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CINEMA ADVERTISING AND THE SEA WITCH 'LOST ISLAND' FILM (1965)

Richard Farmer

Cinema advertising films have for many decades constituted an important element of British cinema programmes, yet they remain relatively under-researched. This article examines the production, distribution and reception of one such film, a 90 second mini-epic called 'Lost Island', which was made in 1965 to promote Sea Witch hair dyes. As well as outlining the technological and experiential aspects of the cinema and cinema-going that continued to make film an attractive medium for advertisers even after the advent of mass television ownership, the article explores the success of the 'Lost Island' film and its eventual transmission on commercial television in the UK. As such, an investigation of 'Lost Island' allows for an assessment of the appeal of the cinema in the mid-1960s, and also the appeal of the cinema relative to other advertising media in the same period.

The cinema's response to the advent of mass television ownership has commonly been understood in terms of differentiation: films as shown in a cinema were promoted as benefitting from a range of technologies and attractions – colour, big screen, widescreen, stereophonic or high-fidelity sound – not available to patrons watching moving images in their own houses. As late as 1965, for example, the British exhibition industry trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* carried advertisements for Eastmancolor film stock, which insisted that cinemagoers had come to 'expect colour':

To most people, colour is what separates the cinema from the sitting room, the big screen from the one at home. It adds to the excitement of an evening out, gives an additional reason for 'going to the pictures'.¹

Correspondence to: Richard Farmer, Department of Film, Television and Media Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK. E-mail: r.farmer@uea.ac.uk

However, the same aspects of the cinema that it was hoped would attract patrons were also appealing to advertisers. Just as colour could be used to sell films, so it could also be used to sell goods and services. In Britain, colour television commercials were not broadcast until November 1969; before then, advertisers hoping to combine moving images with colour needed to sell through the cinema.²

This article will explore the production and exhibition history of one such colour cinema advertisement, an expensive, location-shot, 90 second film from 1965 made to promote Sea Witch hair dyes. The film, entitled 'Lost Island', was directed by Brian Worth and produced by J.D. Chambers & Partners for the London office of the advertising agency J. Walter Thomson (JWT). JWT had been engaged by the manufacturer of Sea Witch, Gibbs Proprietaries Ltd. (which was itself part of the Unilever group of companies).³ 'Lost Island' is an intriguing text to investigate, in that it allows us to see the cultural and artistic institution of the cinema afresh, not as the producers of feature films, the managers of theatres, or the purchasers of tickets saw it, but rather through the dispassionate and calculating eyes of the advertiser and the advertising agency. Admittedly, the substantial sums spent producing and exhibiting advertising films ensured that such people were not disinterested observers, but their willingness to spend money on placing advertising films in the cinema can tell us a lot about the perceived merit and appeal of the cinema relative to other media. Advertising agencies were used to working across a variety of different media, comparing one to another, looking to use their clients' budgets in the most effective manner available. That the cinema was still regarded as a medium through which Sea Witch could be sold tells us a lot about films in the 1960s – and the people who watched them.

As compared to feature films, documentaries, or even trailers, scholars have paid only limited attention to the advertising films that were screened in cinemas. Although there is evidence to suggest that this is changing, the contribution that these types of film made to the cinematic experience, and indeed the films themselves, remains underexplored.⁴ In America, this might have resulted from the fact that until the 1980s, advertising films were rarely shown as part of the cinematic programme. In Europe, however, where the tradition of screening advertising films before the main feature is much better established,⁵ the marginalisation of the advertising film may result from the ambivalent position that many exhibitors and managers have had towards it: advertising films were shown for purely financial reasons, and were therefore thought to have minimal artistic merit.⁶

Some observers seem to have believed that advertising films were not properly part of the cinema but rather something that had to be endured before the 'real' films began. Shortly before the Second World War, John Maxwell of Britain's ABC chain of cinemas explained why his venues would not show advertising films:

It is unethical to take money from customers at the box office then, when they are inside, sell them products from the screen. People come to be entertained, not to be advertised at. The general public I am sure do not approve.⁷

When Maxwell made his comment, advertising via the cinema screen accounted for only 1% of total British advertising expenditure.⁸ In the aftermath of the Second World War, and especially in the first half of the 1950s, the situation changed, albeit only temporarily. The advent of the consumer society predated the

introduction of commercial television in Britain – indeed, was one of the most important contributory factors to the creation of ITV⁹ – meaning that advertisers were eager to find ways of placing their goods before the public. As newsprint continued to be controlled for a decade after the end of the war, there could be only a finite amount of press advertising; the cinema was briefly in a position to pick up some of the slack.¹⁰ Pearl & Dean, perhaps the most famous of the companies selling advertising space in British cinemas, was founded in 1953 and within a year had secured exclusive rights to show advertising films on ABC screens.¹¹ The launch of ITV and the end of newsprint ‘rationing’, both in 1955, combined to reduce the proportion of Britain’s total advertising budget spent at the cinema to something akin to pre-war levels, and by 1965 the £6 million spent on cinema advertising accounted only for approximately 2% of display advertising in Britain.¹²

This is not to say, of course, that British cinemas were not interested in showing advertising films, nor that advertisers were uninterested in using the cinema to reach consumers. The cinema was keen to make up for falling ticket-sale revenue by other means; most importantly by concession sales, but also by screening advertising films.¹³ Indeed, by 1965, the Screen Advertisers Association (SAA) estimated that the average programme in Britain contained eight advertising films lasting for a total of six minutes.¹⁴ Here, however, exhibitors needed to be cautious, for whilst sales of sweets, ice cream and drinks could be positioned as contributing to the experience of cinema-going, advertising films found it much harder to do the same. Advertisers were wary of antagonising potential customers by inserting unappealing, didactic or exhortative advertising films into a programme otherwise dedicated to entertainment. Further, trailers for forthcoming attractions – a different form of advertising film – engaged cinemagoers by focussing on the funniest, saddest, most exciting parts of a forthcoming feature, meaning that poorly conceived and executed advertising films could look slow and dull by comparison, and out of place in the cinema.

