed to achieve similar impulses towards preservation, ones that are no longer primarily focused on the elites, but on a more democratic vision of society. These were processes that lay 'bare the primordial function of statuary, namely, the preservation of life by a representation of life' (1967, p. 10). This would include prehistoric cave paintings, Western portraiture, landscape painting and the more recent invention of photography. The cinema was therefore the latest manifestation of this psychological impulse to cheat death, one that absorbs and extends the desire to faithfully reproduce three-dimensional space in front of the artist, attempted but never fully achieved in the earlier arts. The mechanical nature of photography and cinema was seen as making images that are much closer to the pro-filmic objects being documented. The artist's decisions about framing, lighting and the direction of their subjects were downplayed in this schema. This elision can be noted in the following passage:

For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind (1967, p. 13).

This also effectively subordinates the creative decisions made in post-production in favour of the filming process itself; a system of priorities that Richard Chalfen notes is shared by most home movie makers (Chalfen 1975 and 1987). However, the tension between representing the symbolic and representing reality is extremely useful in considering amateur cinema, and one that has never been fully resolved.

The links between Andre Bazin's writings on film aesthetics and the amateur film movement are suggestive. As Michael McClusky has previously confirmed, amateur films 'record moments in time, but moments shaped by the camera itself. Thus, film presents only fragments of a totality of experience, and what appears in the film are indexical traces of that totality' (2010, p. 13). Moreover, passages of 'The Ontology of the Moving Image' can at times even seem like polemical defences of an 'amateur' film aesthetic:

No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model (1967, p. 14).

This could easily be a description of the aesthetics, or lack of them, of a typical 'home movie'. However, Bazin valued this stylistic naivety as being a closer approximation of the pro-filmic model. The links to what Chalfen calls the 'home mode' becomes even more pronounced as Bazin's article goes on:

Hence the charm of family albums. Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption (1967, p. 14).

This invocation of the psychological need to capture moments of our personal family histories in the form of photographs, in an essay conventionally read as positing an aesthetics for a new mode of professional cinema, may seem somewhat jarring or a diversion from the main thesis. Bazin was fascinated by the *whole* of art, professional and amateur alike, therefore discussion of the recording of private moments was integral to his conception of art; and hence photography. However, he then took this consideration further: from photographs to the cinema. The traditions of photography had a marked influence over the development of early amateur cinema, as can be seen in articles published in *Home Movies and Home Talkies* and in the static quality of many amateur films from the 1930s. The main difference between the two media being that ‘cinema is objectively in time’ (1967, p. 14). The duration of the shots and their ability to capture movement is seen as being key to this new aesthetic, ‘Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were’ (1967, p. 15). This term ‘change mummified’ effectively seeks to highlight a contradictory desire to record events that are in the process of flux, in order to preserve them on film unchanged for eternity. This response to the great changes brought about by modernity is consistent with the position taken by Ernest Oakley in the articles written for *Home Movies and Home Talkies*. It is clear that Andre Bazin’s aesthetic openness to all forms of culture, both amateur and professional, has been lost in studies that have traditionally focused solely on more stylistically regulated professional manifestations. The referential nature of the image is what is important here: the ‘photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint’ (1967, p. 15). This sense of resemblance between pro-filmic event and the resulting image is a quality of most concern in the filming of non-fiction subject matter.

The desire to capture images of events, which are judged to be important in an imagined future, is an everyday occurrence in everyday family life, as both Andre Bazin and Richard Chalfen note. Even Roland Barthes has commented on the unique contribution of the amateur photographer:

Usually the amateur is defined as an immature state of the artist: someone who cannot – or will not – achieve the mastery

of a profession. But in the field of photographic practice, it is the amateur, on the contrary, who is the assumption of the professional: for it is he who stands closer to the *noeme* of Photography (1984, p. 98-99).

Using a slightly different terminology, Barthes' hypothesis is surprisingly consistent with the arguments put forward by Bazin. The desire to capture images of community events for an imagined future, as was achieved by the Wick Society, is still an activity less well documented. These productions are suggestive of a fundamentally different conception of heritage cinema than the one currently in scholarly usage, from both practical and theoretical perspectives. In a comment that also has direct pertinence to studies centred on the 'community mode' (Shand 2008), the anthropologist Richard Chalfen has noted, '[h]ome mode imagery represents the bastion of the classical film theory which exalts the reproduction of "ontological reality"' (1987, p. 121). Amateur films such as *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75* are therefore working within this framework of cinematic realism that is being indicated and acknowledged but not developed by contemporary debate within Film Studies.