That said, the cinema did offer a number of potential advantages to advertisers, provided that they were prepared to work with the medium rather than against it. As Keith F. Johnson has argued, the cinema was thought to provide advertisers with a ‘captive’ audience: ‘by its very construction, a theatre is suited for presentation of information ... Bolted chairs direct the viewer’s attention’.¹⁵ This, of course, does not guarantee that cinemagoers will pay heed to an advertising film, but might be thought to raise the chances of them doing so. Further, it has tended to be the case that fewer commercials are shown as part of a cinema programme than are shown in a standard television advertisement break: this lack of ‘clutter’ has the potential to make each advertisement more memorable and so increase viewer recall. In 1966, Ernest Pearl of Pearl & Dean, writing in his capacity as President of the SAA, informed readers of the *Financial Times* that ‘immediate recall (or memorability) tests [for cinema advertising films] have been as high as 75 and even 90%, or 60% a day later, and even 50% after 7 days.’¹⁶

Sea Witch was a new product, launched in April 1965, and it was felt that cinema advertising would help to raise its profile and take a share of an expanding market for women’s hair tints and colours.¹⁷ As Sea Witch prepared to enter the market, Gibbs informed attendees at a sales conference that the hair colourants market was growing at something like 20% per annum, and that 60% of all

women now used some form of hair colourant. Sea Witch was aimed squarely at younger women who looked upon hair colourants 'like cosmetics', changing the colour of their hair for purely fashionable reasons. Further, it was thought that future growth in the colourants market would come from youthful consumers.¹⁸ The Sea Witch film, then, needed to appeal to this demographic, and it was believed that the cinema offered advertisers a chance to do so.¹⁹

By the mid-1960s, although ticket sales had declined sharply since their peak 20 years previously, the cinema was still a regular feature of the lives of many young people, much more so than it was for those in middle age. Research quoted by JWT found that 48% of female cinemagoers were between 16 and 24 years of age, and a further 15% between 25 and 34. These figures allowed JWT to estimate that whereas £30,000 spent on placing television advertisements would buy 'approximately 5 million [female] impacts against each age-range, 16–24 and 25–34,' spending the same amount buying access to cinema screens brought 'approximately 4.5 million impacts against 16–24 age women, and 1.5 million against 25–34 age women.' JWT's calculations were based on the assumptions that 'an average [cinema has a] capacity of 1300 and an average attendance rate of 25%, of which 46% were women'.²⁰ These assumptions might be questioned, but were deemed sufficiently rigorous and accurate for the agency to base a major plank of its Sea Witch advertising campaign on them.²¹ Clearly, cinema was no cheaper than television, and was, as far as reaching some groups of consumers was concerned, more expensive and less effective. Cinema was, then, unlikely to prove effective as the sole medium by which an advertising message was promulgated, and this would account for JWT's desire to back up the Sea Witch cinema film with television commercials, press advertisements and in-store promotional activity.²² However, for a product such as Sea Witch that was aimed squarely at young women with reasonable levels of discretionary income – income evidenced by their presence in the cinema – the cinema was potentially a very effective advertising medium.

The cinema also offered advertisers a range of attractive technologies that were not available elsewhere in the same combination. 'The cinema,' boasted Pearl & Dean in 1958 in a statement that would hold true for another decade, 'is the *only* mass medium which gives sight, sound, movement and colour.'²³ Although each of these constituted an important point of appeal, colour was, even in the mid-1960s, a major selling point. By the end of the 1960s the vast majority of feature films produced in Britain were shot in colour, but in 1965, this figure was in the region of 50%.²⁴ Thus, a colour advertising film in the cinema was believed likely to attract a great deal of attention, not only by means of comparison with rival, monochromatic efforts then showing on television, but also because there was a good chance that it would also be differentiated from at least some of the other elements of the cinema programme in which it was included.²⁵ Colour film offered advertisers the chance to display a product to its fullest advantage:

show your colourful pack at its best ... for realistic appetite appeal ... to portray clothes, fabrics, household furnishings as the look in real life ... to heighten glamour ... and to add sheer colourfulness to your advertising.²⁶

For a product such as Sea Witch, which promised consumers vibrant hues, colour was particularly appealing. It is not surprising, therefore, that whilst 'Lost Island' begins with a long-shot of a boat moving across the blue waters of the Aegean, with sunlight catching the tops of the waves, the film saves the most intense colours for the Sea Witches' hair: one blonde, one brunette, one red-headed. The red hair, in particular, catches the light and captures the viewer's attention with its almost supernatural lustre.

The cinematic image – whether in black-and-white or colour – could be projected onto the cinema screen at a much higher-definition than could the images constituting a television commercial. For advertisers, this was a not insignificant point of appeal, as Mr A.C. Solomon of the Dorland advertising agency noted:

The cinema commercial is always perfectly focussed and shown to the best advantage. How many times have I been looking at a friends' TV to find the adjustment of the set appalling, sometimes with a light reflecting on the glass, making the picture pale and difficult to see?²⁷

Crisper images allowed for, and justified, more expansive and exciting filmmaking, which in turn assisted in the construction of a dynamic brand image.

Furthermore, as it developed its various campaigns for Sea Witch, JWT was keen to stress the experiential aspect of cinema-going. The cinema was said to 'possess certain glamour values' that television could not easily match: this glamour would chime with the image that JWT was hoping to build for Sea Witch. Cinema-going was still understood to be something of an event, wherein the 'show-place characteristic of the cinema' would help 'to create ... excitement' around the brand.²⁸ What's more, cinema-going is a social activity, and many patrons watch films in the company of friends or other members of their peer group, meaning that 'prime prospects will see an ad in the company of those likely to influence purchasers' buying decisions.²⁹ Finally, the relative paucity of cinema advertising might also benefit an advertising film, as it had more opportunity to 'initiate the word of mouth discussion' amongst groups of cinemagoers.³⁰

Discussions – or, rather, *positive* discussions – of this kind were more likely to be prompted by an advertising film that engaged viewers both by dint of its entertainment and production values. 'Lost Island' features helicopter shots, the use of motor launches, extensive location shooting and an original score: all of these things cost money, and Gibbs' willingness to spend large sums to ensure high production values was in itself capable of generating publicity for both the film and the brand it was intended to promote. For example, the 7 August 1965 edition of *Chemist & Druggist* carried an article that excitedly described 'Lost Island' as 'One of the most expensive advertising commercials ever produced' which by 'the end of the year ... will have been shown in every major cinema in Britain.'³¹ The initial estimated production cost for the 90-second 'Lost Island' was £13,340, and this figure did not include music, artistes, commentator, portorage or insurance.³² Location shooting in Greece, which was meant to take three days, overran by a day and a half, adding £1300 to the budget.³³ A last-minute alteration saw a sequence tagged on to the end of the film to underscore its humorous intent; this cost a further £913 2s.³⁴ It is likely, then, that more than £16,000 was spent on the production of 'Lost Island'. By way of comparison, in 1960 a 60-second

television commercial with an ‘almost unlimited budget’ might cost ‘£2000 or more’, whereas the final production costs of the feature-length *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *Dr No* (1962), a film at which ‘Lost Island’ winks knowingly, were £116,848 and £392,022 2s 3d, respectively.³⁵ JWT bragged that ‘Lost Island’ cost ‘as much to produce per second as the great epic, *Ben Hur*.’³⁶

Although the cast-list of ‘Lost Island’ only just reached double figures, and although there is nary a chariot race or reconstructed hippodrome in sight, it is still easy to see where the budget went. The film was scripted by a JWT copywriter, Assia Wevill, who is now perhaps better known for having an affair with Ted Hughes, a relationship which may have driven Sylvia Plath to suicide. Wevill was no stranger to the female beauty sector, having worked on a 1962 campaign for Yardley cosmetics in which a photograph of a bandolier filled with lipsticks rather than bullets was accompanied by the slogan ‘A woman’s ammunition’. For *Sea Witch*, Wevill returned to the idea of combining sex, death, violence and beauty, but on a more lavish scale; the success of her idea led to both a pay rise and her becoming known in the advertising industry as ‘the Sea Witch Lady’.³⁷

‘Lost Island’ playfully mixes Greek mythology with the aesthetic of an international action-adventure film, with the James Bond films being the most obvious reference points.³⁸ (The ‘Lost Island’ also brings to mind – and anticipates by three years – Cadbury’s ‘Milk Tray Man’ advertisements, which ran from 1968 to 2003.) In the film, a group of men, identically dressed in black roll-neck jumpers and black trousers, launch a raid on an island. The actors who played this band of brothers were all cast by the producers whilst on location in Greece, presumably in order to minimise travel costs and to avoid the need to pay British union rates and repeat fees. The adventure is provided with a voice-over by Brian Cobby,³⁹ who speaks his lines in a resonant, declamatory manner that perfectly complements their hyperbolic composition:

There were seven of us. Thousands had tried before. This [the island] is where they left their bones. We knew what was waiting. We knew what was waiting *for us*. The Sea Witches. The Greeks knew about them. The faces of mortal women, but their hair – their hair is legend. Was this the real location of Eden? Were these the banished descendants of Eve? There were seven of us. Men with no hope, only courage.

A fight follows between the adventurers and three sea witches, after which one of the men escapes, clutching a briefcase: ‘This is what we were after. The hair colours of Sea Witch. Semi-permanent; simple to use; 12 colours – there’s one for you.’

The film, as its overblown, portentous script makes very clear, is intentionally comic. A mock-heroic mini-epic, the film is wildly, joyously ridiculous. Much of the humour in ‘Lost Island’ is dependent on the audience recognising and enjoying the juxtaposition of a bombastic yet ostensibly sincere tone, extravagant production values and the everyday nature of the product being advertised. Indeed, concerns that viewers might take the film seriously led to the filming of an additional sequence for the end of the film in which – after a breathless 80 seconds of sailing, running, fighting and escaping – a box of Sea Witch hair colour is placed by a disembodied hand on a shop counter: ‘At your chemist, four and elevenpence.’ A

Gibbs executive felt that this sequence was a particularly significant element of the film, as ‘the bringing down to earth by means of the statement of the retail price is important in making the audience realise that we also share the joke.’ When Gibbs discovered that, at venues such as the Odeon in Watford and the New Victoria in the West End, the film had been ‘abruptly terminated’ so that ‘reference to the price is lost’, it demanded reassurance that ‘these [cuts] are as a result of over-zealous work on behalf of the projectionist and not because the film over-runs its allotted time or because of faults in the print.’⁴⁰ In order to ensure that advertisers were getting all that they were paying for, the SAA sent inspectors out to about 100 cinemas each week: ‘Errors in presentation of advertising films are reported to the contractors, who take corrective action. In the event of any loss of exhibition to an advertiser, due allowance [i.e. a refund] is made.’⁴¹

The film’s soundtrack begins with a fanfare from the last movement of Béla Bartók’s ‘Concerto for Orchestra’. When the adventurers reach the island, a score composed by Frank Cordell specifically for ‘Lost Island’ takes over. Cordell, a member of the Independent Group of artists in the mid-1950s, composed music for films as diverse as *The Rebel* (1961), *Khartoum* (1966), *Mosquito Squadron* (1969) and *Ring of Bright Water* (1969).⁴² Given that Cordell was only asked to compose approximately 60-seconds’ worth of material for ‘Lost Island’, the music that he wrote is surprisingly varied and effective. The score switches between styles, tempos and volumes, from the mysterious, echoing percussion that attends the arrival at the island, via the sinuous and uncanny when the Sea Witches are introduced, to the jazzily dynamic during the fight sequence, when an insistent brass motif speaks to the Bartók fanfare (which is itself reprised as the lone escapee makes his getaway). Music is central to establishing the film’s ‘big budget’ feel, and the score required that 20 musicians were engaged to play it (at £16 a head). Cordell was paid £175.⁴³