The decision to make non-fiction heritage films, rather than those of a fictional nature, can at least partially be explained by economic considerations. Most amateur filmmakers could not afford to reconstruct locations and costumes, as they would have been in the past.¹⁶ This kind of reconstruction is capital intensive, a production process in conflict with the lack of expenditure involved in most amateur productions. Therefore, amateur filmmakers, instead of aspiring to match professional standards, approached the slippery nature of the relationship between the past, present and future from a completely different angle. They would film the present for the future. The amateur, because they were not trying to make an immediate living from the material they shot, could afford to film now and reap the benefits much later.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the Wick Society's intervention into the filmic heritage of Caithness; however the group's activities were diverse, including restoration of the Whaligoe Steps, the Wick pilot house, two open-air swimming pools and the purchase and restoration of the herring Fifie *Isabella Fortuna*. As a result of these numerous projects Iain Sutherland was awarded an M.B.E. for his contribution to heritage in Caithness in 2006. A local newspaper reported that, 'Well-known Wick historian and conservationist Iain Sutherland has been presented with the MBE medal which he was awarded in the Queen's birthday honours. Mr Sutherland opted against a trip to Buckingham Palace and chose instead a presentation in front of friends and family in Wick Town Hall on Friday evening' (Anon 2006). Significantly, during his acceptance speech:

He also made special mention of the photographer Alexander Johnston, who donated his collection of negatives to the town to create the Johnston Collection, which is held at the Wick Heritage Centre. He described the photographic library as "a national treasure" (Anon 2006. p. 1).

This photographic legacy has now achieved increased public attention as a result of support from local and national bodies, which has enabled volunteers to scan the surviving fifty thousand glass slides and negatives of the Johnston collection (around one hundred thousand were originally taken) to be made available to a wider public via a dedicated website.¹⁷ As we have seen, the desire shown by both Alexander Johnston and Iain Sutherland to capture images of events, which are judged to be important in an imagined future, is a motivation that has intrigued critics such as Bazin and Barthes throughout the years. Amateur documentaries such as these are working within this framework of cinematic realism, which aimed to transform the unstable chemical basis of film into an artefact that has enough value to be passed on and preserved by succeeding generations. As this case study of amateur re-makes has suggested, it is necessary to place them both within the context of amateur film culture more generally and local culture more specifically, to get a fuller picture. Early calls to film local landscapes, crafts and industries that

were being ignored by professional filmmaker were indeed seized by amateur filmmakers. This was the amateur's contribution to a parallel cinema of heritage.

Endnotes

¹ See [*Views of Wick Harbour*] (1897c) and [*Storm at Wick Harbour*] (1897c).

² Following archival conventions, because the second film does not have an official title, the brackets indicate the name given to this film by the cataloguer. For the rest of this article the name will be shorted to *Around Wick Harbour 1974-75*.

³ Surviving Caithness Film Club titles include: *Wick Harbour and Foals* (1937), *Around Caithness* (1937), *Pre-war (Herring) Queens. Wick and Thurso* (1937/8/9 & 53), *Carnival Procession and Crowning of Herring Queen* (1938), *Wick Scenes* (circa 1946), *General Views of Wick in the 1930's and 1970s* (1938/1979).

⁴ A short clip from *Fishing Fleet* is currently available to view on the *Scottish Screen* archive website. See: <http://www.nls.uk/ssa/>

⁵ See: <http://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/News/Tributes-paid-to-last-Johnston-photographer-7006876.htm>

⁶ From an interview featured in the television show *The Way It Was*, episode 77, Grampian Television, 1996. Scottish Screen Archive reference number: 8607.

⁷ A television documentary titled *Ghosts on Glass* (dir: Valerie Lyon, Caledonia TV) detailing the Johnston photographs aired in 2002 (see: <http://www.caledonia.tv/productions/full-catalogue/video.aspx?id=1464>) as well as featuring in an episode of *Landward* (BBC2 Scotland) on May 25 2012 (see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01j855n>). Thanks to Harry Gray of the Wick Society for this information.

⁸ See: <http://www.wickheritage.org>

⁹ The *Scottish Screen* archive was set up in 1976.

¹⁰ Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, dated 08/02/2005.

¹¹ Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, dated 08/02/2005.

¹² Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, dated 08/02/2005.

¹³ Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, dated July 2003.

¹⁴ Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, dated 08/02/2005. Here he is referring to *Pre-war (Herring) Queens. Wick and Thurso* (1937/8/9 & 53, Caithness Film Club)

¹⁵ Schneider (2003, p. 171) has previously suggested the application of the view aesthetic to amateur films.

¹⁶ Although examples of amateur heritage fiction films are now being discovered; see Vinogradova (2013, pp. 144-163).

¹⁷ See: <http://www.johnstoncollection.net>

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All titles are available from the Scottish Screen Archive: Scottish Screen Archive, c/o: National Library of Scotland, Collections Department, 39-41 Montrose Avenue, Hillington Park, Glasgow G52 4LA, United Kingdom; tel.: 0845 366 4600; <http://www.nls.uk/ssa/>; email: ssaenquiries@nls.uk