The soundtrack is entirely non-diegetic, with the exception of a few brief seconds when the men arrive at the island. Here the film is silent but for the sound of the wind whistling across the beach as the viewer is encouraged to anticipate what will happen next (‘We knew what was waiting *for us*’). The frisson of excitement provoked by this sudden quietude is made all the more noticeable by the images that accompany it: the beach is strewn with discarded swords, axes, daggers, various pieces of armour and protective clothing from different historical periods, and a military drum run through with a pikestaff from which flutters a tattered pennant. The camera pans down to reveal a skull inside a knight’s helmet, the empty eye sockets staring blankly into the camera and at the viewer. Simultaneously, the silence is broken by the loud, eerie, shrieking of seabirds. The jolting suddenness of this aural transition is simple and effective, and slightly shocking, and provides the impetus for the fight and then the escape.

However, JWT executives were concerned that the ‘screaming’ of the seabirds might prove *too* shocking. Although the intention was to position ‘Lost Island’ in opposition to more sedate hair-product commercials in which women languidly showed off their hair for the camera, the agency had also been informed by the SAA that without a U certificate from the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), the film would face ‘intolerable’ distribution problems in that it would be difficult to place in cinemas.⁴⁴ When providing guidance as to what the censor might find

acceptable in an advertising film, the SAA forwarded a letter that it had received in January 1965 from John Trevelyan, Secretary of the BBFC:

It is difficult to give any specific advice about what would not be acceptable in advertising films in the 'U' category. Our general line of policy in dealing with films of this category is that they should not include what any reasonable person would regard as harmful to normal children. This would cover things that might frighten young children, e.g. monsters, horrific material of any kind either visual or in sound, any indeterminate shapes of nightmarish types. It would also include nudity or partial nudity, and material making use of sex for advertising purposes. We are not likely to have violence in an advertising film, but it would seem wise to mention that it should be avoided. Nor are we likely to have bad language, but I might mention that as well. There is finally the possibility that some company would wish to advertise a product that would be unsuitable for young children to know much about, e.g. contraceptives.⁴⁵

Having put the script for 'Lost Island' in front of its Copy Committee, the SAA informed JWT that it did not contain anything that was likely to upset the censor, provided that the sea witches were not 'made gruesome or shown nude,' the fight scene was not 'horrific' and that 'the screaming of the birds is not pitched too high.'⁴⁶ JWT informed Gibbs that it was confident that it could meet these criteria.⁴⁷ Sound was to be added in post-production, so the volume of the screeching seabirds could be adjusted so that it might have the desired impact without being likely to scare children. The fight sequence did not need to be visceral to be effective, as the film's violence is mainly implied (by shots of a wave crashing onto some rocks and sea witch hands reaching out to cover male faces, and most of all by Cordell's score, which suddenly bursts back into life in a frenzy of brass and high-tempo percussion). Additionally, the three women chosen to play the sea witches – Fiona Daubeny, Ann Anderson and Sarah Hamilton – had been selected, and tested, to ensure that they, and 'particularly their hair,' would 'reproduce satisfactorily when photographed in colour.'⁴⁸ Although described by one contemporary commentator as looking 'splendidly wicked,' the women who played the sea witches were in fact carefully costumed and made-up to accentuate their glamour; making them gruesome or unappealing would serve no purpose.⁴⁹

With the Censor satisfied, and the coveted U certificate issued on 12 May 1965, 'Lost Island' was ready for distribution.⁵⁰ However, working out in which cinemas the film should be exhibited, and then buying space in them, was the cause of friction between JWT and the Unilever Media Division (UMD), which should have had responsibility for this task and which, JWT believed, 'resented' the agency's involvement in it.⁵¹ In January 1965, JWT had contacted the two most important cinema advertising contractors, Pearl & Dean and Rank Screen Services (RSS), with an eye to ensuring that space could be acquired in a sufficient number of 'first class' cinemas to make the Sea Witch campaign viable.⁵² The contractors informed JWT that they had 'immediately confirmable space' to the value of £56,000, which would allow six or seven screenings of 'Lost Island' in approximately 850 cinemas.⁵³ Not all of these bookings were considered suitable – a cinema might be thought too small or not prestigious enough, a number of proposed

venues might be too tightly clustered, some cinemas were jointly administered and so appeared on both contractors' lists – but JWT felt that somewhere in the region of £50,000 could be spent on the combined list of venues, with the remainder of the appropriation spent on the 'better cinemas' held by Presbury, a third, much smaller, screen advertising contractor which tended to work with independent rather than circuit houses. This would account for the full cinema appropriation of approximately £54,400.

Having been given a list of suitable cinemas to work with, UMD proceeded to sit on its hands, provoking consternation at JWT, which was determined that 'Lost Island' should only be placed in the best venues, and restlessness at Pearl & Dean and RSS, which needed to know whether to offer the space to other advertisers. By the time that UMD finally acted, some of the prestige venues were no longer available: RSS could offer only 225 cinemas for a booking cost of £12,000, Pearl & Dean 440 cinemas for £26,000. Although RSS was able to provide some additional sites, taking its total bookings up to £20,000, the combined total of £46,000 was a significant underspend and threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the campaign.⁵⁴ Likely to exacerbate this underexposure was the fact that by the time that JWT and UMD were desperately scrabbling around for additional venues to make up the shortfall, the most attractive dates had already been taken by other advertisers. Ticket sales were not constant throughout the year, and having to concentrate screenings of 'Lost Island' in June and July, rather than August through December, meant that they coincided with the point in the calendar when admissions were usually at their lowest.⁵⁵

By mid-April, JWT was convinced that UMD had become so desperate to secure venues that they were signing up an 'excessive number' of cinemas in some cities – 28 in Birmingham, 23 in Manchester – whilst also negotiating to buy space at 'wholly unsuitable' venues such as the Playhouse on the Isle of Lewis and the North Star in Lerwick. 'UMD appear to have accepted any bookings they can in an attempt to spend the original appropriation,' noted JWT's David Adamson, 'I can think of no other reason for accepting bookings in Stornoway or the Shetland Isles.' Eventually, an additional £8000 of more appropriate bookings were found through RSS. This allowed UMD to meet its spending target, and reduced reliance on Presbury to the extent that only the 'best' independent cinemas would be secured to show 'Lost Island.'⁵⁶ A finalised scheme, agreed in May, required the production of 701 prints – 346 for Pearl & Dean, 325 for RSS, and 30 for Presbury.⁵⁷ Between June and December 1965, 'Lost Island' was screened in more than a third of British cinemas, and although it is difficult to ascertain the programmes in which it was included, it was released at a time when it is likely to have supported – or been supported by – major new feature films such as *Von Ryan's Express*, *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines*, and *Help!*, and may have also caught the tail-end of *The Sound of Music*'s long, successful run.

Reaction, where recorded, appears to have been very positive. In mid-July, internal JWT correspondence recorded that the film was 'being received with riotous applause and laughter in every cinema in which it is shown':

We keep hearing stories about how people discussing the commercial which appeared to overshadow the feature film, and today I was told about a class of

sixth form girls who spent the whole morning discussing the film and describing it in great detail.⁵⁸

Such comments formed the basis of a press release sent out to retailers and the trade press, which in turn was used as the foundation for puff pieces such as the one in *Chemist & Druggist* mentioned previously. As well as highlighting the cost of the film, the press release also stressed the challenges associated with making it:

Production problems included finding the island, eventually tracked down off Greece; casting seven glorious Greek 'Gods' ... lowering three top London models by rope ladder from a rocky pinnacle to an equally rocky sea-shore ... battling with unexpectedly rough seas and stormy weather.

Having thus established its *bona fides* as a legitimate piece of cinematic entertainment, the press release concludes by declaring that audience reaction to 'Lost Island' has 'been fantastic.'⁵⁹

So positive was the response that Gibbs Proprietaries were willing to pay for the privilege of broadcasting 'Lost Island' in its totality on television. Although JWT had from a relatively early stage favoured trialling the cinema advertisement on TV, it was not until the success of 'Lost Island' in the cinema that the advertiser itself came around to this way of thinking.⁶⁰ The initial plan for the Sea Witch campaign had envisioned a 15-second, black-and-white television commercial – 'The Island of Sea Witch' – to be made from material shot for the cinema film. This shorter commercial would still constitute part of the campaign, but would now arrive in British homes later than initially envisioned and would function as an echo of the longer commercial, which itself sought to take advantage of the public's perceived enthusiasm for the colour cinema version. The fact that television transmissions of 'Lost Island' would no longer be in colour had an obvious potential to undermine the impact of the commercial, but concerns on this score were outweighed by the need to establish the Sea Witch brand in the face of fierce competition. The market for 'Hair Tints, Colour Restorers and Rinses' was becoming ever more crowded, and this resulted in an increasing amount of money being spent on advertising: in the last quarter of 1965, advertisers of such products spent £249,100 buying time on television, in the same quarter the previous year the total expenditure had been only £15,215.⁶¹ Given that all television commercials for hair dye were shown in black-and-white, 'Lost Island' would not be viewed askance, and would still be able to trade on its high production values, innovative form and length.

This, however, posed something of a problem, in that the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA), the body that gave formal approval for the airing of a TV commercial, considered that there was a possibility that the same sumptuousness that made 'Lost Island' so memorable and distinctive might mean that it was not 'sufficiently identifiable as a commercial'.⁶² Although it disagreed, JWT grudgingly ceded the point, and accepted the ITCA's condition that 'Lost Island' could not be the first advertisement shown in any given ad break. An additional point of concern for the ITCA was the question of it 'possibly being unsuitable for children.'⁶³ JWT pointed out that 'Lost Island' had been given a U certificate by the BBFC, and as if to mock the ITCA's overprotectiveness of its

audience, the first television transmissions of 'Lost Island' actually went out with the BBFC certificate still attached to the start of the film. This was, of course, a mistake – a 'catastrophe,' according to one JWT employee – and strained the relationship between JWT and Chambers & Partners, which had been engaged to adapt the film so as to make it suitable for use as a television commercial.⁶⁴

'Lost Island' was broadcast 27 times on British commercial television, with the first airing on Sunday 25 July 1965 on Channel Television, followed that same evening by Southern, Anglia, Westward, Tyne-Tees, and Grampian, with each of the various franchises showing it at least once before the final broadcast on Grampian on 17 August. When the idea of broadcasting the 90-second film on television had been mooted, JWT had hoped that time could be purchased 'in an apposite programme such as *Thank Your Lucky Stars* or *Ready, Steady, Go* – or indeed one of the local disc shows which each regional company runs, e.g. *Discs-A-Go-Go*.'⁶⁵ This, clearly, was an attempt to reach *Sea Witch's* target market, i.e. young, fashion-conscious women. As it transpired, many of the broadcasts actually went out during or between programmes that were less single-mindedly focused on attracting youthful viewers, but which might have been understood as having more general appeal:

25 July 1965	Scottish	<i>Blackpool Night Out</i> (variety show) ⁶⁶
25 July 1965	Anglia	Between <i>Blackpool Night Out</i> and the news
26 July 1965	London	Between <i>All Our Yesterdays</i> (history/documentary) ⁶⁷ and <i>Coronation Street</i>
27 July 1965	Granada	<i>Bonanza</i> (western, USA)
8 August 1965	London	Between <i>The Million Pound Note</i> (film, British, 1954) and <i>Blackpool Night Out</i>

The total cost of placing the 90-second version of 'Lost Island' on television was £35,292 4s in July, and £11,712 16s in August.⁶⁸ The figure for August was supplemented by the purchase of a large number of spots for the abridged 15-second version, making the total spend for that month £24,915 (which amounted to more than half of the total amount spent on television advertising by manufacturers of 'Hair tints, colour restorers, rinses and dyes' that month).⁶⁹

'Lost Island' was submitted by JWT to the annual exhibition of the Designers and Art Directors Association, an event which sought 'to celebrate and encourage excellence in creative communication'.⁷⁰ Submissions to the Association were peer-reviewed, and only those deemed worthy were included. In 1966, the year in which 'Lost Island' was submitted, fewer than 300 of the 3750 entries were deemed worthy of exhibition; the film did not win an award – prizes for cinema and television commercials were that year dominated by a commercial for Remington electric razors – but simply making the cut and earning a spot in the exhibition, and the book that was made to promote and commemorate it, was the 'real prize' and speaks to the qualities of the film as recognised by fellow advertising practitioners.⁷¹ When 'Lost Island' was reviewed, alongside the week's other new commercials, in *Television Mail*, it was praised as

a terrifically courageous and effective commercial, very well filmed on splendid location ... the visual analogy of hair waves and sea waves came off brilliantly – for the first time the sea was really relevant. Good music, editing and set dressing.

The only criticisms related to the name of the product – ‘women love to be witches, so half the name of this news product is well thought up ... but I’m not quite as enthusiastic about “Sea,” doesn’t it do strange things to your hair?’ – and the relatively oblique nature of its sales pitch: ‘not quite enough reference to or emphasis upon hair colouring’.⁷²

However, for all that industry ‘creatives’ may have approved of ‘Lost Island’, the purpose of advertising is to raise awareness and increase sales of a particular product. Gibbs did not employ JWT so that the agency could win kudos, but rather to shift Sea Witch by the lorry-load. The evidence is that ‘Lost Island’ was effective in doing this, too. In both August and September 1965, internal JWT correspondence referred to the positive direction of the sales curve, and although one such letter does allow for the possibility that this might simply have been a ‘coincidence’, the tenor of the rest of the text suggests that the author believed themselves to be demonstrating more than a degree of false modesty.⁷³ Yet perhaps the best testament to the success of ‘Lost Island’ was that it spawned what might be loosely described as a sequel. Both J. Walter Thompson and Gibbs were clearly satisfied enough with ‘Lost Island’ to commission Hardy, Shaffer & Associates to make two versions of ‘Seascape’, a 45-second film which was to be shown in colour in the cinema and in black-and-white on television. Shot on location in Barbados – the Canary Islands, Beirut, Djerba and the West African coast were considered before being rejected as being too windy, too tidal, too inaccessible and, meteorologically speaking, too unreliable⁷⁴ – the two versions of the self-reflexive and overtly comic ‘Seascape’ had a proposed total budget of £9900 and were directed by Robin Hardy, who went on to make *The Wicker Man* (1973).⁷⁵

At the time that ‘Lost Island’ was conceived, produced, distributed and watched, the cinema was clearly still understood as being sufficiently vibrant and vital a cultural institution to bear the weight of a major advertising campaign. Colour, big screens, high-definition images and high-fidelity sound; all established the cinema in contrast to television. Further, the glamour and experiential nature of cinema-going afforded brands associated with the cinema advantages over those that remained housebound. Yet, the process of developing a cinema advertising film was not straightforward, and required, as did a feature film, skill, sensibility and capital in equal measure. The seven adventurers approaching the lost island of the sea witches described themselves in relation to their quest as being ‘Men with no hope, only courage’; advertisers and advertising agencies, when it came to making films for exhibition in the cinema, were clearly more a good deal more confident about the likely success of their own undertaking.

That ‘Lost Island’ was developed for the cinema is telling; that it was shown so soon after on television, equally so. The decision to show the full-length version of ‘Lost Island’ on the small screen suggests that the distance between these media can perhaps be overstated. The advertising agency and the advertiser clearly understood cinema and television as complementary rather than competing media, each

with its own strengths and each able to reach a particular demographic. Similarly, the advertising film was – when produced to the requisite standard – capable of complementing the feature film, and *vice versa*. The elements that constituted the cinema programme need to be explored both individually and collectively if we are to appreciate the appeal of the cinema and the potential pleasures offered by cinema-going.

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Notes

1. Kodak advertisement, *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 20, 1965, 9.
2. BBC2 had begun to broadcast in colour in 1967. Both BBC1 and ITV began colour broadcasts in November 1969.
3. An advertisement for Gibbs SR toothpaste was the first ever commercial broadcast on British television in September 1955.
4. Keith F. Johnson, ‘Cinema Advertising’, *Journal of Advertising* 10, no. 4 (1981): 11–19; Bruce A. Austin, ‘Cinema Screen Advertising: An Old Technology with New Promise for Consumer Marketing’, *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 3, no. 1 (1986): 45–56; and Kimberley A. Owczarski, ‘Come Early and Enjoy the (Pre-) Show: Screenvision and the Growth of Cinema Advertising’, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 31, no. 2 (2014): 148–60.
5. See, for example, Michael Cowan’s observation that in 1929 there were 86 companies producing advertising films in Germany alone. ‘Taking It to the Street: Screening the Advertising Film in the Weimar Republic’, *Screen* 54, no. 4 (2013): 467–8.
6. Terence Kelly, *A Competitive Cinema* (London: Institute for Economic Affairs, 1966), 150.
7. Quoted in T.R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 159.

8. Winston Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion: The Inside Story of British Advertising, 1951–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20.
9. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, 'From Start-up to Consolidation: Institutions, Regions and Regulation over the history of ITV', in *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over fifty years*, ed. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 16; Walter Taplin, *The Origin of Television Advertising in the United Kingdom* (London: Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1961), 87.
10. H.E. Browning and A.A. Sorrell, 'Cinemas and Cinema-going in Britain', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 117, no. 2 (1954), 164: 'In 1948 the total expenditure by advertisers on the distribution and exhibition of advertising films and slides amounted to £2,190,000 compared to £570,000 in 1938. It is not possible to say what proportions of these sums represented revenue to cinemas, but a figure of £1¾ million in 1948 does not seem unreasonable, and it seems clear that revenue from this source in 1948 was four times what it was in 1938'.
11. Pearl & Dean advertisement, *Financial Times*, January 25, 1954, 1. ABC had started to accept advertising films in 1953.
12. John Treasure, 'Analysing the Total Expenditure', *Financial Times*, June 20, 1966, Advertising supplement, iii.
13. J. Arthur Rank claimed that in the 12 months to September 1951, Rank-controlled cinemas had made £1,151,000 profit on sales of ice cream. *The Economist*, December 6, 1952, 716. Reliance on money generated by sales of concessions is still very much in evidence: the Vue cinema chain informed the Competition Commission that it had in 2004 generated a net revenue of £204 million from concession sales, and £63 million from the screening of advertising films. Competition Commission, *Vue Entertainment Holdings (UK) Ltd and A3 Cinema Limited: A report on the completed acquisition by Vue Entertainment Holdings (UK) Ltd of A3 Cinema Limited* (Norwich: Stationery Office, 2006), para. 4.7.
14. *Daily Cinema*, May 31, 1965, 6.
15. Johnson, 'Cinema Advertising', 12.
16. Ernest Pearl, 'Renewed Support for the Cinema Medium,' *Financial Times*, June 20, 1966, Advertising supplement, xiv.
17. Unilever Archives: Brand Historical Information – Sea Witch, February 17, 2011. Sea Witch initially came in 12 shades: Honey Blonde, Gold Blonde, Honey Brown, Hazelnut, Rosewood, Rich Brown, Chestnut, Auburn, Dark Brown, Mahogany, Bordeaux and Black. The brand was re-launched in both 1970 and 1975, and, after a slump in sales, the product was discontinued in 1978.
18. History of Advertising Trust – J. Walter Thompson Archive (hereafter HAT, JWT) 50/1/53/1/2/3/15: 'Sea Witch Sales Conference', n.d. (1965).
19. This is no less true today, when cinema audiences often contain disproportionate numbers of more youthful demographic groups that advertisers are finding harder and harder to reach by way of television advertisements. See Owczarski, 'Come Early and Enjoy the (Pre-)Show', 149.
20. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Clover Southwell to Brian Squires, December 20, 1965.
21. It has been estimated that in 1950 British cinemas operated at 33% capacity, and that the following year the average British cinema had about 920 seats. The discrepancy between the 1950/1951 figures and those used by JWT in 1965

- might be explained by the precipitous decline in cinema ticket sales witnessed in the period, which brought about a decline in the number of operational cinemas: by 1965, there were fewer than half the number of cinemas in Britain than there had been 15 years earlier. Because larger, circuit cinemas were more likely to survive – they had access to the most attractive films, generated more revenue through the sales of sweets and ice cream and could charge higher advertising rates because they reached a greater number of patrons – the average capacity of those cinemas that remained increased whilst the proportion of seats taken fell. Browning and Sorrell, ‘Cinemas and Cinema-going’, 149, 136; Barry Doyle, ‘The Geography of Cinemagoing in Great Britain, 1934–1994: A comment’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 23, no. 1 (2003): 640; and John Spraos, *The Decline of the Cinema: An Economist’s Report* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 49, n. 1.
22. Between June and September 1965, £9370 was spent advertising the Sea Witch brand in the press. *Statistical Review of Press and TV Advertising*: September 1965, 152; December 1965, 152.
 23. Pearl & Dean Advertisement, *The Economist*, May 24, 1958, 686.
 24. Although it is difficult to offer watertight definitions of what constitutes either a ‘feature film’ or a ‘British production’, it is possible to get a sense of the growing dominance of colour in the 1960s by referring to Denis Gifford, *The British Film Catalogue – vol. 1: Fiction Film, 1895–1994*, 3rd ed. (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 683–793.
 25. In 1954, Pat Kirkwood, ‘glamorous star of stage, screen, radio and television,’ featured in a ‘full colour’ advertising film for Brevitt shoes. The film enjoyed its own promotional campaign, with both star and colour presented as points of appeal. Shoe shops purchased space in local papers to promote their own services, Brevitt shoes and the film itself, informing readers at which cinema it – and Kirkwood – could be seen. See for example: *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, April 10, 1954, 7; *Motherwell Times*, April 30, 1954, 3.
 26. Pearl & Dean Advertisement, *The Economist*, May 24, 1958, 686.
 27. *Daily Cinema*, May 31, 1965, 6.
 28. JWT/HAT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Brian Squires to Mike Johnson, December 20, 1965.
 29. Johnson, ‘Cinema Advertising’, 12.
 30. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Brian Squires to Mike Johnson, December 20, 1965.
 31. *Chemist & Druggist*, August 7, 1965, 145.
 32. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/15: ‘Television Production Estimate: Gibbs’ Sea Witch’, January 27, 1965.
 33. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Ron Wiles to David Plumb, April 2, 1965.
 34. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/14: Ron Wiles to Brian Squires, April 26, 1965.
 35. Derek Hill, ‘Commercial Values’, *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1960, 201; Sarah Street, ‘Film Finances and the British New Wave’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 1 (2014): 26; and James Chapman, ‘The Trouble with Harry: The Difficult Relationship of Harry Saltzman and Film Finances’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 1 (2014): 62.

36. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Press release – ‘The Secret of Sea Witch’, included with correspondence from Susan Card to Michael Johnson, July 26, 1965.
37. Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev, *A Lover of Unreason: The Life and Tragic Death of Assia Wevill* (London: Robson, 2006) 78, 151. Wevill worked on the Yardley account, which won a British Poster Design Award, whilst employed at Colman, Prentice and Varley. Whilst at JWT she was also involved with the ‘Mr Kipling’ account, helping to produce an exceedingly good slogan that remained in use for several decades.
38. A reviewer wondered if ‘Lost Island’ would herald the start of a sequence of advertisements inspired by Greek mythology: ‘Cerebus eating Pal (all those heads!), Paris handing Venus a Cape apple, and Leda going to work on an Egg.’ *Television Mail*, August 6, 1965, 13.
39. Cobby was better known as a voice-over artist than as an actor, although he appears in *The Nudist Story* (1960), *Breaking Point* (1961) and *Fate Takes a Hand* (1961). He was also the voice of the speaking clock in Britain between 1985 and 2007.
40. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/11: Mike Johnson to Brian Squires, September 13, 1965.
41. *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 18, 1965, 6.
42. Cordell also made a ‘negligible’ contribution to the soundtrack of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). See David W. Patterson, ‘Structure and Metaphor in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*’, *American Music* 22, no. 3 (2004): 445.
43. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/15: ‘Television Production Estimate: Gibbs’ Sea Witch’, January 27, 1965.
44. Lew Price, of the SAA, quoted in HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Charles Doxat to Mike Johnson, February 15, 1965.
45. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: John Trevelyan to L. Citron, January 11, 1965.
46. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Lew Price to Charles Doxat, February 10, 1965; HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Charles Doxat to Mike Johnson, February 15, 1965; and HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/11: Lew Price to Charles Doxat, February 16, 1965.
47. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Charles Doxat to Mike Johnson, February 15, 1965.
48. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/14: Brian Squires to C. Van Niekerk, D. McDonnell, and Ron Wiles, January 29, 1965.
49. *Television Mail*, August 6, 1965, 13.
50. BBFC correspondence with author, May 6, 2015.
51. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Brian Squires to Christopher Higham, February 23, 1965.
52. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: David Adamson to Christopher Higham, March 16, 1965.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: David Adamson to Christopher Higham, March 18, 1965.

56. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: David Adamson to William Goody, May 6, 1965.
57. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: David Adamson to Brian Squires, May 19, 1965. By 1965, there were only 2000 cinemas open in Britain. Doyle, 'Geography of Cinemagoing in Great Britain', 60.
58. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/17: Brian Squires to D. Barrett, July 14, 1965.
59. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Press release – 'The Secret of Sea Witch', included with correspondence from Susan Card to Michael Johnson, July 26, 1965. JWT wanted to generate extra publicity for *Sea Witch* by getting women's magazines to feature pieces about the film, but was beaten to the punch by the advertising agency behind a campaign for Goya's 'Wild Silk' perfume. *Woman* magazine was persuaded to carry an article about the production of a press advertisement in which a model is shown against a backdrop of burning trees: 'Given permission, they set fire to the forest. That's the kind of crazy thing likely to happen when ad men and their clients are at work.' *Woman*, w/e July 17, 1965, 15. The Wild Silk advertisement itself could be seen on the back cover of the magazine.
60. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Christopher Higham to Brian Squires, April 26, 1965; Brian Squires to Jack Bernhardt, September 21, 1965.
61. *Statistical Review of Press and TV Advertising*, March 1966, 14. These figures do not, of course, include production costs.
62. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/14: Adrian Sycamore to John Jackson, July 15, 1965.
63. *Ibid.*
64. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/14: Brian Squires to Ron Wiles, July 23, 1965.
65. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Christopher Higham to Brian Squires, April 26, 1965.
66. Information in this section is taken from the regional listing magazines for the various ITV stations, most importantly the *TV Times* and the *Viewer* (Scottish TV). *Blackpool Night Out* was described as being 'An exciting spectacular from the summer home of show business, presenting our resident stars Mike and Bernie Winters who this week introduce Petula Clark ... and featuring Lionel Blair with the Lionel Blair Dancers.' *The Viewer*, July 24, 1965, 9.
67. *All Our Yesterday* was a newsreel compilation show focussing on events 25 years ago that week. It was presented by Brian Inglis.
68. HAT50/1/53/1/2/3/13: 'Gibbs Proprietaries Limited – Sea Witch Television Schedule 1965,' June 9, 1965.
69. *Statistical Review of Press and TV Advertising: July/September 1965*, 33, no. 3 (1965): 152. In July, *Sea Witch* commercials had accounted for more than 45% of television advertising in the sector.
70. Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion*, 63. On the genesis and status of the D&AD awards, see 63–4.
71. Edward Booth-Clibborn, 'Foreword', *Design and Art Direction '66: The Annual of the Fourth Exhibition of the Designers and Art Directors Association* (London: Studio Vista, 1966), 5.
72. *Television Mail*, August 6, 1965, 3.

73. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/14: Brian Squires to C. Van Niekerk, August 11, 1965; HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: Brian Squires to Jack Bernhardt, September 21, 1965.
74. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/15: 'Sea Witch', anon., n.d. (December 1965/January 1966?).
75. HAT/JWT: 50/1/53/1/2/3/13: R. Wiles to Robin Hardy, December 31, 1965.

Notes on contributor

Richard Farmer is a post-doctoral research associate at the University of East Anglia, working on the AHRC-funded 'Transformation and Tradition in Sixties British Cinema' project. He is the author of *The Food Companions: Cinema and Consumption in Wartime Britain, 1939–45* (2011) and the forthcoming *Cinemas and Cinemagoing in Wartime Britain, 1939–45: The Utility Dream Palace*.
